Conclusion

For Bakhtin the dialogic orientation is a phenomenon that is the property of any discourse. Only a mythical Adam who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world could escape complete dialogic inter-orientation (Dialogic Imagination 279). Consequently what Bakhtin calls internal dialogization is present to a greater or lesser extent in all genres. Kundera, as other great novelists, has put the internal dialogisation of discourse into artistic use. It enters into the text’s aesthetic object. In Kundera’s novels dialogic interorientation becomes, as it were, an event of discourse itself, animating from within and dramatizing discourse in all its aspects (Dialogic Imagination 284).

Literature of the second half of the twentieth century has a different relation to criticism than that of classical modernists. Eliot, Joyce and their imitators at times appeared deliberately providing occasion for the complex critical explication of the New Critics. In contrast, much of the literature of the last several decades has been marked by the desire to remain invulnerable to critical analysis. Kundera’s writing shares this resistance.

As Bakhtin says, the direct authorial word is not possible in all epochs and not every epoch possesses a style, since style assumes the presence of authoritative point of view and authoritative, established ideological values. “All ideologies have been defeated: in the end their dogmas were unmasked
as illusions and people stopped taking them seriously” (Immortality 127). Kundera is living and writing in an “age of lost innocence,” an age in which as Umberto Eco says even love can be expressed only as “. . . ‘As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly’ ” (67). Kundera’s novels have an inbuilt scepticism in relation to all systems of thought. As Barthes states he is always on the blind spot of systems, adrift, a joker in the pack, a zero degree, the dummy in the bridge game: necessary for the meaning, but himself deprived of fixed meaning (Pleasure of the Text 35).

It is impossible to make a philosophical system of Kundera’s world. It is full of contradictions, inconsistencies and absurdities. It is a universal projection of human soul speaking in many clashing voices. Kundera examines the questions on Paradise, on power, on eroticism, on anything and its relation to existence only as they are expressed in the relations between different fictional characters and this means that there are several possible answers to every question. The novel as “defined” by Bakhtin is “diversity of speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (Dialogic Imagination 262). Bran Nicol in his book Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel describes Bakhtin as “the theorist who most satisfactorily defined” the “essence” of the novel (9). Gary Saul Morson also considers Bakhtin’s theories of the novel as “undoubtedly the greatest ever created” (Waugh 213). In this context the coupling of Kundera, the novelist who extended the essence of the novel, with
Bakhtin assumes significance. A tendentious reading of an author like Kundera, though very much possible, may not be accurate and timely. Besides, the contemporary relevance of the dialogic tradition and of the acceptance of heterodoxy are hard to exaggerate. Discussions and arguments are critically important for democracy and public reasoning. It shapes our social world and the nature of our culture as Amartya Sen says (13). Emphasising this aspect Bakhtin also observes that an independent, responsible and active discourse is the fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal and political human being (Dialogic Imagination 325). Polyphony represents the most far-reaching representation of human freedom and open time ever reached (Waugh 220). Human life is celebrated in Kundera’s novels in all its chaotic progress and existential contingency.

For Kundera apprehending the real world is part of the definition of the novel. Polyphony is Kundera’s “another way” not in order to escape the real world, the way Romantics did according to him, but to apprehend it better (Testaments Betrayed 52-53). A profound antiromanticism is there at the core of Kundera’s novels as a “critique of sentimentality” (Testaments Betrayed 84). Drawing on Herman Broch, to him romanticism means a kind of absolute artistic opportunism capable of drawing on anything in order to move people emotionally (Bradbury 213). This antiromanticism shows up everywhere; in the way he sees society, as well as in the way he constructs a sentence. Jaromil is the only “monster,” character for Kundera. He wants to
both apprehend the world and at the same time engage in an enchanting game – a fantasy. He is rigorous in analyzing the world and at the same time irresponsibly free at playful reveries. He managed this as Kafka by cutting a breach in the wall of plausibility (Testaments Betrayed 53).

For Kundera, “A novel’s value is in the revelation of previously unseen possibilities of existence as such; in other words, the novel uncovers what is hidden in each of us” (Testaments Betrayed 264). For Bakhtin there always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness. This surplus of what he calls the “un-fleshed-out humanness” may be realized not only in the hero, but also in the author’s point of view (Dialogic Imagination 37).

Real life, for Kundera as well as for other postmodern theorists like Lyotard, is in myth, or in narration, or in interpretation. For Kundera novel is the only way to describe, to show, to analyse, to peel way human existence in all its aspects. He can name no intellectual enquiry comparable to novel, not even existential philosophy, in this interrogation (Bradbury 218).

Kundera always maintains “the essential plurality of unmerged consciousness” (Problems 5-6). Kundera always believed that character should not be subjugated because he is made of a different self. In Kundera’s novels the author’s self is undetectable. He says “I don’t claim to know everything about the character. I can’t, just as I can’t claim to know everything about a friend. I am really writing on the level of hypothesis”
Kundera is one among his characters and he often agrees, disagrees, argues with, and is surprised at his characters. He is an author who always resisted the “biographical furor” (sic), his words for biographical criticism (Testaments Betrayed 266). Kundera eschews data, description, pointless attention to null moments of existence and a psychology that makes the characters’ every move predictable. He avoided naming the characters for he did not want to make readers think his characters are real and have an official family record. In Life is Elsewhere, the hero has only a first name; his mother is known only by the term “Maman,” his girlfriend as “the red head” and her lover “the middle-aged man.” In The Book, the mother in part 2, “Mother” has no name. Characters with single letter names appear, like R. in part 3, “The Angels” of The Book; F. in Identity and N. in Ignorance. “. . . a name means continuity with the past and people without a past are people without a name” says Kundera (The Book 157). The novel thus is disregarding the epic past inside which everything is finished (Dialogic Imagination 16).

Kundera’s characters are all split characters, doubting and vacillating and not like a character in mythology who will forever be an internally integrated being. All of them either make us understand or realize themselves as Klima realizes, “that it is only our illusion that we ourselves saddle events and control their course” (Laughable Loves 89). The truth is that they are not our stories at all, that they are foisted upon us from somewhere outside; that
in no way do they represent us. They carry us away, since they are controlled by some other forces. However they are not supernatural forces, but human forces, the forces of those people who when they unite, unfortunately still remain mutually alien (Laughable Loves 88). But this is not all. Because he is engaged in the exposition of what he calls the “anthropological scandals.” That is, a political system can do no more than the men in it. If man was not capable of killing, no political system could engender a war. He is engaged in showing what man is capable of and it is a scandal because it shocks us all (Bradbury 21).

One of the tools that Kundera uses for the unveilance of the existential possibility is sex. Kundera unveiled sex as Kafka not as the playing field for a small circle of libertines as in Vivant Denon’s novella (in Slowness) but as a commonplace fundamental reality in everyone’s life. His erotic scenes serve to illuminate characters and situations. Kundera unveiled the existential aspects of sex. Sex in conflict with love, the strangeness of the other as a condition, those aspects that are exciting and simultaneously repugnant; its terrible triviality which in no way lessens its frightening power, etc. (Testaments Betrayed 46). For example in The Joke sexuality is based on vengeance. The whole book is based on a single act of intercourse. In Unbearable Lightness, Sabina observes that Franz while making love is like a puppy feeding from her breasts, sucking. She sees him as a small animal who is dependent on her and this suddenly disgusts her. At a glance she sees the
truth of their relationship. Sex becomes sad at bottom in Kundera as Updike saw it by way of the particular use it is put to.

Kundera uses history also to create “a revelatory existential situation for” his characters (The Art 36). In other words “a given historical situation is an anthropological laboratory in which he explores his basic question: what is human existence?” (Postscript to Life is Elsewhere 310-11). Thus history too for Kundera is for the study of existence. Though many of Kundera’s novels like The Joke, The Book, Unbearable Lightness and Ignorance are steeped in Czechoslovakia’s history, whatever needs to be known of it the novels tell it. All historical circumstances he treats with the greatest economy and with a four-fold reason in mind. First, he behaves toward history like the stage designer who constructs an abstract set out of the few items indispensable to the action. Second, of the historical circumstances he keeps only those that create a revelatory existential situation for his characters. For example, in The Joke, Ludvik sees all his friends and colleagues raise their hands to vote for his expulsion from university and thus to topple his life. He is certain that they would have voted with same ease to hang him and therefore man is for him a being capable of consigning his neighbour to death in any situation. Ludvik’s,
what Kundera calls, fundamental anthropological experience, thus has historical roots. Third, historiography writes the history of society and not of man. Kundera’s novels therefore talk about historical events that are often forgotten by historiography. The officially organized massacre of dogs that preceded the reign of terror against the public in the year that followed the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 which appears as Tereza’s recollection of a newspaper report in *Unbearable Lightness* and the black bird’s invasion of the cities of Europe one after the other in the last two centuries mentioned part 7 of *The Book* etc. are examples. This can be called “Nomadology,” as Deleuze and Guattari calls in “Rhizome,” the opposite of a history written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a “unitary State apparatus” (Lucy 114). Fourth, for Kundera history itself must be understood and analysed as an existential situation. For example in *Unbearable Lightness*, Alexander Dubcek returns to Prague after being arrested by the Russian army, kidnapped, failed, threatened and forced to negotiate with Brezhnev. He speaks over the radio, but he cannot speak, he gasps for breath, in mid-sentence he makes long, awful pauses. This historical episode reveals for Kundera weakness,
which is a general category of existence. Anyone confronted with a superior strength is weak and vertigo is the intoxication with weakness (The Art 36-38). Quoting the French poet Aragon’s statement Carlos Fuentes says novels including “some of the great novels of our time” written by Milan Kundera are as indispensable as bread because in them one will find the key to what the historian, the conquering mythographer, ignores or dissembles (“The Other K” 262 and 275).

Kundera is guided not by logic but by the charm that comes from the juxtaposition of the different forms, by the contrast of different emotions pervading the different chapters, by the variety of the chapters’ lengths; and finally by the development of the same existential question reflected in different lines in different books. Nineteenth century elaborated the art of composition but Kundera along with Kafka, Broch, Marquez and others brought musicality to that art (Testaments Betrayed 20-21).

For Bakhtin the process of the novel’s development has not yet come to an end. It is currently entering a new phase. For our era is characterized by an extraordinary complexity and a deepening in our perception of the world. There is an unusual growth in the demands on human discernment, of mature objectivity and the critical faculty. These are the features that will shape the further development of novel as well (Dialogic Imagination 40). So
it has done in Kundera as in Broch, as Calvin Bedient observes. Reading Kundera can indeed seem good for furthering human discernment, mature objectivity and the critical faculty (Bedient 40).