CHAPTER VI

PROBING INTO THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

One of the fundamental aims of literature is to make man conscious of the existential condition. Arguably there has never been such uncommon emphasis on different dimensions of human existence as in the contemporary literature. It is quite understandable given the unprecedented and unparalleled horror unleashed by the political power whose irrational manifestation of aggressivity demolished many myths about man and his world that the west had made, discovered, developed and idealised since the Renaissance. The unimaginable ascendancy of the political power and incomprehensible terror of the wars compelled writers, historians and intellectuals to rethink about the world in which we live. This nightmarish historical experience made possible a different kind of sensibility and existence, that sensibility is ironic.¹ An ironic sensibility, is one that renders everything ambiguous, and relative. It can unmask and expose what had been held to be a monolithic truth. One can perceive the power of irony to challenge absolutism in every form. It was this consciousness that suddenly revealed everything about man, belief, rationality, and morality as illusions. As Eco remarks: “… we are obliged to admit that for each of us, in different measure, History has been largely a Theatre of Illusions.”² It is interesting to note that it is literature wherein this sceptical and ironic perception of human truth first appeared, and torn the curtain of all idealistic thinking.
As one examines the literature of Renaissance one sees that adventure constitutes a dominant theme. The theme of adventure reveals one of the important dimensions of human existence, that is, freedom. And the novel marked its genesis with the theme of adventure. There is a long tradition of the picaresque narrative since Cervantes. The novel of adventure was followed by a very different kind of novel called the novel of character, or the psychological novel, which was pioneered in England by Samuel Richardson. In the psychological novel the world of natural landscape, action and adventure were replaced by the world of the mind. That is, the novel came to focus on feelings, emotions and on what happens inside the mind. The nineteenth century realistic novel revealed the shrinking horizon of human adventure in the industrial era. In the twentieth century Kafka, Musil, Broch and Hasek suddenly exposed the parody of human adventure. Kundera believes that if one look at the four hundred years old history of the European novel one comes to the realisation that the novel has always been with man, revealing different aspects of life with the passage of time. Since the dawn of the modern era the novel has been making an investigation into human existence. This existential exploration has uncovered the painful reality of the gradual reduction of the horizon of human freedom. In this respect Kafka probably was the first writer who exposed man’s quest for freedom simply as illusion.

Milan Kundera proudly places himself in the tradition of European novel. He audaciously claims that “My novels are not psychological”. ³
that’s it is difficult to understand the problems presented in his novels from the psychological perspective. Kundera asserts that his novels are concerned with the enigma of the self. If science is concerned with the external universe and philosophy, with abstract truth, the novel is concerned with the concrete world of man, the world of life, feeling and emotion. Thus neglected by science and philosophy the novel has taken this moral responsibility since its genesis to protect the world of man from sinking into oblivion, or from, Kundera borrows a phrase from Heidegger, “the forgetting of being.”

As man became obsessed with the scientific investigation into the material world, there set in a problem what Kundera calls forgetting. Forgetting constitutes a significant theme in Kundera. He thinks that, along with man’s obsession with science and technology in the contemporary world, the problem of forgetting has been aggravated by the political power which uses all types of means to erase people’s memory (see chapter V).

Since Kundera is concerned with the question of existence and its problematisation by historical and political forces. Moreover, he makes many aesthetic and stylistic experiments. In his novels characters, incidents and story are subservient to the theme of existence. On the other hand, in Kafka characters enjoy total independence. They donot seem to be subservient to any particular motive of the author. K can appeal the reader in his own right and his dilemma is open to different types of interpretations. This autonomy of characters is comparatively absent in Kundera’s novels. He uses a set of characters, incidents, images and
symbols in order to discuss the existential possibility of man. This is why there are lot of repetitions in Kundera’s narrative, because his primary concern is with the paradox of existence not with the character. Yet there are certain similarities, for instance, both the authors delineate their characters with extreme economy. Unlike Kafka, in Kundera the nationality of the characters is easily recognisable, yet he hardly gives much information about his character’s family background and other details – except when needed – as are found in the nineteenth century novel. Like Kafka some of Kundera’s characters are nameless, for example, Jaromil’s friend in *Life is Elsewhere* is simply called redheaded girl. Similarly Jean-Marc’s old friend in *Identity* is simply named F. Kundera has his own concept of characterisation:

As I have pointed out before, characters are not born like people, of woman; they are born of a situation, a sentence, a metaphor containing on a nutshell a basic human possibility that the author thinks no one has discovered or said something essential about.\(^5\)

It is not the biography, or the physicality which makes a character realistic, rather it is the situation whence he or she emerges. This art of characterisation Kundera seems to have inherited from Kafka. For instance, the reader does not know anything about K’s family or nationality in *The Castle*. He has not been given any proper name, yet he is no less realistic. Characters become realistic because of certain situations. For instance, K is the product of a mistake made in a file. It is difficult to have any idea of him otherwise. What Kundera challenges is
the nineteenth century theory of fabricating a realistic character by placing him in the context of history and biography. This marks a radical shift in the art of characterisation in which biographical details do not seem to have much importance. The idea is that man acquires self within a particular situation. This is the crux of the existential conception of life. It does not mean that if a character is stripped of his name, family and physical appearance he has no psychological appeal. Some of Kundera’s characters may have psychological interest for the reader. Still the emphasis is on the character’s existential problem. Kundera is not concerned with his character and his psychological vagaries, rather with the crisis in which he is caught. Thus he follows the sole morality of the novel: “getting into the soul of things.”

Kundera is concerned with the existential paradox in a world dominated by power, a world without individuality, privacy, freedom and morality. “The novel is not the author’s confession; it is an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become.”

The transformation of the world into a trap has been a gradual process through political power. Kundera does not talk about the entrapment of life in a metaphysical sense, rather in a historical and political sense in the technological era. This is the difference between Kafka and Kundera. The farmer thinks that freedom is just an illusion, confronted with power man has no choice. It is not a matter of divine power or human power, good power or bad power, negation of freedom is a characteristic of every power. What Kafka shows is that if life without
freedom seems to be a trap, this is man’s eternal condition. On the other hand, Kundera shows that the reduction of human freedom is modern phenomenon, a product of the totalitarian power which he experienced in Prague after the 1968 Soviet invasion. In other words, what Kafka said about power in a symbolic form Kundera offers to the reader its literal image in most of his novels particularly in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Since Kundera is concern with the totalitarian power, he makes it quite clear that it is a historical problem:

That life is a trap we’ve always known: we are born without having asked to be, locked in a body we never chose, and destined to die. On the other hand the wideness of the world used to provide a constant possibility of escape. A soldier could desert from the army and start another life in a neighbouring country. Suddenly in our century, the world is closing around us. The decisive event in that transformation of the world into a trap was surely the 1914 war…

For Kundera the image of the world as a trap is a symbol of how life is being controlled and determined by external conditions. In the face of incomprehensible political power whose working is as ambiguous as Kafka envisaged the whole human knowledge and will seem to be futile. This is what Kundera calls unbearable lightness of being. The external forces of history and politics have become so heavy that the life of the individual does not bear any weight, an image of unheroic mode of life peculiar to the time in which we live. Most of Kundera’s characters are born out of some extreme situations, their life is always at stake. They
face a power which can catch them in its snare any time. Kundera repeatedly shows in a variety of ways the persecution of individual by a political power which obeys its own will. When power follows its own will, its own morality, it suddenly assumes a metaphysical dimension. In man God relationship, man is always at the mercy of God. He has neither any right nor any claim. This is why the divine power has been characterised arbitrary, irrational and absurd. Kundera tries to show that the power exercised by man is no less irrational and arbitrary. A man can be accused, without having done anything wrong, imprisoned, forced to justify his own innocence, and can be executed. Incidents which involve persecution of innocent individuals constitute a leitmotif in the works of Kundera. All these facets of power in the contemporary world, Camus thinks, reveal its criminal tendency. “On the day when crime puts on the apparel of innocence, through a curious reversal peculiar to our age, it is innocence that is called on to justify itself.”\textsuperscript{9} It looks Kafkaesque, an unintelligible situation, in which the accused is forced to prove his innocence. This is a bewildering situation which recurs in Kundera’s \textit{The Joke} and \textit{The Book of Laughter and Forgetting} and in his other novels as well.

If the external conditions have become an insurmountable force; if power has penetrated to the core of human life, what existential possibility is there for man. Kundera treats the idea of unbearable lightness of being, a deplorable existential condition that is both comic and tragic. He ponders over this theme in his novels, especially in \textit{The
Unbearable Lightness of Being (1984) from different angles. He opens The Unbearable Lightness of Being with a philosophical essay on Nietzsche’s idea of eternal return. He thinks that it is indirectly related to the fundamental existential question of Tomas, an important character in the novel. As Kundera remarks “it sets out his problem: the lightness of existence in a world where there is no eternal return.”  Kundera examines this myth of eternal return by negation. If everything recurs as it once happened it will alter our consciousness. And if a thing does not recur it will disappear, it will be forgotten. What does not recur has no significance, no weight and meaning. If the idea of eternal return is the heaviest burden, as Nietzsche presumed, then, Kundera raises the question, is lightness the most splendid condition? The hypothesis is that in human life what happens, happens only once. The absence of eternal return reveals the pathetic condition of man, a condition in which he has no control over himself. It is a condition which shows man’s ignorance, a state in which he is simply unable to decide his motives and actions correctly. It also generates a sense of nostalgia, a desire to return to a time or experience which has gone and cannot return, a theme which Kundera explores in his novel Ignorance (2002).

It is in the context of the absence of eternal return in which Kundera explores the concept of lightness of being. He tries to understand how certain incidents which happen only once and determine the life of an individual. The life of the individual consists of a series of fortuitous events. It means that human life cannot be planned, any unexpected
happening can disrupt the whole design. All Kundera’s characters face an uncertain life in the face of an omnipotent power. Tomas, a doctor, and Tereza, a waitress in a restaurant in Prague, meet by chance, and embrace each other. Then one day she comes to stay with Tomas. A few days after her departure Tomas is unable to decide whether he should call her or not. Tomas, a compulsive womaniser, fears the burden of responsibility. He thinks that if he calls her then she will offer herself to him and if he does not invite her then she will remain a waitress. By putting his character in an undecidable situation the writer tries to grasp an existential dilemma: the inability of man to plan his life.

We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives, nor perfect it in our lives to come. Was it better to be with Tereza or to remain alone? There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself, that is why life is always like a sketch.\textsuperscript{11}

The idea that life cannot be planned, that man is simply unable to know his future, points to a problem that has always been there. But this uncertainty of life in the contemporary world has been aggravated by political situations. Man makes a choice, takes action but the consequences are determined by a power on which the individual has no control; he is simply helpless. He is, like Tomas, in the bind. Tomas had divorced his wife to remain bachelor and lead a life of liberty. In Tomas’s existential code love symbolises weight, a burden and responsibility.
Suddenly Tereza enters his life. He is unable to send her back, as he is taken up with compassion for her. He had got rid himself of his wife, son and parents for fear of responsibility. He devised an erotic game and had so many mistresses on the condition that no one will claim upon anyone’s freedom. Tereza became jealous of his promiscuous life. Therefore, in order to satisfy her Tomas married her. Thus he acted against his own plan. He went further and had Sabina, his mistress, find out a job at a weekly for Tereza. But he is unable to give up his erotic life, it increases Tereza’s suspicion of his infidelity. Thus he is in a trap whence he is helpless to release himself. Kundera tries to show the uncertainty of human life in a way that reveals utter helplessness of the individual. As Tomas tries to manage his personal life, he faces a monster that comes from the outside in the form of Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. At this critical juncture he is offered a job in a hospital in Zurich, but he is unable to join it because of Tereza. He thinks that she will not leave the country under occupation.

Kundera seems to be baffled at how individual’s choices and actions are determined by political situations. The political power is so overwhelming that individual’s life has no significance. Hence the traditional boundary between the public and private spheres of life has been eroded. As Tomas sets the course of his life the country came under Soviet invasion. Kundera often gives exact details of that horrible historical event that struck Prague:

The representatives of the country had been hauled away like criminals by the Russian army, no one
knew where they were, every one feared for the men’s lives, and hatred for the Russians drugged people like alcohol. It was a drunken carnival of hate. Czech towns were decorated with thousands of hand-painted posters bearing ironic texts, epigrams, poems and cartoons of Brezhnev and his soldiers, jeered at by one and all as a circus of illiterates…. in the meantime, the Russians had forced the Czech representatives to sign a compromise agreement in Moscow. When Dubcek returned with them to Prague, he gave a speech over the radio. He was so devastated after his six-day detention he could hardly talk…

It is in the backdrop of this historical incident that Kundera examines the predicament of his characters. By recording real historical incidents the author seems to make the reader conscious of the tyranny of political power, of the humiliation and persecution it inflicts on the people. At the same time he makes it quite clear that he is describing the behaviour of the state power which is as ruthless in rendering people defenseless as the Court authority in Kafka’s *The Trial*. Brezhnev the then Soviet president forced his Czech counterpart Alexander Dubcek to a humiliating compromise. Kundera constantly refers to the 1968 invasion in his fiction but with great economy. Since his concern is with the individual and his existence, he includes those historical details, images and symbols which can help him explore the existential dilemma of man in a mode of narration he calls elliptic. In this respect he is different from Kafka. Kundera often synchronises history, philosophy and fiction. There is no such fusion of philosophy and fiction in Kafka. It shows the difference in art of structuring the narrative in both the authors. Unlike Kafka, for Kundera history is important to reveal the process of
entrappment of the existence. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* he tries to show how personal choices are conditioned by external events. As the critic Scarpetta observes:

> The characters in the unbearable lightness of Being live through grave and tragic historical situations, foremost among them the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and normalisation, at the hands of the police. But the eye the novel casts on these situations is never directly political. Political scrutiny aims at the masses, at the collective phenomena, at common measures of denominators, whereas the novelistic scrutiny plumbs the uniqueness of each case, and through it precisely that which escapes political reason.\(^{14}\)

The idea is that Kundera is not concerned with politics per se, rather his interest in politics is in proportion to its existential impact in the contemporary world. The implied idea is that one can hardly understand life without understanding power.

What possibility is left for Tomas under a totalitarian regime. He has no option but to flee the country he has been living since his childhood. Along with Tereza he emigrates to Switzerland. He is unable to see Sabina, who is in Zurich, as he does not want that Tereza should know about it. One of the most important existential questions which Kundera seems to be preoccupied with is that is there any possibility for hedonism in a world in which the external happenings are so heavy that they can destroy life at any moment. What is the possibility for the evolution of love between Ludvik and Lucie in *The Joke* when their movement is closely watched. What baffles Kundera is the infiltration of
political power into human life. And how with this intrusion man has lost something invaluable: freedom and individuality.

When Tereza left Zurich for Prague after a few weeks, Tomas is unable to decide whether he should follow her or not. Since she is weak, she identifies herself with the subjugated people of her country. As he has developed deep compassion for Tereza, at last, it forced him to return to Prague:

Then Tomas crossed the Czech border and was welcomed by columns of Russian tanks. He had to stop his car and wait half an hour before they passed. A terrifying soldier in the black uniform of the armoured forces stood at the crossroads directing traffic as if every road in the country belonged to him and him alone.\textsuperscript{15}

Tomas experiences an arrogance in the soldier. Since he is the part of the power Tomas perceives in his behaviour a streak of superiority. On the other hand, he is totally helpless. Why is he weightless and insignificant? Kundera believes that with the unprecedented superiority of power of the state the individual is condemned to live on the margin of his life. His life is, in Updike’s phrase, “lobotomized by the severances of tyranny”\textsuperscript{16} Kundera’s hypothesis is that had state not acquired such an incomprehensible power the life of man would not have fallen in such a pathetic condition, a condition he calls the lightness of being. The lightness of being is a philosophical concept which involves the negation of all those ideas about man such as freedom, individuality, heroism, rationality and will which went into the making of Western Humanism.
The humanistic philosophy as it emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe placed man at the centre of the universe. The idea that man is the centre of the universe is an important idea which the Christian Europe inherited from the Greek philosophy during the Renaissance. This secular idea became more prominent in the later centuries. But in the twentieth century certain historical and political developments shook the foundation of the whole idealistic and progressive thinking about man. This ironic decline of man constitutes a recurrent theme in Kundera and his contemporary writers.

As it has already been maintained that Kundera believes that the plight of his characters is the result of the tyranny of political power. In his novels particularly The Book of Laughter and Forgetting and The Unbearable Lightness of Being and other novels he focuses on the predicament of individuals. Since he writes against a recognisable historical and political background he seems to suggest that had Soviet Union not invaded and occupied Prague the life of the people would not have become so miserable. For Kundera the problem of power is historical. He seems to believe in an alternative mode of existence. That is, had there not been totalitarian regime the destiny of the Czech people would have been rather different. In this respect he is different from Kafka. For Kafka neither the irrationality of power nor the plight of man is historical. He thinks that the helplessness of man before power is his eternal condition. There is a determinism in Kafka that confronted with power man is always helpless. He can neither understand nor escape it.
Kafka is either silent or simply rejects any illusion of change. Kundera seems to suggest that had state not acquired so much power the life of man would have been rather different.

In a broad context Kundera seems to suggest that the world has fallen into wrong hands, or it is heading in a wrong direction. Such a perception reflects a moral view. That is, man would not have become so helpless if those who possess political power do not exercise it so ruthlessly. It means if the historical condition changes the existential condition would also change. On the other hand, Kafka tries to grasp power without any historical context. He does not seem to see its irrationality in moral and ethical terms. He even does not promise any change. In Kafka the helplessness of man before power is a condition which is universal and cannot be altered. In this respect Kafka deals with what is universal while Kundera describes what is particular. Similarly Kafka does not make distinction between power of God, state or father. Confronted with power the powerless is always weak and defenseless. He can neither escape like Joseph K of *The Trial* nor understand it like K of *The Castle*. Hence power negates both freedom and knowledge.

Milan Kundera explores the theme of lightness of being in different ways. For example, in *Slowness* (1995) he makes an investigation in the role of technology in the malady of forgetting, and in *Immortality* (1991) he tries to see how external images affect human consciousness problematising the stability of identity, a phenomenon that symbolises “a
gradual; general, planetary transformation of ideology into imagology.”

The idea is that a totalitarian power can exploit anything as a tool in order to erase people from their past. The proliferation of modern science and technology is not a neutral phenomena. These things are encouraged by political power as they serve its interest in controlling people. It is not a denouncement of technology, it is just an ironic interrogation into everything that affects human existence. Tomas’s problem would not have worsened so badly had there not been political turmoil. His choices are radically limited. It is political situation which makes existence fortuitous.

It seems interesting here to recall that Kafka in his novel mentions telephone, a technology which the Castle government uses to run its bureaucracy. What in Kafka simply helps in communication assumes a different role in Kundera. Kundera often shows in his novels how technical instruments like telephone and camera are exploited by power to deprive people of their privacy, to hunt and catch the dangerous individuals. The underlying idea is that had there not been such technologies state would not have become so omnipresent and omnipotent against individuals. In other words, Kundera explores what man can make of man, how certain people who acquire power can make the life of people miserable. Kafka explores the condition of man in a different way: man is miserable and helpless before power. It has nothing to do with the development of technology.
Kundera investigates into the problem of the lightness of being from different angles. The first part of this novel titled ‘Lightness and Weight’ unfolds Tomas’s point of view, while the second part titled ‘Soul and Body’ is narrated from Tereza’s point of view. The second part contains a lot of repetition of the first part. Since Kundera believes that in an individual’s life fortuitous events are crucial, biological condition of human body plays a significant role in shaping life in several ways. For Tereza body is as important that she seems to be prisoner of her body. Kundera seems to suggest that if the individual’s body is everything then human self, or identity, is bound to be uncertain.

Kundera’s method of apprehending the self is very different. The apprehension of self involves grasping of the essence of the existential problem in terms of a set of existential codes. He believes that there are certain words which may or may not have the same significance in the life of other characters but can explain the existential problem of a particular character. For instance, he deploys certain words such as body, soul, vertigo, weakness which constitute the existential codes of Tereza. In the chapter titled ‘Words Misunderstood’ Kundera examines the existential codes of Franz and Sabina by analysing a number of words such as woman, fidelity, betrayal, music, darkness, light and country. For example, Tereza is weak, therefore, her existential code is defined by vertigo, “the insuperable longing to fall”. This is the reason that she sides with the defeated people of her own country. After the invasion she along with Tomas leaves for Switzerland but:
the very weakness that the time had seemed unbearable and repulsive, the weakness that had driven Tereza and Tomas from the country, suddenly attracted her. She realized that she belonged among the weak, in the camp of the weak, in the country of the weak, and that she had to be faithful to them precisely because they were weak and gasped for breath in the middle of sentences.\(^{18}\)

Similarly Tereza’s nightmarish dreams reveal her weakness and sense of insecurity. She feels that she is weak and Tomas is strong. The sense of weakness becomes her permanent obsession.

Kundera deploys a set of characters Tomas and Tereza on the one hand, and Franz and Sabina on the other, Sabina being the link among them. He makes an interrogation into the existential problem through a set of images and words against the backdrop of Soviet occupation. Since Tereza is weak she identifies herself with the people of her country. The Russian invasion particularly the abduction of Alexander Dubcek, the Czech president, has profound impact on Tereza’s consciousness. She realises that a person confronted by a superior power is weak. This is how power generates a sense of impotency and helplessness in the powerless, a recurrent theme in Kafka and Kundera.

Kundera’s mode of narration follows an elaborate circular design which he has modelled upon musical composition. The elements such as leitmotif, counter-point, and repetitions of a number of words and images do not allow the linear progress of the events. The whole story can be narrated in a few words; and the details can be narrated at the later stage. For instance, in part three titled ‘Words Misunderstood’ of The
Unbearable Lightness of Being in which Kundera explores the relationship between Franz and Sabina, the narrator gives a hint about Tomas being turned into a driver on a farmhouse but the reader comes to know the details later. The narrator goes on throwing hints through a variety of means about the fate of the people involved. Though he tells the end in advance when it comes to putting the story in its actual sequence, he succeeds in maintaining the same kind of suspense which one can expect in a detective story.

Kundera makes a very subtle use of language in his works. He perceives a very close link between aesthetics and existence. He believes that there are certain words which define categories of human existence. In The Book of Laughter and Forgetting the writer uses words like ‘laughter’, ‘forgetting’, ‘angels’ and litost in order to explain certain existential categories. He assigns to them the meaning which is commonly not associated with them. For example, part five of The Book of Laughter and Forgetting can be read as an essay on the emotion called Litost. Words are not examined in the abstract, rather they unfold themselves in actions and situations. For instance, Kundera defines litost through the behaviour of the student and his girlfriend by putting them into certain situations. According to the author Litost, a Czech word, has no exact translation in any language. It signifies a synthesis of different types of feelings such as grief, sympathy, remorse:

Let me give an example. One day the student went swimming with his girlfriend. She was a top-notch athlete; he could barely keep afloat. He had trouble
holding his breath underwater, and was forced to thrash his way forward, jerking his head back and forth above the surface. The girl was crazy about him and tactfully kept to his speed. But as their swim was coming to an end, she felt the need to give her sporting instincts free rein, and sprinted to the other shore. The student tried to pick up his tempo too, but swallowed many mouthfeels of water. He felt humiliated, exposed for the weakling he was; he felt the resentment, the special sorrow which can only be called litost.  

Kundera keeps on defining and redefining the word litost. Of the many definitions an important one is “litost is a state of torment caused by a sudden insight into one’s own miserable self.” It is through certain examples that Kundera tries to explain human reactions to litost. In the first instance, as given above, the student insults and slaps his girlfriend because she swam faster than him, and he is stronger than her. While in another situation where the individual finds his counterpart stronger than him his reaction to his litost changes. It leads to the realisation of one’s weakness, defeat and downfall. In a broader context confronted with a superior power the individual’s response is the expression of litost. In the face of power what has been called heroic resistance launched by the powerless is nothing but a form of litost. It symbolises an expression of utter helplessness.

Kundera probes into the existential condition of his characters in terms of certain words and images. This innovative method of characterisation is a significant contribution to the development of the novel. His hypothesis is that a character is an imaginary self or
“experimental self.” This is a radical departure from the nineteenth century realistic character. Both Kafka and Kundera are very parsimonious about their characters, background, their history and family details. By placing his characters under certain situations Kundera tries to prevent the identification and infatuation of the reader with characters as real people. Once the reader takes a character as a real person he tends to judge him as morally good or bad. In Kundera’s novel the characters have certain function to perform, hence they should be judged in that scheme. The reader should not have the illusion that characters in literature are like real people.

Milan Kundera is concerned with the existential condition of man. His interest, however, in character and story is secondary. His primary obsession is with the complexity of life. That is, how certain ordinary events and experiences determine the existential condition of man. It implies that nothing is certain in human life. Political power can destroy the life of an individual, or a powerless nation any moment of time. All his characters are helpless individuals in a world which does not offer any freedom. For instance, like Tamina in The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, Irena in Ignorance is another Czech émigré living in France. Uprooted from her country Irena suffers from poverty. She is left with nothing but the futile longing to return to the lost Bohemia. Her life reveals the plight of people whose images recur in The Unbearable Lightness of Being and other novels.
In part three ‘Words Misunderstood’ of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Kundera examines the relationship between Franz and Sabina in terms of certain key words which play an important role in shaping their response to life. He analyses a number of word such as woman, fidelity, betrayal, music, darkness, light, parades, beauty, country and so on. He constantly shows how Franz and Sabina’s response to life has been determined by certain vocabulary in some historical context. For instance, her existential code can be understood by the fact that she is a symbol of existence characterised by lightness. And her life consists of a series of betrayals. For Sabina fidelity signifies heaviness, weight. It reminds her of her father whom she first betrayed. “Betrayal means breaking ranks and going off into the unknown. Sabina knew of nothing more magnificent than going off into the unknown.”22 Having betrayed her father, she betrays her husband. She has a tendency to get away from everything she considers as burden. In this process of rejection her existence becomes light. Her whole life consists of a chain of betrayals which the narrator brings to the reader retrospectively.

On the other hand, Franz has fascination for public demonstration which involves expression of emotion in a collective way. If betrayal means breaking ranks, demonstration demands joining ranks. He is a professor but he regards his academic profession as unreal, and views public demonstration as real. The narrator offers a comment on Franz’s character that he was wrong in rejecting what was real, and in embracing what was an illusion. Sabina, on the other hand, distrusts public
demonstration, and the migrants’ sentimental identification with their homeland. After betraying her father, husband, country and love Sabina is left with nothing. But she had never realised that the act of betrayal can lead her to a stage of no choice:

How could she have? The goals we pursue are always veiled. A girl who longs for marriage longs for something she knows nothing about. The boy who hankers after fame has no idea what fame is. The thing which 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.  

Kundera wants to suggest that what happens by chance plays most important role in human life. Man is always taken up with certain myths and images without knowing them. How can man know something in advance when his perception is restricted only to the present. If what happens in life happens only once, noting can be planned in advance. It is a denial of human knowledge, experience, evolution and progress.

_The Unbearable Lightness of Being_ incorporates many aspects of Kundera’s technique and theme. One can see, what Calvino says in a passing remark, Kundera’s “… skill is blending together the novel about emotions with existential novel, philosophy and irony.”  

This fusion shows the maturity of the author’s mind. In all of his novels he integrates, in the words of Matejka “… poetics, politics and erotic.”  

Kundera not only theorises different aspects of the novel in his books, but constantly focuses on political condition in which his characters exist. They live in a world without any freedom. In part four titled ‘Soul and Body’ of _The
Unbearable Lightness of Being Kundera on the one hand, focuses on the troubled relation of Tomas and Tereza, and on the other hand, on the real political situation of his country. In an attempt to reveal the problematics of existence Kundera has included incidents in his narrative which are both fictional and historical. For instance, one of Kundera’s primary obsessions is with the tyranny of the totalitarian power. That is, how power erases people’s memory and history. He also shows how it imposes conformity, demands transparency, and obliterates every trace of privacy and individuality, an existential possibility which became common experience of life in Prague after the Soviet invasion.

As is characteristic of Kundera he deals with the same theme in a variety of ways. For instance, the loss of privacy under totalitarian regime is his pressing angst. He has included many incidents in his novels, noticeably in The Joke, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, to show the way power obliterates people’s privacy and erases their memory as it has been pointed out in (chapter V). He thinks that in a totalitarian state people live under the constantly observing eye of the power. Their private conversations are bugged and broadcast on the radio. The individual’s every move is closely and keenly watched. Every criticism, or deviation from the official line is considered a deliberate heresy, hence he can be subjected to any kind of punishment. It shows that a totalitarian power behaves in a mystical and whimsical way. A totalitarian power can exploit every type of technology to trap its opponents.
One of the most dangerous tendencies of the totalitarian power is to change people’s consciousness about their past. Every trace of the past is either altered or erased to force the people to forget their past. After the Russian invasion of 1968, when Tomas and Tereza walk in the street of Prague they are baffled to see how the older names of streets have been replaced by the Russian names. Kundera seems to suggest that though the incident seem ordinary, yet it involves a big conspiracy. It symbolises power’s tendency to deprive people of their past. Language, in fact, connects people to their past, a theme which Kundera has thoroughly explored in his *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (see chapter V). Once the people are uprooted of their past, they feel alienated and isolated. The whole situation seems oddly funny and comic, but in Kundera, as in Kafka “The comic is crueler [than the tragic]: it brutally reveals the meaningless of everything. It follows accordingly, that inspite of Kundera’s anti-ideological stance, the humour of his novels retains a sarcastic sharpness that was surely influenced by the severity of life under communism.”

In the works of Kundera the fall of the individual does not seem tragic, rather it seems comic and ludicrous. In a world where there is no respect for human reason, morality and freedom, there can hardly be any sense of tragedy. The state perpetrated horror has deprived man of the consolation of tragedy, a hyper-pessimistic view of life. The contemporary political power has created a hell on this earth. Hence “Hell (hell on earth) is not tragic; what’s hell is horror that has not a trace of the
tragic.” In the absence of the tragic human existence seems to be what Kundera philosophically calls the unbearable lightness of being. Why this unbearable lightness of being seems comic? Probably because existence divested of every human value like reason and freedom, when life is decided by irrational power, is bound to look comic. There can hardly be more severe punishment than turning the life into comedy. In the face of power human reason has become futile. “in the twentieth century, power wears the mask of tragedy.”

In a world where power obeys its own will, the individual is in perpetual danger. A single action can set in motion a chain of events in which the intention behind that action matters nothing. Kundera explores this pathetic dimension of human existence in a ‘novelistic essay, on Sophocles’s Oedipus in (part five) of The Unbearable lightness of Being. Sophocles’s great tragic hero commits a mistake he does not know. In a series of events he kills his father and sleeps with is mother and causes suffering to the citizens; yet he does not know that he is the source of all the misery. But when he comes to know about it, he plucks out his eyes and becomes blind. This story has been interpreted in different ways. For Tomas the story of Oedipus bears analogy to the situation of the champions of the Russian imposed Communism. The Communist enthusiasts committed all types of crime in an illusion to establish paradise on this earth. What Kundera tries to suggest is that how man becomes victim of his own truth. When he claims to know truth, he tries to impose it upon others, a totalitarian tendency inherent in every human
being. It is just a matter of time when man discovers the folly of his knowledge.

When the Communist in Kundera’s country discovered that they had created hell, a world of political suppression, their opponents blamed them for causing the loss of Czech independence. While the accused insisted on the purity of his heart. Oedipus punishes himself for the crime he committed unknowingly as he was overwhelmed with a heavy sense of guilt. On the other hand, those who perpetrated all types of crime in establishing a totalitarian regime insist on their innocence without any sense of guilt:

It was in this connection that Tomas recalled the tale of Oedipus: Oedipus did not know that he was sleeping with his own mother, yet when he realized what had happened, he did not feel innocent. Unable to stand the sight of the misfortunes he had wrought by ‘not knowing’, he put out his eyes and wandered blind away from Thebes! When Tomas heard Communists shouting in defence of their inner purity, he said to himself, as a result of your ‘not knowing’, this country has lost its freedom, lost it for centuries, perhaps, and you shout that you feel no guilt? How can you stand the sight of what you’ve done? How is it you aren’t horrified? Have you no eyes to see? If you had eyes, you would have to put them out and wander away from Thebes! 29

Fascinated by Oedipus story Tomas wrote an article and had it published in a weekly. Kundera refers to the exact historical context that it was 1968 and Alexander Dubcek was in power. The article infuriated the Communists who believed that Tomas wanted that they should put out their eyes! What the writer tries to make the reader conscious of is the
way writers and intellectuals were arbitrarily persecuted by the totalitarian regime. Kundera provides an extensive detail about the extermination of intellectuals in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (see chapter V). What happens to Tomas after the publication of the article not only reveals the arbitrary and irrational behaviour of power of the oppressive totalitarian regime, but the criminal nature of those who exercise power. Tomas becomes the victim in a world where confronted with unintelligible power human intention does not carry any weight and meaning. It is a world “where it is useless to oppose ‘truth’ to official lies, so long as truth itself can be manipulated, or turned aside to contribute to repression; a universe, in short, where there is no longer any logical link between an act’s intentions and its effects.”

Soon after the publication of the Oedipus article Tomas suddenly came under pressure from every side, from editors and from his colleagues in the hospital who put pressure on him to retract the article. While the authorities demand from him a statement of self criticism. The self-criticism is nothing but a euphemism for self-accusation, self-culpabilisation. As Kafka discovered (see chapter IV) that confronted with an incomprehensible power the powerless has no option but to accuse himself. In Kafka so in Kundera the helpless individual confronts a power that demands conformity to the extent of self-humiliation. Ludvik of *The Joke* is humiliated by the authority for telling a joke, Tomas of *The Unbearable lightness of Being* is facing the same fate because of writing an article.
In order to grasp Tomas’s dilemma it is better to compare his condition with the hero of *The Trial*. After Joseph K was falsely accused, he was taken up with the irrational sense of fear and guilt. He started losing his sense of privacy and while sitting in his office he is preoccupied with his case. He feels that he is being watched by invisible eyes wherever he goes. Similarly Tomas feels that everyone gazes into him in the street. He loses his sense of privacy, his sleep and mental equilibrium. He cannot stop people from babbling about his article. At last, isolated and alienated he was forced to leave the hospital and he becomes a metaphor for what Kundera calls the unbearable lightness of being.

Tomas is a brilliant surgeon; his career is destroyed by political conditions. It is a very unfortunate and ironic reality of the twentieth century that political power has acquired such a dominant sway over human affairs that it seems to have displaced from human consciousness the role of the metaphysical entity in controlling human destiny. The fear of God has been replaced by the fear of man. Kafka in his books imagined a power that seems theological and metaphysical. The kind of arbitrariness, wilfulness, and ambiguity with which power seeks deification in Kafka can hardly be attributed to any temporal authority. But as one compares Kundera with Kafka it becomes dazzlingly apparent that man can behave with the same absurd ruthlessness as divine power. At the deeper level both Kafka and Kundera seem to suggest that power is irrational, arbitrary, mysterious and ambiguous, it induces fear and
guilt in the individual, pushing him to the brink, where he has either to comply, conform or perish.

Tomas is confronted by a power based not on the logic of human morality but on its own morality. Expelled from the hospital he goes to work in a small clinic in the countryside; yet he is chased and interrogated by a secret police. Thus he falls into a trap of which he was so far unaware. Everything good, as manipulated by power, works against him. The spy not only forces Tomas to retract his article but demands to write a new text to show his fidelity to the Communist regime, a demand that baffles him. He realises that he had been led to this situation by a series of events he had never intended. As he perceives that there is no exit:

The very next day he resigned from the clinic, assuming (correctly) that after he had descended voluntarily to the lowest rung of the social ladder (a descent being made by thousands of intellectuals in other fields at the time), the police would have no more hold over him and he would cease to interest them. Once he had reached the lowest rung on the ladder, they would no longer be able to publish a statement in his name, for the simple reason that no one would accept it as genuine. 31

In order to escape from the gaze of the authority Tomas becomes a window washer from a specialist surgeon, a fall that seems both comic and tragic. Confronted with a mysterious, unintelligible, and indifferent power the powerless can escape nowhere he is forced to comply. Diminution and humiliation of oneself, turning of oneself into an
insignificant entity before the indomitable authority is a possibility of life that Kafka depicts in his works. At times it is the naked force which humiliates people by forcing them into a position they had never imagined, a characteristic of the totalitarian power. For instance, when the editor of the weekly which published Tomas’s article meets Tomas:

The editor told the story of how his paper had been banned, what the artist who designed the poster was doing, and what had become of the other Czech painters, philosophers, and writers. After the Russian invasion they had been relieved of their positions and become window washers, parking attendants, night watchmen, boilermen in public buildings, or at best and usually with pull-taxi drivers.32

Sometimes the individual himself denigrates himself in order to avoid the gaze of the power. This is the psychological impact of power which compels the individual to humiliate himself in order to escape punishment.

The wretched life of Tomas and his persecution by the authority speaks a lot about hundreds of intellectuals and writers crushed by the post-1968 regime. Those who think differently and donot conform with the official ideology are enemy in the eye of power. A totalitarian power can hardly tolerate the presence of nonconformist elements. In Tomas the reader can have a glimpse of the images of the persecution of individuals which Kundera keeps on repeating in his novels. As critic Jungmann writes:

When in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* we read of the physician Tomas being destroyed existentially
by the post-August regime on account of a single article in a cultural weekly, we take this as effective artistic condensation symbolizing the nonsensical extermination campaign of the ranting and raving party machine; in the context of the novel it thus truthfully depicts the social atmosphere in which responsible politicians were governed not by rational thought but by a spirit of vengeance and panic.  

Milan Kundera believes that the contemporary world of political oppression is intolerant to the individual. Caught in a horrible situation Kundera’s characters desperately try to withdraw from life as they find it impossible to live under what Kundera calls ‘totalitarian kitsch, that is, in a world without freedom. Tomas and Tereza move to the countryside in a desperate attempt to get freedom and peace. Tomas becomes a truck driver while Tereza looks after cows. Their life has been altered beyond recognition. They have been robbed of everything in their life, a lamentable lightness of being, one of the terminal paradoxes of the twentieth century Europe.

Kundera analyses the lightness of existence by employing different characters, symbols, words and images, by meditating on European history and philosophy. All these elements he has fused in a polyphonic narrative. For instance, in part seven of The Unbearable Lightness of Being Kundera thinks over this lightness of being from historical perspective. He is very sceptical of every philosophical proposition which idealises man, and has a very ironic perception of science and technology, and the myth of progress. Kundera casts doubt over Descartes’s famous formulation: “Man is master and proprietor, says Descartes, whereas the
beast is merely an automation.” Descartes’s ideas played seminal role in the development of the concept of progress. Since the seventeenth century the western civilisation made miraculous advancement in science and technology. It gave birth to an illusion that man can control the universe and can become, what Descartes dreamed, its master and proprietor. But Kundera realises that the same technology has been a source of human enslavement, an idea that has strong echo in the postwar western philosophy, history and literature. For example, Michel Foucault has shown how state uses different types of knowledges and technologies in order to control people. It is not a denouncement of science and technology rather an assessment of their impact on human existence. It is an investigation into how man is enslaved by his own knowledge, the knowledge he takes pride to have discovered. The irony is that as man advanced in science and technology, he unwittingly lost his freedom. The idea is that had man not acquired so much power of science and technology the possibility of human existence would have been rather different.

What Milan Kundera perceives as the lightness of being is a typical phenomenon of the twentieth century. It was a time of unimaginable material development, unparalleled in any period of human history, but at the same time it was also a period of an existential paradox. In all his writings Kundera is preoccupied with existential predicaments. He believes that man generally goes by myths and illusion. All the time people are given illusion of freedom, progress and development; yet at
the bottom life remains superficial, meaningless and absurd. Although the technological era has provided man with physical comfort but at a very heavy price. It has not only reduced space, but created a world in which everyone looks similar; the same manner, behaviour and gestures are repeated everywhere. The idea that our life has been reduced to certain images constituted an important theme in Kunera’s novels especially in *Immortality*. He projects a life without soul. Technology, appropriated and exploited by the power structure only causes forgetting and erases people’s memory. It has changed man into a mechanical product, an inessential entity.

As it is quintessence of Kundera, he uses a series of words and images and keeps on defining, redefining and discussing them until they acquire an existential meaning. For instance, the role of technological instrument in creating images that may not only be false but misleading and deceptive. In *Immortality* Kundera suggests that in the contemporary world of media the individual seems to be helpless before its power. As men lose their self, they become more similar to each other. The loss of the self is at the same time loss of human individuality. The modern technology has not only deprived man of his freedom it has turned the world into a concentration camp whence no one can escape. It helps the state in trapping the individual as Kundera rues:

in the old days, people who disagreed with the world and considered neither its sufferings nor its joys their own withdrew to a cloister. But our century refuses to acknowledge any one’s right to disagree with the
world, and therefore there are no longer cloisters to which a Fabrice might escape. There is no longer a secluded place from people and the world. 36

Given the repressive nature of a totalitarian regime, where can one escape if every trace of his life has already been registered or fed in the computer as Kundera has shown in his works. When Tereza was taking photos of the Russian forces and of the protesting people of Prague she wanted to highlight the misery of her people under occupation. But she could never realise that same photos can be intercepted by the authorities to nab the subjugated people whom she wanted to save. The idea is that in a totalitarian state anything can be exploited by the power as an instrument of control, to make people forget the plight of their real life.

Forgetting is, in fact, an existential condition. Although in a totalitarian state people are made to forget through political repressions, in liberal societies the memory of the people seems to be failing in the same way. It is basically an impact of technology which can be aggravated by political condition:

I see it as a human condition whose causes are deeper and more complex than those of any communist or capitalist ideology, and which depend to a great extent on the conditions of post-industrial age. Television, the media, technology in general are the major instruments of forgetting. One must remember that the technological age represents an extremely advanced stage of our civilization. Our civilization is very, very old, and this mass of time passed is becoming a problem for us. How can we retain the past, remember it, understand it all? Yet the greatest evil confronting us daily is the forgetting our past values; it's in great part the cause of that dehumanization whose
beginnings Kafka perceived. When people begin to forget their past they begin to lose the best part of themselves. Paradoxically, in the mass of information that the technological age brings, memory is lost at ever greater rapidity.⁴³

It is interesting to note that there is a theme of forgetting in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred years of Solitude*. Marquez tries to capture the premodern consciousness of man, that is, how premodern man with his unified sensibility would have responded to the development of science at its nascent stage. He perceived that as man interacted with the phenomenon of science, he started forgetting things. Obsessed with the world of matter he became oblivious of the world of instinct. Marquez equates this problem of forgetting with time. As man tried to know the mystery of the material world, gradually he is taken over by amnesia. Writers like Marquez and Kundera do not see it as a psychological problem, rather as an existential condition. But the difference between Marquez and Kundera’s treatment of the same theme is that in Marquez forgetting is linked with time, in Kundera it is associated with political oppression. Although Kundera shows in his *Slowness* that forgetting is a common problem which has less to do with politics and ideology, and more with our being, yet it is hard to ignore the invisible hand of the power which can exploit technology in order to affect the consciousness of people.

The theme of forgetting is a dominant preoccupation of Milan Kundera. It is one of the important dimensions of the possibility of life which he calls lightness of being. The forgetting of the being naturally
leads to the lightness of being. The lightness of being is a condition of life in which man has been displaced from the centre of the planet. In his *Slowness* Kundera explores how technological advancement affects our daily life. It is a very dominant perception among the postwar intellectuals, historians and writers that the modern era has been characterised both by technological advancement and human regression. For instance, Horkheimer one of the important members of the Frankfurt school contemplating the fall of individual writes:

Yet there is a universal feeling of fear and disillusionment. The hopes of mankind seem to be farther from fulfillment today than they were even in the groping epochs when they were first formulated by humanists. It seems that even as technical knowledge expands the horizon of man, thought and activity, his autonomy as individual, his ability to resist the growing apparatus of mass manipulation, his power of imagination, his independent judgement appear to be reduced. Advance in technical facilities for enlightenment is accompanied by a process of dehumanization. Thus progress threatens to nullify the very goal it is supposed to realize - the idea of man.³⁸

It is not a denoucement of the science and technology, rather an ironic exploration of its negative impact on human life, on his consciousness and behaviour. For instance, speed and sound are the typical phenomena of the modern science that have changed life fundamentally. Technology not only generates a sense of need in man but makes him totally dependent on itself. The technological era has brought fundamental change into human life. Instead of being master of the thing of his own making man becomes slave and subordinate to it. In the era of
technology driven wars how can one remember when incidents are taking place with relentless rapidity. In his *Slowness* Kundera seems to be nostalgic about the disappearance of the pleasure of slowness. With this disappearance man has lost something invaluable; his memory that links past with present and makes him conscious of his own self. Kundera perceives an inseparable link between slowness and memory, speed and forgetting.

There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting. Consider this utterly commonplace situation: a man is walking down the street. At a certain moment, he tries to recall something, but the recollection escaped him. Automatically, he slows down. Meanwhile a person who wants to forget a disagreeable incident he has just lived through starts unconsciously to speed up his pace, as if he were trying to distance himself from a thing still too close to him in time. In existential mathematics, that experience takes the form of two basic equations: the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting.39

Words like slowness, speed or shame and nudity are quite ordinary, but Kudnera thinks that these aesthetic concepts reveal dimensions of human existence. He gives them philosophical semantic nuances which are generally not associated with them. This is one of his great characteristics. As an explorer of human existence Kundera constantly tries to make the reader conscious of how certain human values are gradually vanishing, and we know nothing about it. He attempts to create an effect which is both shocking and provocative.
Milan Kundera is deeply rooted in history. He analyses different aspects of being in an identifiable historical and political context. And the presence of the political context is so palpable that it is difficult to ignore it. As David Lodge points out Kundera is more concerned with love and death than with politics, “but it has been his fate to live in a country where life is willy-nilly conditioned by politics to an extent that has no equivalent in western democracies…” There are different themes in Kundera’s yet all of them are linked to the fundamental theme of forgetting. That is, how external conditions force man to forget himself, to sink into oblivion, into lightness of being. For instance, in Ignorance (2002) Kundera blends theme of love, exile, memory, forgetting, nostalgia, and all in all, the important political events which radically changed the destiny of Europe. One can easily perceive that Kudnera’s synthetic narrative is deeply saturated with historical and political events, hence the repetitions.

There are writers who are products of history. In one sense every writer shares this fate. But there is a difference howsoever schematic and untenable. Kafka, for example, depicted a kind of power and a possibility of life of which he had no personal experience, but Kundera and his postwar contemporaries are grappling with a phenomenon which directly affected them. If Kafka projected a universal view of power, Kudnera’s perception of power is no less universal. There is no doubt that he is concerned with a totalitarian power with a particular kind of government that emerged at a particular point of the twentieth century
history. But it is better to see totalitarianism as an attitude that can emerge into other political dispensations, for instance, Communism and Democracy can be equally totalitarian. The idea is that in the twentieth century political power is totalitarian irrespective of its ideology. As Hugo tell Tamina in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: “… I have come to realize that the problem of power is the same everywhere, in your country and ours, East and west. We must be careful not to replace one type of power with another; we must reject the very principle of power and reject it everywhere.”

Kundera thinks that if people find themselves free in this world where power has infiltrated into every realm of human life, it is only because they have lost their sense of the real. People without memory can hardly judge what they were and what they are.

Kundera believes that the problem of power is a modern phenomenon. Equipped with science and technology the states have committed the kind of horror never experienced in human history. What is designated as a totalitarian power is just an extreme example. What are called liberal democracies their working is no less horrific. Thus monolithic power has pushed man to the margin of the world. This is why contemporary writers find it difficult to ignore the tyranny of the power. “Artists of the past could at least keep silent in the face of tyranny. The tyrannies of today are improved. They no longer admit of silence or neutrality. One has to take a stand, be either for or against.”
Kundera projects an image of the world and of human existence that is hyper-realistic, pessimistic and depressing. Though his novels are deeply rooted in history and geography, and in this sense he can be read as a regional novelist, his observation of power transcends regionality. He is preoccupied with the irrationality of political power and marginalisation of human life, a problem that has gripped the whole world. Invasion, occupation and dehumanisation of the powerless people are still being committed with the same ruthlessness as under the Communism which projected itself as the only truth. People are being uprooted, persecuted and liquidated as characters in Kudnera’s novels. Man seems to be as helpless before the power of the state as before divine power.
Notes and References

1. Irony is the hallmark of post-war western consciousness. Though a literary sensibility is commonly characterised as ironic, even in postwar historians and philosopher, such as Michael Foucault, irony is very conspicuous.


5. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* trans Michael Henry Heim (1984, India: Faber and Faber, 2003) 218 (Milan Kundera is a very innovative author. He constantly makes digressions to reflect upon art of characterisation, contemplate theory of fiction in general. His novels contain features of the metafiction. Metafiction is a contemplation of the art of fiction within fiction.).


13. The technique of ellipsis involves a process of selection and rejection. Hence it results in condensation. The writer is supposed to incorporate only those details which are essential to his theme. T.S. Eliot employs this art of ellipsis in his poem *The Waste Land* in which he uses a set of characters, symbols, allusions, historical details and mythical references in order to explain the moral and spiritual decadence of the modern man.


25. Ladislav Matejka, Milan Kundera’s Central Europe, in Peter Petro’s collection 213.


30. Guy Scarpetta, Kundera’s Quarter (On *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*), in Peter Petro’s collection 189.

31. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* 188.


33. Milan Jungmann, Kunderian Paradoxes, in Peter Petro’s collection 120.

34. Polyphony, a term from music, has been used by Kundera for a narrative technique which brings together heterogeneous elements into a unified whole simultaneously.


40. David Lodge, Milan Kundera, and the idea of the author in Modern Criticism, in Peter Petro’s collection 142.
