THE UNBEARABLE SEARCH FOR SELF:

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ONE MAN'S BIBLE AND THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING

by

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ABSTRACT

This research paper makes an overall comparison between Gao Xingjian’s *One Man’s Bible* and Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in order to demonstrate that both of the works aim to examine how individuals seek their own identity and sooth themselves during times of chaos; my emphasis will be on how both protagonists gradually establish their identity through ostensibly libertine lifestyles and how both writers’ representations of women are free of misogyny, and how the female characters are imbued with a strength as vigorous as the male characters.

This paper begins with a biographical introduction background to these two internationally acclaimed writers and to their importance in twentieth-century literature. The similarities in their own experiences contribute to the similarities in their works, especially in *One Man’s Bible* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Chapter 2 discusses how the protagonists seek their identities through sexual relationships with women. Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrate how the female characters find their identities, and how Gao and Kundera see women and feminism as reflected in the novels. Chapter 5 examines the novels’ philosophical ideas. I will elaborate on each writer’s own literary theories exhibited in these two novels with references to their theoretical writings.

Eventually, I will come to a conclusion that both *One Man’s Bible* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are examples of those singular pieces of art where literature and philosophy coexist, because of their detachment from any political ideology and most importantly their concern for human beings in general.
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Chapter 1

Two Wonderers' Search in Literature and Belief:

An Overview of the Works of Gao Xingjian and Milan Kundera

On 12 October 2000, when Gao Xingjian, then a seemingly unknown Chinese exile in France, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, he suddenly became the center of attention for almost everywhere in the world. His works, especially *One Man’s Bible*, *Soul Mountain* and *Fugitives*, which were mentioned in the Swedish Academy’s press release, were lauded as “an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama.” (Swedish Academy, 2000) Overnight, this Chinese exile writer became famous. It all seemed that during an overnight an exile entered the altar of literature.

The followed reaction to his award from different circles was extremely disparate. The media in Europe celebrated his success with lengthy reports. Newspapers in France, such as *Le Monde*, *L’Humanite* and *Le Figaro*, called Gao “a French citizen who writes in Chinese” in the discussion of that year’s Nobel Prize. (qtd. in Tam, 2001, introduction, p.6) The critics in Taiwan and Hong Kong embraced the news and the general public looked upon this as a victory received by a Chinese. The media was especially passionate about it. As Kwok-kan Tam, a critic in Hong Kong who specializes on Gao’s work, especially his dramas, recounts, the major literary journals, magazines and newspapers in Hong Kong such as *Zhengming Magazine* (Zhengming), *Asiaweek* and *Mingbao Weekly* (Mingbao zhoukan) either published special issues on Gao or made him headline news. The same thing happened in Taiwan as well.
To no one's surprise, the Chinese government was dismayed at the news and immediately blocked it from the public. Newspapers under strict surveillance did not dare to disclose anything in detail about Gao's background. Instead, the media in China reported him as a French Chinese, as if he were a foreigner who is totally irrelevant to China. To quote Tam:

When Gao was awarded the Nobel Prize, many Chinese scholars and writers who live outside of China rejoiced at the news. The same news, however, was received quite differently by the Chinese government and the official literary organizations on the mainland, such as the Chinese Writers' Association. They dismissed Gao as an unknown writer in China and denounced the Swedish Academy for awarding the Prize to Gao with a political intent. (Tam, 2001, introduction, p.3)

In fact, not only the government and the Writers' Association dismissed Gao's award, even some Chinese scholars and writers scoffed at his prize-winning novels. Indeed, if the government rejected the Prize for political reasons, Gao's compatriot writers ridiculed it because of the ghost of the obsession with China. In her essay “Gao Xingjian, the Nobel Prize, and Chinese Intellectuals: Notes on the Aftermath of the Nobel Prize 2000” (Lovell, 2002, p.1-50), Julia Lovell does a comprehensive research on the mainland Chinese critical reaction to Gao’s winning and probes into its deeper psychological source—the obsession with China, especially the Nobel Complex. She sharply points out that “Nobel tensions raise, in microcosm, the key issues of modern Chinese culture, especially national identity, the yearning for equality in the global network, and the relationship between intellectuals (particularly
writers and artists) and politics.” (Lovell, 2002, p.2) She observes that the Nobel Prize has been viewed by the Chinese intellectuals as a symbol of international recognition not only of the Chinese literature but more importantly of the termination of China’s image as a sick and inferior figure in the world competition. Thus the complex implicates nationalism and national inferiority that has bothered the Chinese intellectuals since the May Fourth Movement. The absence of a Chinese Nobel laureate has been considered equal to non-acceptance and exclusion of China in a general sense. Therefore, a term invented by Xueping Zhong is re-introduced by Lovell in her essay: The Chinese (male) Marginality complex. Lovell agrees with Zhong that the Nobel Complex is a product of the both “a sense of rootless marginality (a ‘marginality complex’) —the kickback of patriarchalism and Sinocentrism—a desire to recover a central (read modern, national, global, universal) position.” (Lovell, 2002, p.5)

To rid themselves of the sense of marginality and to move toward the center, the Chinese consider the Nobel Prize recognition from the center and believe it will guarantee China’s to recovery of its “lost glory.” Lovell rightly sees the Complex as an “odd mix of admiration, resentment, and anxiety that intellectuals and writers have felt toward ‘international’ (i.e. Western) values while attempting to forge a modern Chinese literary and cultural identity.” (Lovell, 2002, p.6)

Thus, we can understand the cold reaction to Gao’s award in the Mainland literati circles. Gao Xingjian’s prize is not accepted by the intellectuals because they need someone to win whose award can save them from the margin, from the exclusion of the world arena. A winner who is different from them only enhances their marginality. To be like them, one has to be one of the writers who stay on the Mainland in order to be a decent Chinese winner. An exile writer, in their opinion, is probably not a
pure Chinese. Therefore, the Prize received by such a person would by no means be considered valuable. If Gao had stayed on the Mainland and written the sort of harmless pieces others write, we can easily imagine how much the government and the rest of the writers would have enjoyed the news, because he was one of them, one of the "real" Chinese writers whom they think could be a representative of their idea of Chinese literature.

Besides diagnosing the Chinese intellectuals' disease, Lovell also argues that the non-western Nobel Prize winner is often advantaged for political quality rather than artistic quality in his or her work. She supports her argument with examples of the non-western laureates' works mentioned in the Swedish Academy. Gao's winning, she implies, also falls into such a category that its political value unfortunately outweighs its artistic value, because his works acclaimed in the Nobel Prize conference are *Soul Mountain* (Lingshan, 1990), *One Man's Bible* (Yigeren de shengjing, 1999), and *Fugitives* (Taowang, 1990), all of which seem to suggest a political gesture.

Indeed Gao is never able to free himself from the shadow of politics. In the West, he is often called a (political) dissent writer; in China, he has been banned all for political reasons. In a world where being a-political is regarded as a category of being political, Gao seems to be doomed to be tinted with political color.

Gao's life before he left China was an archetype of many Chinese intellectuals of his generation. Gao was born into a well-off family in Jiangxi province, China in the year 1940. His father was a banker, his mother an amateur actress. Since his early childhood when he could just write a limited number of Chinese characters, his mother had encouraged him to keep a diary, which initiated his life-long career as a writer. She also ignited his interests in drama when she took him to perform on
stage with her when he was five years old. After Gao graduated from the Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages with a degree in French, he worked as a translator at the China International Bookstore. In 1971, five years after the inception of the Cultural Revolution, he was sent to a re-education camp in a village, where he burnt a suitcase of his manuscripts because his wife reported him to the authorities for writing suspicious, possibly anti-revolutionary pieces.

During the Cultural Revolution, Gao was totally disillusioned with the left-wing myth of communism, gaining bitter insights into the nature of totalitarianism. His experience during this catastrophe would attribute enormously to his semi-autobiographical novel *One Man's Bible*. Not until 1975 when the Cultural Revolution was almost ended was Gao able to come back to Beijing. He first worked as the director of the French Department of the magazine *China Reconstruction* (Zhongguo jianshe) and then as a government-subsidized writer of the Chinese Writers' Association. Gao had his first publications in 1979, which included a prose piece entitled *Rumours about Bajin* (Guanyu Bajin de chuanshuo) and a novelette *Stars on a Cold Night* (Hanye de xingchen). In the following decade, he published several dramas, including *Absolute Signal* (Juedui xinhao, 1982), *Bus Stop* (Chezhan, 1983), short stories and a book on writing techniques: *Preliminary Exploration in the Techniques of Modern Fiction* (Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan, 1981).

These works, especially his dramas, continued to stimulate a heated discussion in China's intellectual circles at that time. His absurdist play *Bus Stop* (Chezhan), and *Wild Man* (Yeren, 1985), a play that employed both western dramaturgy and a traditional Chinese Beijing opera approach were both huge successes, receiving applause from critics and audiences alike. The realistic writing style advocated by him and his avant-garde dramas, however, did not impress the Chinese Communist Party.
(CCP) as beneficial for its governing. *Bus Stop* was even condemned as “the most pernicious piece of writing since the foundation of the People’s Republic” by a high-rank official in a movement against so-called “intellectual pollution.” (qtd. in Lin, 2001, p.12)

In 1982, Gao took a self-exile after he was diagnosed with cancer and also for fear of being sent to prison. He spent ten months traveling to the southwestern part of China, including such provinces as Sichuan and Guizhou, where the Confucian influence was not in dominance. This trip, as it turned out, was enormously fruitful for Gao, in the sense it was the fountainhead for his much extolled first novel *Soul Mountain*. After his play *The Other Shore* (*Bi’an*, 1986) was banned in rehearsal, Gao tried very hard to obtain permission to leave China. He finally left, for Germany, in 1987 and settled down in Paris two years later. When the Tian’anmen Massacre occurred in June 1989, he renounced his long-time party membership in France.

Since then, Gao became a non-person in China. His name was erased from the Writers’ Association, his works withdrawn from libraries and bookstores. Fortunately, while he was completely banned in China, he freed himself from the strictly ideology-oriented censorship and for the first time in his life, he did not need to worry about the interference from the Party.

In the 1990s, several of his plays were put on stage in Europe, Australia and America. He also painted and sold his paintings to support his writing career, since his books were never among bestsellers. Gao became a naturalized French citizen in 1993. His second novel, *One Man’s Bible*, was published in Taipei in 1999. One year later, he received what almost every writer would dream to win—the Nobel Prize for Literature.

As a writer and from the beginning of his career, Gao’s works have never failed to draw critical
attention. Critics either extol his excellence or hate his works. The Chinese government, for one, is among the latter. In fact, Gao's work was seldom appreciated by the Party. As a well-known playwright in China before his self-exile to France, as stated before, Gao was most well-known for his avant-garde dramas in the 1980's China. From *Absolute Signal*, *Bus Stop*, to *Wild Man*, which were all put on stage by the prestigious Beijing People's Art Theatre, his dramas always gave rise to heated polemics in China. Audiences generally thought highly of his dramas. *Absolute Signal* was among the most popular plays in the country. The government, however, condemned his plays as "spiritual pollution" to the people. His plays were banned in succession. *Bus Stop* was banned shortly after being staged and later it would be excoriated severely by the Party during the "anti spiritual pollution" movement. Even his well-received *Absolute Signal* was banned after a one-year performance. After *The Other Shore* was ruthlessly put to a premature death by the authorities, Gao's dramas were never again put on stage on Mainland China.

After he left China, Gao continued to be a productive playwright. From 1988 to 1989, He finished two plays *Necropolis* (*Mingcheng*, 1988) and *Tale of Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhaijing zhuan*, 1989). Gao was asked to write a play on the Tian'anmen Massacre after it happened in 1989 by a performing-art center in Los Angels. To their surprise, Gao's play criticized both sides: The government was too totalitarian, the students too politically naïve. His not taking anyone's position eventually led the theatre to ask him to change the story to suit the American tastes (in other words, to

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1 In "A Withered Flower on the Other Day" (*Geri huanghua*), an article in *Without Isms* (*Meiyou zhuyi*), Gao writes about his experiences in the 1980s China. He mentions that *Absolute Signal* was put on performance for "experiment" for ten times before it was showed to the public. The audiences were so passionate about it that they always discussed about the play with Gao and the actors until midnight. (Gao, 2000, p.162)
have a hero), which was refused by Gao because he believed if the CCP couldn't force him to re-write his plays neither could an American theatre. This play is Fugitives. Since then, Gao has accomplished several plays, including Between Life and Death (Shengsijie, 1991), Dialogue and Rebuttal (Duihuayufanjie, 1993), Nocturnal Wanderer (Yeyoushen, 1994), Weekend Quartet (Zhoumo sichongzou, 1996) and Snow in August (Bayue xue, 1997).

His plays have been put on stage around the world and are generally highly acclaimed. Among his critics, Henry Zhao stands out as one of the leading researchers on his plays. In Toward a Modern Zen Theatre: Gao Xingjian and Chinese Theatre Experimentalism, a book written after his intensive study of Gao’s dramas, Zhao defines Gao’s plays as “modern Zen/Xieyi theatre,” because of the apparent Buddhist and Daoist influence shown in his dramaturgy. Besides Gao’s writing techniques, Zhao is particularly impressed with Gao’s determination to invent a new dramatic style. He emphasizes several times in his book that Gao “vows not to repeat anyone, least of all himself, and every new work has to be a step forward.” (Zhao, 2000, p.207)

In fact, Gao’s determination to invent a new style does not only prevail in his dramatic writing, but also dictates the main note in his two novels. His first novel Soul Mountain is originated from Gao’s three months’ travel to the southwest China after being diagnosed with cancer and for fear of being imprisoned for his dramas’ political implications. Soul Mountain is innovative both thematically and formally. Thematically, it is a search not only for one man’s innermost belief (implied by the title, the soul mountain) but also China’s much-neglected marginalized southern/Yangzi river culture. Formally, Gao experimented with his theory of novel writing stated in his Preliminary Exploration in the Techniques of Modern Fiction, which is to intermingle different writing styles, many of which are not
traditionally regarded as novelistic writing, and make the use of narration in first person, second person and third person to the largest possibility. In this novel, one can find such writing styles as travel (youjì), prose, short stories, autobiographical portraits, critique and commentary—whatever has appealed to his omnivorous tastes and needs.

This novel, as anyone could have expected, has generated much controversy. Some reviewers criticize its length and obscurity. For example, Review of Contemporary Fiction considers that “[b]oth thematically and formally, Soul Mountain hovers between mere randomness and the prototypical meaningfulness of the unfolding search itself.” (Twitchell-Waas, 2001, p.161) One of the reasons that Soul Mountain is sometimes not well received in the English-speaking world is perhaps its English translation. Although the translator Mabel Lee is one of the earliest and best critics of Gao’s work, her translation nonetheless fails fully to carry out the original work’s intentions. As Time’s review points out:

Unfortunately, while Mabel Lee, an honorary associate professor in Chinese studies at the University of Sydney, may have captured the literal essence of Soul Mountain in the original, she presents it in a strange and often irksome form of English...

Reading Soul Mountain in this version is a frustrating experience, chiefly because of the sense that there must be more to it than this. Surely the Nobel Prize cannot have been decided principally on the basis of what appears here. Gao, 60, a playwright as well as a novelist, is regarded as a master of the Chinese language. Perhaps that skill cannot be completely conveyed in a translation, but a better use of
Gao's second novel *One Man's Bible* is also semi-autobiographical. This novel's time is set mainly in the Cultural Revolution period in China, during which time the protagonist experiences all kinds of traumas along with the rest of the people. It is a continuation to *Soul Mountain* in the sense that Gao still employs the technique of conducting the narratives with second person and third person (first person is not used in this novel, which imbues the novel with a stronger sense of distance, a sense of observation) and interposing a variety of writing styles in the novel. It is also an upgrading of its predecessor in that Gao perfects his skill of portraying lively characters, especially women characters, and is able to merge different writing genres seamlessly—the ideal he raises in his theoretical works. In the sense that Alfred Nobel himself had wanted the Prize winners to have "an idealistic tendency," this novel seems to be very deserving of the Nobel Prize.

In any sense, Gao is not the only exile that has achieved such recognition. Before him, there were Nicolas Zernov, Vladimir Nabokov, V. S. Naipaul and so on. Among all of them, Milan Kundera is intriguingly comparable to Gao Xingjian. Although Kundera hasn’t received a Nobel Prize, he has nonetheless been awarded several major literature prizes, including the Prix Europa for literature (1982), the Jerusalem Prize (1985), and the Knight of the Légion Étrangère (1990). In addition to having been deprived of the citizenships of their homelands and been naturalized by France, Kundera and Gao’s life experiences are not totally different.

Born in 1929, Kundera is the son of Ludvík Kundera (1891-1971), a musicologist and pianist, who was once the head of the Brno Musical Academy between 1948 and 1961. Under his father's
instruction, Kundera learned to play the piano from his early years on. Later, he also studied musicology, which accounts for the musicological influences showing throughout his works. Besides being a young pianist, he was also a precocious writer, starting to write his first poems as a teenager. After finishing his secondary education, Kundera studied literature and aesthetics at Charles University before he transferred to the Film Academy in Prague.

Kundera first joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia when he was only nineteen years old, but was expelled from the Party for certain so-called anti-Party activities two years later. He was re-admitted into the party in 1956 and remained to be a member until 1970 when he was expelled from the Party forever. After graduation, he took a position as a lecturer at his Alma Mater. In the following decades, Kundera became a successful author, writing a considerable amount of fiction, plays and essays. Kundera was disillusioned with the Communism after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The invasion set back the political progress in Czechoslovakia made by the Prague Spring movement which Czech intellectuals mainly participated in to promote freedom of speech and a more open political atmosphere. As a result of being one of the leading activists in the movement, Kundera lost his position at the university. His works were soon banned in Czechoslovakia in 1970.

Kundera moved to France and became a guest professor in Comparative Literature at the University of Rennes in Bretagne in 1975. After he published *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* in France in 1979, he was deprived of his Czech citizenship because of the novel’s obvious criticism of the Stalinism which was prevailing in Czechoslovakia under the Soviet control. Since then, Kundera has never returned to his country. In 1981, he became a professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris.
Kundera’s novels won him millions of readers around the world and a series of Prizes. Besides being a well-known novelist, Kundera was also a playwright, having written such plays as The Owner of the Keys (1962), Two Ears, Two Weddings (1968), The Blunder (1969) and Jaques and His Master (Hommage to Diderot in 3 acts) (1971), all of which gave rise to considerable polemics due to their controversial nature.

Kundera’s writing career can be divided into two phases. His first phase is made up of his earlier creation in the 1950s and the first half of 1960s. As a promising young writer in Czechoslovakia, Kundera used to firmly believe in the Communism. During the 1950s, Kundera even wrote some communist clichés for the Party, including Last May, a long poem about a communist hero who sacrificed himself for the great cause of the country and the people. This period might be partly the reason why Kundera is averse to disclose his biographical information now. He even draws a clear line between himself and that past by disowning his work before 1958.

Kundera’s second period comprises his mature writings. Laughable Loves is the work recognized by Kundera himself as his first mature work. A collection of Kundera’s first stories written from 1958 to 1968, Laughable Loves deals with love, sex and politics—the three themes that persist through all his following work. It was translated into several foreign languages and won him notoriety and thousands of readers all over the world.

Starting from this work, Kundera’s writing gradually came to maturity. In 1967 he published his first novel The Joke after two years of painstaking dispute with the Czechoslovakia censorship bureaucrats. This work was again praised by readers and critics but banned together with Laughable Loves after the Prague Spring. From then on, Kundera has never published his work in his homeland.
Even his already published works were removed from libraries and bookstores. In other words, Kundera the writer was virtually dead in Czechoslovakia.


In the West, his works still never fail to give rise to enormous controversy from critics, whose comments are often totally the opposite of each other. For example, on *A Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, John Bailey argues that Kundera “was like a man let loose among all the literary fashions of the West, grabbing this and that, intoxicated by the display patterns of freedom.” (Bailey, 2003, p.20) On the contrary, another critic, Ellen Pifer fully appreciates Kundera’s unique way of conducting narration “as an ongoing process of interrogation, differentiation, and contrast” and how he can free his readers to speculate and debate on the novel by doing so. (Pifer, 2003, p.74)

Harold Bloom is also among those who appreciate Kundera’s writing skills but still doubts about his works’ status as even “period piece.” He maintains that “[a]side from the story verve, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* depends upon the relation between the womanizing Tomas and the selfless, loving Tereza. Can Kundera render this fresh, or is it totally similar to many stories we all of us have read or known?” (Bloom, 2003, introduction, p.2)

Like Gao, Kundera has always been cursed by politics. His compatriots banned his novels because they were too politically incorrect while the West considers they are too political to be artistically good.
What these western critics seem to forget is that every writer writes from his or her experiences. Kafka was able to write *The Castle* and *The Metamorphosis* because he had lived in a callous and ridiculous bureaucratized world and because of his almost loveless father; Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* because he had experienced the changes in Russian society during and after the Franco-Russian War; *The Dream of a Red Mansion* (Honglou Meng) was born out of Cao Xueqin’s desire to express what he had seen in mid-1700s China. In short, no author can write beyond his or her own experiences.

Kundera and Gao are no exceptions. What they have experienced, unfortunately, has one thing in common: Having lived through political cataclysms and under Communist Party-state dictatorships. Given that, their choice of writing novels embedded in political events seems to be quite reasonable. What they are truly concerned with, however, is never politics itself, but human nature reflected in the abnormal times of political catastrophe. Kundera has said politics doesn’t deserve to be written into a novel, while Gao couldn’t emphasize enough that he really doesn’t belong to any kind of ism. It is plain to see that they strongly criticize communism, but it would be mistaken to consider this criticism per se as the theme of their novels.

As Kundera has Sabina say in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he would probably like to tell the world that “[m]y enemy is kitsch, not Communism!” (254) Gao once pointed out that there are two categories of so-called political writers: The first category is composed of those who identify themselves as both writers and politicians, while the second comprises those who have political viewpoints but whose artistic creation is not directly aimed at political goals. (Gao, 2000, p.53) Kundera and Gao obviously belong to the second category in the sense that they are never politicians.
Even though they often set their writings' background in a political upheaval, they do not turn their writings into a simple political statement.

Their similar life experiences (having lived through Communist dictatorship, being expatriated to France, being criticized for being too political both in their own countries and sometimes in the West, and having their work banned in their homelands) all contribute to the possibility of comparing their work. Both write about the individual's misery under totalitarianism. Both try to invent an unconventional way to write novels. In their oeuvre, Gao's *One Man's Bible* and Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are intriguingly comparable to each other.

*One Man's Bible* is Gao's semi-autobiographical novel based on his experiences during the Cultural Revolution with scattered fragments of the protagonist's memories of his childhood and his exile days outside of China, while *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is an examination of four characters' lives (physically and spiritually) as changed directly or indirectly because of the Prague Spring movement and the Russian invasion.

As the title suggests, *One Man's Bible* deals with one person's pilgrimage to his own emancipation. It is mainly set in the Cultural Revolution during which the protagonist evolves from a naïve young communist to an almost cynical middle-aged man. He is at first a passionate activist at the beginning of the movement, trying to save other people and fight against the other factions. Gradually, he realizes this movement is not targeted toward the very few counter-revolutionaries as claimed by the Party, but toward whoever does not agree with the Party one hundred percent or even those who are totally innocent and following the Party unconditionally. In short, everyone might become an enemy of the Party and thus be weeded out. Fortunately, he has realized this fact early enough to get himself out of
the maelstrom's center—Beijing—and hide in a small village, earning his life as a middle school teacher. Only at the end of the Cultural Revolution when one of his former leaders recovers her position and reciprocates the protagonist's favor of protecting her during the Cultural Revolution by restoring his job is he able to return to his old job in Beijing. He then becomes a self-made writer and painter and finally leaves China for France and thus acquires the freedom he has always striven for, the freedom to think, speak and write whatever he wants to. During his adventure, he has encountered numerous women in his life and fallen in and out love with some of them. By the end of the novel, however, the protagonist is still on the way searching for his ideal woman. As a matter of fact, this pursuit for love has already become part of his individual bible.

In the novel, Gao's tone is mostly pensive, sarcastic and philosophical while keeping his trademark techniques of intertwining a variety of writing styles and conducting the narratives with both second person and third person, which makes this novel sometimes read like a love story, sometimes pornography, sometimes stream of consciousness, sometimes an essay, and sometimes a play.

Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a novel about four characters' life experiences during and after the Prague Spring movement and the Russian invasion. Of these four characters, most of the time Tomas and Sabina represent lightness while Tereza and Franz represent weight. Tomas is a young doctor in Prague who likes to read and womanize, both causing him enormous trouble. Because he compares in a short article what Oedipus does after he finds out what a mistake he has made and what the Communist government has done after it realizes its own mistakes, he is punished severely after the Soviet invasion. He is removed from his position because he refuses to retract what he says in the article, insisting that nobody can really retract what has already been said. Tomas emigrates to
Switzerland but returns to Prague, following his wife Tereza. After he returns, his positions change from a doctor to a window washer to a farm worker, but as his social position deteriorates to the lowest he finally gains his happiness and inner peace. In the end he and his wife die in a car crash. Sabina and Franz are the other two main characters in the novel. Sabina is a strong and intelligent Czech painter who has had an affair with Tomas. She leaves Prague for Geneva after the invasion and then moves to Paris and finally settles down in the America, betrayals being more of less her way of life. Franz is a professor in Geneva who believes in the leftist ideology and who falls in love with Sabina. He doesn’t realize Sabina never wishes to marry him or anyone else and thus tries to divorce his wife only to find that Sabina leaves him while his wife will never give him a divorce. After Sabina leaves him, although he lives with his young lover he can never forget Sabina. Franz eventually dies in Cambodia when he goes on a demonstration march, still believing in his fantasized image of the goddess Sabina.

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is a milestone for Kundera. As John Bailey adequately points out:

Despite its title, there is nothing weightless about *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In one sense, indeed, it satirizes its predecessors. Nor could it possibly have been written by a Frenchman or an American. It is deeply, central European, both German and Slav, as Nietzsche himself was both Pole and German. Prague is the center of this Europe, and with this book we are right back to Kafka’s city, where neither Kafka nor Kundera can be published. None the less, Kundera’s intelligence has quietly forsaken contemporary Western fashion and goes back to its deep roots, in Europe’s old repressions and nightmares, to a time
Indeed, in this novel, Kundera develops his unique way of conducting the narration to a higher level, interposing different writing genres while not losing the theme. Musical influence is more apparent than before. Not only does his writing pattern of composing a novel in seven parts continue, Kundera also structures the narratives like a quartet with each of the four main characters taking a voice part. Kundera’s tone throughout this novel is mostly playful and inquiring, while nothing short of philosophical.

Besides being too political, Gao and Kundera’s novels are often accused of being infected by misogyny. In this paper, I argue the opposite: Neither Gao nor Kundera has a misogynous attitude, especially not in writing these two novels. Chapter Two is an overall analysis of the relationships between the protagonists and the women characters in both novels. My argument is that both protagonists seek after women not out of misogyny but out of their different views on love and relationships. Ultimately, they are devoted lovers being faithful to their belief in love. Chapter Three is focused on the two female characters in The Unbearable Lightness of Being. My argument is that these two women characters are as strong as the male characters, and therefore Kundera’s representation of womanhood is free of misogyny. Chapter Four is an analysis of One Man’s Bible’s protagonist’s feelings towards women and how women are portrayed in that novel. I argue that just like Kundera, Gao is also immune to any kind of sexism. Chapter Five will be an overall analysis of Gao and Kundera’s writing techniques and their theories on novel writing.

I will also take the narrator’s point of view as that of the author. In The Unbearable Lightness of
Being, Kundera mostly takes an omniscient point of view as he explains the characters' psychological development and meticulously draws the characters' psychograph. Sometimes, however, Kundera also takes a first-person point of view and directly interferes as the author. For example, when Tereza compares pictures of a nude beach with those taken by her of the Soviet invasion, Kundera remarks that "even I find it difficult to explain what she had in mind." (69) The advantage of this writing technique is to propel the reader to deliberate. But this also entails another question: Does the "I" represent Kundera's true opinion? The answer is probably yes because Kundera explicitly declares that "[t]he writer has original ideas and an inimitable voice. He may use any form (including the novel), and whatever he writes—being marked by his thought, borne of his voice—is part of his work." (Kundera, 1986, p.143-145) Therefore, Kundera’s novels are media to conduct his opinions. In other words, what is said in the novel by the narrator or "I" is what Kundera the author believes.

In One Man's Bible, Gao mostly takes a first-person point of view even though "you" and "he" are employed to conduct the narratives. Gao once explained that Soul Mountain is in fact a monologue of the same protagonist while "I," "you" and "he" are actually three angles of the same narrator. (Gao, 2000, p.173) In One Man's Bible, Gao reduces it to only "you" and "he," which enhances the sense of distance so that the narrator can take a more objective tone. These two persons still reflect the same narrator’s different sides, who mostly conducts Gao’s feelings and thoughts. Gao acknowledges that when he is writing he is actually talking to someone about his own feelings. (Gao, 2000, p.73) In other words, he is trying to deliver his own notions to the reader through the novel. Although, theoretically, notions can be conveyed by any character, in Gao’s novel the only characters that make commentary are either "you" or "he." Therefore, it is mostly appropriate to take comments made by "you" and "he"
as Gao's own.
Chapter 2

Tristan in the Disguise of Don Juan:
The Love Journeys of the Protagonist in One Man’s Bible and Tomas in The Unbearable Lightness of Being

In both One Man’s Bible and The Unbearable Lightness of Being, the male protagonists are exiles in many senses. First of all, they are exiles from their jobs: The protagonist in One Man’s Bible is displaced from his job during the Cultural Revolution; Tomas is forever deprived of his hospital position. Secondly, they are exiles from their countries either for a time or for life. Thirdly, and most importantly, they are exiles from love, and marriage and, ultimately, their families: Tomas abandons his sexual adventures later in life, but nevertheless, he spends most of his life seeking after women. As divorced men, neither of them has a conventional concept of family. Even though Tomas marries Tereza after his first marriage fails, he only does so “to assuage Tereza’s sufferings.”(23) His reluctance to marry is not only a residuum of his former marriage but also a tumor in his new marriage and a harbinger of his extramarital affairs. However, if these two characters were merely two modern day Don Juans, these two novels would not be so touching and deep. Unlike traditional roués that are only interested in satisfying their carnal appetites, their womanizing is far more complicated. I argue that the protagonist in One Man’s Bible is propelled by his idealism for women while Tomas in The Unbearable Lightness of Being is torn by his struggle against kitsch and his own tendency towards what he regards as kitsch.

Their belief in love also sets them apart from that of the ordinary cynical lecher. Through all their
scandalous sex journeys, even their womanizing does not negate their belief in love. At the conclusion of One Man’s Bible, the protagonist still is determined to find a woman to whom he can completely express his feelings; in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Tomas is never able to take Tereza—the only obstacle to his sexual adventures—out of his life, because he cannot give up his love for her.

Undeniably, their belief in love is often disguised by their debauchee appearance. The pursuit of women engages them most of the time, but they pursue women very differently. In The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Kundera classifies libertines into two categories: “Men who pursue a multitude of women fit neatly into two categories. Some seek their own subjective and unchanging dream of a woman in all women. Others are prompted by a desire to possess the endless variety of the objective female world. The obsession of the former is lyrical... The obsession of the latter is epic.” (201) In this sense, he puts Tomas into the second category, the “epic” type. The protagonist in One Man’s Bible could be classified into the first category, the “lyrical” type, since he always has an ideal in his mind (his ideal is discussed later in the chapter). First, I analyze the protagonist’s relationships in One Man’s Bible.

Gao develops the book’s main character, a nameless man, through his relationships with different women. This character’s identity also is established through a variety of differing relationships. Born into a fallen bourgeoisie family, the protagonist grows up virtually free of any Communist influence until he is ten years old when the CCP takes control of the government in China. He claims that “[h]e did have another sort of life, only afterward he simply forgot about it.” (Lee, 2002, p.8) (“他不是没有过另一种生活,之后竟然忘了”[7]) Apparently, his first ten years of life leaves an enormous impact on him. His early dim memory roots him in a life that is far different from that of the life of a
working-class family and causes him to be alienated from the Party. With time, his alienation even intensifies. He is always dubious of political movements and devotes his passions to women and literature.

The woman with whom the protagonist first has a sexual relationship is Lin. While she is the daughter of two high-ranking officials and the wife of a military researcher, paradoxically, she has no interest in the Party. To the contrary, she enjoys dressing very fashionably and never makes an effort to join the Party.

Lin is a very beautiful and passionate woman, but she makes him feel that she is condescending because she is much higher in the social hierarchy than he is; being both an intellectual and a non-Party member he is on the lowest rung of society. Consequently, he never feels he is her equal. From the very beginning of their relationship he is very much aware of the difference in their social status; this is the reason he cannot love Lin and it eventually leads to their separation. He is much too proud to love someone higher in the social hierarchy, with her he is always an inferior and immature young man unable to even to pay for their lunch because he does not have a pass for a restaurant that is exclusive for the high-ranking Party officials, but he is too sexually deprived to resist Lin’s carnal charms.

He is physically attracted to Lin and finally submits to her passion. But the first time they attempt sex, initially he fails to have an erection. Perhaps buried deep in his mind is an awareness of their social difference, and this renders him impotent and emasculated. Then Lin helps him, like a servant, to urinate into her washbasin. This action, though voluntary, humiliates her. He enjoys this immensely because he regards her humiliation as an exchange of their positions since now she is serving him. The shadow cast by her superior social position fades for a time from his mind. Her humiliation helps him
to gain courage. But even this seems too little because he is still unable to have an erection. Lin further humiliates herself by eagerly removing his shoes and socks and helping him lie on the bed. This act reminds him of a young woman in his teen-age dreams, a field nurse who gently, yet firmly, wipes his bleeding wound. But what wound? Apparently, he is wounded by his inferior position and his sexual immaturity. Although his wound is incurable, he temporarily overcomes the pain by humiliating her, and only then is he able to have an erection and enjoy his triumph. The next morning when he departs the house, leaving Lin at home, he feels “a sense of quiet self-confidence” (Lee, 2002, p.86) (“一种恬静的自信”[90]), a confidence coming not only from having his first sex, but also from the humiliation he imposes on her.

However reluctant he is to admit the advantage he gains by being Lin’s lover, she helps him at many crucial points. Although he seems to have an intuitive understanding of the ongoing political movement, he would have been unable to survive without her help. It is Lin who informs him that his room is to be inspected. This enables him to gather up and separate his belongings and illegitimate writings from his roommate, Lao Tan, who is arrested and whose belongings are inspected. And it is Lin who tells him there is a record in his file that his father had hidden a gun in their house. This alerts the son to the possibility of being charged and gives him time to extricate himself from prosecution. Thus, she saves his life twice.

Yet her help makes him even more aware of his inferiority. Although the protagonist and Lin arrange their dates carefully so as not to be discovered and ruined, rumors of their relationship still spread. After his director Wang Qi talks to him, he decides to terminate his relationship with Lin once and for all. He tells Lin their relationship is unequal, which is incomprehensible to Lin, because she
considers their relationship and love equal based on their fondness, at least sexually, for each other. He declares he doesn’t need to be condescended to and is not her slave. But trying to terminate their relationship is in vain. He asks her to go to a park where they rountinely go for their dates. This meeting eventually evolves into a round of passionate lovemaking despite his determination to leave her. It seems his determination to leave while rooted in their social inequality and fear of their relationship being discovered, is even more deeply motivated: He does not want to be equal. To be equal he would first have to join the Party, the least attractive thing he could do. He probably sees little difference between associating with insolent Party members and selling his soul to the devil. In choosing between selling his soul and selling out Lin, he chooses the latter. This is his awakening into the nature of their relationship and gives him further insight into his unwillingness to become a Party member. If it wasn’t for his overwhelming determination to remain non-Party, he could love her. But it is his fixation on being a non-Party member that estranges him from her. By giving Lin up, he strengthens his own identity as being a non-party dissident.

A different and anonymous young woman is most likely the one who occupies the gentlest and most poetic part of the protagonist’s heart. She is a medical student and a lover of literature who comes to the protagonist to question him about it. Initially and unsurprisingly, he is very reserved talking to this strange girl. Yet her naivety and passion soon breach his defenses. In the protagonist’s own words, they did everything except engage in the actual act of love. The reason they cannot go all the way is that, as a military medicine trainee, she has to take a yearly physical examination that includes a routine virginity check. At the time, all military women had to be virgins before marriage. Not only were they forbidden to marry until age twenty-six, the would-be spouse also had to be approved by the authorities.
Anyone breaching the regulation was expelled from the Party. Gao’s narratives on this absurd rule are seemingly dispassionate. Yet, here one sees a typical Gao ridiculing the puritan policies of the Party by introducing its unreasonable rules into his writing.

The anonymous young woman disappears for about a year after being assigned to accompany military officials to the Vietnam front. Upon her return she waits six hours for him outside his apartment building. Seeing him, her first words are, “fuck me.” During their sex she cries and screams, but makes no mention of the military rules on sex. One can easily imagine what has happened to her: She undoubtedly had her virginity taken from her by the official whom she is assigned to accompany to Vietnam. She seems to have gained a bitter insight from her experience and encourages her lover to leave China, even though if he does so, they will probably never see each other again. She might not be the ideal woman for him, but with this act, she becomes a goddess in his mind. She is young and beautiful and above all, she sacrifices herself for him. She says she will wait for him but she may not be able to see him off at the airport because she has to work that day.

Just before he boards the plane he hears her say “brother,” which is what she always calls him. He does not even turn back, perhaps because he is determined to leave and seeing her burst into tears might prevent him from doing so.

As I have argued before, this young woman is the image of a love goddess in the protagonist’s mind. She stands for beauty, youth and loyalty. She is one of the women he has loved most and what she has brought to him is peace. From the beginning of their relationship, she reflects on his lack of a sense of privacy, of security and of the ability to trust people, especially the ability to trust women. He worries that his neighbors will see this young woman staying with him; he worries this girl will report
to the authorities what he has said. In comparison with her, he appears somewhat cowardly and his departure is selfish, for he virtually gives up on their relationship with his departure. Thus she becomes not only a goddess in his mind, but also a victim of his selfish actions. The more sacrifices she makes, the more hideous he becomes. It is to himself when he thinks he doesn’t understand that his departure from China is nothing but their last farewell. He prefers not to think about this because he is reluctant to admit that he has victimized her as the price of his own freedom.

What is intriguing is that at the airport as soon as he has the feeling that China is not his country, he hears her calling him brother. He tries to ignore her voice but it becomes louder and louder. When he finally turns back, he sees only a blur of a woman dressed in a military uniform standing behind a banister. This is what China is really like in his heart: It is a country that is beautiful, fragile, militarily suppressed and confined by barriers. He can neither save her nor save his country. To save himself, he cannot but leave.

He then buries her memory deep in his heart, undoubtedly because it is too painful to recall the days when they were passionately in love. He is able to temporarily eliminate her image from his mind until another woman, Marguerite, awakens it. As a German Jewess, Marguerite is constantly conflicted by her animosity against anti-Semitic Germans and her love for Germany. Their relationship is one of his longest and certainly the most important, starting from his earlier days in China when they know each other as only friends.

Marguerite is the one who remembers everything: From how they meet, how he gives her one of his paintings, to how a suspicious man claiming to be a meter reader disturbs them at his home. By portraying Marguerite as a German Jewess, a person whose people have been ruthlessly persecuted by
the Nazis, a person who holds to her memories, Gao suggests that once people have lived under cruel despots and have been persecuted they will never forget. Rather, this becomes a part of their collective memory that is passed from generation to generation. Gao shows that inhuman totalitarianism will never be erased from people’s memory and will never be lost historically no matter how much the authorities try to falsify and eliminate their records. Gao urges his readers to realize the cruelty and the incurable hurt that despotism can bring to its people. The protagonist often confesses that he wants to forget about what has happened to him in China, a markedly different view than that held by Marguerite. However, it is his inability to forget that is the clue to what is in his mind. Not only does China haunt him awake and in his dreams, but there is no means for him to escape.

Marguerite can be likened to a mirror for the protagonist. She reflects his image as a Chinese cast into the shadow of a Communist nightmare. For him, Marguerite is not a goddess, but a woman who excites him as much as she estranges him. The two stand in sharp contrast to each other. Memory is hell for him (56) while she insists there are wonderful memories, especially of those one loves (58). He believes one has to live for the moment and should break with the past (60) while she is never convinced of this.

Their beliefs are incomprehensible to each other. Their love may be sincere, yet their inability to communicate and the unavoidable geographical separation render their relationship short-lived. Almost every time they talk they argue. He considers her naive about politics because she never has lived in the Nazi period. It is only history for her, a history she merely has heard or read about. Yet for the protagonist, he believes his personal experiences with despots and injustices give him a superior right to judge the political side of activities. Nevertheless, one thing she does convince him to do is to speak
out about the injustices he has witnessed and experienced. Indeed, she is actually the one who is responsible for the book, because her questions evoke the protagonist’s memories, which are turned into the novel.

Although the relationship between the protagonist and Marguerite is replete with misunderstanding and arguments, they still admire each other. Such admiration, unfortunately, never appears in his one marriage. Among all his relationships, his marriage is probably the most repulsive one. He and his wife-to-be, Qian, meet in the chaos of a gunfight between two political factions, an ill omen for their future. Both try to go to Beijing but have no way to leave the city (presumably Wuhan), so they end up staying together in a tiny room in a cheap hotel. That night, they have sex, not out of love but out of desperation and just because of a chance encounter. Starting from that first night, he appears to be rather selfish. Fully aware of what could happen to her if she becomes pregnant before marriage, he still ejaculates into her. Only afterwards is he able to remember the potential harm he may have caused her. She is the one who comforts him by telling him that she is having her menstrual period.

Sadly, his selfishness increasingly grows as their relationship develops. When they go to the ferry port the next day, he squeezes onto the ferry with her bag, leaving her behind, alone and defenseless. After he returns to Beijing, he goes to find her aunt, assuming the address he finds in her notebook would be correct. This seemingly kind act is in fact irresponsible and reckless because he is not certain whether or not this address is her aunt’s even when he hands the bag to the woman. It would have been disastrous if this woman were not her aunt but someone from an opposing political faction. While he is always extremely alert about his own affairs, he is not as nearly heedful of her safety.

When she writes to him, however, the protagonist does show his affection to her. In the letter, she
writes, "we of this generation that has been sacrificed do not deserve any other fate." (Lee, 2002, p.287) He is worried by her suicidal tones and calls her at midnight. Surprisingly, she is cold to him on the phone. Yet apparently, it is at this moment that she is converted to trusting him. When he asks her to marry him, it is probably this expression of concern that convinces her to agree.

Later, when he writes to her and asks her to marry after he settles in a small village, he fully discusses his life and what their future might be, but never mentions a word of love. Indeed, he is never sure whether he loves her, although at one point he thinks he might. (327) When he asks someone he does not love to marry him and cares nothing about her happiness, his proposal becomes nothing but a desperate struggle for some company in his lonely life in the countryside.

Qian quietly accepts his proposal and comes to his village in the winter with all her belongings. Their bland and almost loveless relationship turns bitter on the second day of their marriage. When they walk on a small hill in the rain, she suddenly falls into a fit of gloom. After they return home, she blames him for not loving her and accuses him of ruining her life. He takes this condemnation as merely a hysterical whim. But everything she says later comes to pass: He indeed does not love her and their marriage costs her entire youth (they divorce after the revolution, by which time she is already a middle-aged woman). Horrified at seeing what potentially dangerous things he is writing, she loses control of her temper and violently attacks him, which is quite understandable, given that the whole country is superstitious about its self-proclaimed savior Mao Zedong, and the CCP. He should know that she is not one of those incurably brainwashed by the Party if he still remembers what she says in her letter. Disappointingly, he puts no effort into comforting her either then or later. Instead, he yells at
her, intimidates her and finally presses a pillow over her face so that no one in the village can hear her. He threatens to kill her several times, but she never considers taking his life, no matter how infuriated she becomes.

In his marriage, the protagonist is represented to be a frustrated young man sharing little sympathy and understanding with his wife. What he does to his wife cannot be much justified. His life in this stage is at its lowest point in terms of both career and love. He does, however, learn much from this experience. Politically, he is changed from a previous rather passionate activist into an emotionless onlooker, partly due to what he has seen in the outrageous political campaign movements and what Lu shuji (Party secretary Lu) has told him; in terms of love, this failed relationship has forever inoculated him against marriage.

Contrary to what he is in his marriage, the protagonist is incredibly considerate to his French lover Sylvie. He caters to her sudden whim to see the royal park in Australia; he even seems to understand why she needs more than one lover. Although Gao fully appreciates the relevantly great freedom in the West, as a writer who is not convinced of any kind of isms, including Capitalism, he is able to keep a critical attitude towards the western society.

Sylvie is portrayed as a typical young woman growing up in a western consumerist society. She is like a paradigm displaying a panorama of a typical western young woman’s life. She is hedonistic, financially secure, but nonetheless deeply depressed. In a society that has lost all the taboos, especially sexual ones, it seems especially difficult for her to find love. The loneliness and absurdity of life in western society is fully embodied by Sylvie’s friend Madina. A lack of understanding and sympathy is the sole reason for her promiscuity, her being regarded as mentally ill and her suicide. As Sylvie puts
it, “it was just that no one could understand her, people were not willing to try and understand her.” (Lee, 2002, p.393) ("她只是无人能理解，人不愿意去理解一个人，就是这样。” [394])

The protagonist’s relationship with Sylvie seems to be more complex than merely carnal. Sometimes the protagonist’s tolerance of Sylvie almost seems to be paternal rather than that of a lover. During their Australian tour, in just one day, he uses the term “tease” (“逗”) three times, a term usually used for children in Chinese. This is not too strange because their age difference is probably enough for them to be like father and daughter. Sometimes they are like ordinary lovers. They make love passionately and occasionally he is jealous of her other boyfriends. But most of the time, they are just like friends, both lonely and gloomy, finding comfort in each other’s company. What they share best is an understanding of the utopia of love: “What she was searching for was the ultimate in both love and sexual excitement. But that was an ideal, what people dreamed about, utopia.” (Lee, 2002, p.388) ("最多的爱和最大的快感，这就如同理想或梦什么的，也是乌托邦。” [389]) Her melancholy that is entailed by her pursuit of such a utopia is totally comprehensible to him. He understands that “… it made her sad, profoundly sad, it was the profound sadness of being human, an eternal sadness that could never be dispelled.” (Lee, 2002, p.388) ("她的忧伤也是深刻的，人类深刻的忧伤，无法排解永恒的忧伤。” [389]) Since he regards this as “the profound sadness of being human,” it must affect him as well. Indeed, her melancholy is more than familiar to him. This is not only the fundamental element upon which they are able to build a relationship but also is something that the protagonist has sought for his whole life. He does not reveal this life-long desire until near the end of the novel:

You want a woman, a woman whose thinking is as lucid as you are, a woman who
is free of the bondage of the world. You want a woman who rejects the ties of a home, and does not bear children, a woman who does not follow vanity and fashion, a natural and totally wanton woman. You want a woman who does not want to appropriate anything from your person, a woman who will, at this instant of time, enjoy with you the joys of being a fish in water. But where is such a woman to be found? A woman as solitary as you, yet contented with being solitary like you, will fuse your solitude with hers in sexual gratification; it will fuse in caresses and one another’s looks, while you are examining and exploring one another. Where is such a woman to be found? (Lee, 2002, p.439)

你想有一个女人，一个和你同样透彻的女人，一个把这世界上的一切牵绊都解脱的女人，一个不贪家庭之累不生孩子的女人，一个不追虚荣和时髦的女人，一个自然而然充分淫荡的女人，一个并不想从你身上攫取什么的女人，只同你此时此刻行鱼水之欢的女人，但你哪里去找到这样一个女人？一个和你同样孤独并满足这种孤独的女人，将你得孤独同她的孤独融化在性的满足之中， 融化在抚爱和彼此的眼光里，在彼此的审视与搜索中，可这女人你又哪里去找寻？(438)

Obviously, this is an ideal woman whom it is impossible to find. This ideal is responsible for the failure of his relationships. Because of it, the protagonist is never satisfied with any of his real relationships and he searches endlessly for an ideal woman and for "the ultimate in both love and sexual excitement." An impossible mission. Bearing this ideal in his mind, his wandering from one woman to-
another is inevitable. Compared with her, every one of his lovers disappoints him to some degree: Marguerite’s opinions are often much too different; his wife is totally contradictory to him; Lin condescends to him; even the anonymous young woman cannot completely gratify him because of her naivety. In short, his relationships all fail to meet his expectations. Ironically, his unwillingness to give up this ideal love only makes him appear in the disguise of a libertine.

While idealism is the motivation of the protagonist’s philandering in One Man’s Bible, escape from kitsch is the common theme in all the relationships in The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Undoubtedly, in this novel kitsch is the key concept, which is mercilessly examined by Kundera. He gives kitsch various definitions under differing circumstances. His four characters are all weapons to fight kitsch. Sometimes the characters fail, but most of the time they struggle to flee the shadow of an omnipresent kitsch. Tomas is no exception in this respect.

Just like the protagonist in One Man’s Bible, Tomas has relationships with numerous women. Presumably, his philandering starts from the time of his divorce. As soon as he discovers he has to bribe his ex-wife in order to see his son, he forsakes his right to see the child. More outrageously, he even asks himself “why should he feel more for that child, to whom he was bound by nothing but a single improvident night, than for any other?” (11) This question is one of the turning points in Tomas’s life. As Kundera puts it later,

[i]n the realm of totalitarian kitsch, all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. It follows, then, that the true opponent of totalitarian kitsch is the person who asks questions. A question is like a knife that slices through the stage
Tomas’s inquiry, thus, becomes his first move in his battle with kitsch. With this question, Tomas finds the anti-kitsch answer: There is no need to fight for his son “in the name of paternal sentiments!” (12) He then decides to stop visiting his son, but finds he has “no sympathizers.” (12) Even his parents denounce him for this. Consequently, “in practically no time he managed to rid himself of wife, son, mother, and father.” (12) In other words, he sets himself free from responsibilities and from kitsch. Bestowed with this freedom, Tomas begins to live a life that is by no means conventional. He invents “erotic friendship” not out of misogyny, but as an outcome of his “fear” and “desire” for women. (12) This is another means to strike against kitsch, because he clearly views marriage as pointless and believes that “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.” (12) Even though “the unwritten contract of erotic friendship stipulated that Tomas should exclude all love from his life,” he still considers his invention to be “flawless.” (12) What this means can only be that he regards love as a flaw, a kind of kitsch. As Tomas suggests, what he yearns for is a life exclusive of sentiment and love.

Despite his aversion to love, Tomas falls in love with Tereza. After they meet in Tereza’s hometown, she visits him twice in Prague. On the first visit, she catches the flu and has to stay in his apartment overnight. This is a serious violation of one of Tomas’s rules: Never sleep with a woman, because “spending the night together was the corpus delicti of love.” (13) This is exactly the point when his love for her germinates. Later that night, Tomas recalls the metaphor that Tereza always

backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it. (254)
reminds him of: “A child whom he had taken from a bulrush basket that had been daubed with pitch and sent to the riverbank of his bed.”(7) Tomas does not realize that “a single metaphor can give birth to love”(11); neither does he realize that a metaphor-induced love would forever occupy his poetic memory.

His love for Tereza brings Tomas much uneasiness. This love is undesirable for him not only because it puts him “in a bind: In his mistresses’ eyes, he bore the stigma of his love for Tereza; in Tereza’s eyes, the stigma of his exploits with the mistresses.” (23) This is just the tip his dilemma. Underneath it all is his unwillingness to be like every married man, to be the same as others, to live in kitsch. As Sabina puts it, Tomas “is the complete opposite of kitsch” and “in the kingdom of kitsch” he “would be a monster.”(12) As such a monster, Tomas naturally “feared the responsibility.”(6) Marriage is clearly a responsibility and constrains his “erotic friendships.” What’s worse, his first marriage left him with a deep impression of how kitschy marriage is. He cannot get accustomed to being in love. For him, to be in a steady relationship or marriage means nothing but kitsch. Mistaking love as kitsch, Tomas continues his erotic friendship to escape, even though only temporarily, from his marriage, regardless of how much this may hurt Tereza and ultimately himself, only because to love her means he has to yield, in part, his battle against kitsch.

To rid himself of marriage, Tomas tries to first overcome his love for her. Yet his betrayals of her only fail him. His endless affairs with other women are futile attempts to undo his love for Tereza. Even after Tereza leaves him for Prague, which could be a perfect chance for him to live his ideal life once again, Tomas only finds himself unable to let her go. He cannot stop thinking of her and feels unbearably melancholic. This, however, does not mean that he is reconciled with love. He tells himself
he is “sick of compassion” and “[i]t’s good she’s gone and that I’ll never see her again, though it’s not
Tereza I need to be free of—it’s that sickness, compassion, which I was immune to until she infected
me with it.” (31)

We have to look at what compassion exactly means in Czech to understand what Tomas truly implies. Earlier in the novel, Kundera argues that:

In languages that form the word “compassion” not from the root “suffering” but
from the root “feeling,” the word is used in approximately the same way, but to
contend that it designates a bad or inferior sentiment is difficult. The secret strength
of its etymology floods the word with another light and gives it a broader meaning:
To have compassion (co-feeling) means not only to be able to live with the other’s
misfortune but also to feel with him any emotion—joy, anxiety, happiness, pain.
This kind of compassion (in the sense of soucit, współczucie, Mitgefühl, medkänsla)
therefore signifies the maximal capacity of affective imagination, the art of
emotional telepathy. In the hierarchy of sentiments, then, it is supreme. (20)

Given that in Czech, compassion is soucit which is one of those words that mean co-feeling, what
Tomas is sick of is actually co-feeling, something that is “supreme” “in the hierarchy of sentiments,” in
another word, again, love.

Unable to fight against his love for Tereza, Tomas finally returns to Czech to follow Tereza and
continues his sexual adventure. Without love involved in his affairs, he must consider them his
anti-kitsch decampment from marriage. Even his excuse for his infidelity is to discover the “one-millionth part dissimilarity.” (199) This is not only what Tomas seeks in his womanizing, but also what he seeks in his life. In his whole life, Tomas endeavors to be dissimilar, to be anti-kitsch. To be the same as others is no different than being kitsch to Tomas. Later, however, this excuse loses its stimulating function when a storm had left no trace for him while a young woman recalls how beautiful it is as Tomas makes love to her “for the length of the storm.” (207) Tomas is shocked by this and finally realizes all his “poetic memory” is occupied by Tereza and he can do nothing but to accept it.

This is another turning point in Tomas’s life. After he realizes this, and after Tereza enters his mind again—probably the poetic memory of his mind—“with a crow wrapped in her red scarf and pressed against her breast,” he gradually reforms. (209-210) The very next day when he is assigned to clean a window of a private customer, for the first time in his life, Tomas is “not looking forward to it; he was afraid it was still another woman.” (210) For someone who is perpetually in search of new women, this is certainly an abnormal reaction. The private customer turns out to be the editor and Tomas’s son who ask him to sign a petition, which he refuses, again only for Tereza’s sake. The following day, he cannot recognize the actress whom he has dated and has a date with again. Tomas believes it is a function of aging that is causing him to be physically and mentally tired. Yet as a doctor, he probably knows that nobody ages in a day. The reason behind this could only be that now that his whole memory—not only his poetic memory—has been monopolized by Tereza, his mistresses lose their power even to enter his mind.

As a monster in the kingdom of kitsch, even when Tomas realizes he can do nothing to change his love for Tereza, he still needs to reconcile himself with love, a matter he has regarded as kitsch for too
long. After he has a series of erotic dreams, Tomas reflects that love has nothing in common with sex. Then for the first time in his life, Tomas realizes that “[l]ove is our freedom” and “[l]ove lies beyond ‘Es muss sein!’” (236) In other words, love is not kitsch, but is anti-kitsch. Following this epiphany, Tomas dreams of his ideal woman, only to wake up beside Tereza. He then imagines himself in a dilemma: To choose between his ideal woman and Tereza. Unsurprisingly, he chooses Tereza, because “he falls prey to compassion and sinks deep in her soul.” (239) But this time, he does not feel his compassion for Tereza is sickness. Instead, “he felt an ineffable love for her.” (239) This is the point when Tomas finally abandons his notion that love is kitsch and succumbs himself to his affection to Tereza.

From considering compassion (love by another name) as a sickness to regarding love as freedom, Tomas has undergone a long journey. As soon as his bias towards love diminishes, he devotes himself to Tereza. Although Kundera is unclear on how Tomas deals with his erotic friendships afterwards, obviously, Tomas concludes it. Shortly after, he takes Tereza to the countryside and settles down. Thus, he forever rules out womanizing and never regrets his decision.

As discussed above, in both novels, the male protagonists have various relationships with different women. Women always occupy a very important part of their life. Through their different relationships, they appear to be like chameleons changing colors in different environments.

In One Man’s Bible, the protagonist’s relationships are like a prism, they reflect different aspects of his character. From Lin, we see a young man being deprived of both sex and esteem but proudly guarding his own identity as a non-Party dissident; the anonymous young woman, a disillusioned man trying to save himself rather than the country; his wife, a selfish husband getting married and divorced
only for his own sake; Marguerite, a writer with an obsession with China endeavoring to deny it so as to flee from his nightmare; Sylvie, a lonely middle-aged man futilely looking for company in a foreign country. Although most of his relationships fail to last (with the exception of that with Sylvie, which does not seem to have much longevity either), the protagonist never loses his faith in love. By the end of the novel, he is still longing for an ideal love that has always resided in his mind. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas also evolves from a man fearing love and commitment to a husband devoted to his wife and his marriage, from a man mistaking love as sickness to a man believing love “is our freedom.”(236)

Despite their shared belief in love, there is, however, a very distinctive dissemblance between them. As argued before, the protagonist in *One Man’s Bible* is an inveterate idealist that will never settle for anything less than his perfect woman. His idealism spurs him to further his philandering and still keeps him away from finding a love with which he could be satiated and thus could put an end to his sexual adventure. Unlike him, Tomas gives up his ideal life for his love. When imagining a chance to choose, he even gives up his ideal woman for Tereza. This difference results in different endings for the characters. At the end of *One Man’s Bible*, the protagonist yearns for a love stronger than ever, while it seems tragic when Tomas and Tereza die together in a car crash. Yet we have to remember, for Tomas, only one thing is death: “Tereza asleep, having terrible nightmares, and he unable to wake her.”(228) In this sense, one might even say their death is not the end of their love, but rather the only eternity it could possibly reach.

Thus, by portraying the protagonists as two men acting against kitsch but eventually regaining their faith in love, both authors save their protagonist from being stereotypical womanizers. The women
characters, on the other hand, are in turn freed of being subjected to misogyny. The next two chapters will analyze the women characters in each novel.
Some critics find that the representation of women in these two novels suggests a sexist viewpoint. It is not uncommon to find such comments as "far from representing a multidimensional universe of men and women that transcends social and political codes, Kundera's works repeatedly seem to rely on stereotypical representations of gender." (O'Brien, 1995, p.2) In regard to Gao, similar criticisms also prevail: "...feminists might find his treatment of women in Soul Mountain bordering on male chauvinism. While I argue that Gao gives women a prominent role in Soul Mountain, one might nonetheless find the portrayal in One Man's Bible less satisfying, even disturbing. Appearing in a series of encounters fraught with sexual overtones, the female characters in this long novel are somewhat flat and lack autonomy." (Lin, 2001, p.17-18) Contrary to such comments, this paper argues that the images of women in both novels are as distinctive as they are strong, and therefore they are free of any chauvinist representation of women. In both novels the women characters are extremely important. Not only are the identities of the protagonists established through their relationships with women, but also the women characters' identities are vital components of the novels. Indeed, it is difficult to determine in either one of the novels how much of a contribution is made by the women characters and how much of a contribution is made by the male protagonists.

As I said above, how Kundera portrays women characters and how he contrasts men and women often generate polemics from his critics. Some of them consider his perception of women to be biased and opinionated because of his anti-feminist viewpoint. For example, Marjorie E. Rhine sums up this
kind of criticism on Kundera with these words: "... despite Kundera's exploration of the slipperiness of the boundaries defining the differences between various dualities (lightness/heaviness being only the most obvious), his work seems to reflect the age-old duality in which men are positioned as creatures defined by rationality and women are perceived to be the embodiment of all that is corporeal." (Rhine, 1999, p.231) Yet this kind of condemnation is short on evidence from The Unbearable Lightness of Being. In this chapter, I will examine the female characters in the novel in question and repudiate the above opinions.

First, the two principal women characters, Tereza and Sabina, are both women artists who are portrayed as being as intellectual and sensible as the male characters and therefore not the opposite of "creatures defined by rationality." Sabina is an extremely prosperous painter and Tereza a very talented photographer. Although Tereza later refuses her job as a photographer in Zurich, it is not self-deprecation that drives her to abandon her job. On the contrary, it is exactly a feminist awareness that women should have the freedom to choose that leads her to refuse the position offered to her. Tereza has no interest in the position, rather she prefers to "pour over her German and French grammars," both intellectual activities at home. (72) Secondly, despite the fact that "the body" is a very important concept to the female characters in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, especially Tereza, mere corporeality, however, is not exactly what "body" connotes to them.

Tereza is the key to understanding what "the body" truly signifies in the novel. As the title of Part Two and Four ("Soul and Body")—both devoted to Tereza—suggests, the duality of body and soul, or rather the very concept of body, is always an essential issue in Tereza's life. Physical appearance is more to her than an "instrument panel of her body mechanisms." (41) She always sees the body as a
metaphor for both personal privacy and identity. In terms of privacy, Marjorie E. Rhine makes a point when she observes that “Kundera responds to a regime that works toward a desacrilization of individual privacy and integrity by prosecuting characters who poignantly portray the anxieties and importance of upholding the sanctity of the body.” (Rhine, 1999, p.232) In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tereza’s resistance to her mother’s exposure of her nudity is in fact an attempt to prevent her mother’s disclosure of privacy. Some things that Tereza’s mother does to her, such as forbidding Tereza from locking the bathroom door while taking a shower, reading out Tereza’s secret diary over dinner, are akin to what the Communist government does to a country when it destroys the most sacrosanct right of an individual: privacy. Rhine continues to argue, “[t]his is why Tereza’s anxious search to find something unique about her own body to resacralize the body, is not only a form of resistance to her mother’s world, a ‘battle with her mother’ (47), but also, by extension, a kind of resistance to the totalitarian state.” (Rhine, 1999, p.235) In my opinion, Tomas’s sexual adventures with women have the same effect on Tereza: His invariable desire towards different female bodies turns him into another despot in Tereza’s world and eradicates her privacy. When he has intercourses with other women, Tereza’s body loses its uniqueness again because for Tereza it means that he treats her body the same way he does to others.

Besides privacy, her body represents an even more important value to Tereza. She never sees her body as merely “corporeal,” but she “tried to see herself through her body.” (41) Thus her body becomes a way to see “herself”—her identity. She finds the theory that everyone’s body has the same mechanism with an identical function is incomprehensible, because it would be equivalent to the notion that every soul is the same and so no individual is distinct from any other. Whenever she is struggling
with her body, she is actually trying to discover who she is as an individual autonomous being and what
her identity is. Seeing bodies only reminds her of how imperceptible the difference is between everyone.
Thus, she abhors her mother’s excessive bodily exposure. To Tereza, this exposure of an “old and ugly”
body differs very little from disclosure that her soul is old and ugly. In contrast, her mother sees
nothing in common between her body and her soul because “[i]n her mother’s world all bodies were the
same and marched behind one another in formation.” (57)

Knowing how she perceive the soul and the body as a complementary whole, regarding her body
as a means to express her identity, we can understand why Tereza longs for “a body unlike other
bodies”—because any unusual bodily characteristic contributes to the uniqueness of her soul. (47)
(emphasis added) Her strength shines through her determination to be herself, to be unlike anyone else,
especially her mother. Her bodily resemblance to her mother only reminds her that she is her mother’s
daughter and threatens her identity as the woman Tereza. Although she cannot choose her physical
appearance, she does choose to escape from her mother’s world to live her own life by leaving her
mother for Tomas in order to live a life that is totally opposite to that of her mother.

Undeniably, Tereza has very ambiguous feelings towards her mother. On the one hand, she needs
her mother’s love as every daughter does: “She was willing to do anything to gain her mother’s love.”
(44) On the other hand, she is always endeavoring to escape from her mother’s influence. Kundera
maintains that “I sometimes have the feeling that her entire life was merely a continuation of her
mother’s, much as the course of a ball on the billiard table is merely the continuation of the player’s
arm movement.” (41) This ball, however, doesn’t travel in the direction where the movement of the
player’s arm sends it, but rather it strikes the billiard table’s rim and turns to travel in a totally different
direction than was intended. In other words, Tereza takes a very different route from that of her mother. Later in the novel, Kundera adds that “Tereza appears to me a continuation of the gesture by which her mother cast off her life as a young beauty, cast it far behind her.” (46)

Indeed, Tereza is the antithesis of her mother in almost every respect. Her mother has a middle-class background while Tereza grows up in a poor shattered family and has to drop out of school at the early age of fifteen to support her family as a waitress. Her mother is doted upon by her father while Tereza is hardly loved by anyone in her family. Her mother has no interest in school, being preoccupied by thoughts of her own beauty, while Tereza is the most brilliant student in her class. Her mother is pursued by nine suitors and has to choose one of them only because of an unexpected pregnancy while Tereza resolutely decides to leave her hometown to pursue Tomas. Her mother has four children while Tereza never intends to have any (later she even thanks Tomas for not wanting a child). Most importantly, her mother is never ashamed of showing her “old and ugly” body while Tereza cherishes hers as a manifestation of her uniqueness. Estranged and sometimes even exasperated by this contradistinction, Tereza’s mother tries to force her world upon Tereza, which makes Tereza feel as though she “lived in the concentration camp when she lived with her mother. Almost from childhood, she knew that a concentration camp was nothing exceptional or startling but something very basic, a given into which we are born and from which we can escape only with the greatest of efforts.” (137) With her ability to summon “the greatest of efforts,” Tereza does succeed in retreating from her mother’s world.

Nevertheless, there are times when her mother still has power over her. Whenever Tereza’s body—usually her stomach—reacts against her, it is a metaphor for her mother’s haunting her. The first
time she sees Tomas in Prague, Tereza's stomach “started rumbling terribly.” (53) She knows this is her mother's revenge: “She felt as though she were carrying her mother in her stomach and her mother had guffawed to spoil her meeting with Tomas.” (53) Fortunately, Tomas helps her to defeat her mother: He ignores the noises and hugs her.

When they make love, Tereza is still conscious of the “body and soul” issue. Her screams during love-making “in fact (were) the naïve idealism of her love trying to banish all contradictions, banish the duality of body and soul, banish perhaps even time.” (54) Her screams accompany their lovemaking every time. The key to understand why she struggles most to fight against the duality of her body and soul during lovemaking is still her concept of body and soul: Making love could be taken as the physical manifestation of love, i.e. the body of love. Intercourse is the convergence where the body of love meets the soul of love, where the contradiction of body and soul can be resolved. To her, intercourse and love have no duality in the same way that her body and soul are two equal and complementary revelations of her identity.

Therefore one can comprehend why Tereza is always tortured by Tomas’s making love with other women. It is much more complicated than just jealousy. As argued above, for her, her body is not merely corporeal but the outer expression of her identity while sex is the body of love and therefore the outer expression of love. Hence Tomas’s sexual adventures with other women are a sign that not only shows his love is fractured by other women but also announces that Tereza is identical to these women since Tomas obviously does not differentiate among women’s bodies. He treats them equally by having intercourse with all of them, thus obliterating her uniqueness just as her mother’s laughing at her ostensible Puritanism does.
The duality of body and soul even tortures Tereza in her dreams. In one of her nightmares, naked women are marching around a swimming pool, and Tomas shoots them one by one. Being naked with other women, Tereza again feels the frustration Tomas always brings to her. In the dream he forces her to see her body as being exactly identical to other women's bodies and her soul being equally indistinct. His shooting, one by one, is a metaphor for having sex with one woman after another. In Tereza's world, his disregard of their individuality is equivalent to a death sentence for their identities.

Tereza's disgust of nude bodies permeates every aspect of her life, including her job. When a woman photographer at a publishing house in Zurich offers to show Tereza pictures of a nudist beach, the editor who is greeting Tereza "was delicate enough to fear that a Czech who photographed tanks would find pictures of naked people on a beach frivolous." (68) To everyone's surprise, Tereza thinks the photographer's pictures are "the same" as hers of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. (69) Even the narrator finds "it difficult to explain what she had in mind when she compared a nude beach to the Russian invasion." (69) Nevertheless, he does provide a clue of what Tereza is thinking. First, both the naked bodies and the Russian invasion scenes are visually hideous for her. Since naked bodies are never beautiful to Tereza, what she sees in the pictures is no exception: "A naked mother leaning over her children, her giant tits hanging low like a goat's or cow's, and the husband leaning the same way on the other side, his penis and scrotum looking very much like an udder in miniature." (69) As a result, Tereza is reminded of her mother whose nudity she most resents seeing. Moreover, the woman photographer becomes Tereza's mother's incarnation when she tells Tereza with "maternal affection" that "[t]here's nothing wrong with the naked body. It's normal. And everything normal is beautiful!" (69) This is followed by the image in her mind of "her mother marching through the flat naked..."(69)
The image of her mother inevitably links the pictures together. Her mother's exhibition of her naked body shows Tereza she has no unique identity and the Russian invasion tells the Czechs they have no independence.

Not only does Tereza's strength show in her determination to neutralize the duality of body and soul and to escape her mother's world, she is also strong-minded in many other respects. Although she thinks to herself 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," she has great strength beneath her weak appearance. (73) She is strong not only because "a young woman forced to keep drunks supplied with beer and siblings with clean underwear—instead of being allowed to pursue 'something higher'—stores up great reserves of vitality, a vitality never dreamed of by university students yawning over their books," but more importantly because of her life long battle against her mother's world, against kitsch. (55)

Like Tomas, Tereza also deems fighting against kitsch a life priority. Although they have completely different definitions of kitsch—for Tomas kitsch is partly the traditional concept of family and marriage, while for Tereza it is the notion of the negation of one's unique identity—they both strive to stay away from it, regardless of what price they have to pay.

While Tomas's weapon against kitsch is his licentious lifestyle, Tereza's weapon is her books. From her earliest years, Tereza is never impressed by popular trends. She isn't even aware of what constitutes a trend. When everyone her age listens to a transistor radio, Tereza carries nothing but her books with her. Indeed, books have always been Tereza's barrier separating her from others, her "single weapons against the world of crudity surrounding her." (47) Since Tereza is always conscious of the importance
of her body, of physical being, books are no exception: “They not only offered the possibility of an imaginary escape from a life she found unsatisfying; they also had a meaning for her as physical objects: She loved to walk down the street with a book under her arm. It had the same significance for her as an elegant cane for the dandy a century ago. It differentiated her from others.” (48) Along with her body, her books help her to partly establish and disclose more about her identity: A woman who loves to read—an intellectual activity for certain.

Tereza’s obsession with books even helps to spark her love for Tomas who she first sees him with a book on his table. The first time they meet, unsurprisingly, Tereza is weighed down as usual: Her body “sagged under the weight of the beers on the tray, and her soul lay somewhere at the level of the stomach or pancreas.” (47) To understand her physical condition at this time, we need to examine Kundera’s own account of how she was created: “Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach.” (39) He then maintains, “Tereza was therefore born of a situation which brutally reveals the irreconcilable duality of body and soul, that fundamental human experience.” (40) Thus when “her soul lay somewhere at the level of the stomach or pancreas,” it means nothing more than that she again is in the same situation out of which she is born: A struggle with her body.

This struggle also proves to be the theme of their later relationship. After Tomas slips away from her and returns to Prague, Tereza leaves her mother and takes a train to Prague to find him. To some extent, Tereza’s first move against kitsch resembles Tomas’s. Like Tomas who stops visiting his son and completely loses his family, she leaves behind her mother and family for Tomas in Prague. What she leaves behind is what she considers as the ultimate representative of kitsch—her mother.

Tereza is also the stronger one in Tomas and her relationship. From their relationship’s very
beginning, she breaks his rules effortlessly. As early as their first night of lovemaking, she sleeps over at Tomas’s apartment, an unprecedented event for him. Later, he marries her, despite his not believing in marriage. After their marriage, on every single occasion, Tereza makes decisions not only for herself but for both of them. When the Russians invade Czechoslovakia and Tomas is offered a position in a Zurich hospital, “[i]f Tomas rejected the Swiss doctor’s offer without a second thought, it was for Tereza’s sake.” (25) As soon as Tereza says she wants to go abroad, he takes up the offer without hesitation. Shortly after they arrive in Zurich, unable to bear Tomas’s ongoing affair with Sabina, Tereza “made the decision herself” to take Karenin back to Prague, leaving Tomas alone in Switzerland. (29) For the first time in his life, Tomas realizes that “he was utterly powerless” and “[o]ne day Tereza came to him uninvited. One day she left the same way. She came with a heavy suitcase. She left with a heavy suitcase.” (29) Within just a few days, Tomas follows suit: He returns to Prague to find Tereza. When he arrives at their Prague home, she is “waiting” but “she could not tell him that she had been waiting for him.” (77) In other words, Tereza is not at all surprised. She has known that he would come to her. That night, Tereza comes to realize that “… he had come back because of her; because of her, he had changed his destiny. Now he could no longer be responsible for her; now she was responsible for him.” (77)

Despite Tereza enduring Tomas’s liaisons, which seems to indicate her weakness and therefore the author’s sexist representation of women, I argue exactly the opposite. Tereza is never reconciled to Tomas’s sexual adventures. She is not secretive when she reads the letters his mistresses (Sabina in particular) send to him and dramatically reacts with trembling hands. She even tells him that his hair “smells of female genitals.” (235) If Tereza was weak, she would either have been reconciled with
Tomas’s affairs, which would mean that she had given up her battle against the kitsch idea that body and soul are irrelevant to each other and that having sex with other women does no harm to his love for her, or she would divorce Tomas, which would imply she can do nothing about his infidelity but abandon her most treasured love and marriage. Far from being incapable, Tereza never submits to tolerating his affairs—unlike what her mother with her stepfather—nor will she divorce. On the contrary, Tereza gradually persuades Tomas believing that love is the one and only antidote for kitsch.

In terms of work, Tereza is as unwavering as she is in her relationships with her mother and with Tomas. She only chooses what she has a passion for. When her pictures of the Russian invasion are rejected by an editor in Zurich, Tereza refuses to take a job photographing “cactuses and roses and things.” (71) The female photographer is shocked and tries to persuade her to accept her offer, suggesting that “[e]ven if you take pictures of cactuses, you’re leading your life. If you live only for your husband, you have no life of your own.” (71) This woman simply assumes that it is better for Tereza to choose to have a job even if it is unbearably tedious for her. Here, Kundera has the photographer introduce the banal bias that having a job is a prerequisite for becoming a woman who is as valuable to society as a man. In this respect, John O’Brien argues:

... there is a variety of ways that Kundera’s novels actually challenge the problematic representations of women that often seem to be promoted... Kundera repeatedly foregrounds acts or scenes of representation to expose superficial or otherwise false representations of women. The opposition-based thinking that is so undeniably present in his works does not indicate that Kundera embraces such
positions; instead I have contended that Kundera typically presents oppositional
thinking (usually male thinking) in order to expose and challenge its either/or

Here, the “either/or assumption” that every respectable woman should have her own career or she
will not have her “own life” is challenged by Tereza’s rejection of the photographer’s offer. Kundera
has Tereza fighting and rebelling against this cliché, this kitsch, by rejecting the offer without hesitation.
There is no substantial difference between Tereza declining to take the job and Tomas resigning his
hospital position because both prefer self-dignity to the judgment of others. By refusing to photograph
subjects she has no interest in, Tereza becomes even stronger and more immune to kitsch.

All in all, Tereza is not as weak as she—or almost anyone else—imagines she is. On the contrary,
her strong will power enables her to escape from her mother’s world, to reform Tomas’s attitude
towards love, to resist kitschy Communist ideology that places no value on individual privacy and to
contest the prejudice that for a woman to be valuable she must have a job no matter how unfulfilling.
Most of all it powers her to maintain her own unique identity: The woman Tereza.

Compared to Tereza, Sabina’s strong personality is more obvious. Her strong will power is indicated
through her endless betrayals and the contrast between her and the weak male characters, especially
Franz. Just like Tomas and Tereza, Sabina also considers fighting against kitsch to be a very vital part
of her life. Since her childhood, Sabina has always been disgusted by extremism. As a woman artist,
she often sees the world in an aesthetical light: “Living for Sabina meant seeing. Seeing is limited by
two borders: Strong light, which blinds, and total darkness. Perhaps that was what motivated Sabina’s
distaste for all extremism. Extremes mean borders beyond which life ends, and a passion for extremism, in art and in politics, is a veiled longing for death.” (94) Therefore, to her, kitsch presents itself in the guise of different kinds of extremes: Love (the extreme of affections), patriotism (the extreme of collective feelings), Communism (the extreme of idealism), marriage (the extreme of relationships). In Terminal Paradox: The Novels of Milan Kundera, Maria Němcová Banerjee points out that “…paradox is a sworn enemy of all absolutes. In its unadulterated humanist form, it used to serve as a corrective to the totalitarian reductionism embedded in the logical operations of reason.” (Banerjee, 1990, p.3). Leaving aside the murky question as to whether or not, or when, there really is, or might be, a “totalitarian reductionism embedded in the logical operations of reason,” as Blake and Banerjee believe, we can still say that Sabina employs paradox against kitsch. Sabina’s inherent repugnance against extremes is very paradoxical, and her paradoxicality along with her constant betrayals of what she considers to be kitsch become her weapons against extremism and kitsch, just like Tereza’s safeguarding of her body.

Sabina’s paradoxicality is exhibited in many aspects of her life; even her paintings always involve two interpretative levels. She interprets her own paintings as “on the surface, an intelligible lie; underneath, the unintelligible truth” and Tereza does find that “all Sabina’s paintings, past and present, did indeed treat the same idea, that they all featured the confluence of two themes.” (63) This precise depiction of her works is also a portrait of her personality and her life, including her relationships with her father, with her lovers, and her view of family, love and betrayal. Unlike Tereza, who always has faith in love and aspires to “something higher,” Sabina is much more gravitated towards betrayal. At the age of fourteen, she betrays her father’s world of beauty, which is a “woodland of sunsets and roses
in vases," and falls in love with Picasso. (91) When she finally leaves her hometown for Prague to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts, she is overjoyed "with the euphoric feeling that now at last she could betray her home" (91) and "[a]fter she betrayed her father, life opened up before her, a long road of betrayals, each one attracting her as vice and victory." (98) Betrayal is alluring to her because "she had known that beauty is a world betrayed. The only way we can encounter it is if its persecutors have overlooked it somewhere. (Beauty hides behind the scenes of the May Day parade. If we want to find it, we must demolish the scenery.)" (110) Indeed, her betrayal of her father is just the inception of her path of betrayals, followed by her divorce (betrayal of her husband), her escape from Franz (betrayal of her lover), her leaving Czechoslovakia for Geneva (betrayal of her country), and finally her settling down in America (betrayal of Europe).

Along with her betrayals it is her paradoxicality that fully arms her to stay away from kitsch. Although Sabina never puts an end to her betrayals, her attitude towards betrayal remains paradoxical. In spite of betraying her father by loving Picasso and leaving her hometown for Prague and ultimately marrying an eccentric actor against all her father’s wishes, she nonetheless doubts if it is truly necessary to betray her father’s world after he commits suicide, unable to survive her mother’s death. She asks herself "was it really so terrible that her father had painted vases filled with roses and hated Picasso? Was it really so reprehensible that he was afraid of his fourteen-year-old daughter’s coming home pregnant? Was it really so laughable that he could not go on living without his wife?" (92) Even more paradoxically, although she feels "pangs of conscience" about her betrayals of her father, she does not end her betrayals but "again she felt a longing to betray: Betray her own betrayal." (92)

Naturally, her ambivalence towards her father generates a self-contradiction towards her family. In
her younger years, she is always rebellious against her family. As it has been mentioned before, she feels relieved when she is able to leave her family in a small town for Prague at a young age. Yet as time goes by, she finds herself unable to be rid of the idealism of home, so ideal that it could only be called kitschy:

Her kitsch was her image of home, all peace, quiet, and harmony, and ruled by loving mother and wise father. The less her life resembled that sweetest of dreams, the more sensitive she was to its magic, and more than once she shed tears when the ungrateful daughter in a sentimental film embraced the neglected father as the windows of the happy family’s house shone out the dying day.” (255)

Unlike Tereza, who sometimes seems to lose the courage to fight against kitsch (which is to abscond from her mother’s world and reserve her own unique identity) her symptom being vertigo, Sabina’s illusion about lamp and carols brings her nothing but more betrayals. Contrary to most of those who have kitschy ideas, Sabina is very much aware of how kitschy her only idealism is and therefore she is free of kitsch again, since “as soon as kitsch is recognized for the lie it is, it moves into the context of non-kitsch, thus losing its authoritarian power and becoming as touching as any other human weakness.” (256) Thus Sabina is both affected with and immune to kitsch at the same time—paradox itself. The statements quoted, may even be said to be a statement of Kundera’s sympathy for good people who need to believe in some benevolent forms of kitsch, recognition that we cannot all (or all the time) be ironic or nihilistic or blasé post-war Europeans.
Sabina’s attitude towards men is predictably very paradoxical too. On the one hand, she dislikes Franz’s weakness, although she knows clearly that “Franz’s weakness is called goodness,” because “Franz would never give Sabina orders. He would never command her, as Tomas had, to lay the mirror on the floor and walk back and forth on it naked. Not that he lacks sensuality; he simply lacks the strength to give orders. There are things that can be accomplished only by violence. Physical love is unthinkable without violence.” (111) In short, she dislikes men that are not stronger than she is. On the other hand, she also understand perfectly that if she ever had a man “who ordered her about” and “who wanted to master her,” she would not be able to put up with him for even “five minutes.” (112) Thus, “no man was right for her. Strong or weak.” (112) In the whole novel, Sabina fails to find a lover for a lifetime. In fact, neither Tomas nor Franz, her only two lovers mentioned in the novel, is as strong as she appears to be. The comparability and contrast between her and her two lovers are of a critical importance to show her vigor. Of her two relationships, her affair with Tomas is a more or less equal relationship, mainly because they have a significant similarity while being both physically and intellectually strong, while Franz appears to be rather weak compared with Sabina. Her strong image is largely made visible by his weakness. As John Bailay maintains, “Sabina, Tomas’s female counterpart, is similarly questing and capricious. For her love is a kind of kitsch, a breaking of faith and truth, spoiling an honest relationship. As an epic-style female Don Juan she is the ruin of her lover Franz, whose obsession with her is the lyric variety.” (Bailey, 2003, p.23-24) Exactly because she views love as kitsch, Sabina becomes the woman who understands Tomas best. (12) She appreciates Tomas’s lifestyle and even tells Tomas “... you’re the complete opposite of kitsch. In the kingdom of kitsch you would be a monster.” (12) Besides the way they regard love, they are both self-contradictory as
well. Being paradoxical herself, Sabina can easily perceive how paradoxical Tomas is. She tells him that he is “[t]he meeting of two worlds. A double exposure. Showing through the outline of Tomas the libertine, incredibly, the face of a romantic lover. Or, the other way, through a Tristan, always thinking of his Tereza, I see the beautiful, betrayed world of the libertine.” (22) Perhaps, this paradoxicality also enables Tomas to appreciate Sabina in her grandfather’s hat in a more than erotic sense, since Sabina—feminine, modern, artistic—and the hat—masculine, ancient, political—compose a paradox both in sight and in meaning.

Unfortunately, without the mutual comprehension that love and marriage are a category of kitsch, the relationship between Sabina and Franz is full of misunderstanding and therefore is doomed to end prematurely. A lexicon of their misunderstandings is even compiled, including their disparate conceptions of woman, fidelity and betrayal, music, light and darkness, parades, Sabina’s country and cemetery. (89-104) Behind all these misunderstandings is their fundamental difference: What they see as kitsch. For instance, Franz loves the “Grand March” (Kundera’s ironic expression for the march of Communism) and considers it to be a kind of liberation. For him, “[t]he Grand March is the splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness.” (257) Yet for Sabina, “[t]he brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch” (251) and “[t]he model of Communist kitsch is the ceremony called May Day.”(249) Thus Franz’s fantasy—the Grand March—is virtually Sabina’s nightmare.

In terms of love and marriage, Sabina and Franz also have different opinions. Sabina regards them as kitsch. She never says anything like “I love you” nor does she ever long to remarry after her first marriage fails. Indeed, even her first marriage is not out of love but simply the outcome of her will to
betray her father. For Franz, however, love is sacrosanct and marriage is the ultimate indication of love. He cannot even bear to hide his affair with Sabina from his wife because he feels it would be a humiliation to Sabina. This is decidedly wrong because Sabina only enjoys their relationship when it is not exposed to the public. Worst of all is his wish to marry Sabina and his worship of her as a goddess, which is probably what alienates her from him most. As a woman who believes in nothing godlike—not father, homeland and by no means God himself—Sabina does not worship anyone. Given that she endeavors to seek the beauty in a world that is not ruled by any authority as she betrays her father and her country, she could even be regarded as iconoclastic. On the contrary, Franz has always worshiped someone in his life: At first it is his mother and later he apotheosizes Sabina. Thus while Sabina is escaping all authorities, Franz sedulously creates idols for himself to worship. This fundamental difference engenders their other divergence, for example, on how they see physical strength. Sabina prefers strong men while “Franz may be strong, but his strength is directed outward; when it comes to the people he lives with, the people he loves, he’s weak.” (111) When Franz tells Sabina “love means renouncing strength,” Sabina instantly realizes that these words “disqualified him from her love life.” (112) After he tells Sabina that he is going to divorce his wife so that they can be married, Sabina is horrified by the future of taking “Marie-Claude’s place in his large conjugal bed.” (115) Fearing that a marriage would confine her freedom, she then betrays him, moving away without telling him. At this point, Franz again shows how weak he is as he feels that “he lacked the strength” to even ask for her new address. (119)

Just like Tereza, who always has power over Tomas, Sabina sways Franz’s life as well. Even long after she has left him, Franz’s shrine for her is still untouchable. When being invited to march in
Cambodia, he accepts the invitation only for Sabina’s sake, imagining he is doing this for a country that is like Sabina’s, which builds a secret bond between them. Franz tragic-comically loses his life there—the ultimate sacrifice he could make for his goddess Sabina.

Besides the strong images Kundera gives to the women characters, the friendship between them also saves *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* from being sexist. John O’Brien rightly observes that

[Research and theory related to same-sex bonding have served as a powerful means by which feminist scholars have considered ideas and practices related to human interaction, and feminist literature and literary criticism are especially interested in the dynamic of female friendship as a model for anger cooperative structures. Along with the more well-established feminist critique that challenges the representation of individual women, an examination of Kundera’s representational tendencies regarding collective male and female interaction can offer a particularly insightful perspective on Kundera’s representation of men and women. (O’Brien, 1995, p.27)]

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it is especially useful to pay close attention to the female relationships as an instrument to see if Kundera is truly misogynous. Contrary to O’Brien’s accusation that “... in the context of male and female bonding, the cynicism at the core of Kundera’s novels is disproportionally weighted against female-female interaction, which is typically charged with jealousy,
ignorance, maliciousness, and spite. In male-male bonding, a very different stance is almost immediately evident,” the female friendships depicted in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are more sincere than those of male characters. (O’Brien, 1995, p.26) The two male characters, Tomas and Franz, are never said to have close friends. Tomas’s friends are more like colleagues, such as the chief surgeon and the Swiss doctor, while Franz’s friends are never mentioned, rather, it is said “he was even feared by his colleagues for the arrogance and tenacity he displayed during professional meetings and colloquia.” (83)

By contrast, Sabina and Tereza have started a friendship as early as when Sabina finds Tereza a job at a publishing house and teaches her how to appreciate and take photographs. Later, motivated by her desire to be the alter ego of Tomas, which is to examine his mistresses’ bodies as he does, Tereza tries to cultivate her friendship with Sabina, his closest lover. Although Tomas regards Tereza and Sabina as two irreconcilable poles in his life, the two women prove it is feasible to construct an amicable relationship between the two of them. When Tereza visits Sabina at her studio, “offering to do a series of photograph of Sabina,” Sabina first shows Tereza some of her paintings, including those from her earlier years. (62) She then interprets her own works as “[o]n the surface, an intelligible lie; underneath, the unintelligible truth,” which Tereza is able to appropriately see as “the confluence of two themes, two worlds, that they were all double exposures” since after all Tereza herself is the confluence of being both weak and strong. (63) Thus, in their opinion, it is perfectly possible to unite two extremes together harmoniously, which becomes the foundation for their seemingly impossible friendship.

Just after viewing Sabina’s pictures, Tereza “felt a rush of admiration for Sabina, and because
Sabina treated her as a friend it was an admiration free of fear and suspicion and quickly turned into friendship.” (64) Before Tereza starts to take Sabina’s pictures, she sees the bowler hat on a bedside table. As argued before, being a memento of her grandfather, the bowler hat is of an enormous importance to Sabina. It assumes a leading role at the turning points of Sabina’s relationships with both Tomas and Franz: It first excites Tomas as an erotic prop and then when they reunite after both moving to Switzerland it strikes him as a relic of their love affair in the past, while when Franz fails to comprehend the meaning of Sabina in the hat their relationship starts to deteriorate. Tereza seems to have no difficulty appreciating that the hat is part of Sabina’s identity even before Sabina’s explanation of the hat’s history, asking her to pose in it.

As the shooting goes on, Tereza suddenly suggests photographing Sabina’s nude. Since Tereza always considers the body as a kind of revelation of one’s identity, what she yearns for is most likely to see who Sabina really is and the difference between Sabina and herself. At this point, Sabina seems to be a bit nervous and has to drink some wine to help her to gain a little courage. Meanwhile, Tereza “felt her body going weak; she was suddenly tonguetied,” an indication that her soul is getting weak, being apprehensive of seeing Sabina’s body/identity. (65) Apparently, even the wine cannot endow Sabina with enough courage to undress. She then starts, again, to talk about the bowler hat and her grandfather until she empties her third glass. Here, the bowler hat becomes her source of strength.

Finally, Sabina gains the courage she needs and takes off her clothes. After Tereza has taken several pictures of Sabina, they change places: Sabina shoots while Tereza poses when Sabina commands Tereza to “strip,” a command Tomas often uses on women. Tereza feels more willing to obey Sabina’s order because “the command came not from a man but from a woman.” (66) For Tereza,
this command is merely erotic when it is from a man, while it is a call for opening one’s heart, for showing the ultimate sincerity, for showing who she really is when it is from Sabina, since the body always represents one’s identity to her; for Sabina, to see Tomas’s wife “standing oddly compliant and timorous before her” without animosity is also shockingly enchanting. (66)

This seemingly preposterous situation — a naked woman shooting another naked woman—is actually a solid evidence of their sincerity to each other, especially for Tereza. When the shooting is finished, what Tereza feels is more likely a friend of Sabina’s instead of an “alter ego” of Tomas, considering that she does not look at Sabina in an erotic way as Tomas does but rather from an observing, friendly perspective.

All in all, Kundera’s representation of womanhood in *The Unbearable of Lightness* is free of misogyny. His strong female characters have great importance in his novel. Sabina and Tereza may be different from each other in many aspects. Their vigorous strength shown in their struggle against kitsch, however, puts them on the same level as the male characters.
Chapter 4

Mothers, Lovers and Victims: Female Characters in *One Man's Bible*

Such female-female friendships as that between Tereza and Sabina are less visible in Gao’s *One Man’s Bible*, which, however, is no denial of Gao’s equally non-sexist view towards women. Gao explicitly points out that one weakness of the contemporary Chinese literature is “it exalts male chauvinism instead of regarding men as human with the general skepticism.” (“它宣扬崇阳主义而不是把男性作为人性普遍加以怀疑。”) (Gao, 2000, p. 102) In his writings, he thus deliberately takes both genders as equal human beings, and the relations between the two sexes have always been one of the themes in Gao’s writings.

The plays *Between Life and Death, Nocturnal Wanderer* and *Dialogue and Rebuttal* are considered by some critics to be a trilogy of plays focusing on deconstructing gendered subjectivity. They maintain that Gao endeavors to negate the boundary between the genders in these plays as “he shows through the tension in gender relations and subjectivity that ultimate awakening lies in the vision of non-distinction—in the ‘soul of chaos.’” (Xu, 2002, p. 102; Yip and Tam, 2001, p. 232) In his novels, he carries on this practice as well. In regard to *Soul Mountain*, Sylvia Li Chun Lin observes that “[t]he critic Henry Zhao has argued that, in Gao’s mind, there is an official culture represented by power and symbolized by rationalism, male power, and inculcation. This has been the dominant culture in Chinese society for centuries, one that can only be countered with an opposite culture represented by

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2 Among all the female characters in the novel, Sylvie and Madina seem to be the only women who have a friendship with each other.
anti-rationalism, woman, and nature.” (Lin, 2001, p.16) Indeed, in *Soul Mountain*, Gao does put some effort into challenging the dominant ideology in China, including sexism. Again, Henry Zhao makes a point when he argues that “[i]n a sense, the narrator’s search for the ‘soul mountain’ could also be understood as his search for an ideal She. Only when She is found, her spirit fully comprehended and her body firmly embraced, can her image be defined, and ‘I’ then finds ‘my’ soul, my identity. Since the identity of the Dramatic She is never fully grasped, the Dramatic I can not but continue the search.” (Zhao, 2000, p. 189)

In other words, Gao is aware that woman is not only equal to man but also is vital to the protagonist’s search for identity. Although *One Man’s Bible* is considerably different from *Soul Mountain* in form (In *Soul Mountain*, the narration is carried on through “I,” “you,” “he” and “she,” while in *One Man’s Bible*, “you” and “he” are the two pronouns employed to represent the narrator in different times, and women are given specific names instead of being an anonymous “she.”), it nonetheless retains the quintessential spirit the first novel possesses, which, among other issues, disdains the male-dominated tradition of Confucianism. In this novel, the search for an ideal woman still prevails in the protagonist’s life. Not only is the whole novel born from Marguerite’s demand, but also most of the main characters are women. Through the protagonist’s life journey, he encounters numerous women, among whom Marguerite, Lin, the anonymous Chinese young woman, his mother, his wife, Xiao Xiao, Sun Huirong and Sylvie are of greater importance. Judged by how the protagonist views them, these women can be categorized into three groups: Mother, lover and victim (by victim, it

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3 The one exception is the young nurse who is not given a name. However, her identity is so clearly represented that it is unlikely to be mistaken.

4 This point was made by Professor Michael S. Duke on a seminar given by Professor Perry Link in 2004.
doesn’t mean they are victims of his actions but of the society or politics or man in general) and very often each woman can be categorized into more than one group in the sense that most women characters are victimized one way or another.

The women who belong to the category of lovers are the most obvious. Marguerite, Lin, the anonymous Chinese young woman and Sylvie all take a part in his intimate relationships. All these women appear to be very determined about what they like to pursue in relationships. With the exception of Sylvie (how she and the protagonist meet remains unknown in the novel), it is always the women that initiate and end their relationships rather than the protagonist. Marguerite reintroduces herself into his life after she watches his play in Hong Kong and leaves him after being together only four days despite his almost begging her to be with him; Lin takes him to bed and helps him to achieve his first sexual climax and also eventually makes the decision to terminate their affair (he once tries to end their liaison, but only to no avail because of Lin’s unwavering resolution that they should carry it on at that time); the young nurse starts their relationship with a number of questions on literature and after her assignment to the Vietnam front where she must have tasted the bitterness of Communism, she urges him to leave China, thus concluding their relationship as well. In contrast, the protagonist is a mere receiver of their decisions, being neither able to resist their charm nor able to keep them from departing. With this contrast, these women characters are represented to be as independent and strong as any male character could be.

Another category of women is the category of mother. No doubt, his mother is the most evident in this category. To the protagonist, she is not only a doting mother, but also the first woman who rouses his sexual desire:
Your mother was the first woman you saw naked, through the half-closed door of her lighted room. You were sleeping in the dark on the cool bamboo bed, heard the splashing water, and wanted to take a proper look. When you propped yourself up on our elbows, your bed cracked. Your mother, with soap all over her body, came out, and you quickly lay down and hid your face, pretending to be asleep. She went back to the tub, but the door was left open, and you stealthily looked at the breasts that had fed you, and the black bushy place from which you had emerged. At first, you held your breath, then your breathing quickened, and after that you fell asleep in a state of stirring lust and confusion. (Lee, 2002, p. 428)

Another maternal woman desired by the young protagonist in the novel is Mama Li, his childhood nanny whom he loves very much as a substitute for his mother. Unfortunately, she eventually is taken away from him by her violent husband. Instead of his mother, it is Mama Li that gives him his first taste of female comfort:

But he could still remember that his first experience of female warmth didn't come
from his mother but from a servant called Mama Li who used to bathe him. He would splash around naked in the tub, then Mama Li would grab him and carry him against her warm breasts to his bed, scratch him where he itched, and coax him to sleep. This young peasant woman didn’t worry about taking a bath and combing her hair in front of him when he was a child. He could still remember her big white breasts hanging like pears, and her oiled, shiny, waist-length black hair. (Lee, 2002, p.34-35)

Thus his first sexual awakenings are not triggered by any young woman, but rather by the two maternal figures in his early life, and this entails his attraction to women’s maternal qualities. From then on, it is not rare to find him taking his lovers as his mother/Mama Li alternative, or trying to get maternal comfort from his lovers. In his first sexual experience, he cannot have an erection until Lin reminds him of “a big girl in his teenage dreams, or like a kind nurse on the battlefield caring for him, cleaning his bleeding wounds with her gentle, firm hands.” (Lee, 2002, p.86) (“他少年时梦中的一个大女孩，一位耐心照看他的战地护士，那坚决而柔软的手在擦拭他流血的伤口。” [90]) In other words, he can’t have an erection until he finds the mother-like soul he is always searching for. More than once, he longs for a breast he could cry on: “You want to cry, to throw yourself onto her firm breasts wet with
perspiration and smeared with semen, and to cry uncontrollably, like a child needing the warmth of his mother.” (Lee, 2002, p.427) ("你想哭，趴在她厚硕的乳房上，汗淋淋又被精液涂抹得润滑的奶上哭，不必矜持，像那个需要母亲温暖的孩子". [427]) (emphasis added)

In Chapter 57, one of the most complicated chapters in the novel, the protagonist intertwines his memories of the women in his life with his excursions to New York, France, Italy and Denmark. What makes this chapter more intriguing, however, is that in and only in this chapter, the protagonist makes love to a “she” without a name, rather than a specific woman. Referring to a woman or women in general as “she” is a writing style Gao engages in Soul Mountain and many of his plays. As Henry Zhao aptly summarizes, this “she” is a “recurrent image in Gao’s plays, a female one, which shows up in virtually all his plays, even in some male-dominated ones. This woman is definitely the embodiment of desire which the Dramatic I can never shake off,” and in Soul Mountain, “she is lascivious, hungry for gratification of her carnal desires; ‘she’ is a magnanimous woman, always caring about others. ‘She’ is intelligent and compassionate, with whom people feel at ease; ‘she’ is a fastidious and impulsive woman, excessively difficult.” (Zhao, 2000, p.186-187) When “she” reappears in One Man’s Bible, it seems safe to say that she still occupies the traits she always has, which is an amalgamation of many different women’s characteristics. More specifically, “she” is comprised of many of the protagonist’s lovers within the novel. Thus when the protagonist confesses his feelings towards her,

5 The young Chinese nurse with whom the protagonist has a long-term relationship in Beijing is undoubtedly not given a name. Yet whenever she is mentioned, she is referred as “the young nurse” or “the young girl,” so that her identity will not be confused with other women in the novel.

6 In Chinese, ta (she) can be either subject or object.
She said you were just a child, and, instantly, your lust settled. Contented and sleepy, you were her obedient child. She gently stroked you, and you placidly allowed her to examine you all over with the palm of her hand. That shriveled thing between your legs, she called it her little bird. Her eyes were gentle as she stoked your head, and deeply moved, you wanted to nestle against her, nestle against this woman who had given you life, happiness, and comfort. (Lee, 2002, p.8)

她说你就是一个孩子，此时此刻你欲望平息，满足了，疲惫了，就是她的乖孩子。她轻轻抚摸你，你在她手掌下平平贴贴由她端详，端详你的身体，你胯间萎缩的那东西她叫做她的小鸟。她目光柔和，抚弄你头发，你深深感激，想依傍什么，依傍那给你生命、快乐和安慰的女人。你把这称之为爱，称之为性……

(428) (emphasis added)

In other words, what the protagonist desires most from women is the motherly love, and above all he sees himself as her/women’s child. Naturally, being a child, he has gratitude, reliance and love for women, whom he believes endow him with life, happiness and love. With his infantile love towards women, the protagonist is never able to hurt them, let alone to despise them. More often than not, he admires them and when these women are in a less advantaged position he takes their stand compassionately.

A certain kind of paradoxicality inhabits the women characters in the novel; that they are strong

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7 When he fights with his wife, he does threaten to kill her and puts a pillow on her face to stop her yelling. Yet, rather than hurting her, his intention is more about protecting himself. After their fights, he just lets her leave his village without any more brawls.
and determined but at the same time all of them are victimized. Indeed, most of the women in the novel are portrayed as victims of various political causes who suffer no less, if not more, than the protagonist, a victim of politics himself. Gao clearly recognizes that women are treated (more) unfairly by society: They are sacrificed more in political catastrophes and men take advantage of them both sexually and psychologically, adding immensely to their ordeal. Their ill fate is not a result of their lack of ability—on the contrary, as shown before, they are portrayed as competent and well-educated—but imposed on them by the society. Gao’s depiction of social prejudice seems to be devoid of emotion and he does not even comment on it. However, under his seemingly detached account of those women’s misery, there always remains Gao’s criticism of the male-dominated society, be it China or the West.

In China, he witnesses many women’s suffering. First in China, his mother drowns herself due to malnutrition while rinsing clothes by a river during the Great Leap Forward Movement (Dayuejin yundong) (1958-1961); Mama Li is brutally beaten and forced to leave the young protagonist’s home by her violent husband; Xiaoxiao and Sun Huirong are raped helplessly during the Cultural Revolution, each of them sacrificing themselves sexually for a chance to leave the village for the city; Xiaowuzi is used as a sexual plaything by the boys in her neighborhood; Qian is brainwashed by the Party and almost loses her sanity due to her father’s being wrongly sentenced as a counter-revolutionary; despite the young nurse’s protection of her virginity, she loses it at eighteen, presumably to some high military official whom she is assigned to accompany as a medical assistant to the Vietnam front.

After Gao leaves China, he finds that women are still victims in the supposedly free and much advanced western world. Sylvie is portrayed perpetually lonely and wanders from one man to another, desperately hoping she can start a new life; Madina, Sylvie’s best friend, commits suicide because of
the unbearable isolation and misunderstanding from both her family and the society. In addition, in a society that is said to have lost all its taboos, after Madina and Sylvie's absurd sex play of exchanging sexual partners, what they feel is not enjoyment but unspeakable frustration. Even the Japanese woman who performs in his play in New York is trapped between her own dream of being a professional dancer and the traditional role assigned to her by her father and society—to be merely a mother and a wife.

First of all, Gao's representation of the Chinese women characters—including their victimization—is not a creation of his imagination or prejudice, but in fact reflects what women's real condition were at the time. To understand the Chinese women characters in *One Man's Bible*, especially those who live though the Cultural Revolution—a revolution that claims to liberate proletariat, Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women* seems to be a very useful resource. Written after her trip to China in April and May 1974 and referred to as notes she made on "the women of China," this book is out of her attempt "to deal with the tremendous and rapid changes in their condition."(Kristeva, 1974, preface, p.1) Her book provides a deep insight into both the historical and political background of Gao's novel, given that the condition of women she writes about in this book reflects the same period as that in *One Man's Bible*. During her stay in China, Kristeva did an extensive research on the history of Chinese women and a scrupulous investigation into their living and working conditions in relation to men. In her book, Kristeva aptly points out that one of the problems of the women's liberation in China during the Cultural Revolution is:

the theme of women's liberation has been generally understood to mean liberation
of women’s capacity to join the work force. Only the surface of the anti-Confucian
theme of change in the family hierarchy (father/son, husband/wife, etc.) has
scratched; and it will be hard to dig any deeper without directly confronting sexual
and psychological issues. (Kristeva, 1974, p.143)

Gao’s representation of Chinese women in that period reveals the same problem. The radical
Maoist Communist Party movement seems to have destroyed all the existing social orders and was
supposed to have also destroyed all the communist-designated social oppressors. Ostensibly, the
Chinese women characters in One Man’s Bible are rather capable and they do have the opportunity to
either study or work. A closer look, however, reveals that their work opportunities turn out to be
inferior to that of their male counterparts. Again, Kristeva makes a point when she observes that “[i]t
was indeed true that the only place where a Communist woman could be a leader was in ‘women’s
issues’; in any position that did not concern feminism and was involved in politics of class rather than
sex, she was subordinated to the authority of men.” (Kristeva, 1974, p.114) In the novel, except for
Wang Qi, the protagonist’s office head in Beijing, all the cadres are men. Women, on the other hand,
are often just students or have low-profile jobs. Due to their lack of power, these women are more
vulnerable during the political turbulence, because all they can do is to take commands from their
leaders, who in most cases are men. Thus, not only are women not freed from the old family
hierarchy—wives are subordinates to husbands (as Mama Li to her husband), daughters are subordinate
to their parents (as Lin enters an arranged marriage, most marriages at that time were so arranged by
parents or by the party)—but when they are working they now have to take orders from their male
leaders. Thus in every kind of arena in life, women are inferior to men, rendering their lives even more difficult.

Of all the women characters, the protagonist’s wife, Qian, seems to be the only thoroughly negative image. Yet at the beginning, Qian is not hideous. When they first meet in the besieged city, she is just a shy young woman, having freshly graduated from university and hoping that her degree and her aunt, a cadre in Beijing, would bring her a bright future. During their first night together, she appears to be gentle and has a genuine trust in the protagonist. She lets him to make love to her and then reassures him not to worry afterwards because she is having her period. Later, when he recalls that night, he admits: “Afterward, many years later, when he thought back to that night, there was also flirting, seduction, lust, passion, and love. It was not just a night of terror.” (Lee, 2002, p.242) (“事后，很多年之后，他回忆当初，记起这一夜也有过调情，有过诱惑，有过欲望和冲动，也有过爱情，不仅仅是恐怖。” [246])

As an educated woman, Qian is never enthusiastic about the Cultural Revolution, in part because her career as a biologist is ruined by it. Qian is not deceived by the Party about how disastrous the Cultural Revolution is. She is insightful enough to understand that her generation is just the sacrifice of the time: “We of this generation that has been sacrificed do not deserve any other fate…” (Lee, 2002, p.287) (“我们这牺牲了的一代，不配有别的命运……” [291])

Her attitude only changes after she is assigned to a village primary school in the hinterland of northwest China. Facing the harsh reality of being a village teacher for life, or even worse, facing the possibility of dying of some unknown malady just like the young Malaysian woman does in another village, Qian’s life expectations are crushed. On the telephone, she becomes emotionless; in her letter,
she writes curtly and impassively. When she finally visits the protagonist at his comparatively well-off village, she gives up her dream of having a career and contentedly accepts the protagonist’s decision to transfer her from where she is to the local school. During their lovemaking, she doesn’t react eagerly as she did during their first night.

Being safely alive seems to be all she is concerned about now. However, under her emotionally numb appearance, there must be turbulence in her heart. Within a few days, she bursts into a fit of insanity and fury towards the protagonist. After a walk in the rain, she loses control of herself and accuses him of taking advantage of her momentary weakness and marrying her without love. She threatens to turn in his writings and to disclose all his “counter-revolutionary” activities to the Party; she even claims that he is the enemy and believes he will murder her. Worst of all, she blames him for ruining her whole life: “You’ve killed me.” (Lee, 2002, p.330) (“你葬送了我这一生。” [332])

From regarding herself as a sacrifice to the Party to reproaching the protagonist for her devastation, Qian goes through an agonizing psychological path. Her transformation does not come naturally, but is the outcome of the brainwashing Cultural Revolution movement. Her vitality and dreams are extinguished by a futureless fate, which leads her to lose her faith in life. Sadly, the protagonist fails to realize that her insane violence towards him is just an eruption of her repressed confusion, fear and disillusion caused by the Party and the movement. After their fight, she tells him she will not act like this again and the reason behind her abrupt outburst of anger: Her father has been declared a counter-revolutionary verdict by the Army Control Commission—the Party faction the protagonist used to belong to. Since she has no courage to attack the despotism, the revolution or the Army Control Commission, she cannot help but release her anger on him. He misses the message in what she says and...
does not recognize that she is only another victim of the catastrophic Cultural Revolution, just like himself and everyone else.

Although after their conflict, he wishes she would disappear and feels that he has become a misogynist, he is never really hostile toward women. His self-alleged misogyny is merely his detestation of his wife, rather than hatred towards all women. Shortly after his wife leaves the village, Maomei, the young village woman, re-ignites his desire for women. He turns her down only because he lacks the courage to take her love, not because of misogyny. During his life in the village, without any love life, he devotes himself to writing and teaching. As a teacher, he is rather caring to his students, especially to a young woman student, Sun Huirong. Being one of the three daughters of a poor widow, Sun is pretty and sensitive. Unfortunately, just like some other young women in the novel, such as Xiaoxiao, Xiaowuzi and the young nurse, she is victimized both politically and sexually during the Cultural Revolution. After she graduates from high school, she is sent to a safe family by the protagonist according to the policy that all the registered permanent residents—be they agricultural or not—must settle down in a village. Like Xiaoxiao, who goes to the protagonist’s room on the night before she has to leave for the countryside, Sun also goes to his home late at one night.

Sun obviously has something important to tell him, but she is too shy to say it. Finally, the protagonist loses his patience and almost pushes her out, which proves to be a serious mistake, for what Sun is going to tell him may very well be about her being raped by the village leader. Desperately hoping to move to the city, Sun did not tell the investigators the truth but instead writes a testimony saying that she was not forced. Here, Gao points out the fate of numerous young Chinese women during the “Up-to-the-mountains-down-to-the-countryside” Movement (Shangshan xiaxiang yundong),
which was to use their own bodies as the sacrifice to escape a life in the countryside.

As I said before, Sun is very comparable to Xiaoxiao in the sense that both of them sacrifice themselves sexually for the sake of leaving the countryside. What’s worse, society does not sympathize with either of them because they are regarded as prostitutes who would do anything to get what they want, even though all they struggle for is simply to live in the city.

Not only does Gao expose the misfortunes of women under political persecution, he also reveals the suffering of women in a supposedly free and equal society—the West. The woman whose victimization is exposed most thoroughly is perhaps the German Jewess Marguerite. Being the protagonist’s female alter ego, Marguerite is parallel to him in many senses. First of all, both strive to escape their nightmares of the past yet neither is able to do so. Marguerite cannot forget the Holocaust and the protagonist cannot forget the Cultural Revolution. Secondly, although they often argue over politics, they nonetheless have a mutual revulsion towards the extreme ideologies, be it Fascism or Communism. Having experienced the cruelty and the blindness of the mass movements, they also understand that the masses can be easily agitated and manipulated by politicians and therefore are not trustworthy. When they are together, they seem well matched both sexually and intellectually. Yet there is one difference that confuses the protagonist and betrays the fact that Marguerite is more victimized than he is just because of her gender: Her abhorrence of her own body.

Just like Tereza in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Marguerite is extremely self-conscious about her body. But unlike Tereza, whose concern is to protect her body as part of her own unique identity, Marguerite’s obsession is mostly negative. She condemns her body as too fat and cannot even bear to look at it. However, it would be mistaken to assume that Marguerite is affected by the
contemporary anorectic trend and that her repellence is thus a byproduct of some self-imposed anti-feminism and lack of self-esteem. As the protagonist goes deeper and deeper into her psychological world, the reason for Marguerite’s strange reaction to her body finally emerges. She was raped by an Italian painter at the young age of thirteen and has never been able to reconcile herself with the sight of her body ever since. Hence her intolerance is not germinated by her physical appearance, but by the fact that to her the body is nothing but a reminder of the trauma. Thus, when she misses her young body, what she pines for is not her slim, immature shape, as she claims, but rather the unviolated femininity she used to have.

After her confession about the past rape, the protagonist finally understands her repugnance toward her body; for her intolerance is not much different from his unwillingness to recall his own experiences in the Cultural Revolution. His memory and her body remind each of them of nothing but pain. Her traumatic experience actually provides another common ground for their communication. He tells her that “… you have experienced the feeling of being raped, of being raped by the political authorities, and it has clogged up your heart. You can understand her, and can understand the anxiety, frustration, and oppression that she can’t rid herself of. Rape is not a sex game.” (Lee, 2002, p.121-122) (“你说你倒是有过近乎被强奸的感觉，被政治权利强奸，堵在心头。你理解她，理解她那种摆脱不了的困扰、郁闷和压抑，这并非是性游戏。” [127]) In other words, political and sexual exploitation are very comparable to him in the sense that both involve other’s will being forced upon one’s self. With this comparison, Gao is also criticizing both political and sexual oppressors because both political and sexual exploitation can impose permanent damage on their victims. Even more sadly, although men and women have the same chance of being persecuted in a political calamity, women are much more often
victimized sexually.

The protagonist's French lover, Sylvie, and her friend, Madina, are two examples of the western women who seem to have all the freedom that most Chinese women strive for, but they are just as unhappy as their Chinese counterparts because neither of them can achieve what they long for in life, such as love, friendship, companionship, and understanding. Sylvie constantly changes her lovers, because none of them can liberate her from her sense of insecurity. Her unlimited freedom even confuses her as she wonders where is the limit of freedom. She pines for "... the ultimate in both love and sexual excitement. But that was an ideal, what people dreamed about, utopia. She was aware of this, but it made her sad, profoundly sad, it was the profound sadness of being human, an eternal sadness that could never be dispelled." (Lee, 2002, p.88) ("最多的爱和最大的快感，这就如同理想或梦什么的，也是乌托邦。这她完全明白，所以忧伤，她的忧伤也是深刻的，人类深刻的忧伤，无法排解永恒的忧伤。"[389])

In other words, Gao understands that what saddens Sylvie is "the profound sadness of being human," the ideal that all human beings try in vain to emancipate themselves from. If Sylvie's suffering from the anguish is still endurable, her best friend, Madina's agony is so unbearable that she commits suicide after years of misunderstanding from her family and lack of love. Before she dies, Madina is briefly hospitalized because her mother thinks she has psychological problems after she brings a homeless man home to spend a night with her; since her mother considers this a family disgrace and a sign of mental debility. Madina is completely disillusioned about life by her hospitalization and resorts to suicide. Long after her death, Sylvie still regards Madina as the only person whom she could talk to and who could understand her.
All in all, Gao's portraits of the women characters comes from his insightful observation of the society as a whole and of women in society. His representation is often imbued with his sympathy, but not condescension. Gao's opinions are represented by the protagonist, who, as argued before, has a profound affection, or even admiration, for women. He is sympathetic to these women characters, just as he is to any of the many victims who were destroyed, physically and psychologically by the Maoist Cultural Revolution or by a cruel society, regardless of their gender.
Chapter Five

The Art of the Novel:

The Writing Techniques and Theory in *One Man’s Bible* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

Being established authors, Kundera and Gao have developed their own theories of literature, which are written up in *Testament Betrayed* and *The Art of the Novel* by Kundera and *Preliminary Explorations in the Techniques of Modern Fiction* (Xiandai Xiaoshuo Jiqiao Chutan) and *Without Isms* (Meiyou Zhuyi) by Gao. Both being anti-Communism (and anti-ism, in Gao’s case) dissenting writers, Gao and Kundera’s opinions agree on a variety of literary and political issues. They both strive to find a new way of novel writing. Both of them observe that the modern world is far more complex than it had used to be before the Twentieth century and therefore an accordingly more complex writing style should be engaged in order to represent the intricacy of contemporary existence. Writing in their own unconventional ways, they interweave different writing styles and techniques in their works. In “Notes Inspired by *The Sleepwalker*,” Kundera maintains that

> [a]ll great works (precisely because they are great) contain something unachieved.

Broch is an inspiration to us not only because of what he brought off but also because of what he aimed for and missed. The unachieved in his work can show us the need for (1) a new art of radical divestment (which can encompass the complexity of existence in the modern world without losing architectonic clarity);

(2) a new art of novelistic counterpoint (which can blend philosophy, narrative, and
dream into one music); (3) a new art of the specifically novelistic essay (which
does not claim to bear an apodictic message but remains hypothetical, playful, or
ironic). (Kundera, 1988, p. 65)

Apparantly, Kundera aimed to meet all of these needs when he wrote The Unbearable Lightness of
Being, and was quite successful in his pursuit.

Gao’s views on novel writing are surprisingly similar to Kundera’s in many respects. This chapter
will analyze how they apply their theories to novel writing and how they share or differ with each
other’s opinions in various ways.

In regard to “radical divestment,” Kundera endeavors to write in a concise, even rather elliptical
style, because in his opinion, “[e]ncompassing the complexity of existence in the modern world
demands a technique of ellipsis, of condensation” and “[t]here are anthropological limits—the limits of
memory, for instance—that ought not to be exceeded.” (Kundera, 1988, p.71) Indeed, Kundera’s novels
are never enormous in size. Instead, all his novels consist of exactly only seven chapters, and verbalism
is nowhere to be found.

Kundera rarely employs the common novelistic technique of presenting a character or a situation
in a detailed or exhaustive way. For example, in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Tomas’s parents
and his ex-wife are almost never described except when it is absolutely necessary to mention her in
order to explain his fear of marriage or to depict his son. This lack of family background, however,
does not obscure Tomas’s image or hinder the reader from comprehending this character, because what
is crucial in appreciating Tomas lies in elsewhere, such as his relationships with Tereza and Sabina, and
his experiences during and after the Soviet invasion. Tereza's background is the most thoroughly
described, only because her family, especially her mother, is one of the most important factors in her
character development and identity building. In other words, Kundera considers explanation that is only
remotely relevant to the characters redundant and thus he elides it. As a result, his novels are complex
without being subject to being superfluous.

In this category, Gao seems to be the opposite of Kundera in the sense that both of his novels are
of a considerable size. The impressive length of the novels, however, is not achieved at the price of
redundancy. Given that in *One Man's Bible* there are far more characters than in *The Unbearable
Lightness of Being*, and that the former story is more complex than the latter, a certain length seems to
be inevitable.

Secondly, to achieve a "new art of novelistic counterpoint" Kundera invents his own idiosyncratic
way of writing, a writing style he himself aptly terms as "polyphony." Originally a musical term,
polyphony means "the simultaneous presentation of two or more voices (melodic lines) that are
perfectly bound together but still keep their relative independence." (Kundera, 1988, p.73-74) Kundera
channels this musical technique into his writing and makes it part of the most noticeable distinctiveness
of his novels. Having studied musicology for a long time before he became a writer, Kundera is no
stranger to this technique. He believes that "[i]ndeed, one of the fundamental principles of the great
polyphonic composers was the equality of voices: No one voice should dominate, none should serve as
mere accompaniment." (Kundera, 1988, p. 75)

When writing *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in such a polyphonic style, Kundera puts
emphasis on "the equality of voices" through several techniques. First, he constructs the story by
interweaving the individual stories of the four characters, and, when these individual stories overlap, he provides accounts of the stories from all sides. The relationships between Tomas and Tereza, Tomas and Sabina, Sabina and Franz and even Sabina and Tereza are all presented from the relative angle of each character. Thus not only does the novel's structure become multi-dimensional, but also Kundera's goal of accomplishing a writing style that is elliptical without neglect becomes feasible because what is missed from one character's point of view is usually complemented by another's.

Besides carrying out the story through multiple narratives from different characters, to amplify the polyphonic effect, Kundera also strives to skillfully weld together various writing forms. Not only novelistic writing is employed, but also other writing genres, such as philosophical meditations, anecdotes, musicological reflections and sometimes even meta-fictional writing, are engaged. As a result, his novels are structured with many layers but nothing is separable from the novel, as everything is united by the thematic consistency.

In Kundera's opinion, this polyphonic feature is most apparent in Part Six because it consists of "the story of Stalin's son, a theological meditation, a political event in Asia, Franz's death in Bangkok, and Tomas's burial in Bohemia [which] are connected by the prevailing question: What is kitsch? That polyphonic passage is the keystone of the whole structure." (Kundera, 1988, p. 77)

The other parts of the novel are also composed of this kind of multi-style writing. Part One begins with Kundera's philosophical reflections on Nietzsche's notion of "eternal return" and on the lightness/weight opposition, followed by the novelistic narrative of Tomas's recollection of his life before he returns to Prague, interpolated with Kundera's philosophical thoughts on compassion, the anecdote of Beethoven's composing his last quartet and Tereza's dreams, all of which are united by
the recurrent motif suggested by the title of this part: Lightness and Weight. In Part Two, Kundera even puts in a meta-fictional passage: “It would be senseless for the author to try to convince the reader that his characters once actually lived. They were not born of a mother’s womb; they were born of a stimulating phrase or two or from a basic situation.” (39) Philosophical meditation and musicological reflection, depiction of dream (i.e. oneiric narratives) are other recurrent subjects in Kundera’s polyphonic writing. Given that Kundera is immensely influenced by Kafka’s oneiric narratives, which is a writing form that fuses dream with reality, it is not surprising to find such narratives in his own writing. Even though Kundera himself argues that his way of composing oneiric narratives is “not by a ‘fusion of dream and reality’ but by polyphonic confrontation,” this kind of fusion nonetheless exists besides his polyphonic confrontation in the novel in question. (Kundera, 1988, p.82) As the dreamiest character in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Tereza often has extremely reflective dreams betraying her feelings and her psychological world, especially when there is turbulence in her life, such as when she finds out Sabina’s letter to Tomas, or when Karenin is dying.

Kundera’s masterful craftsmanship of fusing dream and reality is best displayed in Part Four when Tereza is sent to be executed by Tomas on Petrin Hill. Apparently, this experience cannot be real since Tomas never sends her to death and there is no such a service as assisted-execution. But throughout this whole experience, nothing about dreaming is mentioned. Tereza’s fear of being destroyed by her love for Tomas is quietly magnified by this dream. Another oneiric narrative is at the end of this part, when Tereza stands on the bank of the Vltava and sees “all the park benches of Prague were floating downstream, away from the city, many, many benches, more and more, drifting by like the autumn leaves that the water carries off from the woods — red, yellow, blue.” (171) This is a metaphor for the
collapse of Tereza's homeland, because red, yellow and blue are the three main colours of the Czech national blazon. These oneiric narratives reveal Tereza's innermost world and are unconceivable in any other writing form because of their dreamy quality. By seamlessly merging dream into reality, Kundera creates a reverie that is both realistic and illusional. It is realistic because it is the extension of the character's life—as in Tereza's case, it can be said that she actually releases more feelings in her dreams than in her daily life.

Gao Xingjian also employs such Kafkanesque oneiric narratives. The protagonist's dreams are often as revealing as Tereza's are. Most of his dreams can be categorized into two groups: Those of women and those of politics, all of which are perpetually of China. Just as Tomas dreams of his ideal woman, the protagonist also dreams of his ideal women. For instance, in Chapter 37, the protagonist dreams of an unknown young women whom he believes to be his ideal woman and who has to leave him in the end because there is no room for them to stay. The dream is at first presented in a way that is hard for readers to decide if it's a dream or reality (or in Kundera's words, a fusion of reality and dream) until half way through the chapter when the protagonist wakes up. As ridiculous as it sounds, in his dream, this ideal woman leaves him because there is no available hotel room. Yet just as Tereza's dreams are an extension of her life, the protagonist's dreams are also a reflection of his experiences. Not having a room that totally belongs to oneself is in fact a harsh reality in China, which is obviously the deprivation of one's freedom. Because he has no room of his own, the protagonist has to meet Lin in a park, or date the anonymous young nurse with the door open so that none of his close neighbors will be suspicious. His neighbors are so close to him that when he touches the young woman, they can even hear "the neighbors walking in the courtyard, turning on the tap, washing clothes, washing
vegetables, and emptying dirty water into the drain.” (Lee, 2002, p.18) (“邻居在院子里放水、洗衣、洗菜，往下水道倒脏水和过往的脚步。” [19]) As Gao writes:

He needed a nest, a refuge, he needed a home where he could be away from people, where he could have privacy as an individual and not be observed, he needed a soundproof room where he could shut the door and talk loudly without being heard so that he could say whatever he wanted to say, a domain where he as an individual could voice his thoughts. He could no longer be wrapped in a cocoon like a silent larva. He had to live and to experience, be able to groan or howl as he made wild love with a woman. He had to get a space to exist, he could no longer endure those years of repression, and he needed somewhere to discharge his reawakened lust. (Lee, 2002, p.17)

他需要一个窝，一个栖身之处，一个可以躲避他人，可以有个人隐私而不受监视的家。他需要一间隔音的房间，关起门来，可以大声说话，不至于被人听见，想说什么就说什么，一个可以出声思考他个人的天地。他不能再包在茧里，像个无声息的蛹，他得生活，感受，也包括与女人尽兴做爱，呻吟或叫喊。他得力争个生存空间，再也忍受不了这许多年的压抑，也包括重新醒觉的欲望，都不能不有个地方发泄。 (18)

It takes him a long time to fulfill this seemingly simple desire of having his own room: Even though he moves around from one place to another in China, trying to escape from political persecution,
his wish is only realized when he starts his life over in France. Obviously, this nightmare is one of the byproducts to his time of repression in China.

Besides this sort of dream, another kind of dreams also haunts him. In Chapter 5, the protagonist dreams of returning to where he used to live in China, only to be told that his apartment has been confiscated by Lao Liu, who in reality was murdered by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. Finally he has to retreat to the countryside and finds a cave that is bigger than both the bed he used to sleep in when he was in a labor reform farm camp and the graveyard where the ossuaries of his parents' bones are buried. In the dream, he blames himself for being too impetuous, forgetting about how hard it is to survive in China after having lived in the overseas for too long. Yet this dream itself clearly indicates that he can never commit China and his life in China to the oblivion of forgetting. As hard as the protagonist tries, his memories of China stay with him. Whenever he tries to deny them, they materialize into his dreams. Ironically, his constant reminding of himself that he has forgotten about China exactly divulges his inability to forget.

In terms of polyphony, Gao seems to go even further than Kundera does. Written as early as in the beginning of the 1980’s, Gao’s first theoretical work *Preliminary Explorations in the Techniques of Modern Fiction* gave rise to a heated polemic in China, both on an intellectual level and a political level. Applauded by many writers, including Minister of Culture Wang Meng and editor of *People’s Literature* Liu Xinwu, this book aimed to both depoliticize the novel in opposition to the Communist Party’s encouragement of Socialist Realism and literature that serves their political policies, and to re-introduce Modernism into Chinese literature. Unsurprisingly, the government was incensed by this book and labeled it as “ridiculous and counter-revolutionary,” because this denunciation of the Socialist
Realism posed a threat to their intellectual control. (Gao, 2000, p.159) Actually this book only
discusses and tries to establish some techniques of novel writing, which will be found in Gao’s later
novels.

Gao’s opinion about inventing a new novel form is similar to Kundera’s belief that “[t]he novel
form is almost boundless freedom. Throughout its history, the novel hasn’t taken much advantage
of that. It has missed out on that freedom. It has left unexplored many formal possibilities.” (Kundera,
1988, p.83) In Preliminary Explorations in the Techniques of Modern Fiction, when contemplating
upon the future of the novel, Gao argues that the novelistic writing should not be confined into merely
one style, rather, it has the potential to involve a variety of writing genres. He passionately argues that

The novel can be married to any literary genre. This marriage will give birth to
many beautiful sons and daughters... Why can’t the novel be combined with the
prose? ... Combined with biography, it becomes a biographical novel... Combined
with reportage, it becomes a journalistic novel... If the novel is combined with
music, its expressiveness and impressiveness reproduced by this combination will
be beyond comparison with that of the musical poetry, bestowing the novel rhythm
with endless changeability. The chapter numbers used by the novelist are no longer
lifeless digits, but stand for allegretto, adagio, andante, or a brisk variation of the
main theme. The writer of this kind of novel will be able to expose the subtler
feelings of the art of language. The novel can also be combined with the drama... A
kind of sound effect novel will take in form too.
Gao further points out that music can also be combined with novel writing so as to create a rhythmic novel. In short, to Gao, the future of the novel is a future of a polyphonic orchestration of various writing forms.

This future is later realized in Gao’s novelistic experimentation, starting from his first novel *Soul Mountain*. In *One Man’s Bible*, he further develops it to an even higher level, in the sense that the polyphonic nature of this novel is more complex in many ways. First of all—and probably the most obvious—is his seamless combination of different writing genres. Besides the semi-autobiographical novelistic writing, among other writing styles, prose, historical writing, drama and philosophical meditation are also engaged in this novel. The juxtaposition of heterogeneous writing styles not only enriches the novel’s construction but also enables Gao to put in all that he wants to say. In the novel, Gao’s philosophical meditations and political commentaries are no less important than the story. Narratives are interrupted by his thoughts at various intervals, for example, Chapter 20, 24, 31, 39, 53,
54, 56, 58 and 60 are all philosophical meditations, their topics ranging from politics to love, life and even his reflections on Mao Zedong.

This kind of authorial intrusion, however, never seems to interrupt the flow, because, just like Kundera, Gao also unites all the elements in the novel with the theme, which could be generally defined as an individual’s struggle for human rights and love. In each chapter, no matter what kind of writing genre is dominant, its thematic strength remains. His deviation from the story-line only emphasizes or brings out what cannot be expressed by the narratives.

Secondly, to achieve the polyphonic effect, Gao narrates his story-line using second person and third person alternatively. Third person is for the narratives of the past while second person represents the protagonist in the present, or narrative, time. Gao is very well known for his penchant for the Chinese Zen philosophy’s standpoint on language: Language should be concise but incisive, as he clearly stated. One of the Zen concepts that Gao deeply appreciates is choushen jingguan, or “self-observation,” which is also a core concept in his writing.\(^8\) The absence of first person helps to create a sense of distance, which Gao believes to be absolutely necessary because

\[\text{[i]t is impossible to write a good work without this sense of distance. As it is said, recall the pain after it is over and then you can write about how deep it is.} \]

Accordingly, you need to ruminate how deep the love used to be to convey how

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\(^8\) In “The Predicament of China’s Emigré Literature” (Zhongguo Liuwang Wensxue de Kunjing), Gao states that "I don't appreciate Zen as a way of religious practices. But I do think how Zen looks at language is thorough perception of man's intelligence. “ ("禅宗作为一种宗教实践，我并不赞赏，但禅宗对于语言的态度，确是人类智慧的透彻领悟。") (Gao, 2000, p.114) He also admits that he is immensely influenced by Zhuangzi and Jin gang jing. (Gao, 2000 p.175)
everlasting the love is. Only when he impassively note change keeps this kind of
distance from the characters, can an author portray his characters perfectly without
distorting them with his own emotional tsunami.

没有这种距离感是写不好作品的, 所谓痛定思痛, 痛才能写得深切, 而爱之深切
又往往需要潜心回顾, 才能表现爱之持久, 作家对他笔下的人物只有清醒地保持
这种距离感, 才能把他的人物写得恰到好处, 不致于被感情的波澜把人物弄的歪
曲了。(Gao, 1981, p.96)

Because this novel is semi-autobiographical, which is to say, part of the protagonist’s story is in
fact experienced by the author himself, to avoid being too sentimental, the sense of distance between
the author and the protagonist is even more crucial. That is probably why Gao never employs the first
person in One Man’s Bible. In Chapter 22, he even warns “you” to remain nonchalant about “he’s”
experiences:

His experiences have silted up in the creases of your memory. How can they be
stripped off in layers, coherently arranged and scanned, so that pair of detached
eyes can observe what he had experienced? You are you and he is he. It is difficult

for you to return to how it was in his mind in those times, he has already become so
unfamiliar. Don’t repaint him with your present arrogance and complacency, but
ensure that you maintain a distance that will allow for sober observation and
examination. You must not confuse his fervor with his vanity and stupidity, or hide
his fear and cowardice, and to do this is excruciatingly difficult. Also, you must not become debauched by his self-love and his self-mutilation, you are merely observing and listening, and are not there to relish his sensory experiences. (Lee, 2002, p.182)

他的经历积淀在你记忆的折缝里，如何一层层剥开，分层次加以扫描，以一双冷眼关注他经历的那些事件，是你，他是他，你也很难回到他当时的心境中去，他已变得如此陌生，别将你现今的自满与得意来涂改他，你应保持距离，沉下心来，加以观审。别把你的激奋和他的虚妄、他的愚蠢混淆在一起，也别掩盖他的恐惧与怯懦，这如此艰难，令你憋闷得不能所以。也别浸淫在他的自恋和自虐里，你仅仅是观察和谛听，而不是去体味他的感受。” (188) (emphasis added)

Another advantage of using the second person for present time and the third person for the past is that “you” feels more direct than “he.” Because the second person is more immediate than the third person, when using the former one for the present time narrative, it imbues the narrative with a sense of now, and the author can address to “you” directly. As the most indirect person, however, the third person helps to inject a stronger sense of distance into the narrative of the protagonist’s experiences during the Cultural Revolution; this also objectifies the tone, and the author’s reflections on the Cultural Revolution also becomes more retrospective without being overly emotional.

Devoid of self-indulgence, Gao’s tone throughout of the novel is analytical and critical, rather than pathetic, especially concerning the protagonist. More often than not, Gao is more sympathetic to some
of the other ill-fated characters, especially the women, than to the semi-autobiographical protagonist. The composite construction of narrating the story-line with both second and third person alternatively makes the novel like a symphony with variations, each part having its own individual voice while keeping thematically consistent. By doing so, Gao leads the reader to travel back and forth between now and the past, while confusion of the fluctuation of time is ruled out.

Last but not least, Gao’s polyphonic effect is not only achieved on a structural level, but also is increased by what may be called the “musical composition” of the pronunciation of the writing. Gao has the habit of writing novel while listening to music that is rhythmically and emotionally compatible with what he is writing. He also puts emphasis on the pronunciation of the Chinese characters. His works thus acquire a sense of music when read aloud.

Thirdly, in terms of “a new art of the specifically novelistic essay,” Kundera interweaves his own thoughts in the form of the author/narrator’s direct intervention throughout the novel, which is also a vital element of his polyphonic writings. Philosophical meditations, musicological reflections and meta-fictional writing can all be categorized into it. While the key to Gao’s meditations is the sense of distance, the key to Kundera’s novelistic essay is its tone. Even though he deliberately puts in his observations directly as authorial commentaries as oppose to having them spoken by the characters, he never assumes an authoritative tone. Instead, his tone is always playful and inquiring rather than affirmative. In his opinion,

tone is crucial. From the very first word, my thoughts have a tone that is playful, ironic, provocative, experimental, or inquiring. The entire sixth part of The
Unbearable Lightness of Being ("The Grand March") is an essay on kitsch whose main thesis is: "Kitsch is the absolute denial of shit." All of that meditation on kitsch is vitally important for me, there is a great deal of reflection, experience, study, even passion behind it, but the tone is never serious; it is provocative. That essay is unthinkable outside the novel; it is what I mean by "a specifically novelistic essay." (Kundera, 1988, p. 80)

Because Kundera’s tone is unassumingly playful, the readers’ space to contemplate is reserved and their desire to reflect over his essays is in turn enhanced, provoked by his cognitive observations.

Besides the tone, the topic is another of Kundera’s main concerns in regard to the “specifically novelistic essay.” Kitsch being only the most obvious topic, his essay topics involve a variety of issues, ranging from eternal return, beauty, the lightness/weight opposition, soul, body, love, compassion, fortuity, and communism to death, all of which are consistent with the main theme of his novel. In other words, all the essays still serve to reinforce the theme, not to enfeeble it.

One of the essay forms frequently employed by Kundera is etymological analysis. He often picks up a word that is key to the chapter or even to the whole novel and writes a glossarial explanation on it. At first, it may seem to be a divergence from the story-line. Gradually, however, Kundera will develop it into a concept behind the story, which might be difficult to appreciate without such hints. For instance, in Chapter 11 of Part Two, Kundera first explains the literal meaning of “co-incidence.” He then skillfully associates it with Anna and Vronsky’s love story in Tolstya’s Anna Karenina and how Tereza and Tomas come across each other, reflecting that co-incidence is a living condition, a
“dimension of beauty.” (52) “Co-incidence” is actually a part of the novel’s theme. Not only do Tereza and Tomas meet by coincidence, but they also die by coincidence (accident or chance); so does Franz dies, and Tomas’s unintentional confession of who edited his Oedipus essay also implicates an innocent editor. All of these events are a result of coincidence. Kundera seems to believe that life is itself a coincidence, another reason that why life is unbearably light. Thus, a seemingly irrelevant term is developed into an important thematic element. Another example can be found in Chapter 9 of Part One where Kundera does an exhaustive etymological analysis of the word “compassion.”

His essays on these theme elements help to unite the novel as a thematic whole. This kind of “specifically novelistic essay” can be taken as Kundera’s own short critical work, dispersed into the narrative and enriching the novel on a large scale.

In this respect, Gao’s opinions are again surprisingly similar to Kundera’s. In Preliminary Explorations in the Techniques of Modern Fiction, Gao also mentions a kind of authorial intervention, maintaining that

... the narrator can even take part in the characters’ discussion, probing into all kinds of existential problems in their lives. They can talk about literature, philosophy, science and their wishes and dreams. Thus, emancipated from the traditional three-dimensional spacial and temporal order, the novel acquires more freedom of expression.

......而叙述者竟也可以参加到主人公们的讨论中去，同人物一起探讨现实生
In One Man’s Bible, the “specifically novelistic essay”—to use Kundera’s term—takes the form of “language flow” (yuyan liu).

Since the early years of his fictional writing, Gao has always striven to establish his own way of conducting the story, to liberate his language from all kinds of barriers so that he could express all he needed to in his writing. At first, Gao was fascinated with the stream of consciousness, which he avidly re-introduced to China’s literati in Preliminary Explorations in the Techniques of Modern Fiction. At that time, he had to defend it as a literary genre without any political intentions. Later on, he puts great effort into combining the Chinese language’s unique properties with the stream of consciousness. Hence his invention of the “language flow.” In his own words:

When I tried to find a way to express my own feelings more accurately, western writers such as Proust, Joyce and the French Nouveau Roman endowed me with much inspiration. Both their pursuit of consciousness and unconsciousness and the way they construct their narrative perspectives encouraged me to study the difference between the Chinese language and the Western languages. Furthermore, I find that in Chinese language parts of the words are not definite, subject and object can exchange freely, verbs do not change according to person or time,
subjects can be omitted, and sentences without person are commonly used, all of which means that the Chinese grammars based on western grammatical systems written after *Mashi Wentong* should be rewritten. A more uninhibited way of conducting narratives could be derived from many characteristics of the structure of Chinese language, and this is the origin of the writing style I call language flow.

我努力追求能更为贴切表达我个人的感受的时候，西方作家普鲁斯特、乔伊斯和法国新小说派的一些作家给我很多启发，他们对意识和潜意识的追踪以及对叙述角度的建构也促使我研究汉语同西方语言的差异。我进而发现汉语的词性无定性，主语宾语可自由颠倒，动词无人称、无时态的形态，主语可以省略，以及无人称句的普遍使用，凡此种种，《马氏文通》以来套用西方语法的汉语语法应该重写。从汉语结构的许多机制可以引发更为自由的表述方法，我自己称为语言流的写法便从中发端。” (Gao, 2000, p.11)

In *Soul Mountain*, such language flow is dispersed into everywhere in the novel, while in *One Man’s Bible*, language flow is mainly used when the protagonist or Gao the author meditates. His knowledge on the Chinese language certainly enhances his language flow effect. Gao observes that the difference between the Chinese language and the Western languages leads to the distinctiveness of the two literatures and philosophies. He maintains that,

[t]he traditional western philosophical disputation, i.e. the so-called metaphysics [in
Chinese: “Study of what is beyond forms”), is derived from the western language, which could be called analytical language. The Chinese language, however, is structured in terms of the word order, which in turn derives a different eastern philosophy, i.e. the mysticism [in Chinese: “Dark studies”). The difference between the Eastern and the Western Culture initially originates from these two different language systems. No matter which philosophy, first and foremost, they are all represented as narrative exactly as is the case with literature.

Western tradition philosophical thought, as already pointed out, is rooted in the western language, this language, accordingly, can be called analytical language. On the other hand, the Chinese language is structured in terms of word order, which in turn derives a different eastern philosophy, i.e. the mysticism. The difference between the Eastern and Western cultures initially originates from these two different language systems. No matter which philosophy, first and foremost, they are all represented as narrative exactly as is the case with literature.

Being fully aware of these differences, Gao takes full advantage of the comparatively more flexible Chinese language, especially grammatically. Since his early explorations into the “language flow,” Gao has gradually perfected his skill in this category in One Man’s Bible. His sentences are often without subject so that it could be thought to be “you,” “he” or even Gao the author. Thus “you,” “he” and Gao are merged together and their feelings are intermingled. Time limits are also surpassed by the language flow because of the absence of time tense in Chinese. For example, in Chapter 16, Gao’s language flow involves “you” and Marguerite’s farewell at the airport, “you’s” recollection of their three days together, including their sadistic sex play, “you’s” random thoughts on Hong Kong’s future after 1997, on his life, and his determination to write down all his life experiences, all of which could
Although both Gao and Kundera put much effort into reforming the previous novel writing techniques, their first concern is always with theme. Gao points out many times that form is just the medium to deliver the thematic message while Kundera believes the purpose of the novel is to explore “some great themes of existence.” (Kundera, 1988, p.142) In other words, both agree that the novel’s intrinsic nature is still to convey its theme. This idea might not be the newest invention in novel writing, but is certainly among the most righteous theories of novel writing, especially in a time when many writers are paying more attention to the reform of form rather than to the theme.

In terms of theme, for both of them, nothing seems to be more fascinating and permanent than the human existence, or the Being. Kundera repeatedly maintains that a novel “examines not reality but existence” or the novel is “[t]he great prose form in which an author thoroughly explores, by means of experimental selves (characters), some great themes of existence.” (Kundera, 1988, p.42 & p.142) This notion would be appreciated by Gao as well. In his Nobel acceptance speech, Gao declares that literature is a general examination of the man’s existential impediments. Politics, as one of the elements in the human existence or one of the great “existential impediments,” is recurrently written upon as the background of their novels. However, as I have repeatedly pointed out before, political catastrophe is only the setting of their story while human conditions reflected in this kind of situation are what they are constantly interested in and consistently write about.

As a matter of fact, the word “historical” might be more accurate than “political.” Kundera has been very deliberately trying to avoid using the term “political” to describe his story background. Kundera sees the historical or political background as indispensable but it needs to be strictly ruled by
four principles in his novels:

First: All historical circumstances I treat with the greatest economy...Second principle: Of the historical circumstances, I keep only those that create a revelatory existential situation for my characters... Third principle: Historiography writes the history of society, not of man. That is why the historical events my novels talk about are often forgotten by historiography...But it is the fourth principle that goes further: Not only must historical circumstance create a new existential situation for a character in the novel, but history itself must be understood and analyzed as an existential situation. (Kundera, 1988, p.36)

Obviously, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera himself strictly obeys these principles. Although this novel is set in the time of the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion—two events of significant importance—Kundera does not write at length on them. Rather he threads them in with the characters’ lives, putting them sideways to the story-line. Even when Kundera is occasionally focusing on the historical events, he never turns to a political essay. On the contrary, what Kundera is most interested in is what side of human nature has lead to this situation. For example, in Chapter 2 of Part Four, Kundera introduces a seemingly trifling event that happened after Prague is under the Soviet government: A well-known Czech novelist Jan Prochazka, who is also a leading figure in the Prague Spring, is spied on by the secret police, who bug his conversations with a professor friend and broadcast the tapes nationwide. This seems like a totally political anecdote that discloses how secretive
and tyrannical the Communist Party could be. Yet Kundera doesn’t categorize it into the purely political. He has Tereza associate it with what her mother does to her when she reads out Tereza’s secret diary to the whole family and laughs at her. Thus, Kundera suggests that totalitarianism is not a unique characteristic of the Communism, but is deeply rooted in human nature: A will to power, in Nietzschean terms.

Gao also avoids overly emphasizing the political events in his novels. In *Soul Mountain*, political events are never even touched upon. Rather, the novel represents a search for the long suppressed Yangzi River culture and the protagonist’s identity. Although *One Man’s Bible* is mainly set in the Cultural Revolution, Gao rarely mentions the phrase “the Cultural Revolution” or specifically writes about other political events. Instead, he just provides the necessary background information and then concentrates on its effects on the characters. As Liu Zaifu sums up in his epilogue to the novel, *One Man’s Bible* not only pictures the biggest disaster in the contemporary Chinese history, more importantly, it truly depicts how fragile the man is. (Liu, 1999, p.453-454) Gao doesn’t demonize the characters who have persecuted others and who have been a weapon of the Party. There is not even a villain in the novel. He clearly realizes that these characters are not so different from their victims in the sense that they are also terrified of the revolution and that it is their animal sense of survival that propels them to act as the puppets of despotism.

Armed with their writing skills and their thematic strength, Gao and Kundera have created a unique way of writing novels that are innovative and incisive. However, as Kundera points out, “[a]ll great works (precisely because they are great) contain something unachieved.” (Kundera, 1988, p.65) *One Man’s Bible* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* also contain something unachieved. One of
the former’s biggest shortcomings could be that Gao’s portraits of the male characters (except the protagonist) in the novel are not as vivid and deeply explored psychologically as the female characters. Although there are quite a few male characters in the novel, unfortunately, none of them leaves a deep impression on the reader’s mind. Another weakness of Gao’s work is that both of his novels are based partly on his own experiences, which seems to suggest his ability to fabricate a story needs to be further proven.

The unachieved in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is not so obvious. But Kundera’s writing elsewhere suggests that he is somewhat afflicted by the Eurocentrism. For example, he erroneously believes that “[t]he decisive event in that transformation of the world into a trap was surely the 1914 war, called (and for the first time in history) a world war. Wrongly ‘world.’ It involved only Europe, and not all of Europe at that.” (Kundera, 1988, p.27) Which only shows that he is somewhat ignorant of the history of the war. In reality, World War I did not only involve Europe, but also Asia, Africa and even North America. In Kundera’s view European novels are superior to any other novels even though from what he has mentioned in interviews and writings it seems that he hasn’t actually read many non-European novels.\(^9\) Secondly, his novels after *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* seem to fail to meet the expectations of both readers and critics. He continues to carry out his seven-part composition, but instead of taking it to a higher level he seems to be repeating himself and the structure loses its dynamic. Written in French, his latest novel *Ignorance* still focuses on the theme of “forgetting.” Yet far from being as impressive as *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, it suffers from the overly

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\(^9\) In his definition of novel (European), Kundera argues that “[i]n the richness of its forms, the dizzyingly concentrated intensity of its evolution, and its social role, the European novel (like European music) has no equal in any other civilization.” (Kundera, 1988, p.142)
exaggerated theme of coincidence, and the story itself is too predicable and bland to be fascinating.

All in all, although both writers and their novels have shortcomings, they remain to be great authors and works. Imperfections cannot negate merits. Their works represent outstanding literature that helps the reader to discover a state of existence that might have been unknown to him.

In this paper, I have compared the two authors’ backgrounds, theories, and most importantly their two novels: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *One Man’s Bible*. I have focused especially on how they represent the relationships between both genders and the female characters in the works. I also realize there is still much room for me to improve in my thesis, the literature review could be more profound and objective; the analysis of the female characters could be applied with more feminist theories. And in the future, I would like to do more research in these fields and continue to explore the complexity of both writers’ works.

At this point, however, I would like to end my thesis with some remarks made by Milan Kundera during an interview with *Le Monde*:

> If the novel has any message at all, this is it: All truth is hidden and from that you can draw your conclusions. No one can hold a monopoly on truth, but you can take hold of other men’s truths and play with them in an endlessly comic teatrum mundi:

> This is the only consolation for which you may hope. (qtd. in Liehm, 1991, p. 36)

Although I have only analyzed a small part of his teatrum mundi, I think these two works demonstrate some interesting comparable aspects of the works of two of the best writers in the
contemporary world.
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