The Unbearable Lightness of Being

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MILAN KUNDERA

Kundera was born to middle-class parents, Milada Kunderová and Ludvik Kundera, in Brno, a large city in Czechoslovakia, known today as Czechia. Kundera's father was a noted Czech pianist and musicologist, and he taught Kundera piano and musical composition, an influence that is reflected throughout much of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. As a teenager, Kundera began to write poetry, and it was during this time that he officially joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He graduated from high school in 1948 and moved to Prague, where he studied literature and aesthetics at Charles University. One year later, Kundera transferred to the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague to study film. Despite being pro-communist, Kundera was also an outspoken supporter of communist reform, and he was expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1950 for his political views. He graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in 1952, where he stayed on as a lecturer of literature. Kundera was readmitted to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1956, but his desire for reform continued, and after participating in the protests of the Prague Spring in 1968—an event that is also mentioned in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*—he was again expelled from the party and dismissed from his job. He immigrated to France in 1975, and after his Czech citizenship was stripped in 1979, Kundera officially became a French citizen in 1981. Since moving to France, Kundera has lived a quiet and guarded life in Paris. He is a highly respected writer and has written numerous novels, poems, and essays, including *Life is Elsewhere*, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *The Festival of Insignificance*. Kundera has won several prizes and awards, such as the 1987 Austrian State Prize for European Literature; the 2000 Herder Prize, an international prize awarded to European writers; and the 2011 Ovid prize, an honor awarded annually to one writer from any country.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Unbearable Lightness of Being takes place before, during, and after the Prague Spring, a period of mass protest against Czechoslovakia as a Communist state after World War II. The Prague Spring officially began on January 5, 1968 with the election of Alexander Dubcek as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Dubcek, whom Kundera mentions several times in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, was a reformist, and under his leadership, previous media censorship was lifted, and the Czech people were allowed increased freedoms and liberties they had not enjoyed since Czechoslovakia's move to Communism decades earlier. Dubcek's reform gained the negative attention of the Soviet Union, who worried that Czechoslovakia was becoming too westernized. The Prague Spring lasted until August 21, 1968, at which time the Soviet Union sent 650,000 armed troops and tanks to occupy Czechoslovakia. The Russian occupation, meant to last only a few days, went on for nearly eight months. The resistance to the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia was entirely civilian-based and there was never a formal military engagement. While there was never official engagement with the Soviet Union, it is estimated that roughly 82 Czechoslovakian civilians were killed during the resistance to the Russian occupation. While the Soviet Union had pulled out of Czechoslovakia by the spring of 1969, the occupation sparked mass emigration with some 300,000 Czechs leaving their nation by the end of the conflict. The Soviet Union remained in control of Czechoslovakia until 1989, at which time the communist regime was ended, and the country officially became the Czech Republic.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a piece of postmodern literature, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* explores the problems inherent to language and meaning. According to postmodern theory, words and language are constantly changing and evolving; thus, fixed and universal meaning is impossible. Other works of postmodern literature that interrogate the arbitrary and unstable nature of language and meaning include Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Postmodern literature is also known for its rejection of traditional philosophy and metaphysics, which is seen in Kundera's rejection of the philosophical concept of eternal return in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. This metaphysical questioning is also seen in *Ficciones* by Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Kundera's novel is highly intertextual, which means it references other books and writers—another hallmark of postmodernism. Kundera makes multiple references to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as to Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, a book that plays a significant role in the novel. He also mentions Stendhal, a 19th-century French writer best known for the 1830 novel *The Red and the Black*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Unbearable Lightness of Being
- **When Written:** 1984
- **Where Written:** Paris, France

- **When Published:** 1984
- **Literary Period:** Postmodern
- **Genre:** Novel; Philosophical Fiction
- **Setting:** Czechoslovakia—before, during, and after the Prague Spring of 1968—as well as Switzerland, France, and Cambodia.
- **Climax:** When Tomas leaves Zurich and follows Tereza back to Czechoslovakia.
- **Antagonist:** The Soviet Union and the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia's oppressive communist government, and the duality of body and soul.
- **Point of View:** Third Person Omniscient; First Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Out of This World. In 1983, an asteroid that was discovered by the Klet' Observatory in the Czech Republic was named 7390 Kundera after Milan Kundera.

Fly on the Wall. In 2008, Kundera was accused of informing on a fellow Czech to the secret police in the 1950s, which prompted the young man's long-term imprisonment in a labor camp. Kundera vehemently denied any involvement in the young Czech's arrest or acting as a police informant, and he was publically supported by fellow writers Salman Rushdie and Gabriel García Márquez.

PLOT SUMMARY

Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher from the 19th century, has long baffled philosophers with his take on the theory of eternal return: the ancient belief that the universe and everything in existence repeats and recurs into infinite space and time. Nietzsche called eternal return "*das schwerste Gewicht*," or "the heaviest burden," and, conversely, he argued that any existence that does not return is "like a shadow, without weight." Nietzsche's understanding of the theory assumes that the heaviness of eternal return is negative, while its opposite, lightness, is positive, but the unnamed narrator isn't so convinced. He questions if heaviness is really undesirable, and points out that "the lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all" known opposites.

The narrator has been thinking about Tomas and Tereza for years. Tomas is "born" staring out the window of his Prague flat, trying to decide what to do about his feelings for Tereza. Tomas is a perpetual bachelor and libertine, and his life isn't bogged down with attachments of love and committed relationships. He has managed, however, to fall in love with Tereza, a woman who barges into his life with her "enormously heavy" **suitcase** and her equally weighty ideas of love and monogamy. Before long, Tomas and Tereza are married, but this doesn't mean that Tomas has given up his mistresses, especially Sabina, with whom Tomas has been carrying on an affair for years. Tereza knows all about Tomas's unfaithfulness, and when the couple moves to Zurich after the Prague Spring, Tereza is hoping that Tomas will leave his infidelities behind. He does not, however, and when he continues to see Sabina (who has since immigrated to Geneva), Tereza leaves Zurich and heads back to Prague. Within days, Tomas follows her—even though Czechoslovakia's Communist state dictates that he won't be able to leave again. Back in Prague, Tereza feels intensely responsible for Tomas's decision to return to Prague and change his fate, and she and Tomas both struggle with the implications of his choice.

Meanwhile, it is early afternoon in Geneva, and Franz is on his way to see his own mistress, who also happens to be Sabina. Franz is going to Sabina's art studio, but he doesn't plan on sleeping with her there. Franz only has sex with Sabina in foreign countries, as sleeping with both Sabina and his wife, Marie-Claude, in the same country would cheapen Franz's marriage, as well as his relationship with Sabina. Franz asks Sabina to go with him to Palermo, but she isn't interested in going anywhere. She would rather stay in Prague, Sabina tells Franz, as she steps out of her skirt and places her **black bowler hat** on her head. In doing so, she means to tell Franz that she would rather have sex right now, in Geneva, but the significance of the hat is lost on him. Franz's inability to decipher the meaning of Sabina's hat is just one of many misunderstandings between Franz and Sabina, and to illustrate this point, the narrator includes a short dictionary of the misunderstood words between them. Franz and Sabina have conflicting definitions for common words such as "woman," "cemetery," and "parade," but their differences are best reflected in their understanding of the word "betrayal," which Franz considers a "most heinous offense." Sabina, on the other hand, views betrayals as a "breaking [of] ranks" and an adventure into the unknown. When Franz finally tells his wife about Sabina, Sabina ultimately betrays Franz as well, leaving him alone without wife or mistress.

After leaving Franz, Sabina moves to Paris, but she is plagued by a persistent depression. Sabina's depression is not the result of "heaviness" or "burden," the narrator says, "but of lightness," as she has fallen victim to "the unbearable lightness of being." Sabina lives in Paris for nearly three years, and then she receives a letter from Tomas's son, Simon, which informs her of Tomas and Tereza's deaths in a car accident. At the same time, Franz has left Marie-Claude—although she refuses to agree to a divorce—and is living with one of his young students. Franz, who is in love with parades and the idea of protesting and marching, decides to join a Grand March to Cambodia. The march, consisting primarily of intellectuals, hopes to convince the Cambodian government to let a group of doctors into the

country to help the Cambodian people, a country that, like Czechoslovakia, has been devastated by Communism and foreign invasions. When the Grand March reaches the Cambodian border, they are ignored and denied entrance into the country, and Franz's romantic ideals about the power of protest and resistance are dashed. Before Franz leaves Thailand, on his way back to Europe from the Grand March, he is held up for his money by two men. When Franz resists the robbery, he is struck on the head and later dies at a hospital in Geneva.

Sabina ultimately moves to America, where she lives with an elderly couple in a kind of makeshift family arrangement. While Sabina has spent her entire life trying to avoid heavy commitments and kitsch, she is never able to escape the pull of familial relationships. Sabina makes plans for her ashes to be scattered into the wind upon her death, but it is Tomas and Tereza's final days the narrator focuses on. After returning to Prague, both Tereza and Tomas are dismissed from their professional jobs and forced to do menial work. They move to the country, far away from the government and Tomas's mistresses, where they live a comfortable and predictable life with their dog, Karenin. The cyclical nature of their lives in the country—they wake at the same time each day, run the same errands, and go to the same jobs—is the closest Tomas and Tereza come to happiness throughout the novel, but they still aren't entirely happy. Tereza still obsesses about Tomas's unfaithfulness, and, what's worse, she sees him as an old man stripped of his strength and power, like a helpless and scared rabbit in her hands. Sadly, Karenin develops cancer and dies, and while Tereza and Tomas are crushed, they still decide to go dancing in a nearby town. That night, they drink and dance, and Tomas tells Tereza that he doesn't regret his decision to leave Zurich and return to Prague to be with her. He considers himself "free" and happy, even though their lives have not turned out as expected. They decide to spend the night and return home in the morning, and even though it is clear to the reader that Tomas and Tereza will die in the car accident the next day, there is a general feeling of optimism as they enter their hotel room for the night.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Tomas – Tereza's husband, Sabina's lover, and Simon's father. Tomas is a successful neurosurgeon and serial womanizer when he first meets Tereza. Most notably, he has a long-term affair with Sabina. Tereza later comes to Prague, ready to give her life to him, and Tomas thinks that she is like a helpless infant who has been floated downriver to him in a basket. To Tomas, sex is all about violence and power, and he has the upper hand in all his sexual relationships. Tomas, however, has zero power when the Russians occupy Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring. He is offered a job abroad, and he manages to convince Tereza to move to Zurich, but she soon grows tired of Tomas's philandering and returns to Prague. Tomas is miserable without her and is powerless to stay away. He quits his job, quoting one of Beethoven's quartets, saying: "*Es muss sein!*" Tomas's love for Tereza is out of his control, thus "It must be!" that he returns to Czechoslovakia despite its oppressive Communist regime. Back in Prague, Tomas begins to resent Tereza, and he quickly slips back into his womanizing—another manifestation of "*Es muss sein!*" and something he can't seem to control. While Tomas still has power over Tereza, his control over his own life is slipping. He can't manage to have sex with other women without first drinking alcohol, and he writes an article for an intellectual newspaper that ruins his professional life. The article is considered anti-communist by the regime, and when he refuses to issue a retraction, Tomas is summarily dismissed from his job. He works as a country doctor for a while, but he soon quits and becomes a window washer, as he believes the regime won't care about him if he holds a menial job. Tereza and Tomas move to the country, where Tomas grows old and is completely stripped of his power before he dies in a car crash with Tereza. Tomas serves to illustrate Kundera's argument that true equality—in sex and in politics—is impossible; there will always be one who has power over another.

Tereza – Tomas's wife. Tereza first meets Tomas working in a country restaurant in Czechoslovakia. When Tomas walks through the door of the restaurant, Beethoven, Tereza's favorite composer, is playing on the radio. Tomas places an open **book**—which, to Tereza, is the symbol of a "secret brotherhood" and "something higher" in the form of knowledge and enlightenment—on the table. When Tomas says his train is leaving at six—Tereza's childhood address—she knows that Tomas is her Fate, and she follows him to Prague and marries him. Tereza serves as the personification of the soul in the novel, and she despises her physical body, an aversion that is worsened by Tomas's repeated infidelity. Lost amongst Tomas's many mistresses, Tereza is just one body out of many, and she is convinced that Tomas does not love her if he can have sex with other women. Tomas, however, claims that sex and love exist independent of each other and says his affairs are no threat to his love for Tereza. Tereza tries to understand his lighthearted approach to sex, but she is represented in the novel as "heavy" compared to Tomas. Tereza believes in love and committed relationships, and she carries her entire life around in a massive **suitcase**, a physical symbol of her weighty character. To test Tomas's theory about love and sex, Tereza has sex with a tall stranger she meets in the Prague bar where she works, but she doesn't leave the encounter convinced that Tomas is right. She tries to disconnect her soul from her body, and she refuses to enjoy sex with the stranger. She is ultimately unable, and when she begins to orgasm, she spits in his face. Through Tereza, Kundera implies that the body and soul cannot be separated as easily as their duality might suggest. Tereza and Tomas are

killed in a car accident near the middle of novel, crushed under the weight of a truck; however, the night before they are killed, Tereza is secure in her love for Tomas and is convinced that it knows no bounds.

Sabina – Tomas and Franz's lover. Sabina is a painter, and like Tomas, she is represented as "light." Sabina avoids love and committed relationships, and her entire life is a series of "betrayals." Sabrina sees "betrayal" as a way of "breaking ranks" and going "into the unknown," which she considers to be one of life's greatest pleasures. Sabina has a longstanding affair with Tomas, both in Prague and Geneva, and she has an affair with Franz after she moves to Paris. Sabina is always slightly disappointed by Franz, however. Unlike Tomas, he has no power, and their relationship is riddled with misunderstandings. For instance, when Sabina puts her **black bowler hat** on her head, a symbol of her individuality and her sexuality, Franz has no idea what the gesture means. Tomas, on the other hand, sees the hat as a sexual "prop." As a fluid symbol whose meaning changes throughout the novel, the masculine hat also humiliates Sabina, and her identity as a woman, and it is further symbolic of violence. When Sabina puts the hat on in front of Tomas, she willingly submits to this power sexually, but alone, the hat is a personal "sentimental object" that reminds Sabina of her grandfather. The multiple meanings of Sabina's hat reflect the arbitrary nature of language and meaning, but Sabina also serves to illustrate Kundera's argument regarding kitsch. Kitsch is an aesthetic ideal that Kundera defines as the exclusion from the world that which is considered unacceptable through "the denial of literal and figurative shit." Sabina objects to Communism not because it is morally reprehensible, but because it is kitsch, and she has a strict policy against kitsch. To Sabina, the epitome of kitsch is the traditional family, an idea that first began to form after her parents died. Sabina avoids kitsch her entire life, which is difficult since there is kitsch everywhere, including "American kitsch" and "*totalitarian kitsch*." By the end of the novel, Sabina has moved to America, where she lives with an elderly couple in a makeshift family—an undeniably kitschy situation. Through Sabina, Kundera argues that kitsch can never be completely avoided, no matter how hard one tries.

Franz – Sabina's lover, Marie-Claude's husband, and Marie-Anne's father. Franz is a professor who makes his living with words. He gives lectures at the university and writes academic articles, yet he comes to the conclusion that "no words were precise, their meanings were obliterated, their content lost, they turned into trash, chaff, dust, sand." Franz and Sabina have multiple misunderstandings rooted in language, and they define common words differently, which underscores Kundera's overreaching argument that language is unstable and that meaning can never be fixed. Franz eventually comes clean to Marie-Claude about his affair with Sabina, but he is left alone when both Marie-Claude and Sabina leave him. Franz then falls in love and moves in with his girlfriend, one of his young students. Even after Sabina leaves him, Franz remains obsessed with Czechoslovakia and other Communist countries, of which he holds romanticized ideals of persecution and revolution. When a friend invites Franz to join the Grand March into Cambodia to protest the government's refusal to let doctors into the country, Franz agrees to go because he believes Sabina would want him to. Ironically, Sabina hates the Grand March—she considers it the height of kitsch—and she wouldn't want anyone to go. The Grand March is ultimately unsuccessful, and when they reach the border of Cambodia, they are ignored. Franz is so disappointed that he wants to rush the border and be gunned down by the Vietnamese military just to add weight and significance to the meaningless protest, but instead he returns to Bangkok and is assaulted there by three men attempting to rob him. Franz later dies at a hospital in Geneva, his life having been overwhelmingly "light" and meaningless. Franz desperately tries to add bulk and meaning to his life through relationships and protests such as the Grand March. His search for meaning proves futile, and he dies, "unbearably" light, never to return and destined to fade into obscurity and insignificance. Franz serves as the personification of "*Einmal ist keinmal*," or "once is never," an old German saying that assumes that which happens once may as well not happen at all.

The Narrator – The unnamed narrator is often considered by critics to be a stand-in for Kundera himself, which is why this guide uses masculine pronouns to refer to this character (though it's impossible to say for sure whether Kundera intends the narrator to be a character apart from himself). The narrator does not have an active role in the plot, but he often breaks into the narrative to provide philosophical or historical context, such as explaining the ideas of eternal return and kitsch and offering his opinions on them. Additionally, the narrator makes it clear that he is inventing the novel's characters, especially Tereza and Tomas, and he often comments on the storytelling process as it's happening. At times, the narrator provides small amounts of information about his own life (referring to childhood experiences, for example), but he never reveals much about himself or clearly identifies himself to the reader.

Simon – Tomas's son. Tomas abandons Simon when he is just an infant and leaves him with his mother, a staunch Communist. Once Simon is old enough, he moves out of his mother's house, leaving both her and the regime. Rebelling against his mother and against Communism, Simon becomes a devout Christian, which is exceedingly rare in the state atheism of the Communist regime. Simon spends most of his adult life trying to reconnect with his father, and after Tomas writes an article, disavowing Czech Communists, Simon and the editor try to get Tomas to sign a petition seeking to grant amnesty to political prisoners. Tomas refuses to sign, and he doesn't hear from Simon for a long time, until Simon begins sending him letters.

Simon longs for the "imaginary eyes" of his father to look at him, and after Tomas's death, Simon sends letters to Sabina instead so there is still a set of imaginary eyes looking at him. After Tomas's death, Simon rushes to make his funeral arrangements and has Tomas's tombstone engraved with the following words: "HE WANTED THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH." Simon knows that his father would have never said such a thing, but Simon doesn't care and does what he wants. In this way, Simon is kitsch, as he willfully ignores that which is not acceptable to his world.

Marie-Claude – Franz's wife and Marie-Anne's mother. Marie-Claude owns an art gallery, and she and Franz have a loveless marriage. Franz believes that Marie-Claude is weak, and that she can't live without him, but this proves untrue after Franz tells her about his affair with Sabina and Marie-Claude kicks him out. Even though Marie-Claude is not in love with Franz, she will not consent to a divorce, a play to power which keeps her in control over him. Franz is assaulted in Bangkok after the Grand March, and Marie-Claude convincingly plays the role of grieving wife, even sitting next to Franz's bed as he dies. Franz is unable to speak in his final days, and he keeps looking at Marie-Claude, who is certain that his eyes are asking her forgiveness. She forgives Franz and continues the role of the grieving wife at his funeral, where Franz's girlfriend sits in the back and cries. It is likely that Franz was not seeking Marie-Claude's forgiveness in his final days and that his stare was more indicative of hate or disgust. Still, Marie-Claude ignores this, as do all the people at Franz's funeral, who all know that Franz and Marie-Claude's marriage was over. This willful disregard for the truth is yet another example of kitsch, which Kundera argues cannot be escaped.

Karenin – Tereza and Tomas's dog. Tomas buys Karenin for Tereza after they are married, and Tereza names him after a character in her favorite **book**, *Anna Karenina*. Karenin is half German shepherd, half Saint Bernard, and he is actually a female, even though Tereza gives him a masculine name and addresses him using masculine pronouns. In this way, Karenin represents the blending of dichotomies and collapse of polar opposites. By being both masculine and feminine, German shepherd and Saint Bernard, Karenin renders these opposing characteristics meaningless, which underscores the arbitrary nature of language. Tereza and Tomas have Karenin for years, and they establish a comfortable and repetitive routine, until Karenin gets cancer and dies at the end of the novel. Tereza is heartbroken after Karenin's death—he was perhaps her sole source of happiness while he was alive. Kundera asserts that happiness is a desire for repetition, and Karenin brings this repetition to Tereza's life. Unlike human time, dog time, according to Kundera, is not linear but circular—"like the hands of a clock." Because of this, in addition to the fact that dogs were not expelled from Paradise, only a dog can give a human the gift the "idyll," or true happiness, which is exactly what he gives to Tereza.

Alexander Dubcek – The president of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. After the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia, Dubcek is taken with the other Czech politicians to Moscow, where he is forced to sign a compromise to end the protests of the Prague Spring and support the ideology of the Soviet Union. When Dubcek returns to Czechoslovakia, he addresses the people on the radio, but he stutters and takes long pauses. It is clear that the Russians have complete control over Dubcek and are telling him what to say. As an enthusiastic reformist, Dubcek has an interest in reforming the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union does not support his politics, however, and he is bullied into submission. Dubcek represents weakness within the novel, and he illustrates the power of the Soviet Union over even elected politicians. Historically speaking, when Communism was overthrown in 1989, Dubcek, who was loved by the Czech people, was elected as chairman of the federal Czechoslovak parliament. He died in 1992.

Tereza's Mother – After Tereza's mother gives birth to Tereza, she decides that she looks "old and ugly." She ultimately resents Tereza for taking her youth, so she abandons Tereza and Tereza's father. After Tereza's father is imprisoned by the regime for anti-communist sentiments, Tereza moves back in with her mother, who makes Tereza completely miserable. Tereza's mother believes that the world is a "vast concentration camp of bodies," and she thinks all bodies are the same. Tereza's mother has zero modesty, and she frequently walks around naked. She is at the root of Tereza's hang-ups about her own body, and when Tereza moves to Prague to be with Tomas, Tereza's mother lies and says she has cancer in an attempt to get Tereza to return home. It doesn't work, and Tereza never sees her mother again; however, Tereza has many of her mother's physical features, and Tereza sees her every time she looks in the mirror. Tereza tries to "banish" the parts of herself that resemble her mother, although she is never successful. In this way, Tereza and her mother are another example of eternal return in the novel, as Tereza's mother repeats, in more or less the same way, through Tereza's physical traits.

The Tall Stranger – An engineer and a patron of the Prague bar where Tereza works. When the obnoxious man insults Tereza, the tall stranger stands up for her. He later asks her to go home with him, and while she initially declines, Tereza ultimately accepts and has sex with him. For Tereza, the tall stranger is a way for her to test Tomas's theory that love and sex are completely unrelated. Tereza's encounter with the tall stranger is a complete disaster, but she is left wanting to see him again just so she can see her own naked body in proximity to his. The tall stranger never returns to the bar after his sexual encounter with Tereza, and she is left thinking that he, too, is a member of the secret police and will accuse her of prostitution just like the obnoxious man. Like the young man, it is never confirmed if the

tall stranger is with the secret police or not.

The Editor – A member of the Czech intelligentsia and the editor of a small Prague newspaper. Tomas incriminates the editor when he unwittingly implies to the dignitary that the editor was the one who had altered Tomas's article on Oedipus. The editor later tries to pressure Tomas into signing a petition that is meant to persuade the government to grant amnesty to political prisoners. Much like the Communist regime, the editor tries to make Tomas sign something Tomas hadn't written or even read, and he gives Tomas little time to think. Through the editor, Kundera highlights the persecution of the Czech intelligentsia under the Communist regime, but also suggests that the regime is not the only ideology that oppresses and intimidates people.

The Obnoxious Man – A patron of the Prague bar where Tereza works. The obnoxious man accuses Tereza of serving alcohol to a young man, and then the obnoxious man subtly accuses her of being a prostitute. Tereza later discovers that the obnoxious man is a member of the secret police, and she grows increasingly paranoid that he is trying to incriminate and subsequently imprison her. The obnoxious man never does officially incriminate Tereza, but he serves as an example of the intimidation and terror employed by the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia during the Cold War.

The Dignitary – A member of the Communist regime who tries to get Tomas to retract the article Tomas wrote about Oedipus. The dignitary implies that Tomas will be able to operate as a surgeon again if he just retracts what he said in the article. The regime even drafts a retraction for Tomas on his behalf, which the dignitary delivers to him, but Tomas refuses to sign. The dignitary is another arm of the regime. He serves to intimidate and spy on the Czech people and keep them silenced under the regime.

Yakov Dzhugashvili – The son of Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1950s. Kundera uses the historical figure of Yakov, who, in the novel, commits suicide in a German concentration camp, to highlight his argument that opposites are interchangeable. Yakov was both privileged and rejected by his father, and he was a mix of both happy and sad. Through Yakov, Kundera claims that there is little difference between polar opposites, which renders such opposites meaningless. Historically speaking, Yakov Dzhugashvili was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1941, although it is unclear whether he was captured by the Germans or surrendered. He died at the concentration camp in 1943, but it is unknown if he committed suicide or was killed.

The American Actress – A participant in the Grand March. Like the German pop star, the American actress treats the Grand March like a photo opportunity, only she claims that participating in the Grand March is her "moral obligation." The actress's fame means that she attracts paparazzi, and she uses her fame to draw attention to the tragedy in Cambodia. She claims that the Grand March "won't get anywhere without stars," but, of course, the Grand March doesn't get anywhere *with* stars. The American actress highlights the failure of the Grand March, which is ultimately unsuccessful.

The German Pop Star – A participant in the Grand March. The German pop star has written over 1,000 songs of peace, and he waves a white flag as he marches toward the Cambodian border. The German pop star is another example of kitsch in the novel. He treats the Grand March like a photo opportunity, rather than a protest to help the people of Cambodia, and everyone simply ignores this and marches on.

The Tall Woman – One of Tomas's customers as a window washer. She is taller than Tomas and looks a bit like a stork. Tomas has never had sex with a woman who is taller than him, so he immediately seduces her. The tall woman represents one of the "curiosities" Tomas collects and "conquers" as an "epic womanizer."

Franz's Girlfriend – One of Franz's young students and the woman he falls in love with after both Sabina and Marie-Claude leave him. Franz's girlfriend sits at the back of Franz's funeral as Marie-Claude plays the role of the grief-stricken wife, even though everyone knows that their marriage was over, and that Franz was living with another woman. This willful denial of truth is another example of kitsch in the novel.

Marie-Anne – Franz and Marie-Claude's daughter. Marie-Anne takes after her mother and is nothing like her father, and she does not have a particularly close connection to Franz. Despite the "heaviness" implied by the father-daughter relationship, Marie-Anne and Franz are practically strangers, and she is yet another reason why Franz's life is overwhelmingly "light" and therefore meaningless.

The Young Man – A 16 year old boy who comes into the Prague bar where Tereza works and tries to order a drink. Tereza refuses to serve him, and he promptly goes across the street to another bar and proceeds to get drunk. He comes back to Tereza's bar, obviously intoxicated, and the obnoxious man accuses Tereza of serving the young man alcohol, even though she hadn't. The young man leaves, and Tereza never sees him again, but she has a nagging feeling that something isn't right about him, especially once she finds out that the obnoxious man is actually secret police. Tereza is convinced that the young man was a trap set by the Communist regime's secret police to incriminate and imprison her. Her suspicion is never confirmed, but the young man serves to illustrate the extreme paranoia that results from the regime's intimidation. Tereza is constantly worried about being arrested, even though she does nothing wrong.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Collective Farm Chairman – One of Tomas's former patients and the chairman of the collective farm where Tomas

and Tereza move at the end of the novel. Tomas and Tereza spend their last night alive together with the collective farm chairman, dancing at a bar in a nearby town.

TERMS

Eternal Return – A philosophical concept that assumes that everything in the universe—including people, events, and animals—repeats and recurs in a similar way over infinite time and space. The theory of eternal return has been around since antiquity, but it is most often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher from the 19th century, whom Kundera directly references in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Ultimately, Kundera rejects the idea of eternal return and instead argues that human existence occurs on a straight, fixed line in time and space.

Kitsch – Kitsch is a German word that expresses tacky or tasteless art, but Kundera uses this term in a slightly different way. He defines kitsch as "the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence." Kundera uses his idea of kitsch to explain the complicated politics of Czechoslovakia's Communist state. He claims that "whenever a single political movement corners power, we find ourselves in the realm of *totalitarian kitsch*," in which anything that threatens said political ideology is "banished for life," such as individualism, doubt, and irony. While Kundera writes mainly about what he calls "Communist kitsch," he ultimately contends that kitsch "is the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements."

The Prague Spring – A period of widespread protest in Czechoslovakia against the Communist state declared in the country after World War II. The protests of the Prague Spring began on January 5, 1968, with the election of **Alexander Dubcek**, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Prague Spring officially ended when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia and occupied the country with 650,000 armed Russian troops and tanks, a maneuver which was meant to last only a handful of days but continued for nearly eight months. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* takes place in the period before, during, and after the Prague Spring, a time in Czechoslovakian history marked by intense conflict and mass emigration.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TIME, HAPPINESS, AND ETERNAL RETURN

At the center of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is the philosophical concept of eternal return, which assumes that everything in the universe—people, animals, events, and the like—recurs and repeats in a more or less similar fashion over infinite time and space. The theory of eternal return has been around since antiquity and can be found in ancient Indian, Greek, and Egyptian writings; however, in modernity, it is most often associated with 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whom Kundera references directly in the novel. Kundera uses his characters Tomas, Tereza, Sabina, and Franz to explore and refute the idea of eternal return, which he claims is "a terrifying prospect." If life and everything in it are on a continuous loop, Kundera asserts, then "the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make." But while Kundera points out the drawbacks of a cyclical existence, he also acknowledges its benefits. Happiness, according to Kundera, is the desire for repetition. Though Kundera dismisses the theory of eternal return—arguing that time and existence, especially human existence, are linear and occur only once—he asserts that a cyclical existence would be the key to true happiness.

Throughout the novel, Kundera repeatedly rejects the idea of eternal return and instead claims that people only live once, and that their lives exist on a straight and fixed line within space and time. When Tomas first meets Tereza, he thinks he may be in love, but isn't sure he wants to give up his bachelor lifestyle. This indecisiveness, according to Kundera, is to be expected. "We can never know what to want, because, living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come." In other words, existence does not repeat on a continuous loop in which one can compare and contrast decisions—it only occurs once. Kundera posits that life is like a sort of "sketch," because people "live everything as it comes, without warning." Yet he claims it is not an "outline" or "groundwork for something." Instead, Kundera argues that "life is a sketch for nothing, an outline with no picture." Because one's life can never be known before it happens and doesn't exist until it does, there is no way to prepare, which again dismisses the idea of eternal return. Tereza is a photographer, and she takes hundreds of pictures during the Prague Spring, a period of mass protest in 1968 that responded to Czechoslovakia becoming a Communist state after World War II. She gives much of her film undeveloped to the foreign press, but she tries to sell some photos to a magazine in Zurich about a year after the uprising. The conflict will "never recur," Kundera writes, but the magazine isn't interested because the pictures are "out of date." The Prague Spring has already happened, and Tereza's pictures are too late. Not only does this imply that events do not recur, it also emphasizes that time and

events occur in a linear and chronological way.

While Kundera rejects the idea of eternal return, he also draws a parallel between cyclical time and "the idyll," or true happiness, which suggests that a cyclical existence is the only way to achieve real happiness. According to Kundera, "the idyll" is rooted in the Old Testament of the Bible and is an image of Paradise. "Life in Paradise was not like following a straight line to the unknown," Kundera says, "it is not an adventure. It moved in a circle among known objects. Its monotony bred happiness, not boredom." In other words, the repetitive nature of life in Paradise is the *source* of its happiness. Kundera argues that no one can give another person "the gift of the idyll," but an animal can, which is exactly what Tereza's dog, Karenin, does. Animals did not get expelled from Paradise, Kundera says, and "dog time cannot be plotted along a straight line." Dog time is circular, "like the hands of a clock," and because of this, Karenin lives a "life based on repetition." Karenin brings this repetition to Tereza in the form of his loyalty and love, which are Tereza's main (perhaps only) sources of happiness in life. Kundera claims that people can retain "at least a glimmer of that paradisiac idyll" if they live in the country, as Tomas and Tereza do at the end of the novel, surrounded by nature and animals and experiencing the recurring seasons. The cyclical nature of seasons and wildlife mimics that of Paradise, bringing people as close to happiness as humanly possible.

Ultimately, Kundera argues that happiness comes from cyclical existence, which, for people at least, makes true and lasting happiness unobtainable. "Human time does not turn in a circle," Kundera asserts, "it runs in a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy; happiness is the longing for repetition." This general unhappiness and unfulfilled desire for repetition is reflected throughout *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which, Kundera then maintains, is proof positive that life occurs only once.

LIGHTNESS, WEIGHT, AND DICHOTOMIES

As Kundera examines the philosophical concept of eternal return at the beginning of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he explains Nietzsche's view of eternal return as "the heaviest of burdens." The heaviness implied in Nietzsche's understanding of eternal return makes the concept appear "unbearable" and negative, yet Kundera isn't convinced. "But is heaviness truly deplorable and lightness splendid?" he asks. To answer this question, Kundera references Parmenides, a Greek philosopher from the 5th century B.C.E., who saw the world as divided into opposites, such as lightness and dark, cold and warmth, and being and nonbeing. Parmenides argued that one half of such oppositions is positive, while the other half is negative. Kundera claims the division of these pairs into positive and negative poles is "childishly simple except for one difficulty: which one is positive, weight or lightness"? For Parmenides, the answer to this question was simple—lightness has a positive value and weight a negative one—but Kundera argues that it's more complicated than that. Kundera calls the lightness/weight opposition "mysterious" and "ambiguous," suggesting that it's not actually possible to separate these two seeming opposites into a clear dichotomy. Through this analysis of lightness, weight, and their interconnection, Kundera ultimately argues that all similar dichotomies are false as well.

While Kundera presents his characters as either primarily heavy or primarily light, each behaves in ways that suggest they don't fall strictly on one side of the dichotomy. Sabina is represented as light—she is sexually liberated and adverse to commitment, and she goes out of her way to rid her life of family and other heavy relationships to keep herself as light as possible. But by the end of the novel she is living with an elderly couple in a makeshift family. Sabina can't escape the pull of her "image of home," which is "ruled by a loving mother and wise father," two undeniably heavy relationships. Tomas is likewise represented as light—he, too, is sexually free and, as a general rule, he avoids love to keep from getting bogged down. He even abandons his wife, Tereza, and son, Simon, in the name of making himself weightless. When he first meets and falls in love with Tereza, however, this weightlessness isn't so easy. After Tereza leaves Tomas in Zurich and heads back to their native Czechoslovakia, Tomas follows her, even though the Communist state of Czechoslovakia mandates that Tomas's return must be permanent—he won't be able to leave. Not only does Tomas opt for love—a heavy emotion—he willingly enters into Czechoslovakia during the middle of a very heavy conflict that he may not be able to escape. Conversely, Tereza is represented as heavy both figuratively and literally—she values love and commitment (especially to Tomas) and carries her entire life around in an enormous **suitcase**. Despite this, however, she still displays light behavior, such as flirting with the male customers at the Prague bar where she works. Tereza even flirts with Sabina, one of Tomas's mistresses. As Tereza puts stock in serious, committed relationships, the lightness of her flirting is at odds with her heavy values. Even though Tereza is depicted as overwhelmingly heavy, she still manages to be somewhat light, just as Sabina and Tomas are somewhat heavy despite their lightness.

In addition to the blending of lightness and weight, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* blends other dichotomies as well, most notably that of gender. This frequent subversion of commonly accepted dichotomies further suggests that people do not fit neatly into what Kundera refers to as "either/or" understanding. When Sabina seduces men, and when she takes nude pictures with Tereza, she does so in lingerie and a **black bowler hat**. Sabina's lingerie enhances "the charm of her femininity, while the hard masculine hat denie[s] it." Wearing the bowler hat, Sabina embodies elements of both femininity and masculinity. Tereza's dog, Karenin, has a masculine name

and everyone refers to the dog using masculine pronouns, but he is actually female. Karenin has "his periods, too," Kundera confirms. "They come once every six months and last a fortnight." Like Sabina, Karenin embodies traits that are both masculine and feminine. After Tereza and Tomas are married, his constant infidelity begins to affect her, and Tereza wishes that she and Tomas could "merge into a hermaphrodite. Then the other women's bodies would be their playthings." By fantasizing about being both man and woman as a way to save her relationship, Tereza hints at Kundera's broader point that erasing dichotomies may be more helpful than trying to maintain them. This resistance to dichotomies is also reflected in Karenin's breed—he is half Saint Bernard, half German shepherd—and Kundera's attempt to separate Tomas and Tereza into distinct personifications of the body and soul, respectively. Just as Karenin is not wholly Saint Bernard or German shepherd, Tomas and Tereza cannot be defined exclusively as either the body or soul, which again rejects "either/or" thinking and the idea that people and things must be one thing or another.

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera argues that the opposition of lightness and weight is the "most ambiguous of all." While Kundera ultimately rejects the theory of eternal return and argues that life only occurs once and is therefore overwhelmingly light, he does not imply that life is therefore meaningless. On the contrary, life is at once heavy and light, and it's pointless to try and separate the two.

SEX, LOVE, AND DUALITY OF BODY AND SOUL

Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* centers on the story of Tomas and Tereza, two people who fall deeply in love despite Tomas's constant womanizing and infidelity. Tomas represents lightness—he is sexually liberated and, as a general rule, avoids heavy emotions like love—and his libertine lifestyle and aversion to commitment mean that he is free and unattached. He believes that sex and love are completely unrelated, and he has multiple mistresses, none of whom particularly mean much to him. Tereza, on the other hand, represents weight—she values monogamy and, compared to Tomas, is sexually repressed—and she believes in the power of love and lifelong commitment. For Tereza, sex and love are inextricably intertwined, and each time Tomas is unfaithful, she sees it as a direct threat to their relationship. Kundera depicts Tereza as the personification of the soul, and Tomas, who represents sex and lust rather than love, as the personification of the body. Together, Tereza and Tomas represent the dualism of body and soul, which assumes that the soul and body are two separate and distinct entities. Like most pairs of opposites in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, however, Kundera ultimately argues that the mind and body cannot be separated as easily as their seeming duality might suggest.

According to Tomas, casual sex has nothing to do with love. Casual sex is "light" and "weightless," and it exists independent of love, which, by comparison, is heavy. Tomas believes that "love does not make itself felt in the desire for copulation (a desire that extends to an infinite number of women) but in the desire for shared sleep (a desire limited to one woman)." Tomas desires sex with many women, but he can only sleep next to Tereza, which suggests that for him, sex and love are two totally different things. Tomas believes that "attaching love to sex is one of the most bizarre ideas the Creator ever had." To Tomas, the connection between love and sex is just as random as attaching sexual excitement to the sight of a bird. "If a cogwheel in Tomas's head goes out of phase and he is excited by seeing a swallow, it has absolutely no effect on his love for Tereza," and, Tomas argues, neither does his engagement in casual sex with other women. Just because Tomas does not love the women he has casual sex with does not mean he sees them merely as "sex objects." On the contrary, Tomas is quite fond of many of the women he sleeps with; he simply excludes them "from the sphere of love," which entails much more than sex and the mere meeting of bodies.

Tereza, on the other hand, believes that love and sex are intimately linked and cannot exist independently of one another. For Tereza, the bodily act of sex cannot be extricated from love, an emotion that is rooted deep in the soul. When Tereza discovers that Tomas is unfaithful, she begins to have nightmares in which she is just one of numerous women Tomas has sex with. In Tereza's dreams, Tomas makes "absolutely no distinction between Tereza's body and the other bodies." Tereza wants her body to be "irreplaceable" to Tomas, but he has "drawn an equal sign between her and the rest of them," and she therefore believes he cannot possibly love her. Tereza tries to understand Tomas's perspective regarding love and sex, but they cannot seem to see eye to eye. "Oh, I understand," Tereza says to Tomas. "I know you love me. I know your infidelities are no great tragedy…" Tereza's sarcasm suggests that, to her, Tomas's infidelities *are* a great tragedy. No matter how Tereza tries, she cannot reconcile Tomas's love for her with his repeated unfaithfulness. When Tereza and Tomas have sex, Tereza screams, but not out of pleasure. Tereza's screaming is "the naïve idealism of her love trying to banish all contradictions, banish the duality of body and soul." The only way Tereza can accept Tomas's betrayal is to find a way to disengage the body (sex) from the soul (love) and accept that they can never be perfectly combined.

However, it eventually becomes clear that even though body and soul cannot become one, their apparent duality doesn't mean that they're completely separate, either. For example, when Tereza has a one-night stand with a tall stranger to prove to herself once and for all that sex can exist without love, she immediately goes to the bathroom afterwards and empties her

bowels, which suggests that Tereza's soul, the part of her that is in love with Tomas, rejects the sexual act of her body. Similarly, after Tomas meets and falls in love with Tereza, he is not able to have sex with other women without alcohol, which implies that Tomas must first trick his soul to make his body to engage in casual sex with other women. Despite the popular philosophical opinion that the body and soul are distinct and separate, Kundera implies that like other dichotomies, the dual entities of soul and body cannot truly be separated.

WORDS AND LANGUAGE

Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* examines the lives of four main characters—Tomas, Tereza, Sabina, and Franz—and their conflicting and contradictory use of words and language. For instance, Tomas and Tereza define sex differently. Tereza defines sex as an intimate act between two people in a committed relationship, and she considers it the physical manifestation of her and Tomas's love. Tomas, on the other hand, defines sex as a purely physical act, one that is not connected to love whatsoever. "Love and lovemaking are two different things," Tomas tells Tereza. Similarly, when Franz's wife, Marie-Claude, meets Sabina for the first time, Marie-Claude tells Sabina that the pendant on her necklace is "ugly." Yet Franz knows the word "ugly" is subjective. "An object was ugly if [Marie-Claude] willed it ugly, beautiful if she willed it beautiful," Franz says. Words and language are open to interpretation in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and through examples like these Kundera argues that words and language are inherently unstable—their meanings can never be fixed.

The arbitrary nature of words and language is reflected in Kundera's explanation of the word "compassion," which is defined differently depending on the language spoken. These inconsistent definitions suggest that fixed meaning is impossible. According to Kundera, languages that are derived from Latin—like French, Italian, and Spanish—form the word "compassion" by "combining the prefix meaning 'with' (*com-*) and the root meaning 'suffering' (Late Latin, *passio*)." In Latin languages, compassion is being unable to watch others suffering without feeling sympathy. It is akin to "pity," Kundera claims, and adds that "[t]o love someone out of compassion means not really to love." Compassionate love in Latin languages is to feel sorry for another, and it is therefore inferior in Kundera's eyes. But in languages not rooted in Latin, Kundera says, like Czech, Polish, and German, "compassion" is "translated by a noun formed of an equivalent prefix combined with the word that means 'feeling.'" The word compassion is used much the same way in these languages as it is in Latin-based languages, except that it means one cannot look on *any* emotion—be it suffering and pain, or happiness and joy—without feeling that emotion as well. In these other languages, compassion "signifies the maximal capacity of affective imagination," Kundera says. "In the hierarchy of sentiments, then, it is supreme." True compassion, Kundera argues, is the sharing of all emotions, not just the negative. These differences between the definitions for "compassion" clearly outline Kundera's point: a single word can have many, wildly different meanings. There is not a primary definition of a word that remains fixed; rather, the meaning of the word changes with the language.

Meaning changes not only from language to language, Kundera argues, but from person to person as well. To further illustrate his point of the ambiguity of words, Kundera includes a dictionary of misunderstood words that pass between Sabina and Franz. The competing definitions of these commonly used words again suggest that meaning can never be completely fixed or certain. Sabina uses the word "woman" to "signify one of the two human sexes," but to Franz, the word "woman" represents "a *value*. Not every woman was worthy of being called a woman." Even with such a common and seemingly straightforward word, Sabina and Franz can't agree on one meaning. Similarly, Franz uses the word "betrayal" to express "the most heinous offense imaginable." Sabina, on the other hand, sees "betrayal" as "breaking ranks and going off into the unknown." To Sabina, venturing into the unknown is the most glorious feeling. Thus, her life is full of purposeful betrayals. Again, Franz and Sabina's understandings of the very same word are worlds apart. Finally, to Sabina, the word "cemetery" represents a place of peace, even in times of war. During the violence of the Russian occupation, Sabina thinks that cemeteries are as "beautiful as a lullaby." Franz thinks that the word "cemetery" signifies "an ugly dump of stone and bones." Once more, words and meaning in Kundera's novel are unstable. Definitions are not fixed, so humans like Sabina and Franz can never reach universal understanding and agreement.

As a professor, words are Franz's bread and butter. He lectures and writes academic articles, and his words are carefully chosen and meticulously revised. Still, Franz comes to the conclusion that "no words were precise, their meanings were obliterated, their content lost, they turned into trash, chaff, dust, sand." There is nothing permanent about words and language in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*—meaning is ultimately unstable and it inevitably changes across languages and from speaker to speaker.

POWER, POLITICS, AND INEQUALITY

Power is constantly at play in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The novel largely takes place in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s, during a time known as the Prague Spring. In the winter of 1968, mass protests broke out across Czechoslovakia to push back against the Communist state that had been declared in the country after World War II. The protests lasted until late August, at which time the Soviet Union invaded and occupied

Czechoslovakia in an effort to subdue the growing social and political unrest. The fight for political power and freedom is mirrored in the personal relationships of Kundera's main characters. For instance, after Tereza discovers Tomas's infidelity and tries to kill herself, Tomas knows that he is "in an unjustifiable situation" that is based "on complete inequality." Tereza is powerless compared to Tomas, just like Czechoslovakia is powerless compared to the Soviet Union. Through the power struggles portrayed in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera effectively argues that true equality—in politics and in love—is impossible; there will always be one party who holds power over the other.

While politics is not the main focus of Kundera's novel, the absolute power of communism and the Soviet Union over the people of Czechoslovakia is clear, despite communism's claims of equality. Even before the political uprising of the Prague Spring and the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Russians, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had control of the people. When Tereza was a young girl, her father dared to speak anti-communist sentiments and was arrested and sentenced to "a long term in prison." The Czechoslovakian people are completely overpowered, both by their own government and, later, by the Soviet Union. Once the Soviet Union occupies Czechoslovakia, Czech political representatives are "hauled away like criminals by the Russian police." In Moscow, the Czechoslovakian politicians are forced to sign a compromise agreement. When Alexander Dubcek, the first president of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, returns to Prague from Moscow, he addresses the nation on the radio, but he is so "devastated" by his Russian detention that he stutters and takes long pauses while speaking. It is clear that the Soviet Union has complete control over Dubcek and the Czechoslovakian government, even when he is not literally imprisoned. Tereza, a photographer, takes hundreds of pictures during the Prague Spring, and when she takes a close-up photo of a Soviet officer aiming a gun at a group of Czechoslovakians, she is arrested by the Russian military and kept overnight at military headquarters. She is released the next day, but the message is clear: Tereza is not free to do as she pleases—the Russians have all the power.

This unequal distribution of power is reflected in personal relationships within the novel as well, especially sexual relationships, as one person is always in control. This suggests that inequality is a given in private relationships as well as in political ones. When Tomas has sex, be it with his wife Tereza or his lover Sabina, he "commands" them to "Strip!" He doesn't ask them to take their clothes off or simply suggest it; he demands it, "firmly and authoritatively," and they both obey. Tomas obviously holds the power in his sexual relationships. Sabina may not have any power in her relationship with Tomas, but she has all the power in her relationship with Franz. Franz is weak and never gives Sabina orders like Tomas does. "He simply lacks the strength to give orders," Sabina reflects to herself. In Sabina's relationship with Franz, Sabina has the upper hand, making it clear that every relationship has an unequal power dynamic, regardless of who is playing which role. Tomas does not just hold power over Tereza in matters of sex; he has power over her in general and can make her fall asleep instantly just by whispering in her ear. He has "complete control over her sleep: she doze[s] off at the second he [chooses]." Tereza is not even free to choose when she closes her eyes, again suggesting that she is not equal compared to Tomas.

By the end of the novel, however, there is a complete reversal of the power between Tereza and Tomas. Tereza has a dream in which Tomas is shot by the secret police, only to turn into a helpless and scared rabbit that Tereza holds in her hand. Tereza later realizes that Tomas has aged terribly. His love for her and his desire to stay with her in Czechoslovakia mean that he has lost his career as a surgeon and everything he has worked for his entire life. He appears weak to Tereza now and has been "transformed into the rabbit in her arms." To turn into a rabbit, Tereza says, is to lose "all strength. It means that one is not stronger than the other anymore." But of course, one person *does* still have the power—it's just that now Tereza is in charge instead of Tomas. Through this reversal in Tereza and Tomas's relationship, Kundera ultimately suggests that though power dynamics may shift, true equality in any sense will remain unobtainable.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SABINA'S BLACK BOWLER HAT

Sabina's black bowler hat appears several times in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and it symbolizes several different things in Kundera's novel, giving it a fluid quality that embodies the idea of eternal return which Kundera explores in the novel. The hat originally belonged to Sabina's grandfather and was left to Sabina after her father's death. It thus is a "sentimental object" and comes to be symbol of Sabina's individuality—the masculine nature of the hat is at odds with her obvious femininity—and it is used by Tomas as a sexual "prop." When Sabina wears the hat during sex with Tomas, it signifies "violence; violence against Sabina, against her dignity as a woman." Sabina and Tomas's relationship is one based on an unequal distribution of power in which Tomas has the upper hand, and when Sabina dons the bowler hat, she willingly submits to this inferior status in a sexual manner.

The bowler hat is also a repeated "motif in the musical composition that [is] Sabina's life," and it means different things during different times in her existence. The recurring

appearance of the hat closely resembles the idea of eternal return within the novel, and the hat's shifting meaning underscores Kundera's overreaching argument of the arbitrary nature of words and language. Sabina's bowler hat does not have one fixed, universal meaning; rather, what the hat signifies changes from time to time and person to person. For instance, while the hat symbolizes sexual power and eroticism to Tomas, when Sabina puts the hat on in front of Franz, he is confused by its meaning. To Franz, the bowler hat is "an incomprehensible gesture," which suggests that fixed and singular meaning of any symbol or word is impossible.

BOOKS

Books are a major part of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and they symbolize "a secret brotherhood" of knowledge and the aspiration for "something higher" within Kundera's novel, but they also illustrate the theory of eternal return and the idea of cyclical existence. For Tereza, books are her "single weapon against the world of crudity surrounding her," and she voraciously reads the novels in her local Czechoslovakian library as a means of escaping her "unsatisfying" life. She is first attracted to Tomas in part because he is reading a book, and when she goes home with the tall stranger in Prague, she is convinced he is a good person because of his personal library. "A man with this sort of library couldn't possibly hurt her," Kundera writes.

Tereza's favorite book is Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*—she even names her dog, Karenin, after a character in the novel. Kundera notes that Anna Karenina meets her lover, Vronsky, under "curious circumstances," and such chance happenings are key in Tereza and Tomas's first meeting as well. Both novels follow a "symmetrical composition," in which the beginning of the novel is reflected at the end. In Tolstoy's novel, Anna meets Vronsky at a train station, and Anna later commits suicide at the very same station. In Kundera's novel, Tomas and Tereza meet in the country at the beginning of novel and return to the country at the novel's end, where they die in a tragic car accident. Kundera argues that while the "symmetrical composition" of such novels may appear cliché or "novelistic," human existence unfolds in much the same way, even though he ultimately rejects the idea of eternal return. Kundera asserts that while human existence occurs in a linear way, human happiness is the longing for repetition and cyclical existence, and books—especially *Anna Karenina*, and even *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* itself—represent this desire.

TEREZA'S SUITCASE

Tereza carries a "large and enormously heavy" suitcase throughout much of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and it symbolizes Tereza's figuratively "heavy" character formed by her devotion to love and deep emotional connections. But Tereza's suitcase also represents the inevitable weight of human existence within Kundera's novel. When Tereza first arrives in Prague, she lugs the massive bag along with her. It holds her entire life, which she plans to "offer up" to Tomas, a perpetual bachelor and serial womanizer. Tomas's character is "light"—he is sexually liberated and unattached—compared to Tereza and her huge suitcase, which serves as the physical representation of her emotional baggage, so to speak. Even though she tries in different ways, Tereza never manages to rid herself of her heavy bag. When she leaves Tomas in Zurich and heads back to Prague, the suitcase goes along with her, suggesting that Tereza's "heaviness" is a key part of her core identity.

Kundera's novel explores the philosophical theory of eternal return and Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of cyclical existence as "the heaviest of burdens." According to Nietzsche's understanding of eternal return, within a cyclical existence, "the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make." Conversely, a life which does not return "is like a shadow, without weight." Kundera ultimately rejects the notion of eternal return and posits that since human life only occurs once, one's existence is incredibly light. Despite the supposed weightlessness of human existence, however, Kundera's characters are not able to fully rid themselves of all heaviness, and Tereza's suitcase is evidence of this. Thus, Tereza's heavy suitcase represents the inescapable weight of human existence in the face of "the unbearable lightness of being."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* published in 2009.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Putting it negatively, the myth of eternal return states that a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity, and beauty mean nothing.

Related Characters: Franz's Girlfriend, Franz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears at the very beginning of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and it is important because it illustrates the way in which Kundera views human existence. While

eternal return assumes that a life that repeats infinitely is a "heavy burden," it conversely assumes that a life that does not repeat is incredibly "light." Kundera ultimately rejects the theory of eternal return and posits that human life only occurs once, and this is reflected in his use of the word "myth" to describe this philosophical concept. According to Kundera, life that does not repeat—which, in his opinion is *all* life—is essentially meaningless. Life is like a "shadow," "without weight," and it matters not if it is absolutely terrible or painfully beautiful.

This passage perfectly reflects the title of Kundera's novel. As life doesn't return and is therefore weightless, it fails to gain significance, which leads to "the unbearable lightness of being." The character of Franz embodies this unbearable lightness of being, as he fails to have any meaningful relationships, other than with his young girlfriend, and he desperately tries to add weight and meaning to his life. He joins the Grand March to Cambodia in an attempt to imbue his life with significance, but when the protest fails, Franz is left disappointed and empty. He is later attacked by three strangers who try to steal his wallet, and he dies in a Geneva hospital. Franz's existences seems to be "dead in advance," and whether or not his life is dreadful or breathtakingly beautiful, it is completely insignificant and destined to fall into obscurity.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the ground. But in the love poetry of every age, the woman longs to be weighed down by the man's body. The heaviest of burdens is therefore simultaneously an image of life's most intense fulfillment. The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become.

Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant.

Related Characters: Sabina, Tomas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the beginning of the novel, when Kundera explains the weight of eternal return, and it is significant because it rejects the idea that that which is "heavy" is also a "burden." A "burden" implies a terrible weight, which is reflected in Kundera's language. Beneath a burden one "sinks," and is "crushe[d]" and "pin[ned]" to the ground. Kundera, however, doesn't necessarily believe this. The most important thing in life, that is "life's most intense fulfillment," is achieved only by the "heaviest of burdens," like love. Weight adds truth and significance to life, and life thus becomes "more real."

If weight is a burden, then the lack of weight makes one much "lighter" and "free." This is how both Tomas and Sabina live their lives. They avoid love and committed relationships, and they even abandon friends and family in the name of shedding weight, becoming light, and avoiding burden. But without this added weight, Kundera implies, life is insignificant and meaningless. While weight and burden are overwhelmingly viewed as negatives, Kundera suggests that weight can be a positive, and that lightness can also be a negative. Kundera's rejection of weight as an automatic negative, and lightness as an assured positive, underscores the ambiguity of language and the fluidity of words and meaning.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself? That is why life is always like a sketch. No, "sketch" is not quite the word, because a sketch is an outline of something, the groundwork for a picture, whereas the sketch that is our life is a sketch for nothing, an outline with no picture.

Einmal ist keinmal, says Tomas to himself. What happens but once, says the German adage, might as well not have happened at all. If we have only one life to live, we might as well not have lived at all.

Related Characters: Tomas (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Kundera rejects the theory of eternal return, and it is important because it underscores Kundera's own theory that human life only occurs once. Kundera claims that indecisiveness is natural because there is no way to test "which decision is better." As human life only occurs once, and a life doesn't exist until a person is

born, it is impossible to compare decisions and choices. Kundera likens life to "an actor going on cold" without rehearsing, and the only choice one has is to take things as they come for the first time, never to return again.

Kundera questions what value life can possibly have if it is little more than a flash in the pan: there is no preparation, and there is no review or reflection. Life is here, and then it is gone. The German saying, "*Einmal ist keinmal*," translates to "once is never," and this is how Tomas views life throughout the novel. That which only happens once is incredibly light and without significance, and when human life is over, is quickly fades into obscurity. In this way, Tomas argues that life is barely worth living, and this again is what Kundera calls "the unbearable lightness of being"—the tragedy of a fleeting life that matters little in the grand scheme of things.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Tomas came to this conclusion: Making love with a woman and sleeping with a woman are two separate passions, not merely different but opposite. Love does not make itself felt in the desire for copulation (a desire that extends to an infinite number of women) but in the desire for shared sleep (a desire limited to one woman).

Related Characters: Tereza, Tomas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Tomas explains his understanding of sex and love, and it is significant because it sheds light on Tomas's infidelity, but it also underscores Kundera's assertion that dichotomies like lightness and weight—or in this case, love and sex—cannot really be separated. The argument that love and sex are two entirely independent and "opposite" terms is how Tomas justifies his cheating to Tereza. He doesn't love the other women he has sex with—his encounters with them are simply meetings of random bodies. He never spends the night with the women he has sex with—he asks them to leave by midnight—but he longs to sleep next to Tereza, which is the very definition of love in Tomas's eyes.

The "two separate passions" of love and sex are like all the other dichotomies in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and Tomas soon realizes that he can't so easily separate them. Soon after Tomas falls in love with Tereza, he finds that he needs to drink alcohol before having sex with other women, as if he has to trick or somehow alter himself in order to betray Tereza's love and trust. If Tomas was so easily able to extricate feelings of love from sex, he would not have to be intoxicated to have sex with women whom he doesn't love, and this again implies that love and sex are not so detached after all.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Something else raised him above the others as well: he had an open book on his table. No one had ever opened a book in that restaurant before. In Tereza's eyes, books were the emblems of a secret brotherhood. For she had but a single weapon against the world of crudity surrounding her: the books she took out of the municipal library, and above all, the novels. She had read any number of them, from Fielding to Thomas Mann. 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.

Related Characters: Tereza, Tomas

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47-8

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Tereza first meets Tomas, and it is significant because it highlights Tereza's connections to books, but it also reveals her fear that she is just a carbon copy of all the other bodies in the world. Tereza believes that books are "the emblems of a secret brotherhood," and they also represent knowledge and enlightenment in the novel. Kundera later says that books are Tereza's steppingstone to "something higher," and a way out of her miserable life living in her mother's house. Tereza has read more books than any university student, and her mention of Thomas Mann reflects Kundera's own subject matter, as Mann, a German writer, often explored the human soul and the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.

While Tereza has a deeper connection to books and their meanings, she enjoys books as "physical objects" as well, and she usually has one in her hands. When she is holding a book, Tereza is part of the secret brotherhood, and it

"differentiates her from others." Tereza's mother is fond of telling Tereza as a young child that the world is a concentration camp full of bodies that are all the same, but Tereza badly wants something that sets her apart, especially from the bodies of the other women Tomas has sex with. If her body can't be different, Tereza figures, she will distinguish herself with a book.

Part 2, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Early in the novel that Tereza clutched under her arm when she went to visit Tomas, Anna meets Vronsky in curious circumstances: they are at the railway station when someone is run over by a train. At the end of the novel, Anna throws herself under a train. This symmetrical composition—the same motif appears at the beginning and at the end—may seem quite "novelistic" to you, and I am willing to agree, but only on condition that you refrain from reading such notions as "fictive," "fabricated," and "untrue to life" into the word "novelistic." Because human lives are composed in precisely such a fashion.

Related Characters: Tomas, Tereza

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Tereza goes to Prague to be with Tomas and carries with her a copy of *Anna Karenina*, and it is significant because it underscores the importance of books in the novel, but it also points to Kundera's opinion that happiness is the desire for repetition. *Anna Karenina* is Tereza's favorite book, and Tereza's relationship with Tomas is mirrored in the relationship between Anna and Vronsky in Tolstoy's novel. Anna and Vronsky meet under "curious circumstances," as do Tereza and Tomas. While Tereza believes that meeting Tomas is fate, Tomas believes that his connection to Tereza is the result of six coincidental happenings.

The "symmetrical composition" of *Anna Karenina* is seen in Kundera's novel as well, as Tereza and Tomas meet in the country in the beginning of the book, and they move to the country, where they later die together, at the end of the book. This circular writing is also seen in the parts and chapters of the book, since Kundera repeats the names of the parts and the precise number of chapters, too. While Kundera claims that life is composed in the same way, he does not mean to imply that life itself repeats in eternal return. Instead, Kundera maintains that happiness is a desire for repetition precisely because human existence does not recur. This desire for repetition is seen in the "symmetrical composition" of both Tolstoy and Kundera's novels, and, according to Kundera, is mirrored in human existence, not due to eternal return but due to the eternal pursuit of happiness.

Part 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Let me return to this dream. Its horror did not begin with Tomas's first pistol shot; it was horrifying from the outset. Marching naked in formation with a group of naked women was for Tereza the quintessential image of horror. When she lived at home, her mother forbade her to lock the bathroom door. What she meant by her injunction was: Your body is just like all other bodies; you have no right to shame; you have no reason to hide something that exists in millions of identical copies. In her mother's world all bodies were the same and marched behind one another in formation. Since childhood, Tereza had seen nudity as a sign of concentration camp uniformity, a sign of humiliation.

Related Characters: Tereza's Mother, Tereza, Tomas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs during one of Tereza's reoccurring dreams, and it is significant because it sheds light on Tereza's disgust for her own body, and it also introduces the association between bodies and concentration camps, which Kundera revisits several times throughout the book. As a result of Tomas's philandering, Tereza begins to have a series of reoccurring dreams, which illustrate her insecurities and anger related to Tomas's infidelity. In this dream, Tomas forces Tereza and several other women to march naked around a pool, as he aims a pistol and shoots them one by one. Tereza's dream suggests that she sees herself as just one of the many bodies Tomas has sex with, and she desperately wants to set herself apart.

Kundera's repeated mention of concentration camps reflects Czechoslovakia's history, both during World War II with the Nazi concentration camps of the SS, and during the Cold War and the Russian occupation, which also saw forced political camps, such as the Russian gulag. Tereza's mother's claim that all bodies are alike connotes images of thousands of nameless, faceless bodies forced into labor

camps, where they do the same labor all day, every day. Tereza's mother humiliated Tereza by denying her privacy and equating her body to all the other bodies of the world, and this is exactly what happens to the Czech people as a whole. The Communist regime strips the Czech people of their privacy, and Tereza later claims that all of Czechoslovakia is one big concentration camp of bodies with no privacy.

Part 2, Chapter 20 Quotes

"Here is a painting I happened to drip red paint on. At first I was terribly upset, but then I started enjoying it. The trickle looked like a crack; it turned the building site into a battered old backdrop, a backdrop with a building site painted on it. I began playing with the crack, filling it out, wondering what might be visible behind it. And that's how I began my first cycle of paintings. I called it "Behind the Scenes." Of course, I couldn't show them to anybody. I'd have been kicked out of the Academy. On the surface, there was always an impeccably realistic world, but underneath, behind the backdrop's cracked canvas, lurked something different, something mysterious or abstract."

Related Characters: Sabina (speaker), Tomas, Tereza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Tereza goes to visit Sabina at her art studio, and it is important because it reflects Kundera's argument concerning the inseparable state of dichotomies and dualities, and it also hearkens to Tomas's profession as a surgeon and his desire to cut open his mistresses with his metaphorical scalpel. The Communist regime does not allow abstract art, only realism, so Sabina's adventure into the abstract begins as an accident. She first spills paint on her canvas, which she quickly paints into a "crack" that soon reveals an entire other dimension of the painting. The name, "Behind the Scenes," implies there is much going on below the surface, made visible only through the small crack.

As a surgeon, Tomas works "behind the scenes" as well. He reveals, with his scalpel, what the body has kept hidden. The "trickle" of red paint on Tereza's canvas connotes images of blood, and the widening "crack" hearkens to a surgical incision and the exposing of the body beneath. This connection of cutting can also be extended to Tomas's womanizing, as he desires to find each woman's unique sexual trait, and he cuts these women open figuratively, searching for the ways in which they are different. According to Sabina, this abstract world is always present under the backdrop, which again suggests a duality that cannot be wholly separated.

Part 2, Chapter 26 Quotes

Thinking in Zurich of those days, she no longer felt any aversion to the man. The word "weak" no longer sounded like a verdict. Any man confronted with superior strength is weak, even if he has an athletic body like Dubcek's. The very weakness that at the time had seemed unbearable and repulsive, the weakness that had driven Tereza and Tomas from the country, suddenly attracted her. She realized that she belonged among the weak, in the camp of the weak, in the country of the weak, and that she had to be faithful to them precisely because they were weak and gasped for breath in the middle of sentences.

Related Characters: Alexander Dubcek, Tereza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Tereza decides to leave Tomas in Zurich and return to Prague, and it is significant because it establishes Tereza as weak and inferior compared to Tomas, but it also implies that there will always be one person—or in this case, one political party—who is stronger than the other. Teresa mentions Alexander Dubcek, the president of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring, and she references his famous speech after his return to Czechoslovakia from Moscow during the Russian occupation. Dubcek, an ardent reformist who was invested in seeing the Communist party reformed and improved, was forced by the Russians to sign a compromise agreement and submit to the ideology of the Soviet Union. Dubcek's speech, given over the radio at the obvious behest of the Russians, was littered with long pauses and gasps for breath, and to Tereza—and much of Czechoslovakia at the time—is the epitome of weakness and surrender.

Tereza's distance from her homeland has softened her perception of Dubcek, whom she now does not see as wholly weak. Dubcek did not represent the absence of power; rather, the Soviet Union was simply stronger. Kundera ultimately implies that there is no equality, in personal relationships or in political ones, and this is a particularly significant argument given the equality implied in communism. Tereza is no longer repulsed by Dubcek's

weakness in the face of the Russian power, as she now recognizes herself as weak compared to Tomas. Instead of an "aversion" to Dubcek and the Czechs, Tereza now feels a renewed kinship with them, as she is just as weak as they are.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Quotes

The bowler hat was a motif in the musical composition that was Sabina's life. It returned again and again, each time with a different meaning, and all the meanings flowed through the bowler hat like water through a riverbed. I might call it Heraclitus' ("You can't step twice into the same river") riverbed; the bowler hat was a bed through which each time Sabina saw another river flow, another *semantic river*: each time the same object would give rise to a new meaning, though all former meanings would resonate (like an echo, like a parade of echoes) together with the new one. Each new experience would resound, each time enriching the harmony. The reason why Tomas and Sabina were touched by the sight of the bowler hat in a Zurich hotel and made love almost in tears was that its black presence was not merely a reminder of their love games but also a memento of Sabina's father and of her grandfather, who lived in a century without airplanes and cars.

Related Characters: Franz, Tomas, Sabina

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Franz is confused by the sight of Sabina in her bowler hat, and it is important because it underscores the significance of the bowler hat in Tereza's life, but it also highlights Kundera's central claim that language is inherently unstable. The reference to Sabina's hat as a "motif in the musical composition" of Sabina's life that appears repeatedly, and thus points to the theory of eternal return and the human desire for repetition. But the fluid meaning of the hat that changes with each return suggests that meaning can never be fixed. This fluidity is reflected in Kundera's language of water and the "*semantic river*."

While the meaning of the bowler hat changes throughout Sabina's life, old meaning is never lost, and it builds with the new like a "parade of echoes," or a "harmony," moving toward a collective crescendo. The bowler hat is a sexual "prop" for Tomas and Sabina, but as it once belonged to her grandfather and was left to Sabina after her father's death, it also reminds her of her family and has sentimental value. Further, the hat is a symbol of Sabina's individuality and her refusal to conform, and these changing and shifting meanings for the same symbol suggest that language is constantly evolving.

Part 5, Chapter 21 Quotes

The pain grew more intense. He could not speak. It occurred to him that his womanizing was also something of an "*Es muss sein!*"—an imperative enslaving him. He longed for a holiday. But for an absolute holiday, a rest from *all* imperatives, from all "*Es muss sein!*" If he could take a rest (a permanent rest) from the hospital operating table, then why not from the *world* operating table, the one where his imaginary scalpel opened the strongbox women use to hide their illusory one-millionth part dissimilarity?

Related Characters: Tereza, Tomas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Tomas tries to curb his womanizing only to discover that he is powerless to stop it, and it is significant because it illustrates Tomas's relationship to "*Es muss sein!*" as well as his desire to conquer women and uncover their unique sexual identity. Here, Tereza has again caught Tomas being unfaithful, and he knows that he must stop, but he isn't sure he is strong enough. "*Es muss sein!*" translated "It must be!" implies that Tomas has no control over his womanizing; rather, it is "an imperative enslaving him." In this way, Tomas doesn't have the power to change his behavior.

Kundera draws a parallel between Tomas's identity as a surgeon and his identity as a womanizer, both of which require a scalpel of sorts. Tomas has sex with so many women not because he is obsessed with sex, but because he is obsessed with finding the minute—"one-millionth part dissimilarity"—ways in which each woman is an individual. To find these differences, Tomas cuts the women open with his metaphorical scalpel, and once he has isolated a woman's uniqueness, he must conquer it right away and exert his power over each new woman. The Communist regime has dismissed Tomas from his job, and he would like to be dismissed from the "*world* operating table," too, as there isn't

any other way to escape the "*Es muss sein!*" of his womanizing.

Tomas's philandering does not pose any real threat to his love for Tereza.

Part 5, Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ He thought: In the clockwork of the head, two cogwheels turn opposite each other. On the one, images; on the other, the body's reactions. The cog carrying the image of a naked woman meshes with the corresponding erection-command cog. But when, for one reason or another, the wheels go out of phase and the excitement cog meshes with a cog bearing the image of a swallow in flight, the penis rises at the sight of a swallow.

Moreover, a study by one of Tomas's colleagues, a specialist in human sleep, claimed that during any kind of dream men have erections, which means that the link between erections and naked women is only one of a thousand ways the Creator can set the clockwork moving in a man's head.

And what has love in common with all this? Nothing. If a cogwheel in Tomas's head goes out of phase and he is excited by seeing a swallow, it has absolutely no effect on his love for Tereza.

Related Characters: Tereza, Tomas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Tomas wakes from a dream with an erection, and it is significant because it reflects Tomas's belief that there is no connection between love and sex, but this passage also illustrates Kundera's overarching argument regarding the arbitrary nature of words and meaning. Tomas's description of the physiological functions behind the male erection is completely random and has nothing innately to do with love. Rather, the presence of an erection and sexual excitement has to do entirely with a "command" and "response," and in this way is hardly a conscious effort.

Kundera's analogy of a cogwheel, and the random placement of images of naked women and birds, suggests that women need not even be involved in the process of a man's sexual excitement, and the implication that men get an erection during *any* dream whatsoever further suggests this. In this way, even the connection between the male erection and women is completely arbitrary. This is the argument that Tomas offers up to justify his womanizing—if the connection between an erection and women is random, so is the supposed connection between love and sex, thus

Part 6, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Rejection and privilege, happiness and woe—no one felt more concretely than Yakov how interchangeable opposites are, how short the step from one pole of human existence to the other.

Then, at the very outset of the war, he fell prisoner to the Germans, and other prisoners, belonging to an incomprehensible, standoffish nation that had always been intrinsically repulsive to him, accused him of being dirty. Was he, who bore on his shoulders a drama of the highest order (as fallen angel and Son of God), to undergo judgment not for something sublime (in the realm of God and the angels) but for shit? Were the very highest of drama and the very lowest so vertiginously close?

Vertiginously close? Can proximity cause vertigo?

It can. When the north pole comes so close as to touch the south pole, the earth disappears and man finds himself in a void that makes his head spin and beckons him to fall.

If rejection and privilege are one and the same, if there is no difference between the sublime and the paltry, if the Son of God can undergo judgment for shit, then human existence loses its dimensions and becomes unbearably light.

Related Characters: Yakov Dzhugashvili

Related Themes:

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Kundera tells the story of Joseph Stalin's son, Yakov, and it is important because it introduces the theme of "shit," which will become increasingly important in the description of kitsch. This quote also underscores Kundera's argument that oppositions and dichotomies are not as separate as they may at first seem. Yakov knows "how interchangeable opposites are," meaning he is frequently two completely opposite things at one time. As the son of the leader of the Soviet Union, Yakov is incredibly privileged; but Stalin never really accepted his son, so Yakov is rejected as well. Yakov is happy but also sad. These differences are "vertiginously close," which implies they are so close Yakov has vertigo and is falling into the void created by the obliterated meaning of two polar opposites coming together.

This particular story about Yakov comes about because he will not consent to cleaning up after himself in the latrine while he is held by the Germans in a concentration camp with a group of British soldiers. Yakov even goes before the commander to plead his case, but Yakov refuses to talk openly about "shit," so he throws himself onto an electrified fence, committing suicide. Yakov's refusal to acknowledge "literal shit" mirrors the refusal to acknowledge "metaphorical shit" in the idea of kitsch. Kundera refers to Yakov as the "Son of God" because he is the son of the most powerful man in the East, yet he is still must endure "judgement for shit." This collapsing of opposites causes human existence to "lose its dimensions" and become "unbearably light." In other words, Yakov's death and the "shit" that has brought him there are meaningless.

Part 6, Chapter 5 Quotes

"Kitsch" is a German word born in the middle of the sentimental nineteenth century, and from German it entered all Western languages. Repeated use, however, has obliterated its original metaphysical meaning: kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Kundera explains the concept of kitsch, and it is important because it further underscores the fluidity of language and the fact that meaning can never be fixed. Kitsch is an aesthetic term that expresses tacky or gaudy art, but Kundera defines it in a slightly different way. Kitcsh, according to Kundera, is "the absolute denial of shit" both literally and metaphorically. Kitsch's "original metaphysical meaning" has been "obliterated," or completely ruined, because of "repeated use," which again implies that language and meaning are fluid and constantly changing.

Kundera uses the term "kitsch" to describe most of the unpleasant things in the world. For example, Kundera implies that it is kitsch that makes totalitarian regimes and Communism possible. The people all know that the regime is oppressive and abusive, but they willfully ignore this. In this way, the violence and oppression of Communism is the metaphorical "shit" that is disregarded by the people, as the level of pain and suffering caused by Communism "is essentially unacceptable in human existence."

Part 6, Chapter 12 Quotes

All her life she had proclaimed kitsch her enemy. But hadn't she in fact been carrying it with her? Her kitsch was her image of home, all peace, quiet, and harmony, and ruled by a loving mother and wise father. It was an image that took shape within her after the death of her parents. 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 into the dying day.

Related Characters: Sabina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 255

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears as Kundera further explains kitsch, and it is significant because it underscores Sabina's relationship to kitsch while illustrates her inability to steer clear of the power of kitsch. Sabina has made it her life's work to avoid kitsch and rid it from her life, but Kundera implies that kitsch has been with her all along. Kitsch can also be understood as something that is horribly cliché, and to Sabina, there is nothing more cliché than the traditional family. Kundera's language perfectly describes this trite tradition; it is "all peace, quiet, and harmony, and ruled by a loving mother and wise father."

Sabrina's image of kitsch as the traditional family formed after her parents died, which implies that her opinion of kitsch as the perfect family was more of a defense mechanism to save her from the pain of losing her parents. This removal of kitsch, however, has the opposite effect—in its absence, Sabina is actually more vulnerable to its pull. The "sentimental film" that brings Sabina to tears, evidence in and of itself of kitsch, is one cliché after another. The "ungrateful daughter," the "neglected father," and the "happy family" are the very definition of kitsch, and instead of driving Sabina further away, she instead is acutely aware of what she is missing.

Though touched by the song, Sabina did not take her feeling seriously. She knew only too well that the song was a beautiful lie. 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. For none among us is superman enough to escape kitsch completely. No matter how we scorn it, kitsch is an integral part of the human condition.

Related Characters: Sabina

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, too, occurs as Kundera explains Sabina's relationship to kitsch, and it is significant because it implies that Sabina is aware of the power kitsch has over her, and it also suggests that no one can, not even Sabina, can avoid the power and pull of kitsch. Here, Sabina is living with the elderly couple in America in a makeshift family unit, and the song about "two shining windows and the happy family living behind them" has just come to her mind. Sabina admits to being moved by the sentimental meaning behind the song, but she knows it is a "beautiful lie." It is, after all, kitsch, and it ignores the fact that the perfect family in the song likely does not exist in reality.

Only in admitting the lie behind kitsch is Sabina able to let go of its power over her and be content with the improvised family she has now in her life with the elderly couple, even though she knows it can't last forever. By admitting the perfect kitschy family is a lie, Sabina recognizes that such a family is an unrealistic goal, and it no longer has the "totalitarian power" to make her feel inferior or unworthy. Sabina's character illustrates that even the most harden enemy of kitsch cannot avoid its power indefinitely.

Part 6, Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ The fantasy of the Grand March that Franz was so intoxicated by is the political kitsch joining leftists of all times and tendencies. The Grand March is the splendid march on the road to brotherhood, equality, justice, happiness; it goes on and on, obstacles notwithstanding, for obstacles there must be if the march is to be the Grand March.

The dictatorship of the proletariat or democracy? Rejection of the consumer society or demands for increased productivity? The guillotine or an end to the death penalty? It is all beside the point. What makes a leftist a leftist is not this or that theory but his ability to integrate any theory into the kitsch called the Grand March.

Related Characters: Franz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears as Franz readies himself for the Grand March to Cambodia, and it is significant because it identifies the Grand March as kitsch, and in doing so implies that the Grand March is in essence a lie and has no chance of affecting any real change. Franz is drawn to protest in general, but he is particularly obsessed with the Grand March. As "political kitsch," it can be assumed that the Grand March is covering up some sort of lie that is incompatible to the life of the leftist. Kundera claims the Grand March is "the road to brotherhood, equality, justice [and] happiness," which is to say that it is actually none of these things.

Kundera claims it does not matter what the particular cause, such as dictatorships or the end of the death penalty, a leftist is made not by the cause but by the ability to join those causes together into the kitsch of the Grand March. The particular cause does not matter, because the Grand March doesn't have the power to affect any change, and this is ultimately demonstrated during the Grand March to Cambodia. Once Franz and the others finally reach the Cambodian border, they are met with silence and hidden machine guns, and they are forced to turn around without actually helping anyone. Here, Kundera seems to imply that what "makes a leftist a leftist" is their tendency to buy into kitsch and think they are making a difference, when it is all just a lie.

Part 6, Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ What remains of the dying population of Cambodia?

One large photograph of an American actress holding an Asian child in her arms.

What remains of Tomas?

An inscription reading HE WANTED THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

What remains of Beethoven?

A frown, an improbably man, and a somber voice intoning "*Es muss sein!*"

What remains of Franz?

An inscription reading A RETURN AFTER LONG WANDERINGS.

And so on and so forth. Before we are forgotten, we will be turned into kitsch. Kitsch is the stopover between being and oblivion.

Related Characters: Marie-Claude, Simon, Franz, Tomas, The American Actress

Related Themes:

Page Number: 277-8

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs near the end of the novel, after the Grand March has ended and after both Franz and Tomas have died, and it is significant because it underscores the inescapabilty of kitsch, as well as the nonexistence of eternal return. Ultimately the Grand March is unsuccessful in helping the Cambodian people and all that remains is a photograph of the American actress with a Cambodian girl. This is undeniably kitschy by Kundera's definition. The actress cares nothing of about the actual people of Cambodia, she only cares about her own image and *appearing* to care.

Similarly, all that remains of Franz and Tomas—their tombstones—are lies as well, which also makes them kitsch. Franz wasn't trying to return home, he was very likely trying *not* to return home, and Tomas did not want the kingdom of God on earth. All Tomas wanted to do was save lives as a doctor and have sex with as many women as possible, but both Marie-Claude and Simon sacrificed honesty for kitsch. Even Beethoven's quartet has turned to kitsch, and it is remembered mostly for a repetitive and cliché line that has nothing to do anymore with its original meaning. As kitsch is the "stopover between being and oblivion," it is implied that kitsch cannot be avoided before one is "forgotten," which again suggests that human existence only occurs once and then slips into obscurity never to return.

Part 7, Chapter 4 Quotes

But most of all: No one can give anyone else the gift of the idyll; only an animal can do so, because only animals were not expelled from Paradise. The love between dog and man is idyllic. It knows no conflicts, no hair-raising scenes; it knows no development. Karenin surrounded Tereza and Tomas with a life based on repetition, and he expected the same from them.

Related Characters: Tomas, Tereza, Karenin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears just after Karenin has died, and it is important because it explains Kundera's notion of the "idyll," or Paradise, and it again implies that true happiness is the desire for repetition. The fact that no one can give another person "the gift of the idyll," or the gift of Paradise or true happiness, suggests that Tereza and Tomas never had any real chance of making each other happy. Instead, their happiness relied upon Karenin, who was the only one who could make them happy.

Now that Karenin is gone, it is implied that Tereza and Tomas will never be happy. This further implies that the love between two people, particularly between Tereza and Tomas, can never be "idyllic," or perfect. Unlike Tereza and Tomas's love for Karenin, their love for each is full of "conflicts" and "hair-raising scenes." There is constant strife and contention in their relationship, between Tomas's infidelities and their resentment for each other, and these are troubles that did not plague their relationship with Karenin. Karenin was able to make Tereza and Tomas happy because he brought to them a "life based on repetition"—each day he did the same things at the same times—and Tereza and Tomas helped Karenin to live this circular life, thereby maintaining a repetitive existence themselves to the best of their abilities.

If Karenin had been a person instead of a dog, he would surely have long since said to Tereza, "Look, I'm sick and tired of carrying that roll in my mouth every day. Can't you come up with something different?" And therein lies the whole of man's plight. Human time does not turn in a circle; it runs ahead in a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy: happiness is the longing for repetition

Related Characters: Tomas, Tereza, Karenin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 298

Explanation and Analysis

This quote also occurs after Karenin's death, and it is significant because it further identifies repetition as the key to happiness and implies that humankind will never be happy because their lives do not repeat. Karenin's daily existence of going to the market each morning with Tereza to buy milk and the dog roll was in large part what made Karenin so happy. After returning home from the market, he would play with Tomas for a while before finally eating his roll. Karenin's existence was simple and repetitive, and he was always happy and content.

Kundera implies that if Karenin had been a human instead of a dog, however, he would have turned cynical and

unhappy. As a human, Karenin is bored with his daily run to the market to get his roll and seeks variety, which Kundera claims is "the whole of man's plight." Humankind is never happy, and will never be happy, because human existence occurs in a linear way and does not repeat. Happiness, Kundera says, is "the longing for repetition," which is evident in Tereza's fondness for Karenin and his predictable days and is also seen in Tomas and Tereza's move to the country. Kundera has already revealed that, outside of dog, moving to the country to live in the repeating beauty of the seasons and nature is the closest humankind can get to happiness. Of course, this will only give the *impression* of happiness, as humans can never be truly happy.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has long confounded philosophers with his take on eternal return—the age-old belief that the universe and everything in existence repeat on an infinite loop. According to Nietzsche's theory, a life that only occurs once is "without weight" and essentially meaningless.

Kundera immediately opens with the theory of eternal return, which he ultimately refutes. While Kundera later argues that human life only occurs once and is therefore incredibly light, he does not depict life as meaningless. Instead, there is "weight" to life—namely love—that adds heft and meaning.

If the French Revolution occurred on a continuous loop, then people wouldn't be so proud of Maximilien Robespierre. Because the French Revolution only occurred once, the unspeakable violence associated with it has "become lighter than feathers," and it is no longer frightening. The narrator thinks back to many years before, when he had looked at some portraits painted by Hitler. The narrator was moved by the paintings, which made him quite nostalgic, even though much of his family had been killed in Nazi concentration camps. The ability to appreciate Hitler's art, the narrator says, illustrates the absence of eternal return—"everything is pardoned in advance and therefore everything cynically permitted."

Kundera offers up the violence and pain of the world as proof of the nonexistence of eternal return, and he uses Robespierre, a political leader of the French Revolution, as an example. Robespierre was an exceedingly violent man who sentenced thousands to death at the guillotine, yet he remains a popular French icon. This acceptance of Robespierre and the narrator's appreciation of Hitler's art illustrate his point: if the atrocities of Hitler and Robespierre occurred over and over again, people would grow tired of the violence and condemn them both outright. However, since both men only lived once, their violence is more isolated and therefore "lighter" and more distant. Thus, people excuse it "cynically," even though they know it is wrong.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

According to Nietzsche, eternal return is "the heaviest of burdens," which means that human life stands out in its weightlessness, but the narrator questions whether heaviness is truly negative compared to lightness. Life's most meaningful aspects—like love—are heavy. Without these burdens, the narrator claims, one is "lighter than air."

Kundera frequently debates the meaning of words and highlights how different words mean different things to different people. While the general consensus is that weight is negative, Kundera defines it differently and suggests that being too light is negative, which illustrates the innate ambiguity of words and language.

Parmenides, a Greek philosopher from the 5th century B.C.E, viewed the world in opposites, such as light and dark, fine and coarse, and being and nonbeing. He considered one half of such oppositions positive and the other half negative. For instance, Parmenides claimed that lightness is positive and weight negative, but the narrator isn't so sure that Parmenides was correct. According to the narrator, the lightness/weight opposition is the most "mysterious" and "ambiguous" of all opposites.

All oppositions are ambiguous in Kundera's novel—he blends the feminine and the masculine, the weak and the strong, and even breeds of dogs—but he undermines the lightness/weight opposition most of all. Kundera notes that Parmenides thought lightness positive, but Kundera's "light" characters are only able to find happiness in "heavy" relationships and situations. In this way, Kundera claims that heaviness isn't entirely negative, which again suggests that language is unstable and meaning can never be fixed.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

The narrator has been thinking about the character of Tomas for years. He sees Tomas standing in front of a window, absentmindedly staring outside. It has been three weeks since Tomas met Tereza. They met briefly in Tereza's small Czech town, but she soon visited Tomas in Prague. After coming down with the flu, Tereza stayed on at Tomas's flat for an entire week. To Tomas, Tereza seems like a small child that has been floated downriver in a basket.

Kundera's novel is quiet meta and self-referential, in that it is very clear that the narrator is telling a story, and he frequently interrupts it to talk about his process and the creation of his characters. This thinking about writing is a hallmark of postmodern literature, as is Kundera's attention to language and power dynamics, such as the one between Tomas and Tereza. Tomas considers Tereza like a helpless child from the start, placing him in a clear position of power over her.

Tomas doesn't know what to do about his feelings for Tereza, but, the narrator says, such indecisiveness is natural. Life occurs only once, and one does not have a chance to compare their life with previous ones. There is no "outline" for life, the narrator says, and everything happens "without warning." As Tomas stands at the window, he mutters: "*Einmal ist keinmal*." The old German saying, which says that what happens once may as well not happen at all, is how Tomas views life. With only one life to live, one may as well not live at all.

"Einmal ist keinmal" translates roughly to "once is never," which points to Kundera's opinion that eternal return does not exist. Tomas doesn't know what to do because his situation has quite literally never happened before, and it won't, according to Kundera, ever happen again. Thus, life can never be predicted or "outlined." If Tomas had met Tereza an infinite number of times before, he would surely know the best thing to do.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

One day at the hospital (Tomas is a surgeon), Tereza calls and tells him she is coming to Prague on business. He is ecstatic, and she arrives the next day with a **book**—a copy of *Anna Karenina*—under her arm. Tomas asks where she is staying, and Tereza says she doesn't have a hotel yet. She left her **suitcase** at the train station, she says, so Tomas immediately takes her to get it, bringing both Tereza and her enormous suitcase back to his flat.

Tereza's massive suitcase is symbolic of her "heavy" character. She is the complete opposite of Tomas (he's a womanizer who avoids love), and she values committed relationships and monogamy. When Tomas brings Tereza and her suitcase back to his flat, he is inviting both Tereza and her heaviness into his life, a move that is at odds with his lightness.

Inviting Tereza to stay at his flat violates Tomas's way of living. Tomas, who has long since divorced his wife and abandoned his son, Simon, is a bachelor, and he is unable to sleep next to a woman. He has plenty of mistresses, but he always asks them to leave by midnight. Sleeping next to Tereza, however, he wakes holding her hand and looks at the massive **suitcase** sitting by the bed. He thinks again that she is a child floated downstream to him in a basket, but then stops himself. Metaphors are dangerous, Tomas thinks, and can quickly lead to love.

Later, after Tomas has fallen in love with Tereza, the narrator again claims that metaphors lead to love, as Tereza has made her way into Tomas's "poetic memory." Tomas denies that sex and love are related and instead argues that love is the desire to sleep next to someone else. Here, it is clear that Tomas is falling in love with Tereza, and this is reflected in his glance toward her "heavy" suitcase. Tereza is the embodiment of love, an undeniably heavy emotion. Despite this love, Tomas still sees himself in a position of power over Tereza, as he again refers to her as a helpless infant in a basket. Tomas's constant need to place Tereza in an inferior position implies that, in love, one person will always be in a position of power over the other.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Tomas had been married for less than two years when he divorced his wife, and while he initially fought for custody of his infant son, Simon, he quickly decided not to see him anymore either. Tomas's parents were furious with his decision to abandon his son, so Tomas quit seeing his parents as well. Since then, his life has been a series of sexual relationships with women.

Tomas abandons his entire family as a means to achieve lightness. Marriage and fatherhood are incredibly serious—and therefore heavy—roles, as is Tomas's relationship with his own parents, so he leaves them all behind. Instead, Tomas's life is full of meaningless sex with hundreds of women, a much lighter existence compared to his previous life as a father and a son.

Tomas abides by a set of rules regarding his mistresses. He either sees a woman three times, back to back, or he sees a woman for years and separates each meeting by at least three weeks. Not every woman Tomas meets appreciates his approach to relationships, but Sabina does. Sabina understands Tomas, and she likes him because he is "the complete opposite of kitsch."

Sabina lives her whole life trying to avoid kitsch, an aesthetic ideal that Kundera extends to life in general. In Sabina's opinion, traditional marriage and family are examples of kitsch, and Tomas is certainly the anti-family—and so "the complete opposite of kitsch."

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Until Tereza, Tomas made a concerted effort to remove all love from his life. If he allowed himself to love one woman, than his other mistresses would "assume inferior status and become ripe for insurrection," which is why he doesn't want anyone to know that he spends the night with Tereza. Tomas never spends the night with his mistresses, but after waking to Tereza holding his hand, he finds that both he and Tereza enjoy sleeping next to one another.

Tomas's desire to sleep next to Tereza again suggests that he is falling in love with her, which again is at odds with his light character. His worry that his mistresses will find out and "assume inferior status" again suggests power imbalances, and it implies that Tomas considers Tereza to have more power than his mistresses, but not more than him. She is, after all, the one who sleeps clutching his hand. Kundera's use of the phrase "ripe for insurrection" mirrors the mounting political tensions of the Prague Spring.

Whenever Tereza spends the night alone in the small flat Tomas has rented for her, she is unable to sleep. In Tomas's arms, however, Tereza sleeps like a baby. He whispers in her ear and lulls her to sleep with meaningless words. He has "complete control over her sleep," and each morning when he wakes, Tereza is holding him tightly. Tomas comes to the conclusion that sleeping next to a woman and having sex with a woman are complete opposites. Love is not the desire for sex, Tomas concludes, but the desire to sleep next to someone.

Tomas's control over Tereza's sleep illustrates the power he has over her. Tomas often exerts his power in a sexual way, especially with Sabina, but he has "complete control" over Tereza, so much so that he even commands her sleep. Tereza clings to him, almost desperately, which reflects her strong desire to be loved by him. Kundera later suggests that Tereza could have fallen in love with anyone, *not just Tomas—an idea hinted at here by the fact that Tomas lulls her with meaningless words rather than specific, important ones.*

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

One night, Tereza wakes from a nightmare. She tells Tomas that in her dream, she was forced to watch him and Sabina have sex upon a stage. Tomas lulls Tereza back to sleep, but something about her dream bothers him. The next day, Tomas remembers a letter Sabina had written him, in which she said she wanted to have sex with him at her art studio because it would be like having sex with him on a stage surrounded by people. In that moment, Tomas knows that Tereza has been reading his personal letters.

Tereza is painfully aware of Tomas's mistresses, even if he hasn't explicitly told her about them. Tereza goes through Tomas's desk drawers because she is rightfully suspicious, and his behavior is like torture to her. Going through his personal belongings gives her aan emotional advantage, or at least a warning, which allows her to recoup a small amount of power over him. This is the first of several dream sequences that occur in the book, and Kundera often jumps in and out of them with little to no warning.

Tomas confronts Tereza about the letter, and she admits to reading it. Tereza tells him to kick her out, but he doesn't want to. He tries to convince Tereza that his mistresses have nothing to do with his feelings for her, but the next day he finds her trying to drink an entire bottle of valerian drops. At that moment, Tomas knows that their relationship is based on "complete inequality." Still, Tomas can't help but think about a few nights earlier, when he and Tereza had gone to a bar with some of Tereza's friends from work to celebrate her recent promotion. Tomas is not a dancer, and when Tereza had danced with another man, he was surprised to find that he was jealous.

Tomas's jealousy suggests that he doesn't have as much power over Tereza as he thinks he does. Although Tereza tries to commit suicide over Tomas's infidelities and his betrayal of her love—an act that suggests weakness—Tomas is acutely uncomfortable when she dances with another man. Tereza, despite her seeming weakness, has power over Tomas. Notably, Tomas won't dance with Tereza here. But at the end of the book, the night before they are killed, Tomas dances with Tereza, which suggests that he finally finds happiness—or the closest thing to it, at least.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Despite Tomas's attempts to convince Tereza that the other women in his life mean nothing, Tereza can think of little else. In her sleep, she cycles between three nightmares. In one nightmare, cats claw at Tereza's face and body (the narrator points out that "cat" in Czech slang means "pretty woman"), and in another, Tereza is marched naked around a pool with other naked women as Tomas gives them orders and shoots them one by one. In Tereza's third dream, she is dead.

The naked pool dream reoccurs throughout the book, another example of eternal return in the novel. Tereza is obviously feeling threatened by Tomas's mistresses, thus she is dreaming about "cats," or "pretty women," attacking her. Her dreams illustrate Tomas's power over her—he has the ability to make her completely miserable and wish she were dead.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

In languages that are rooted in Latin, the narrator says, the word "compassion" is formed using the prefix "with" and the root word for "suffering." Languages not rooted in Latin—like Czech, Polish, and German—form the word "compassion" from a word that means "feeling." In Latin-based languages, the word compassion is synonymous with "pity." Therefore, the narrator claims, to love out of compassion in Latin languages is inferior love.

This passage also underscores the fluidity of language. The same word has subtle, yet exceedingly important and significant, differences depending on the language in which it is spoken, and this again implies that words' meanings can never be certain.

To love out of compassion in Czech, Polish, or German, however, is "supreme" love. Compassion from "feeling" implies that *all* emotions are shared, not just pity, which makes compassionate love, in Czech at least, a superior form of love. This is how Tomas feels about Tereza—he shares all her emotions, including her anger over his infidelity, and he finds it impossible to be upset with her for reading his letters.

Tomas's love for Tereza is incredibly empathetic. He feels her physical pain as well as her emotional pain, and it soon turns him miserable and depressed. Tomas later refers to his compassionate love for Tereza as a disease that she has infected him with. To Tomas, his love for Tereza is something he can't escape, and it even has the power to get him to return to Communist Czechoslovakia after he managed to escape.

PART 1, CHAPTER 10

After two years with Tereza, Tomas still has not given up his mistresses, but he has found he is unable to have sex with other women without alcohol. One night, while having sex with Sabina, Tomas keeps looking at his watch, nervous about getting home to Tereza too late. Afterward, Tomas can't find one of his socks, and he is forced to borrow one of Sabina's frilly socks for the chilly walk home. He knows that Sabina has hidden his sock; she is irritated with him for glancing at his watch and thinking about Tereza during their time together.

Sabina takes Tomas's sock to gain some power over him, and over Tereza. Sabina knows that she has inferior status compared to Tereza, and the hiding of the sock is just the type of "insurrection," or rebellion, that Tomas mentioned earlier. Tomas represents the physical body in the novel—the polar opposite to Tereza, the soul—but his need to drink before cheating on Tereza implies that he is not entirely body—he must trick his soul through drinking in order to betray his love for Tereza.

PART 1, CHAPTER 11

To convince Tereza of his love for her, Tomas marries her and gives her a puppy. The dog is part Saint Bernard, part German shepherd, and Tomas suggests they name the puppy Tolstoy, after Tereza's favorite **book**, *Anna Karenina*. The puppy is a girl, Tereza says, and she suggests they name her Anna Karenina, but Tomas doesn't think the puppy looks like Anna. The dog looks more like Anna's husband, Karenin, Tomas says, and after a short discussion on whether or not naming a female dog a masculine name will affect her sexuality, they decide to call her Karenin.

In the blending of both his breed (German shepherd and Saint Bernard) and his gender, Karenin collapses sets of opposites, making them meaningless and insignificant. This is a repeated theme throughout the book, and it points to another way in which language is unstable. While Karenin is biologically female, he is referred to with male pronouns throughout the book.

Even with Karenin's help, Tomas isn't able to make Tereza happy, and Tomas becomes acutely aware of this fact on the 10th day of Russia's occupation of Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring in August of 1968. A friend in Switzerland keeps calling to offer Tomas a job at a hospital in Zurich. Tomas's friend is worried about Tomas in Czechoslovakia and wants him to immigrate to Zurich.

The power struggles of the Russian occupation are mirrored in Tomas and Tereza's relationship. Just as Czechoslovakia has lost power to the Soviet Union, Tomas is losing power over Tereza, as he can't seem to make her happy. Kundera later claims that a human cannot give another human the gift of happiness, but a dog can, which Karenin later does for Tereza.

PART 1, CHAPTER 12

During the first week of the Russian occupation, Tereza walks the streets of Prague taking pictures. She gives most of her film undeveloped to the foreign press, and then she is arrested by the Russian military but is released the next day. After being released from Russian custody, Tereza asks Tomas why he doesn't take the job in Zurich. He then asks Tereza if she could live abroad, and she doesn't see why not. Since Dubcek has returned, Tereza says, things are different in Czechoslovakia.

Dubcek represent weakness and loss of power within the book. He is a Czech politician—the president for all intents and purposes—yet he is completely controlled by the Russians. Tereza's stint in military custody illustrates her parallel loss of freedom and the power the Russian military has over her. Tereza isn't even free to take photographs as she likes.

Dubcek and the other Czech representatives had been taken as criminals by the Russian military and sent to Moscow, where they were forced to sign a compromise agreement. When Dubcek was brought back to Czechoslovakia, he addressed the nation on the radio, but his speech was littered with long pauses, and he stuttered and stammered throughout the entire address. Most of the Czechs are nervous; there have been mass executions and deportations to Siberia, and it is clear they will now "have to bow to the conqueror." Given all this, Tereza says, she is willing to go to Zurich, even though she knows that Sabina has since moved to Geneva.

Again, having to "bow" to the Russians as "conquerors" underscores the absolute power of the Soviet Union over Czechoslovakia. Dubcek, the actual president of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1968, is like a puppet controlled by the Russians. They are dictating his speech to his own people, and he practically chokes on his false words. Tereza may escape the power of the Soviet Union by going to Zurich, but she will still lose power due to Tomas's affair with Sabina.

PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Tomas and Tereza move to Switzerland with Karenin, and it isn't long before Tomas makes plans to see Sabina. He can't get away long enough to go to Geneva, so Sabina comes to Zurich and stays in a hotel. Tomas goes to Sabina's hotel, and she opens the door wearing only lingerie and a **black bowler hat**. Tomas closes the door and takes the hat off Sabina's head, and they immediately have sex.

Sabina's bowler hat is a symbol of her sexuality and of her submissiveness to Tomas. To Tomas, the hat confuses Sabina's gender, since it represents a masculine contrast to the femininity of her lingerie. It seems that this blurring of opposites is part of what makes Sabina attractive to Tomas, but at the same time, he still demonstrates his dominance over her by taking the hat off before they have sex.

Tomas and Tereza live in Zurich for about six months, and then Tomas comes home to find that Tereza has taken Karenin and returned to Prague. She isn't strong enough to live abroad, Tereza says in a letter to Tomas, and while she is sorry, she has decided to return. Tomas puts down the letter and feels the seriousness of Tereza's decision. Since their move to Zurich, the Czechoslovakian borders have closed—once Tereza enters Czechoslovakia, she will be unable to leave again.

Czechoslovakia is on the eastern side of the iron curtain, the line that separated countries controlled by the Soviet Union from the countries of the West until the fall of Communism and the Soviet Union in 1991. Tomas and Tereza were lucky to get out once, and by going back they seal their fate—they will not make it out again.

PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Tomas feels "utterly powerless" after Tereza leaves, but he finds this feeling strangely comforting. He is not being forced by anyone to either stay in Zurich or follow Tereza back to Prague, and she had not been forced to return to Czechoslovakia. Tereza has left his life the same way she entered it: with an enormous **suitcase**. Without Tereza, Tomas feels less heavy, and, as Parmenides's theory stipulates, Tomas is "enjoying the sweet lightness of being," but he doesn't want to call any of his mistresses. Tomas knows that the memory of Tereza will make being with another woman too painful to bear.

Technically, Tomas is light, because he has lost Tereza and her heavy emotions and baggage, but he still isn't entirely without weight. He can't enjoy himself and see one of his mistresses—the height of his "light" behavior—because he is too bogged down by his love for Tereza. He isn't light, he is heavy, and Tereza holds all the power by leaving him in such a state, even though no one is forcing him to act in any certain way.

PART 1, CHAPTER 15

In the following days, Tomas suddenly becomes aware that he is "sick with compassion," and there is no heavier emotion than this. Tomas goes to the hospital and tells the director (the same man who had given him the job in the first place) that he must return to Prague. The director is understandably upset, but Tomas simply shrugs and says: "*Es muss sein. Es muss sein.*"

The "es muss sein" motif repeats throughout the book. The phrase literally translates to "it must be." It is another example of eternal return and also represents the fate and predestination implied within eternal return. If everything has already happened before, then one is destined to make one decision or another—each event that occurs literally must *be.*

Tomas's words are a reference to one of Beethoven's quartets, the narrator says. The quartet is based on two motifs—*Muss es sein?* (Must it be?), *Es muss sein!* (It must be!), *Es muss sein!* (It must be!)—and is usually translated as "the difficult resolution." With Tomas's words, the doctor, a great lover of Beethoven, smiles. "*Muss es sein?*" he asks. "*Ja, es muss sein!*" Tomas answers.

The exchange between Tomas and the doctor again suggests that Tomas's decision to return to Prague is fate—he simply must go and doesn't really have a choice in the matter after all. While Tomas is now convinced that Tereza is his fate, he later convinces himself she is merely chance, or coincidence, and he deeply doubts the decision he makes here.

PART 1, CHAPTER 16

Beethoven, the narrator says, considered weight positive, unlike Parmenides. The "weighty resolution" of Beethoven's quartet describes Fate, and it implies that only that which is heavy has any real value. Tomas crosses the border into Czechoslovakia and is met with Russian tanks. "*Es muss sein!*" he says to himself again. Tomas knows that staying in Zurich without Tereza would have been unbearable, but he wonders how long this feeling would have lasted. A week? A month? His entire life? He doesn't know, and since his life occurs only once, the narrator says, Tomas has no way of knowing.

This passage again directly refutes the theory of eternal return. Tomas doesn't know what to do, or if Tereza is chance or Fate, because he is experiencing his feelings for the first time. The sight of the Russian tanks suddenly puts Tomas's decision into perspective. With his move back to Prague, the presence of the Russian tanks and the power of the Soviet Union become his fate, and he cannot escape it.

PART 1, CHAPTER 17

Back in Prague, Tomas can't sleep due to the sounds of Russian airplanes circling the night sky. He thinks back to when he first fell in love with Tereza, and she told him that if she hadn't fallen in love with him, she would have fallen in love with another man, one of Tomas's friends. It was chance, Tomas thinks, not fate that has brought them together. In fact, Tomas and Tereza's meeting had involved a total of six "chance happenings."

Tomas's "chance happenings" are exactly what Tereza sees as fate, which again underscores the ambiguity of language; the seemingly opposite words can apply equally to the same situation. This passage also underscores Tomas's doubt—he is worried that he sacrificed his future for a mere coincidence, not true love.

Tomas has returned to Prague because of Tereza, and the need to make such a heavy decision would not have existed if not for his colleague's sciatica. Tomas was sent to Tereza's small Czechoslovakian town because his colleague could not go. If not for someone else's sciatica, Tomas thinks, he would have never met Tereza in the first place. Thinking this, Tomas feels no compassion for Tereza. He feels only despair over having returned to Prague.

Tomas has sacrificed his power and freedom by returning to Prague, and he clearly resents Tereza for his decision to return—even though she did not pressure him to do so. Tomas's reason for going to the small town, where he subsequently met Tereza, was completely random and coincidental, which suggests that he was not destined to be with Tereza after all.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

The narrator claims that he will not try to convince the reader that Tomas and Tereza actually lived. He has created them, and Tereza was born the first day she visited Tomas's flat with a rumbling stomach. "When we ignore the body," the narrator says, "we are more easily victimized by it."

Tereza represents the soul, and she hates her body, especially bodily functions, such as the rumbling of the stomach. Tereza wants to forget about her body, banish it in a sense, and be only a soul, but her noisy stomach is a painful—and humiliating—reminder of her body.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Tereza, the narrator says, illustrates "the irreconcilable duality of body and soul." The body is a "cage," the narrator contends, and inside is the soul—the thing that feels, listens, looks, and fears. Since humankind has learned about the human body and its various physiological systems, the soul is often understood in scientific terms as the gray matter of the brain. However, little is really known about the duality of body and soul. For Tereza, standing at Tomas's door with a rumbling stomach, the "unity of body and soul" exposed by science was gone completely.

Philosophical thought has long divided the body and the soul into two separate and distinct entities. Medicine understands the soul as the mind, or the brain, but Kundera implies it is something else entirely. Standing at Tomas's door, Tereza has no power to silence her stomach—that is, she has no power over her body. Here, Tereza's body is completely separate from her soul, but Kundera later implies that the body and soul are not as separate as their perceived duality implies.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

As a girl, Tereza would stand in front of the mirror and stare at her body. Afraid of being caught by her mother, Tereza only looked at her body in secret. Tereza, however, didn't at first realize that she was only looking at the vessel of her body, not her soul. She would stare at her features that matched her mother's and wish them away. Occasionally, Tereza was successful in banishing her mother's traits from her body, and when she was, Tereza's soul would rise out of her body along with intense feelings of elation.

Tereza's mother is at the root of Tereza's dislike of her body. Her mother sees all bodies as carbon copies of one another, and she thinks of bodies like machines that all function in the same way and excrete the same waste. Tereza, however, is repulsed by the body, which is why she stands in front of the mirror trying to banish the ways her body is like her mother's. Tereza wants to be a unique individual, and then, Tereza believes, she alone will be enough for Tomas.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Tereza takes after her mother, physically and in other ways. At times, the narrator thinks of Tereza's life as "a continuation of her mother's." Tereza's mother often looked in the mirror, too, and that is what she was doing the day she decided to leave Tereza and her father. Tereza's father, however, was soon arrested by the Communist police for "harsh statements," and Tereza was sent back to her mother, who had remarried and had three more children. From then on, whenever Tereza's mother looked in the mirror, she thought she looked "old and ugly."

Tereza's life as "a continuation of her mother's" is another example of eternal return in the novel. As Tereza is so much like her mother, the two women are something like different repetitions of the same basic pattern. Tereza's mother believes that Tereza and her father have stolen her youth, and she abandons them because of it. Tereza's father's arrest for "harsh statements" suggests that he did not support the regime, and his anti-Communist sentiments led to his unfair imprisonment.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Tereza's mother resented her "old and ugly" reflection and took her negative feelings out on Tereza, who she felt was responsible for her resentment in the first place. After all, it was Tereza who had sealed her fate as a mother. A mother is "Sacrifice personified," the narrator says, and a daughter is "Guilt, with no possibility of redress."

Kundera's language here is a bit ironic. Other than her looks and youth, Tereza's mother has actually sacrificed nothing for Tereza. Tereza's mother is manipulative and cruel, and she makes Tereza miserable, yet Tereza still feels profound guilt for her mother's "sacrifice."

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

At age 15, Tereza's mother forced Tereza to quit school and go to work in a restaurant. Tereza was forced to clean house and take care of her siblings, but she often escaped into the bathtub with a **book**. Tereza's stepfather would come into the bathroom when she was in the tub, and Tereza's mother, who frequently walked around naked, became upset if Tereza locked the door.

There is no modesty in Tereza's house. Everyone is reduced to just a body, but Tereza longs for something more, which she looks for in books. Tereza is constantly being forced to work in restaurants, both by her mother and by the Russians (she is later dismissed from her professional job), which again illustrates the power they both hold over her.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

Tereza's mother was not modest in the least. She talked publically about sex and even removed her dentures in front of others. When Tereza's mother had been young and beautiful, she guarded her body, but she felt she had little need to do so in old age. Tereza is a continuation of her mother, the narrator says, because her mother's behavior has left "an indelible imprint on her."

The "indelible imprint" left on Tereza by her mother is again an example of eternal return. While Kundera argues that life only occurs once, he does suggest that it repeats in other ways, such as Tereza's similarities to her mother. This moment hints at how even in a linear life without eternal return, some cyclical aspects do remain.

PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Tereza's mother thought that the world was a "vast concentration camp of bodies," each one alike in every way. When Tereza looked in the mirror, she wished that her body were unique and unlike any other, including her mother's. Tereza's soul, the narrator says, was therefore buried deep in her bowels, which is exactly where it was the day she first met Tomas.

The idea of the world as a "vast concentration camp" is repeated throughout the book. While it here represents the sameness of bodies in Tereza's mother's eyes, Tereza later refers to a concentration camp as the complete lack of privacy, in which case the entire country of Czechoslovakia is a "vast concentration camp."

The first time Tereza met Tomas, he was a customer in the restaurant where she worked. He placed a **book** on the table, which caught Tereza's eye. To Tereza, books were symbolic "of a secret brotherhood," and they afforded her an escape from her miserable existence. She enjoyed books as physical objects as well, and she was never without one, an addition that made her different from others.

Tereza's books set her apart and make her more unique, but they are also the means through which she seeks power and knowledge. She frequently refers to books as "the emblem of a secret brotherhood," and she assumes that reading means one is enlightened and automatically a good person. Tereza is attracted to Tomas because of his book. Tomas sees this as a coincidence, but to Tereza, it is fate.

PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Back in Prague after leaving Zurich, Tomas becomes worried that his relationship with Tereza is based on six coincidences. But isn't an event more significant, the narrator asks, if it takes multiple chance happenings for it to occur? When Tomas sat down at the table in the restaurant where Tereza worked, Beethoven was playing in the background. Tereza loves Beethoven, and she immediately took notice of it playing as Tomas entered.

Again, Tereza sees the playing of Beethoven during her first meeting with Tomas as another example of fate. She believes she is meant to be with Tomas, and the addition of her favorite composer is more evidence of this. However, the narrator's interruption further suggests that there is more than one way to interpret meaning, which again points to the ambiguity of words and language. Tomas and Tereza are in the same situation, but one of them considers it "fate" while the other interprets it as "coincidence."

PART 2, CHAPTER 10

When Tomas closed his **book** in the restaurant of the small Czech town and motioned to his waitress, who happened to be Tereza, Tereza took note of the book. He told her to charge his bill to his room, which he said was number six. Tereza thought of her childhood home, whose address was six, but she didn't tell Tomas this. Instead, Tereza told Tomas that it was curious that his room was six, since her shift ended at six. When Tereza left the restaurant at six o'clock and found Tomas waiting for her in the park across the street, she knew Tomas was indeed her fate.

Each one of these happenings that Tomas sees as chance or coincidence, Tereza sees as fate. Again, meaning and interpretation are subjective, not consistent or universal. Tereza's childhood home appears again near the end of the story. She visits the house during a dream, and the night before she and Tomas are killed in a car accident, their hotel room looks very similar to Tereza's childhood bedroom.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11

Life is full of such coincidences, the narrator claims, which most of the time go unnoticed. The narrator notes that such coincidences are what bring Anna and Vronsky together in Tereza's favorite **book**, *Anna Karenina*. Anna and Vronsky meet at a train station when someone falls on the tracks and is killed, and at the end of the novel, Anna throws herself on the very same tracks, committing suicide.

Anna and Vronsky's relationship is mirrored somewhat in Tereza and Tomas's relationship. Not only are both couples brought together by coincidences (or fate, depending on the interpretation), both Tomas and Tereza are killed at the end of the novel as well.

Human life, the narrator says, is like the "symmetrical composition" of the **book** *Anna Karenina*. What occurs at the beginning, occurs at the end. Life is like music, the narrator further explains, with repeating motifs, and while many consider the coincidences in *Anna Karenina* to be cliché, the narrator disagrees. Those who refuse to see life's coincidences, he claims, rob themselves of life's beauty.

The "symmetrical composition" of Anna Karenina is another example of eternal return, and this circular composition is present in Kundera's novel as well. Tereza and Tomas meet in the country in the beginning of the novel and die in the country at the end. The novel itself also repeats—the names of parts of the book are repeated and in some cases, the exact number of chapters repeats too. Thus, Kundera's rejection of eternal return is more complicated than it initially seemed; the book argues against cyclical existence while also creating *cyclical existence.*

PART 2, CHAPTER 12

When Tereza left her small town for Prague to visit Tomas, she felt a slight scratch in her throat. She tried to ignore it, but by the time she arrived at Tomas's, she was mortified by the loud rumbling of her stomach. Tomas didn't seem to notice, and he instantly pulled her inside, kissing her. Within minutes, they were making love.

Tereza's scratchy throat, like her rumbling stomach, is another reminder that she can't separate her body from her soul. Tomas's doesn't notice her stomach—or ignores it if he does—because, as the personification of the body, he doesn't have the same bodily hang-ups as Tereza does.

PART 2, CHAPTER 13

When Tomas and Tereza made love, Tereza screamed at the top of her lungs. Her scream was not one of pleasure or sensuality; it was an attempt to cripple her senses. She wanted to "banish all contradictions," including the duality of body and soul. That night, she fell asleep holding Tomas's hand, and she held it tightly all night long.

Kundera's choice of language in that Tereza wants to "banish all contradictions" again points to the instability of language and the fallacy of opposites. By bringing together and merging the duality of body and soul, Tereza obliterates these two opposites, effectively rendering them meaningless.

PART 2, CHAPTER 14

In an attempt to differentiate herself from the drunk patrons she was forced to serve in the restaurant, Tereza read as many **books** as she could, even more than most university students. Living in Prague, Tereza found a job in a darkroom, and before long, she was promoted to photographer. Tomas took her out to celebrate, and he became jealous when she danced with another man. Tereza saw Tomas's jealousy as proof of his love and came to view it as a sort of prize. Tereza was jealous, too, of Tomas's mistresses, but he didn't see her jealousy as a prize. To Tomas, Tereza's jealousy was a heavy "burden."

Tomas's reference to Tereza's jealousy as a heavy "burden" again brings up eternal return and the idea of lightness and weight. According to Nietzsche, as outlined in the book's opening, that which returns is the "heaviest of burdens." Tereza's jealousy is repetitive, and it weighs heavy on Tomas and their relationship (even this section of the book is repetitive—the reader has already heard this part of the story in previous chapters). Tomas's jealousy completely invalidates his argument about the separation of sex and love. While dancing is certainly not sex, it still implies a meeting of bodies, and Tomas is clearly threatened by Tereza dancing with another man. This again underscores the ambiguity of language, as Tereza and Tomas's definitions of jealousy are different.

PART 2, CHAPTER 15

Tereza's recurring dream, in which she walks naked around a pool with other naked women, is her idea of complete and utter horror. Her body is like all the others, and none of them have souls. The other women rejoice in their soullessness, but Tereza does not. She doesn't understand why Tomas stands nearby, shooting the women one after another.

Tereza's reoccurring pool dream is eerily like a concentration camp, which Kundera mentions throughout the novel. During WWII, the Nazis operated a concentration camp in Bohemia, a part of Czechoslovakia, called the Theresienstadt Ghetto. The ghetto ran from 1941-1945, during which time some 33,000 Czech Jews were murdered. The narrator mentions in the beginning of the book that his family had been killed in a Nazi concentration camp, and it is likely that he is referencing the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

Tomas is the one who has sent Tereza to stand with the other women, the narrator says, and that is what the dream is meant to tell both of them. Tereza came to Prague to escape her mother's world where all bodies are the same, but Tomas has "drawn an equal sign" between Tereza's body and his mistresses' bodies. He kisses them the same and touches them the same, and there is again no difference between Tereza's body and the bodies of others.

Tereza fears that she is just another body to Tomas, like she was just another body to her mother. Tomas has drawn "an equal sign" between Tereza and the others, which suggests, in her mind, that she does not have power over the other women—meaning Tomas does not love her and she is just another mistress and sexual conquest.

PART 2, CHAPTER 16

Tereza soon comes to understand that her three reoccurring nightmares are meant to accuse Tomas of his infidelity. She knows that Tomas loves her, and that he sees his mistresses as no threat to his love for Tereza, but she grows to fear the night and her dreams. Her life is "split" between the competing forces of day and night.

The "split" between day and night is yet another opposite, or dichotomy. Tereza understands that sex and love cannot be completely separated, regardless of what Tomas says, and she is tortured by her repeated nightmares of Tomas's infidelity.

PART 2, CHAPTER 17

Anyone who aspires to "something higher," like Tereza does with her obsession with **books**, will suffer vertigo. Vertigo, the narrator says, is more than just the fear of falling. Vertigo is "the voice of the emptiness below" that entices one to fall. The naked women marching around the pool rejoicing in their soullessness are what lures Tereza, and she is ready to dismiss her soul and sing with them.

Here, Tereza considers surrendering her soul and willingly becoming just a body. The contrast between "something higher" and the fear of falling is another dichotomy. By falling—in this case, in love with Tomas—Tereza closes the distance between high and low, again obliterating it and making the difference between seeming opposites meaningless.

PART 2, CHAPTER 18

Before leaving Prague for Zurich, Tereza's mother had called Tereza and told her that she was dying of cancer. Tereza told Tomas that she must go home at once, but Tomas was suspicious. He called a colleague in Tereza's hometown and discovered that Tereza's mother was not sick and hadn't seen a doctor in years. Tereza "obeyed" Tomas, who didn't want her returning to her mother, and hours later, Tereza fell walking in the street. She kept falling several times a day, as if she was living with continual vertigo, and Tomas kept picking her up.

The fact that Tereza "obeyed" Tomas when he didn't want her to return to her mother, and that he has to keep picking her up when she falls, again implies Tereza's weakness and Tomas's power over her. He is in complete control of Tereza—he tells her what to do and even snoops around in her mother's life—and he is the one to save her, too. Tereza is powerless compared to Tomas.

PART 2, CHAPTER 19

Tereza kept thinking about Sabina's letter to Tomas, the one in which Sabina said she wanted to have sex with him on a stage, and these thoughts excited Tereza. She began to think that if Tomas were to take her along when he went to visit his mistresses, then it wouldn't be infidelity. She longed to "merge into a hermaphrodite" with Tomas, so they could go to his mistresses together.

The imagined merging of Tomas and Tereza into a hermaphrodite again brings together opposites and renders them meaningless. The male/female opposition is a common one with much significance, but Kundera undermines this opposition in a number of ways: the hypothetical merging of Tomas and Tereza's genders, the blurring of Karenin's gender, and the way that Sabina expresses her sexuality through clothing that is both masculine and feminine.

PART 2, CHAPTER 20

Tereza wanted to understand Tomas's infidelity, which is why she befriended Sabina before Sabina left Prague for Geneva. She went to Sabina's studio, and Sabina explained her paintings, which belonged to a collection called "Behind the Scenes." The paintings were realistic but also abstract, like a photograph with double exposure.

The idea of Sabina's paintings as dual images with something hidden beneath suggests opposites, but it also reflects both Tereza's job as a photographer and Tomas's job as a surgeon. Tomas is always slicing something open with his scalpel, both literally and figuratively, to expose what is hidden beneath.

PART 2, CHAPTER 21

At Sabina's studio, Tereza noticed a **black bowler hat** on a stand. Sabina said it had been her grandfather's, and Tereza offered to take Sabina's picture wearing the hat. After about an hour, Tereza suggested that Sabina take her clothes off for some nude photos. Sabina laughed and opened a bottle of wine, and after several glasses, excused herself and went to the bathroom. Minutes later, Sabina came out of the bathroom wearing only a bathrobe, which she quickly threw open.

The bowler hat is symbolic of Sabina's sexuality, and Tereza's request that Sabina take her clothes off suggests that Tereza reads the hat in a sexual way, too. Ironically, the hat is Tomas's sexual "prop" as well, although Tereza does not know this. Along with the alcohol, the hat give Sabina the courage to take her clothes off and submit to the nude photos.

PART 2, CHAPTER 22

Tereza's camera was both an eye for her to see Tomas's mistress through and a way for Tereza to hide her face from Sabina. After a while, Sabina took the camera and ordered Tereza to "Strip!" It was the same command that Tomas issued, "firmly and authoritatively," to both Tereza and Sabina whenever he had sex with either one of them, and they both recognized this. Tereza took off her clothes, and Sabina only snapped a few pictures before breaking into laughter. Tereza laughed too, and then they both got dressed.

Tomas's command to "Strip!" is another example of his power over the women. When he has sex with them, he doesn't ask them to take their clothes off; rather, he demands it in a "firm" and "authoritative" way. Both Tereza and Sabina are uncomfortable, and their nervous laughter and the fact that Tereza hides behind the camera are proof of this.

PART 2, CHAPTER 23

Tereza took hundreds of photos of the Russian occupation of Prague before moving to Switzerland. She gave much of the film to the foreign press, and many of her photos were printed in Western publications. The Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia was not merely a tragedy, the narrator says, but "a carnival of hate."

Kundera's description of the occupation as "a carnival of hate" illustrates just how terrible the occupation was for Czechoslovakia. Thousands of pictures like Tereza's were leaked to the foreign press, but this did the Czech people very little good.

PART 2, CHAPTER 24

When Tereza was in Zurich, she tried to sell some of her photographs of the Russian invasion to the Swiss press. The editor showed Tereza some photographs that she intended to publish of a nude beach somewhere in Europe, and said that she could tell just by looking at Tereza that she had never been on a nude beach. The editor said that naked bodies are "normal" and "beautiful," and Tereza couldn't help but think about her mother.

Tereza's idea of "normal" and "beautiful" is obviously different from the editor's, which again illustrates the ambiguity of language and suggests that meaning can never be fixed. The fact that the magazine would rather publish photos of a nude beach diminishes the importance of Czechoslovakia's struggle, but it further emphasizes the body.

PART 2, CHAPTER 25

As the magazine editor looked at Tereza's photographs, she remarked that Tereza would make a good fashion photographer. She agreed that Tereza's pictures were good, but she wasn't interested in them. A year had passed since the Russian invasion, and Tereza's pictures were "anachronistic." Tereza agreed. Tomas, too, always said the same thing about her.

The editor's assessment of Tereza's pictures as "anachronistic" suggests that Tereza and her pictures are somehow out of sync, or out of date. Not only does this belittle Tereza and her photos, further stripping her of power, it suggests that human existence is linear and chronological, not cyclical as is implied with the theory of eternal return. After all, if existence were cyclical, nothing would ever really be out of date.

PART 2, CHAPTER 26

In Zurich, Tomas was always at work, and Tereza was left alone with Karenin. She kept thinking about Dubcek and his speech on the radio. They had all thought Dubcek weak after that, but Tereza no longer hated him for his weakness. She realized that she was weak, too, and belonged "in the country of the weak." Tomas could tell that Tereza was again experiencing vertigo, and he asked her if she was okay. She said she was fine, and that she only wanted him to be old, so he would be weak like her.

Tereza's vertigo is a manifestation of her weakness in relation to Tomas, which is mirrored in Dubcek's weakness and the weakness of Czechoslovakia in the face of the absolute power of Russia. At the end of the novel, Tereza notes how much Tomas has aged, and she finally sees him as weak. By then, however, Tereza is no longer the weak one and has amassed all the power in her relationship with Tomas, which implies that someone will always have power over the other person; no relationship can be truly equal.

PART 2, CHAPTER 27

Karenin was not happy about moving to Zurich. "Dog time," the narrator says, does not occur on a straight path but moves in a circular fashion, "like the hands of a clock." Still, Karenin tried to establish his routine in Zurich, and he was "the timepiece" of Tomas and Tereza's lives.

Karenin experiences time in a circular way, like a clock, thus he is happy. As Karenin brings this happiness and circular existence to Tomas and Tereza, he is their timepiece and the sole source of their happiness. Here, Kundera indicates that in some ways, human happiness is largely impossible, since human life is linear rather than cyclical.

One day, the phone rang and Tereza answered it. It was a woman asking for Tomas, and Tereza immediately began thinking of his infidelities. She knew the woman could have been a patient or a nurse, but this mattered little to Tereza. She began to believe that their relationship had been a mistake from the start. **Anna Karenina** had given him the wrong idea about Tereza, and they were, in fact, incompatible. Tomas was strong, Tereza realized, and she was weak. Tereza looked at Karenin and told the dog she was sorry, but they would have to move again.

While it assumed that the woman on the phone is one of Tomas's mistresses, this is never confirmed. Still, the idea alone is enough to send Tereza back to Prague. She doesn't believe that Tomas loves her in the way he says, and Tereza later admits that she leaves as a way to test Tomas's love for her. If he follows her, then he loves her; but if he doesn't follow, his love is not true and she is justified in leaving him.

PART 2, CHAPTER 28

As Tereza sat on the train to Prague with her massive **suitcase** and Karenin, she began again to feel vertigo and the intense desire to fall. Vertigo, the narrator says, can also be called "the intoxication of the weak." It is an awareness of one's weaknesses and the wish to give in rather than fight.

Again, Tereza's vertigo is evidence of her weakness and desire to fall, while her suitcase represents her "heavy" emotions and metaphorical baggage. She deeply loves Tomas, and she is heartbroken because she doesn't feel that her love is reciprocated.

Tereza had planned on returning to her small hometown rather than staying on in Prague, but by the fifth day after her arrival, she had made no effort to relocate. That night, Tomas returned. He asked her if she was all right and if she had been to the magazine to see about her old job. She said she hadn't and told him that she had been waiting. When he asked her what she had been waiting for, Tereza did not want to tell Tomas that she was waiting for him, so she said nothing.

The fact that Tereza waits in Prague for Tomas instead of returning to the small town she is from is evidence that her return to Prague is a test of Tomas's love. She is waiting for him to see if he really does love her like he says he does. Tomas's return to Prague is indeed evidence of his love, and while he later regrets it, Tomas is undeniably drawn to Tereza regardless of the consequences—he is now stuck in Czechoslovakia indefinitely.

PART 2, CHAPTER 29

The narrator returns to the present moment. Tomas has a stomachache, and he can't sleep. As Russian planes fly overhead, Tereza wakes, too. She thinks about Tomas and how he left Zurich for her and feels an intense responsibility for him. His decision has changed his fate, Tereza thinks, but then she remembers that when he arrived at the flat after leaving Zurich, a church bell in the distance had struck six o'clock.

Tereza has a special connection to the number six. It was the address of her childhood home, and it was the number of Tomas's hotel room the night they met as well as the time Tereza got off work that day. Tomas's arrival home at exactly six o'clock is evidence of fate to Tereza. He was destined to come back, she figures, which is why he does so at six o'clock. Her reflections here set up something of a paradox; Tomas seems to have taken charge of his fate, but at the same time, some larger force also seems to have made this choice for him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 1

It is early afternoon in Geneva, and Franz is on his way to see his mistress, Sabina. He is going to Sabina's art studio, but he doesn't intend to have sex with her there. He never has sex with Sabina in Geneva, the city where he lives with his wife, Marie-Claude. To do so would insult both Sabina and Marie-Claude, Franz believes, so he only has sex with Sabina in foreign cities. That way, he is away from his marriage and his relationship with Sabina has its own space.

Franz's refusal to have sex with Sabina in Geneva is about the only form of power he has in his relationship with her. Unlike Sabina's relationship with Tomas, Sabina has all the power over Franz, and despite his muscular build, she considers him weak. Franz considers love the complete surrender of one's power—the complete opposite of Tomas's definition of love.

Alone with Sabina in her art studio, Franz asks her to go to Palermo, but she says she would rather stay in Geneva. Franz worries that Sabina's refusal to go with him to Palermo means that she no longer desires him. Franz is incredibly unsure of himself, and he worries constantly that Sabina will leave him. Franz, the narrator interrupts, believes that love is the "antithesis" of public life, and he also believes that love means always being on guard.

Franz thinks love is the "antithesis," or opposite, of public life, which suggests that Franz considers love to be a private affair, but it also establishes another dichotomy. Franz's insecurity is more evidence of his weakness. He is intimidated by Sabina and is always waiting for her to hurt him.

Sabina looks at Franz and empties a glass of wine into her mouth. Just because she doesn't want to go to Palermo doesn't mean she doesn't want Franz. Franz feels silly for doubting her, but he is worried that Sabina obviously wants to violate his rule of only having sex in foreign cities. Standing in only her bra and skirt, Sabina stares at Franz. She seems to be asking him something, but Franz is "bewildered."

Franz's "bewilderment" is evidence of the miscommunication and misunderstandings that pass between him and Sabina. This confusion also illustrates the ambiguity of language, as the same words and symbols mean different things to both Sabina and Franz.

Sabina steps out of her skirt and puts a **black bowler hat** on her head. Franz thinks Sabina looks odd in the masculine hat, and it makes him slightly uncomfortable. She stands staring into a mirror for several seconds, and Franz removes the hat from her head before again asking her to go to Palermo. She agrees, and Franz leaves.

Sabina's hat has special meaning to her, but since Franz is not privy to this meaning, he is completely confused. Franz thinks the hat looks odd because it blurs the line between masculine and feminine, obliterating their meaning, and the loss of this dichotomy makes Franz uncomfortable. Only by removing the hat from Sabina's head can Franz regain some measure of control in their relationship—in this case, by finally convincing Sabina to go to Palermo.

PART 3, CHAPTER 2

Many years earlier, Tomas had visited Sabina at her art studio in Prague, and he was drawn to the **bowler hat**. It was like a joke. Tomas put it on his own head and then Sabina's. They looked in the mirror and laughed, and then realized they were both excited by the hat. It was no longer funny, and it now seemed to signify "violence; violence against Sabina, against her dignity as a woman."

To Tomas and Sabina, the bowler hat signifies sex, and in particular, violent sex. Sabina recognizes the way that blurring gender in Tomas's presence might demean her in his eyes.

To Tomas, the **bowler hat** "denied" Sabina's femininity. It "violated and ridiculed it," and when Tomas put the hat on Sabina's head, he meant to ridicule her as well. However, Sabina was open to the humiliation, and she submitted to it like a "public rape." She pulled him to the floor, and they had sex.

The bowler hat is another way for Tomas to assume power over Sabina through humiliating her. Sabina, however, is sexually excited by this humiliation and imposed inferior position, and when she puts the hat on, she willingly submits to it.

The **bowler hat**, the narrator says, signifies many things in Sabina's life. It reminds Sabina of her grandfather, who originally owned it, as well as her father, whose death left the hat in her possession. The hat is also "a prop" used by Tomas during sex and a symbol of Sabina's individuality. It is a "sentimental object" and a repeated "motif in the musical composition that [is] Sabina's life."

The multiple meanings of the bowler hat—a sex prop, a sentimental object, a sign of individuality—illustrate that meaning can never be fixed, as even the same object can embody several different meanings. Kundera frequently refers to the hat as a repeated "motif" in Sabina's life, which again is an example of eternal return.

The **bowler hat** is exceedingly important to Sabina, which is why it is like a huge chasm separating her from Franz. When Franz saw Sabina wearing the hat, he was confused and had no idea what it meant. To him, it was "an incomprehensible gesture." When people are young, the narrator says, the "musical composition of their lives" is still being written, but by now, Sabina and Franz's "musical compositions are more or less complete, and every motif, every object, every word means something different to each of them." To illustrate his point, the narrator introduces a short list of Franz and Sabina's misunderstood words.

Kundera frequently refers to the "musical composition" of his characters' lives, which again connects to eternal return, as music connotes repetition, recurring verses, and refrains. The "incomprehensible" nature of the hat again underscores the ambiguity of language. Franz does not understand the hat in the same context as Sabina. In this way, language and symbols are again unstable, as they are fluid and always changing in meaning.

PART 3, CHAPTER 3

For Sabina, the word "woman" signifies one of the human sexes, but to Franz, it represents "a *value*." According to Franz, not all women can be called "a woman," and Sabina wonders if he considers his wife, Marie-Claude, a woman. Franz isn't in love with Marie-Claude, but she loves him, and since he considers himself undeserving of love, he figures he owes Marie-Claude.

Franz has very little power in his relationship with Sabina, or in his relationship with Marie-Claude. He doesn't love his wife, yet she still has a powerful hold over him, and this power continues when she later denies him a divorce after he admits to his infidelity. Sabina and Franz's differing definitions of the word "woman" suggest again that even common words can have wildly different meanings from person to person.

Franz was raised by his mother and deeply loved her, and he tells Sabina all about her, hoping his faithfulness to his mother will impress her. But Sabina is "charmed more by betrayal than by fidelity." To Sabina, "betrayal" is not an immoral offense but "means breaking ranks" and going "into the unknown," and Sabina thinks there is nothing more wonderful than breaking ranks and heading into the unknown. From a young age, Sabina did everything she could to betray her family and her home, especially her father.

Again, the conflicting definitions for both "betrayal" and "fidelity" underscore the ambiguity of language. Sabina's "betrayals" keep her moving through much of the book, but such betrayals are also seen in Tomas's relationship with his son, and in Tereza and Tomas's move to the country. Before they move they "break" from their friends, or essentially betray them to head into the unknown.

Franz thinks the word "music" signifies something of true beauty, but Sabina hates music. When she was a girl, Czechoslovakia's Communist government played music from loudspeakers each day from early morning to late at night. To Sabina, "the music was like a pack of hounds that had been sicked on her," and she has hated music ever since. Not only does Franz think music is beautiful, he likes it because it drowns out the sound of words. As a professor, words are Franz's life, but he thinks words are imprecise and really don't mean anything. To Franz, music is the "anti-word."

This passage underscores the ambiguity of language in the most explicit terms yet—Franz makes it clear that no one, not even a professor, can really trust words. This passage also reveals the power of Czechoslovakia's Communist government over the people. Sabina was effectively manipulated by music. Music is supposed to be beautiful, yet the Communists use it as another way to control citizens and force happiness and compliance. Sabina connects music with this experience, and it has therefore lost its beauty.

PART 3, CHAPTER 4

Living in Geneva, Sabina wonders why she should continue her friendships with other Czech emigres. She has nothing in common with them, other than where they come from, and she is excited by the idea of "betraying" their relationship, just as she had "betrayed" her father. Sabina meets Franz on a train to Amsterdam, and when she first sees him, she is overjoyed. She wants to throw herself at him and be his "slave," but she doesn't tell him this. Instead, Sabina smiles and tells Franz she is happy to see him.

Sabina does not view "betrayal" as a negative thing, and when she "betrays" her relationships with others, even her parents, it is to strike out on her own and form new relationships and connections. Sabina views betrayal as a type of adventure, and it is closely tied to who she is. Sabina wants to be Franz's "slave," meaning she wants him to exert power and control over her. But Sabina views Franz as weak and incapable of such control, so she doesn't tell him.

PART 3, CHAPTER 5

Growing up in Czechoslovakia, Sabina was forced to participate annually in the May Day parade. Now, she hates all parades. Franz, on the other hand, studied in Paris and took part in every demonstration he could. Watching parades fill the Paris streets with protesting people, Franz imagined all of Europe a "Grand March." He thought of the people marching "from revolution to revolution, from struggle to struggle, ever onward."

Franz holds a romanticized ideal of Communist countries with their struggles and revolutions, but Sabina obviously doesn't feel this way. To Sabina, there is nothing romantic about forced patriotism and allegiance to a political regime that seeks to oppress her. Franz's fascination with the "Grand March" reflects this romanticism, and leads to his demise near the end of the book, as he is killed attending the failed Grand March into Cambodia.

PART 3, CHAPTER 6

Franz paces his apartment in anticipation as his wife, Marie-Claude, entertains her guests. She is throwing a party for the painters and sculptors who have exhibited art in her private gallery, and she has invited Sabina. Sabina usually avoids Marie-Claude, but Sabina and Franz decided it would be best if she attended the party. Franz walks into the next room, where his daughter, Marie-Anne, entertains more guests. She is nothing like Franz, and he thinks this to himself as Sabina walks in.

Despite the heaviness that is implied by Franz's identity as a husband and father, he has no real connection to his wife and daughter. In this way, Franz's life is quite "light" in Kundera's terms, and so he looks for meaning and significance elsewhere, like with the Grand March. Standing and fighting for something, in Franz's eyes, has meaning, so he chases this significance, ignoring the potential sources of meaning already present in his life.

As Sabina enters, Marie-Claude immediately approaches her. Marie-Claude grabs the pendant from Sabina's neck and inspects it. "How ugly!" Marie-Claude cries, but Franz knows his wife's comment has nothing to do with the pendant. Something is ugly if Marie-Claude "willed it ugly, beautiful if she willed it beautiful." But most of all, Franz knows that Marie-Claude has insulted Sabina's pendant to show her, and everyone else, that she has power over Sabina.

Marie-Claude obviously knows something is going on between Franz and Sabina. She makes a beeline for Sabina and then promptly insults her, immediately establishing herself in a position of power. Marie-Claude's comment that the pendant is ugly suggests not only the subjective nature of art and beauty, but also the instability of language. "Ugly" cannot be defined as one thing—it is whatever Marie-Claude (or, presumably, anyone else) wants it to be.

PART 3, CHAPTER 7

Franz is a muscular man, and Sabina likes to stroke his muscles in bed. She tells him he is strong, but Sabina really thinks he is weak. He doesn't order her to strip the way Tomas did, and Franz believes that to love someone is to renounce all strength. Franz and Sabina also differ in their definitions of what it means to live in truth. Sabina thinks it is only possible to live in truth out of the public eye. When someone is watching, Sabina says, people act differently and therefore are not "living in truth."

Franz's muscular build is at obvious odds with his weak character. His muscles imply strength, but he has absolutely no power. In this respect, Franz is an obvious contrast to Tomas. For Tomas, love and sex are all about power and strength, but Franz considers love the absence of strength. Sabina's belief that truth cannot occur in the public eye again reflects her history in a communist country. The forced May Day parade is a prime example of how, for Sabina, public acts are not "living in truth."

For Franz, however, "living in truth" means living publically, which is why he decides to tell Marie-Claude about his affair. After telling Marie-Claude all about Sabina and their affair, Franz meets Sabina at the airport. As their plane takes off and gains altitude, Franz feels "lighter and lighter."

Franz is obviously thinking about his relationship with Sabina here. They have to lie and sneak around, which is why Franz believes going public is the only way to live in truth. Franz feels "lighter" because he has unburdened his soul regarding his infidelity.

PART 3, CHAPTER 8

In Rome, Franz tells Sabina about confessing to Marie-Claude, and Sabina feels as if he has "pried open the doors of their privacy." Now that their affair has been made public, it will "gain weight" and "become a burden," Sabina says. She tells Franz that she isn't angry, but she doesn't share his joy in coming clean to Marie-Claude.

Privacy is a big deal to Sabina because she had so little of it in Czechoslovakia. Tereza later says that the whole of Czechoslovakia is a concentration camp because they have no privacy, and Sabina definitely feels this here. Sabina's comment that in their relationship will "gain weight" and "become a burden" again assumes that weight is a negative thing, but Kundera asserts this isn't necessarily true. The fact that something "light" like their affair can transform into something "heavy" also indicates that these seeming opposites aren't actually mutually exclusive.

PART 3, CHAPTER 9

For years, Franz has seen Marie-Claude as weak, and when he returns home from Rome, he expects to find her a mess. Instead, Marie-Claude is fine and, surprised to see him, asks him what he is doing home. She has no problem with Franz moving in with Sabina, but even if he doesn't, she wants him out of the house. Franz isn't particularly upset that Marie-Claude is kicking him out, but he is upset that he has obviously misunderstood her all these years.

This again underscores how easy it is to misread language and other information. Franz misunderstands everyone in his life. He has always assumed that Marie-Claude needed him, but she very clearly doesn't. Franz isn't particularly upset because he doesn't love Marie-Claude, which again is why he is so desperately searching for meaning elsewhere in his life.

Franz leaves and goes to a hotel, and the next day he goes to Sabina's flat. He rings the bell, but she doesn't answer. He stops by the concierge's desk, who directs him to the owner of the flat, and the owner tells Franz that Sabina has moved and left no forwarding address. Franz soon finds a small flat and falls in love with his new girlfriend, one of his students. He is as happy as he can be without Sabina, but Marie-Claude refuses to consent to a divorce. Marie-Claude thinks that "love is a battle," and she intends to fight. Franz disagrees and refuses to fight.

Marie-Claude's refusal to divorce Franz is another way for her to hold power over him, and this is reflected in her comment that "love is a battle" that she needs to fight. Again, Franz sees love as the absence of strength, so he doesn't fight back. Sabina has betrayed Franz, in her own definition of the word, and has set out on a new adventure. Sabina's actions, too, reflect her power over Franz. He is devastated and goes to great lengths to try to find her.

PART 3, CHAPTER 10

After spending four years in Geneva, Sabina moves to Paris, but she can't help feeling depressed. Sabina's depression is not the result of "heaviness" or "burden," the narrator says, "but of lightness." Sabina has fallen to victim to "the unbearable lightness of being." Sabina lives in Paris for nearly three years, and then she receives a letter from Simon, Tomas's son, which informs her of Tomas and Tereza's deaths.

Sabina's depression suggests that lightness is not always positive. Even though she is light and unattached, she is still miserable. Kundera extends this analogy to life and eternal return. Kundera claims human existence is light and doesn't return, which is precisely the tragedy. One's life will eventually fall into oblivion and obscurity, which is undeniably heavy despite the lightness of being.

According to Simon's letter, Tomas and Tereza had lived the last few years in a small town in Czechoslovakia. They were killed when their car went off the road after spending the night at a hotel in the country. Sabina can't get Tomas and Tereza out of her mind, so she goes to a local cemetery. Sabina has always thought cemeteries peaceful places, and as she walks through the tombstones, she begins to miss Franz, even though he always said cemeteries were just dumps for bones.

Sabina and Franz's different definitions for "cemetery" again underscore the fluidity of language. Kundera's novel doesn't follow a linear, chronological timeline, and he later goes back to Tomas and Tereza's deaths. Kundera bounces back and forth, often revisiting the same time from different perspectives. This, too, mirrors the theory of eternal return, even though the narrator claims to reject it. Much of the story repeats, in more or less the same way, again and again.

PART 3, CHAPTER 11

All of Franz's friends know that he is dating one of his students, but they never knew about Sabina, and she simply disappears from his life. Sometimes when Franz is alone with his girlfriend, he thinks about Sabina, but he never talks to her about Sabina. Franz's girlfriend doesn't understand his love for countries occupied by Russia, nor does she understand why Franz wants to attend a memorial meeting held by a Czech student group on the anniversary of the Russian invasion.

Franz loves the idea of Sabina as a persecuted Czech person more than he actually loves Sabina as an individual. Franz's privileged life in France is wholly unlike Sabina's experiences in Prague. Protesting communism and Russia's occupation of Czechoslovakia give meaning, and therefore weight, to Franz's life, which is generally light and meaningless.

PART 4, CHAPTER 1

When Tereza comes home from work, it is already late, and by the time she climbs into bed with Tomas, it's nearly the middle of the night. She leans over to kiss him and smells the unmistakable aroma of another woman's genitals in his hair.

Kundera is obviously going back in time to before Tereza and Tomas's accident, again reflecting the theory of eternal return within the novel's narrative structure. Tomas's affairs also reflect eternal return, as they seem to be on a continuous loop.

At six o'clock, the alarm goes off, and Karenin jumps onto the bed, licking Tereza and Tomas. Karenin has been up waiting for hours (as he always is) but waited for the sound of the alarm. Tereza loves starting her day with Karenin, and she grabs his leash for his daily walk. Each morning, Tereza walks Karenin and picks up bread and milk, as well as a roll for Karenin. Back at home, Karenin always eats his roll and plays with Tomas, but this particular morning, Tomas is busy listening to the radio.

Karenin's predictable life of doing the same exact thing every day of his life again reflects eternal return. Karenin is the only character in the book who is truly happy, and Kundera attributes this to the cyclical nature of a dog's life. Karenin brings this repetition and happiness to Tereza and Tomas's lives, and he is the only true source of happiness for them.

PART 4, CHAPTER 2

Tomas is listening to a program about the Czech emigration. It is made up of private conversations recorded by a Czech spy who infiltrated the émigré community, and it is mostly meaningless conversations sprinkled with some negative comments about the occupation. The program is intended to prove not only that emigres have bad things to say about the occupation, but that they have bad things to say about each other. "Every country has its secret police," Tomas says to Tereza. "But a secret police that broadcasts its tapes over the radio—there's something that could happen only in Prague, something absolutely without precedent!"

Tereza later says that it is exactly this lack of privacy that makes Czechoslovakia so oppressive. By broadcasting private conversations publicly, the government pits the citizens against one another, creating dissent and strife, a maneuver that is typical of oppressive governments. By keeping the citizens busy fighting each other, they are too occupied to band together and rise up against the government. Tomas's comment that every country has secret police suggests that all governments are, in some way, oppressive and dishonest.

Tereza tells Tomas about a time when she was a young girl and kept a secret diary. Tereza's mother found the diary, Tereza says, and read it out loud at dinner. Tereza was humiliated, and her siblings laughed so hard they could barely eat.

Tomas implies that the level of oppression found in communism is completely unprecedented, but Tereza's story suggests it isn't. Kundera argues that all political regimes are oppressive, not just communism—and what's more, interpersonal relationship often mirror the same oppressive dynamics.

PART 4, CHAPTER 3

Tereza always gets up to have breakfast with Tomas, even though she works until midnight. If she didn't get up for breakfast, she wouldn't see Tomas until Sunday, so she gets up early each day and goes back to bed after he leaves for work. One particular day, the narrator says, Tereza doesn't go back to bed because she has an appointment at the sauna at 10:00 o'clock.

By this time, both Tereza and Tomas have lost their professional jobs. They are both considered part of Czechoslovakia's intelligentsia, who were heavily persecuted during the Cold War. By suppressing ideas and those who have them, the regime can better control the masses.

Tereza walks to her appointment because she hates the crowded trains. On her way to the sauna, it begins to rain and umbrellas fill the streets. The men are polite and move aside to let Tereza pass with her umbrella, but the other women are rude and yell things like "Fat cow!" and "Fuck you!" Tereza thinks back to the women she had photographed in the first days of the occupation. They had paraded around in front of the Russian soldiers (who were forced to be celibate) wearing short skirts and revealing shirts. Tereza had respected those women, but now they seem different.

Likely, Tereza hates crowded trains because she doesn't want to be in close proximity to so many bodies, which is also why her trip to the sauna is somewhat perplexing. With her aversion to bodies, Tereza does not seem the type who would be comfortable in a public bathing scenario. The people of Prague are beginning to change with the Russian occupation. Constant oppression and fear has turned them bitter. The women parading around in front of the celibate Russian soldiers illustrates another power struggle. In other words, the Russians may have most of the power, but they don't have all of it.

PART 4, CHAPTER 4

As Tereza walks to the sauna, she thinks about her mother. What is gained by exposing someone else's misery, Tereza wonders? She has been thinking about her mother a lot recently, which is why she told Tomas about her reading the diary at the dinner table. When private conversations are broadcast on the radio, Tereza thinks to herself, it must mean that the world is becoming a "concentration camp."

Kundera repeatedly references concentration camps, which again reflects the many political conflicts of Czechoslovakian history. Between Nazi concentration camps during WWII, and Russia's use of gulags—a type of political labor camp—the Czech people have a long history of being persecuted on their own soil by foreign powers.

Tereza always uses the term "concentration camp" to explain where her family was kept during World War II, but she also uses the term to describe the total lack of privacy. Living in her mother's house was like living in a concentration camp, and like a real camp, her mother's house was nearly impossible to escape.

Kundera's interrogation of the term "concentration camp" again underscores the ambiguity of language. A concentration camp, to Tereza at least, is not merely a physical place where people are held, and likely tortured and killed. Tereza also uses this term more broadly to describe places like her mother's house and later the entire country of Czechoslovakia.

PART 4, CHAPTER 5

Tereza sits in the sauna, sweating with the other naked women, and she stares at a young and beautiful woman with huge breasts. Tereza notices that the woman has a rather large backside as well, and Tereza wonders if she ever stares in the mirror and tries to see her soul. The woman smiles at Tereza, and she ignores her, going to the shower to rinse off.

Again, Tereza's trip to the sauna is baffling. She strictly guards her own body and privacy, but she studies the other woman's body intently. Tereza usually represents the soul, but here she disregards the other woman's soul and treats her like only a body when she doesn't reciprocate her smile.

PART 4, CHAPTER 6

After showering, Tereza stares at her naked body in the mirror. She does not have big breasts or a large backside, and she wonders what her relationship is to her body. She hates her body. Her body doesn't have enough power to be "the only body in Tomas's life," and she longs to dismiss it and become only a soul.

While philosophy sees the body and soul as separate entities, Kundera argues that they can't be separated and are wholly dependent on one another. Tereza wants to know what about her body isn't enough for Tomas, which could potentially explain what she is doing at the sauna—she needs to see multiple naked bodies so she can compare.

PART 4, CHAPTER 7

Back at home, Tereza eats lunch standing up at the sink. She has to go to work soon, a waitressing gig she got through a friend after the Russians dismissed her from her job as a photographer. Standing at the sink, Tereza's legs begin to hurt, and she thinks about the large varicose veins that have developed from working long hours on her feet. Tereza goes to work and returns home well after midnight as usual. She climbs into bed with Tomas and is again struck by the strong smell of another woman in his hair.

Eating alone standing up at the kitchen sink is the epitome of loneliness. Even though Tereza is married, she lives a rather empty life, and then she has to be reminded of Tomas's infidelity every time she climbs into bed. The loss of Tereza's job is again evidence of the persecution of the intelligentsia by the Russians. Tereza's work as a photographer exposes the oppression of the Czech people to the West and the rest of the world, so it is suppressed.

PART 4, CHAPTER 8

Tomas always tries to convince Tereza that love and sex are different things, and she tries to think about this as she flirts with strangers at the restaurant where she works. Flirting, the narrator says, "is a promise of sexual intercourse without a guarantee," and Tereza is very bad at it. Tereza wishes that she could learn to be "light" because she knows she's a burden to Tomas, but by taking flirting so seriously, she fails at it.

Tereza's flirting represents her attempt to be "light" like Tomas. She wants to discover if there can be sex without love, and flirting offers her a safe way of testing this theory, since there is no "guarantee" of sex. But Tereza can't even flirt well, which, Kundera implies, is because she is too heavy.

PART 4, CHAPTER 9

One day, a young man of about 16 comes into Tereza's restaurant and begins to flirt with her. He compliments Tereza's legs and asks for a drink, but Tereza won't give him one. He leaves and goes to another bar, and when he returns, he is clearly drunk. He has returned to look at Tereza's legs, he says, and then he tells her he loves her. An obnoxious man at the bar assumes that Tereza has illegally served the young man alcohol and begins to yell at her. A tall stranger interjects and tells him to shut up. Tereza thanks the tall stranger for sticking up for her, and then he leaves.

While it is never confirmed, Tereza later wonders if the young drunk man was a trap set by the secret police (Tereza later finds out that the obnoxious man is secret police) to incriminate and then imprison her. She even wonders if the tall man, (whom she later has a sexual encounter with) is involved as well. This level of paranoia again illustrates the power of the Russians over the Czech people, as Tereza lives in fear that she will be trapped and falsely incriminated for one thing or another.

PART 4, CHAPTER 10

A few days later, the tall stranger comes back to Tereza's restaurant and begins to flirt with her. He tells her that he is an engineer and lives nearby. It was only "sheer chance" that he came into the restaurant a few days earlier, the stranger says.

This moment reinforces Kundera's fate/chance argument. Whereas Tereza sees Tomas as her fate, the tall stranger is portrayed as "sheer chance," and in this way, not at all important.

PART 4, CHAPTER 11

Tereza looks at Tomas and admits that she can't take his infidelity or her guilt anymore. He only came back to Prague because of her, so she has tried not be jealous of his mistresses, but she is. Tomas takes Tereza out to walk in the park and tells her that everything will be fine once she climbs Petrin Hill. She asks why, and Tomas says she will find out when she gets there. Tereza is "constitutionally unable to disobey Tomas," and as she looks back at him, he waves, signaling her to keep climbing the hill.

Kundera jumps into a dream sequence here, in which Tereza's insecurities and anger are revealed. She feels responsible for Tomas's return to Prague, but he is breaking her heart with his unfaithfulness. Petrin Hill is a hill located in the center of Prague, and in Tereza's dream, it is where the Czech people are executed, presumably by the Russians or their communist government.


PART 4, CHAPTER 12

Tereza finds herself at the foot of Petrin Hill and walks to the top. There are six men at the top of the hill, and they look at Tereza and assure her she is in the right place. One of the men has a rifle and asks if coming to the hill was her own choice. Tereza doesn't want to disappoint Tomas, so she says that it was. The man with the rifle asks Tereza if she wants to go first, and Tereza tells him she would rather go last. He agrees and begins to aim and fire at the other people standing on the hill.

Petrin Hill is now a major tourist attraction, and it has long since been divided into gardens, but it was initially used as an execution site, particularly for those who had been convicted of some sort of political crime. Somewhat ironically, Petrin Hill is now the location of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism (1948-1989).

PART 4, CHAPTER 13

One of the men approaches Tereza to blindfold her, but she stops him and says she would rather watch. She doesn't really want to watch; she just wants to delay death a bit longer. As the other man turns to her and raises his rifle, Tereza loses her nerve. "But it wasn't my choice," she says. He lowers the gun. If she didn't freely choose, he says, they don't have any right to kill her.

Kundera later extends the idea behind Tereza's dream on Petrin Hill to her sexual encounter with the tall stranger. She doesn't want to be unfaithful to Tomas—it isn't her choice—yet she feels forced by Tomas. Of course, Tomas isn't making her do anything, but because of his repeated infidelity, she needs to see once and for all if there can be sex without love.

PART 4, CHAPTER 14

Tereza cries as she walks down Petrin Hill. The man with the gun was kind, and she longs for him and his kindness. She was sent to her death by Tomas, but the other man wanted to help her. The more Tereza thinks about the other man, the more she longs for him, and she begins to fear Tomas even more.

Tereza sees the man with the rifle on Petrin Hill as the tall stranger who defended her in the bar. The tall stranger is kind, and she believes that she could fall in love with him very easily. This suggests that sex and love aren't really all that disconnected after all. While Tereza doesn't ultimately fall in love with him, she is tempted to.

PART 4, CHAPTER 15

The tall stranger keeps inviting Tereza to his flat. She knows nothing about him except that he is an engineer, and by the third invitation, she accepts. Tomas has always told her that love and sex are two different things, so she decides to test his theory. She thinks that she wouldn't stay for very long. She would have a cup of coffee and stand on the very edge of infidelity without looking over. Then, when it came time for sex, she would say: "It wasn't my choice." And then he would say that he didn't have any right.

Again, Tereza does not want to be unfaithful to Tomas. She takes their love seriously, and she can't separate sex from romantic attachments and heavy feelings. In this way, it isn't *Tereza's choice; rather, she is forced by Tomas, in a way, to test his theory about love and sex. Still, she sees infidelity—both Tomas's and her own—as a sort of death of their love, hence the executioner on Petrin Hill and the tall stranger's association with him.*

PART 4, CHAPTER 16

The tall stranger's flat is a simple one-room efficiency with a curtain dividing it. He has little furniture, but hundreds of **books** line the walls. Tereza feels instantly comfortable. This many books have to be a good sign. She reaches up and grabs a copy of Sophocles's *Oedipus*. Tomas gave her a copy once and couldn't stop talking about it. Then he wrote an article about it for the paper, and it ruined their lives. Seeing the book is like a message from Tomas meant to tell her that he's the reason she's there in the first place.

The simplicity of the tall stranger's flat suggests that the whole situation could be staged to incriminate Tereza, and Tereza later thinks this because Oedipus *is so strategically placed. Tomas's article about* Oedipus *is the reason why he was dismissed from his job, and it is implied that Tereza suffered because of it, too. Still, Tereza thinks that books are symbolic of a "secret brotherhood" of knowledge and enlightenment, which is why she is instantly comfortable when she sees the stranger's books.*

PART 4, CHAPTER 17

The tall stranger begins to undress Tereza, but she refuses to help. Her soul disagrees with what her body is doing, and it doesn't want to participate. Tereza's soul watches her naked body from above, and she refuses to enjoy what is about to happen, but then she feels herself grow excited. Just as Tereza begins to orgasm, she yells: "No, no, no!" and spits in the man's face.

This moment again illustrates the body and soul as separate entities. Tereza's soul is at complete odds with what her body is engaged in, and the fact that Tereza spits in the man's face is evidence of this. She doesn't want to enjoy sex with him, and when her body begins to respond independent of her soul's desire, she becomes angry.

PART 4, CHAPTER 18

Alone in the tall stranger's bathroom, Tereza sits on the cold porcelain toilet. She feels the urge to empty her bowels and "go to the extreme of humiliation." She wants to be only a body reduced to its functions. After evacuating her bowels, Tereza feels intensely depressed.

Here, Tereza's soul seems to reject her body's behavior, but Tereza's trip to the bathroom also reduces her to a mere body and its physiological functions. For Tereza, this is the height of humiliation, as she detests bodies—especially bodily functions.

PART 4, CHAPTER 19

Outside the bathroom, Tereza stands on the other side of the curtain. The tall stranger calls her from behind the curtain, and she feels the urge to cry. She wants to go to him, but she knows that if she does, she will fall in love with him. She grabs her clothes, dresses quickly, and leaves.

The fact that Tereza could fall in love so easily suggests that there is nothing special about her love for Tomas. She could have, quite literally, fallen in love with anyone, and she earlier said that she could have even fallen in love with one of Tomas's friends. In this light, it is Tomas who appears to love Tereza more, despite his infidelity. He has been with hundreds of women, but he only fell in love with Tereza—just as he's been insisting all along.

PART 4, CHAPTER 20

Later, walking home with Karenin, Tereza notices the head of a crow on the ground near a housing development. As she moves closer, two boys, who had been hidden behind a wall, run off. She sits by the crow and sees that it has been buried halfway in the dirt. She excavates it, sees that it is badly injured, and takes it home. She lays it gently, wrapped in a scarf, on the bathroom floor and waits.

The buried crow represents weight, in this case, the weight of dirt on a body. Sabina later says that being weighed down with dirt in death is her greatest fear, which is why she has cremation included in her last will and testament. Tereza metaphorically feels this weight and death in Tomas's infidelity, and in her own encounter with the tall stranger.

PART 4, CHAPTER 21

Sitting on the bathroom floor with the crow, Tereza thinks about the tall stranger. She asks herself if her visit to the tall stranger has taught her anything about casual sex. It hasn't. Tereza's fidelity was all she had to offer to Tomas, and it was what kept their entire relationship together. After a while, Tereza goes to the kitchen for something to eat, and when she returns, the crow is dead.

In Tereza's eyes, her infidelity represents the death of her and Tomas's love, and this is reflected in the death of the crow. Tereza takes sole responsibility for keeping their relationship together, and here she believes it is her fault, not Tomas's, that their love has, in a sense, died. This reflects the unequal power distribution within their relationship: Tomas is off the hook but Tereza suffers, even though both their actions have contributed to the current situation.

PART 4, CHAPTER 22

When Tereza and Tomas were in the first year of their relationship, Tereza used to scream during sex. She had wanted to overcome her senses and become blind and deaf. She doesn't scream anymore, but her soul had indeed been "blinded by love." Tereza's afternoon with the tall stranger has made her soul see again. Thinking about that day, she doesn't think about the stranger—she hardly remembers him, in fact—but rather, she thinks about herself. She longs to see her own body again close to another, and she secretly wishes the tall stranger would come into the bar where she works.

Tereza's screams were her attempt to get rid of the duality of body and soul. The fact that she can "see" again after her encounter with the stranger implies that she has come to a basic truth of some sort. Tereza has always hated her body and wished she could somehow disengage herself from it. Of course, this isn't possible, and now Tereza realizes that she has been ignoring a vital part of herself in her attempts to rid herself of her body.

PART 4, CHAPTER 23

Every day Tereza secretly wishes for the tall stranger to return to the bar, but he never does. One particular day, the obnoxious man who had accused her of serving minors begins to tell a dirty joke. When Tereza interrupts him, he becomes angry. "You ought to thank your lucky stars we let you stay here in the bar," he says to her. Tereza asks what he means by "we," and then he asks her how she afforded the string of pearls around her neck. "Just remember that prostitution is a criminal offense," he says.

Tereza grows terrified that the secret police are trying to set her up as a prostitute so they can arrest and imprison her. This again illustrates the level of fear people are forced to live in under the communist regime. Tereza hasn't done anything illegal, yet she still worries that she will be arrested and charged with a crime.

PART 4, CHAPTER 24

Tereza learns soon afterward from one of the men she works with that the obnoxious man is with the secret police. The secret police function in several ways, Tereza's coworker says. They spy and report back to their superiors, and they intimidate, so everyone knows who has all the power. The secret police also stage certain situations to incriminate others—like planting drugs in someone's pocket or accusing them of rape.

Fear is the primary way in which the Russians and the communist regime maintain control over the Czechoslovakian people. Kundera later claims that nothing within a communist country can ever be trusted, from parades to politicians, and the obnoxious man is proof of this reality.

Tereza is suddenly convinced that the tall stranger was sent to trap and incriminate her. No engineer reads Sophocles, Tereza thinks to herself. She worries that he will say she slept with him and then demand money. Tereza's coworker tries to assuage her fears. Nothing about her encounter with the tall stranger seemed suspicious, the coworker says, but she isn't so sure.

Whether or not the tall stranger is really working with the secret police is never revealed, but Kundera certainly leaves this possibility open. After Tereza and the stranger's afternoon together, he never reappears.

PART 4, CHAPTER 25

Most people try to escape their problems by looking to the future. They try to think about a place and time where their current troubles no longer matter, but Tereza feels a strong desire to go backward, so she and Tomas decide to go for a night at a country spa they went to years earlier, before the Prague Spring and the Russian occupation.

Tereza's desire to go back in time is another reference to eternal return. Kundera says that happiness is the desire for cyclical existence, and Tereza and Tomas's trip to the spa is their effort to repeat time and find some kind of happiness.

When Tereza and Tomas arrive at the spa hotel, which was previously named "Grand," they find that it has been renamed "Baikal." All of the streets have been renamed as well, and they have signs that read "Leningrad Street" and "Kiev Street." Tereza also sees "Tolstoy Sanatorium" and "Tchaikovsky Sanatorium," and the "Café Pushkin." The place where Tereza wanted to escape her problems has been stolen by the Russians. Tereza and Tomas do not spend the night.

The Russians have completely taken over Czechoslovakia and imposed their Russian culture and language on the Czech people. Because of this undeniable change, Tereza can't go back to a specific place in time, because that specific place no longer exists. While this passage refutes eternal return, it also underscores the power of the Russians and their oppression of the Czech people.

PART 4, CHAPTER 26

Tereza can not stop thinking that the tall stranger is part of the secret police. When Tereza first arrived at his flat and found the copy of *Oedipus*, he went behind the curtain for coffee, but when he came back, he didn't bring any. She knows more than ever that it was a trap. Just the other day she laughed at Tomas's Czech radio program because they all failed to see that they are living in a concentration camp. So is Tereza.

This, too, highlights the oppression of the Czech people by the Russians. There is no privacy at all, not during phone conversations and not even during an intimate moment between two people. The Russians have completely infiltrated Tereza's life and existence in more ways than one.

PART 4, CHAPTER 27

After leaving the spa, Tomas and Tereza go to a small café, where Tomas runs into one of his old patients. The man has since moved to the country and become the chairman of a collective farm. Tomas points to his neck, near the base of his skull, and asks the man if it gives him any trouble. The man admits to some pain, so Tomas writes down the name of a medication and hands it to him. Tomas tells the man he can't prescribe drugs, but says that the man should tell his doctor that he needs that medication.

This is a painful reminder that Tomas has lost his ability to practice medicine. He is a brain surgeon, yet because he will not support the Communist regime, he has been ousted from his job. Tomas and Tereza later move to the same collective farm, which is farmland owned by the state and worked by the people to supply them with food and other necessities. The people cannot own any land and there is no chance to make a profit; working on the farm simply sustains them.

PART 4, CHAPTER 28

Driving back to Prague, Tereza wonders if any photographs exist of her with the tall stranger. Maybe the secret police will show them to Tomas, she thinks to herself. Tomas probably wouldn't kick her out, but the thought of him looking at pictures of her and the tall stranger is unbearable. She has a strong desire to tell Tomas that they must move to the country. That is the only way they can be happy, she thinks. Tereza turns to Tomas intending to speak, but when he doesn't turn to her, she loses her nerve. She feels like going back to Petrin Hill to die.

Kundera later examines this moment from Tomas's perspective, and in this moment Tomas hates Tereza. Seeing his former patient has reminded Tomas of what he has lost, and he resents Tereza and his love for her. Being a surgeon had been an integral part of Tomas's identity, along with being a womanizer, and Tereza has threatened both aspects.

PART 4, CHAPTER 29

Alone at home, Tereza wakes up. She dresses and goes outside to see the Vltava. Standing over the river, the water looks more depressing than anywhere else. Something catches her eye, and she sees that several brightly colored park benches are rushing downriver. They rush past her, and she turns as if to ask someone why benches are washing downriver, and she sees two final benches go by. Feeling deep grief, Tereza knows it is Prague's "farewell."

Again, Kundera has entered a dream sequence without warning. Tereza goes outside to see the Vltava, the river that runs through Prague, one last time because she knows that she and Tomas will soon leave Prague. The park benches going down the dark, depressing river represent the mass emigration of Czech people from their homeland during the Communist reign. Tereza is only leaving Prague, not the country, but it is still the Communist regime that is driving her actions.

PART 5, CHAPTER 1

When Tereza first came to Prague, Tomas had thought her like a child who had been floated downstream in a basket. He has a strange fascination with abandoned infants, which was why he is so drawn to **Oedipus**. In the story of Oedipus, Oedipus is abandoned and taken in by King Polybus. As a young man, Oedipus meets a dignitary walking on a path and kills him, then he marries Queen Jocasta and becomes king of Thebes. He later finds out that the dignitary was his father and Queen Jocasta is his mother. Oedipus's people are visited by a great plague that Oedipus is sure he has caused. Ashamed, he stabs out his own eyes.

Here, Kundera jumps back in time again, focusing on Tomas's perspective on years that have already been described in other sections. Again, the narrative structure seems to imply eternal return, even as the narrator denies that it exists. Tomas repeatedly refers to Tereza as a helpless infant in a basket, which again places him in a position of power over her. It is ironic that Tomas has a fascination with abandoned infants, since he abandoned his own infant son. Tomas's fascination suggests that Tomas has deep guilt for abandoning his own son in the name of becoming light and unattached. While Tomas is lighter because he has fewer attachments, his feelings of guilt over such actions are undeniably heavy, which again suggests that one cannot be entirely heavy or light; the two opposites always go hand in hand.


PART 5, CHAPTER 2

Contrary to popular belief, the Communist regimes of Central Europe were not all bad, the narrator says. Most Communists weren't innate criminals; they merely believed that their ideology would lead to paradise. It was only when it became clear that there was no paradise that Communists became criminals. Everyone blamed the Communists for the state of Czechoslovakia—the country is poor and lost its independence to Russia—but the Communists claimed they didn't know it would all end so badly. They were innocent, the Communists said.

Kundera examines communism throughout most of the novel, and while he clearly condemns Czechoslovakia's Communist regime, as well as the Soviet Union, he doesn't entirely dismiss the ideology. Instead, Kundera implies that all political ideologies have the potential to be dangerous, especially if they are the sole ideology of a given region.

Tomas follows politics closely, and the general consensus is that while some Communists know their ideology is evil, the vast major of them have no idea. But to Tomas, whether or not they know makes little difference, and this is the connection that he makes to **Oedipus**. Tomas wonders how the Communists can look at what they have done and not put out their own eyes. He is so fond of this analogy that he writes it down and sends it to a small intellectual newspaper in Prague.

Obviously, Tomas, too, blames the Communists for the state of Czechoslovakia. Prior to the end of WWII, Czechoslovakia had been a free and politically liberal country, but that all ended with Communism. Tomas believes that those Communists who aren't inherently evil should be deeply ashamed about what they have done to the freedom and autonomy of the Czech people, just as Oedipus is ashamed of the effect he inadvertently has on Thebes.

Sometime later, Tomas is called in to meet with the newspaper's editor. He asks Tomas to change the order of a single sentence and thanks him for the article. Tomas's article later appears in the paper, on the very last page, but it has been shortened, and his thesis is changed. This is in the spring of 1968, and Dubcek has just been elected, along with a bunch of Communists who actually felt bad about the state of Czechoslovakia and wanted to do something about it. Yet there were still those Communists who claim innocence, and they worried that the others would bring them to justice, so they went to the Russians for help. "See what things have come to!" the evil Communists say when they read Tomas's article. "Now they're telling us to publicly put our eyes out!" Within three months, Russia has occupied Czechoslovakia.

While it wasn't specifically Tomas's article that caused Russia to occupy Czechoslovakia, it was opinions like Tomas's that did. Alexander Dubcek, the president of the Czechoslovakia, was a dedicated reformist, and he truly wanted to reform the Communist party into something that did not completely oppress the people, which meant ousting those who truly were evil. When the Russians occupied the country, they took Dubcek back to Moscow and forced him into a political comprise that effectively protected those who meant to use communism for evil means.

PART 5, CHAPTER 3

After Tomas comes back to Prague from Zurich, he takes his old job back at the hospital. One day, the chief of surgery calls Tomas into his office and tells Tomas that he has to retract the **Oedipus** article. He tells Tomas he doesn't have to make a public statement or anything, but he does have to write something up that formally states he has nothing against the regime. Tomas says he will take the week and think about it.

Tomas's Oedipus article makes him appear to be against the regime, and since all doctors are employed by the state, the hospital will not employ Tomas if he is politically against them. This again illustrates the power the Communist government has over the people. Tomas is not allowed his own political opinions—he has to support the regime or suffer the consequences.

PART 5, CHAPTER 4

Tomas is the best surgeon at the hospital, and there is talk that he will one day be chief. Soon, rumor of the retraction hits, and it seems that everyone knows about it. Everybody just assumes that Tomas will comply, and this bothers him. He has never done a thing to suggest he isn't an honest man, yet they all assume he will lie and write the retraction. They all seem to be smiling at him, and Tomas can't stand it. He goes to see the chief surgeon and says he won't write the retraction but hopes he can stay on at the hospital. He is dismissed immediately.

The fact that Tomas is the best surgeon at the hospital and has been slated for chief implies that no one is safe from the Communist regime. The regime doesn't give Tomas a pass just because he is valuable; they expect him to comply just like everyone else. It is ironic that Tomas is so worried about his integrity considering his repeated infidelities, but nonetheless, this sense of personal integrity seems to fuel his decision not to write the retraction more than his moral objection to communism does.

PART 5, CHAPTER 5

Tomas takes a job at a country clinic, but he isn't allowed to operate anymore and serves only as a general practitioner. One day, a dignitary comes to the clinic and asks Tomas to go for a drink. It is a shame, the dignitary says, that such a talented doctor is handing out aspirin. The dignitary is kind and polite, and Tomas has to remind himself that nothing he says is truthful or genuine.

Tomas's job at the clinic is a massive step down from where he was as a surgeon, and the regime is trying to use this against him to get him to conform, which is another display of their power over Tomas. They control everything, and the dignitary's visit is a reminder of this.

The dignitary asks Tomas if he really believes that Communists should put out their eyes, and Tomas tells him that that idea is ridiculous. If the dignitary had read what was actually written, Tomas says, he wouldn't think that. He tells the dignitary that the article was cut and altered. He asks Tomas who he met at the paper, but Tomas lies and says he doesn't remember his name. He asks Tomas what the man looked like, and even though he was short with brown hair, Tomas says he was tall with black hair. The dignitary nods. He knows just the editor Tomas is talking about. "You have been manipulated, Doctor," the dignitary says. He stands to leave and tells Tomas he will be in touch.

Of course, it is the dignitary and the Communist regime who are manipulating Tomas, and everyone else for that matter. Tomas's lie about the editor is intended to protect him, but what he doesn't realize is that his description actually matches another editor. In trying to save one man from the regime, he inadvertently implicates another. It is clear that the regime is closely watching the editor, which is further evidence of the persecution of the Czech intelligentsia by the regime.

PART 5, CHAPTER 6

Tomas is deeply depressed after the visit from the dignitary. What if he was seen talking to him? He doesn't want anyone thinking he is associated with the secret police. Two weeks later, the dignitary comes back. He has a letter with him that he wants Tomas to sign and submit to the press. Not only does the letter retract the **Oedipus** article, but it also expresses Tomas's love for the regime and the Soviet Union, and it is particularly harsh concerning the tall editor with dark hair. Tomas refuses to sign what he did not write, and the dignitary tells him he can write his own, as long as it is approved by the regime.

This, too, reflects the power of the Communist regime. They draft Tomas's retraction letter, in which he basically pledges his allegiance to the regime, and he has zero power to express his opinion or stand up for himself. He is clearly against the regime, as he worries that he will be seen with the dignitary and others will think he associated with the regime, yet if he wants to keep his job, he must sign and submit to its power.

Telling the dignitary he will write his own letter buys Tomas some time. He quits his job at the clinic the next day and assumes that if he is no longer a doctor (since doctors are state employees), no one will care about what he wrote. After he quits his job, Tomas isn't sure he has made the right choice, but he is "bound to it" by "an unspoken vow of fidelity," so he becomes a window washer.

Kundera's language here is ironic. Tomas is "bound" to his decision by "an unspoken vow of fidelity," but he obviously does not feel bound to Tereza in any such way. This turns of events also implies that there is still some autonomy to be found in the country, where Tomas can get some distance from the regime and make his own choices, even if doing so means giving up his career as a doctor.

PART 5, CHAPTER 7

As a surgeon, Tomas spent every day with human bodies. He cut them open with a scalpel and inspected what was underneath. Of course, Tomas's job at the country clinic wasn't exactly medicine in his opinion, so quitting was no big deal. Still, the narrator says, it seems as if Tomas made the decision too quickly and was, perhaps, missing something important.

Kundera frequently uses the analogy of Tomas's scalpel to represent the idea of finding something hidden or otherwise covered up. Elsewhere, Tomas takes a metaphorical scalpel to his mistresses to find the ways in which they are unique, and just as the regime forces him to give up his literal scalpel, his relationship with Tereza forces him to give up this symbolic scalpel to some extent.

PART 5, CHAPTER 8

Tomas loves Beethoven because Tereza loves Beethoven, so he has no idea about the story behind "*Muss es sein? Es muss sein!*" Apparently, a man had owed Beethoven some money, and when Beethoven reminded him of this, the man said, "*Muss es sein?*" To which Beethoven responded, "*Es muss sein!*" When the exchange became the quartet, it wasn't funny anymore and became "'*der schwer gefasste Entschluss*' (the difficult or weighty resolution)." The saying went from light to heavy, or positive to negative, like Parmenides would say.

Kundera repeatedly returns to the "Muss es sein? Es muss sein!" motif in respect to Tomas. Tomas uses Beethoven's "weighty resolution" to describe something that is out of his control, like his love for Tereza. Remember, Tomas said "Es muss sein" when he left Zurich for Prague. Here, "Es muss sein" is seen as heavy, or negative, but Tomas later realizes that his womanizing (something that makes him light) is out of his control, too, and is also *"Es muss sein," or essentially heavy.*

When Tomas starts his job as a window washer, he experiences some initial shock. Soon, however, he begins to enjoy himself. It is like a vacation. He doesn't care about what he is doing, and there is no stress. He even goes back to his bachelor ways and starts having affairs again. He walks around Prague like he is 10 years younger. He washes public as well as private windows, and when his former patients find out what he is doing, they begin to request him. Tereza works the night shift, and the only time they see each other is at breakfast. Tomas has all day to himself to do whatever he wants.

Again, Tomas doesn't seem to have any control over his womanizing, and he slips right back into his bachelor ways. Even though Tomas is a window washer, his former patients still seem to respect him, for his station as a doctor and his refusal to conform to the regime's demands. Tomas appears almost happy in his new life, which, interestingly enough, has very little to do with Tereza—even though she was the reason he moved back to Prague.

PART 5, CHAPTER 9

Tomas figures that he has had sex with around 200 women in his lifetime, which he doesn't think is so many. Having sex with so many women isn't about pleasure (although the pleasure is nice). For Tomas, it is about finding the ways in which each individual woman is unique. But not just unique in general. Tomas wants to find out how each woman is sexually unique, and he wants to "conquer" it.

Again, Tomas's attraction to sex and women is all about power and strength. He wants to "conquer" as many women as possible, meaning he wants to have power over all of them. The word "conquer" also implies violence, which Tomas often seems to associate with sex and power.

PART 5, CHAPTER 10

Womanizers fit into one of two categories. The first category, the "*lyrical*" womanizer, is looking for a very specific type of woman in many women, and they are often disappointed. The "*epic*" womanizer, on the other hand, is not looking for a specific type of woman and is never disappointed. Tomas is an "*epic*" womanizer, and like the others, he is a "curiosity collector."

Tomas is never disappointed because he looks for how women are unique, and every woman is unique in some way. Describing Tomas as a "curiosity collector" again puts him in a position of power over women; even if he appreciates their differences, he still views them as objects to be conquered.

One day, Tomas is called to an apartment to clean the windows, and the door is opened by a very tall woman, who looks much like a stork. Tomas is immediately intrigued. They instantly begin to flirt, and before they know it, they are caressing each other's bodies. When Tomas tries to touch her between the legs, she resists. It is nearly the end of the appointment, but he has not washed a single window. The tall woman signs his slip anyway. Her husband is paying, she says, and he is paying the state, not Tomas. The transaction has nothing to do with either of them.

The tall woman who looks like a stork is simply another "curiosity" Tomas would like to collect. She is clearly different from the other women Tomas has been with, and so he must "conquer" her, too. Here, Tomas's need to conquer the tall woman is depicted as almost compulsive, as if he is unconsciously prone to the behavior and is unable to control himself.

PART 5, CHAPTER 11

Within a few days, Tomas is again sent to the tall woman's house to clean windows. When she answers the door, she already has a bottle of wine and two glasses sitting out. Tomas commands her to "Strip!" and she replies "No, you first!" Tomas isn't exactly sure how to respond to such a woman, but he takes his clothes off anyway. He has never been with a woman who is taller than him, and when he leaves her apartment, he is pleased that he has added another curiosity to his collection.

Tomas isn't sure how to respond to the tall woman's command to strip because he is not used to a woman exerting power over him. She tells him what to do, and Tomas obeys, which is a complete power reversal when compared to his relationships with Tereza and Sabina. Still, he leaves feeling like he has nonetheless conquered the woman, which hints at how important it is for Tomas to maintain a sense of power—even when he's technically the one being ordered around.

PART 5, CHAPTER 12

A few days later, Tomas is with a woman he frequently has sex with during the day. She reminds Tomas about the time they had sex on a rug during a thunderstorm. To her, it was "unforgettably beautiful." Tomas remembers the sex, but not the storm, and he is disappointed that he failed to notice something so beautiful. The different ways in which Tomas and the woman remember the storm "sharply delimit love and nonlove."

Tomas does not attach romantic sentiments, like "unforgettable beauty," to any of the women he sleeps with because he excludes them from feelings of love, which he saves exclusively for Tereza. Here, the woman obviously does not separate love from sex, but Tomas does, so the beauty of the storm completely escaped his attention.

To say "nonlove" is not to say that Tomas was not fond of the woman, because he was. He simply did not love her. The brain has a certain "*poetic memory*," such as that which remembers thunderstorms during love-making, and it is only Tereza who occupies Tomas's poetic memory. "Love begins with a metaphor," the narrator claims, at the very moment a woman's words enter one's poetic memory.

The narrator says that love begins with a metaphor earlier in the novel when Tomas first meets Tereza and says she is like a baby in a basket, and this implies that Tereza entered Tomas's poetic memory—which is to say he fell in love with her—from the very moment he met her.

PART 5, CHAPTER 13

The next day, a private customer requests Tomas specifically to wash the windows, but Tomas is not looking forward to whoever it is. He doesn't want to be with other women today, as his thoughts are completely focused on Tereza. Arriving at the address, Tomas is relieved when a man answers the door. He is tall and dark, and he looks familiar. It is the editor from the paper that the dignitary had mentioned. A second man is present, and Tomas immediately recognizes him as his son, Simon.

The fact that Tomas doesn't want to have sex with any other women because his thoughts are too occupied with Tereza suggests that Tomas really can't separate love from sex all the time. If Tomas's theory about love and sex were true, then he would be able to go and have sex at any time, regardless of how he was feeling about his love life with Tereza.

The editor and Simon do not want Tomas to wash the windows; they want him to sign a petition. They are asking all the important Czech intellectuals to sign the petition, which condemns the rough treatment political prisoners have apparently been subjected to and seeks amnesty for them. Tomas doubts that his signature is important enough to carry any weight, but he promises to think about it. There is no time to wait, the editor says; the petition is to be sent to the president the next day. "Aren't you on the side of the persecuted?" Simon asks. Tomas nods and takes the petition.

Like the chief of the hospital and the dignitary who both wanted Tomas to sign the retraction letter, Simon and the editor want Tomas to sign the petition right away, without even thinking about it. Obviously, the editor and Simon are arguing for a better cause, but their cause makes little difference to Kundera's point. Kundera argues through their behavior that any political ideology can be oppressive. Simon and the editor represent liberalism and democracy, yet they still don't give Tomas much choice.

PART 5, CHAPTER 14

The editor tells Tomas that he really enjoyed the **Oedipus** article, and Simon comments that some ideas are very powerful. Tomas says that because of the Oedipus article, he can no longer practice as a doctor, but the editor assures Tomas that his article saved lives. Tomas doesn't know about that, he says, but he is sure he saved lives as a surgeon. Simon says that ideas save lives, too, and it is Tomas's "duty to sign." Tomas hands the petition back and refuses to sign.

Tomas clearly disagrees with the Communist regime, but he doesn't want to give them a reason to come after him again. Tomas knows that those who sign such a petition will be smeared publically by the regime. Tomas clearly does not like that Simon has told him what his "duty" is, which may be related to Tomas's guilt for abandoning Simon and his "duty" as a father.

PART 5, CHAPTER 15

Days later, word of the petition hits the papers. The petition was all over, but not a word of it was cited, and all the signatories have been publicly defamed. Tomas isn't surprised, but he still wonders if he did the right thing in refusing to sign. Surely, it is right to speak up for others. He wonders why the paper is giving the petition so much attention. Of course, the papers are all state-operated, but they could have just as easily not mentioned the petition, and very few people would have ever known about it. There is no way for Tomas to know if he made the right decision. "Human life occurs only once," the narrator says.

This moment again points to eternal return, and Kundera implies that if Tomas's life did repeat, he would know from experience that the regime put word of the petition in the paper in order to intimidate and control the people. In Tomas's case, it has worked. Tomas didn't speak up for others in part because he was afraid of being further smeared by the regime. By intimidating people like Tomas, the regime stays in power and the people stay oppressed.


PART 5, CHAPTER 16

Tomas thinks about a planet where people from earth would go to be born again. They would be born with all the knowledge and experience from their life on earth, and then they would go on to a third planet, and a fourth, and so on. That was eternal return to Tomas, and that was how he thought of optimism and pessimism. Optimism was thinking that life on planet number five would be peaceful; pessimism was thinking it would still be bloody.

The narrator implied earlier through his reference to Robespierre and the French Revolution that humankind's atrocities are proof of the nonexistence of eternal return, but here Tomas suggests this isn't necessarily true. Thinking that life on planet number five would still be bloody implies that humankind would continue to commit atrocities knowing full well what they were doing was wrong, which suggests it is human nature to behave in such unspeakable ways—whether or not life repeats.

PART 5, CHAPTER 17

By Tomas's third year washing windows, it is no longer a vacation. One day, while Tomas is walking home from work, a woman who obviously knows him approaches him in the street. The way she speaks to him suggests that they have been intimate, but Tomas can't remember her. Tomas is exhausted. He cannot extend this vacation indefinitely.

Tomas seems to be losing steam as the perpetual womanizer, which suggests that his behavior isn't as light as he originally thought. He is exhausted, and this implies that Tomas is bogged down by his sexual exploits instead of freed by them.


PART 5, CHAPTER 18

Tomas hardly sees Tereza anymore. They are only off from work on Sundays, but they sleep next to each other each night, Tereza tightly holding Tomas's hand. One Sunday, they drive to a country spa, and all the street signs have been changed to Russian names. On the way home, Tomas thinks about the monumental mistake he made in leaving Zurich. He is so angry at Tereza that he can't look at her. Why was she sent to him in a basket, Tomas wonders, and why hadn't it been some other woman?

Here, Tomas looks at Tereza as a burden. He blames her for his decision to come back to Prague and for losing his job as a surgeon. Interestingly, while Tomas's reference to Tereza as a baby in a basket puts him in a position of power over her, he actually had relatively little power in resisting her, as he realizes here. He didn't have the power to put her back in the basket, so to speak, and float her downstream to someone else. Instead, he was compelled to assume the responsibility, which he now resents.

PART 5, CHAPTER 19

Prague is a very different place after the Russian occupation, and in the following years, the death rate in Czechoslovakia rises significantly. One day, Tomas goes to the funeral of a famous biologist who was ejected from the Academy of Sciences. When Tomas arrives there are several cameras, but they aren't for television. They are for the police, so they can study who attended the funeral. Tomas notices that the tall editor is among the mourners, but when Tomas goes to approach him, the editor mouths not to come closer. Tomas isn't sure if he is referencing the cameras or simply doesn't want to talk to Tomas because he refused to sign the petition. Either way, Tomas turns and walks out.

The cameras present at the biologist's funeral again illustrate the persecution of Czechoslovakia's intelligentsia. Likely, the editor tells Tomas not to come closer because of the cameras. The regime already knows the editor works at the magazine that published the Oedipus article, and they know Tomas was the one who wrote the article. Being seen together by the regime could be bad for both of them. This passage again reflects the power of the regime, which cannot be escaped.

PART 5, CHAPTER 20

One afternoon while washing a storefront window, Tomas runs into an old colleague from the hospital. He is polite but standoffish, and Tomas knows that his position as a persecuted intellectual is no longer respected and has instead turned into something "permanent and unpleasant."

Even though Tomas lost his job as a surgeon, he still had the respect of his colleagues for standing up to the regime, but this seems to have worn off. Now, Tomas isn't respected at all, and since he can never be a surgeon again, this disrespect is likely permanent.

PART 5, CHAPTER 21

Later that night, Tomas develops terrible stomach pains, a condition he always experiences with deep depression. He usually keeps medicine on hand, but he has not stocked the cabinet recently. Tereza comments on how terrible Prague has been lately and suggests moving to the country. They won't run into the editor there, or colleagues from the hospital. Nature hasn't changed, Tereza says, and Tomas agrees that perhaps she is right. He would probably be bored, however, Tereza says to Tomas, if he had to be alone with her in the country.

Without Prague's never-ending supply of women, it would be difficult for Tomas to continue his womanizing, and Tereza's passive-aggressive comment draws attention to this and implies that she alone will not be enough for him. Meanwhile, Tomas's stomachache is evidence of his depression and unhappiness. He resents both Tereza and what his life has become, but he has little to look forward to, especially in the country.

Tomas's stomach aches even more. He thinks that his womanizing may be "something of an '*Es muss sein!*'—an imperative enslaving him." He needs a vacation from all enslavements. Just like his vacation from the operating table, he needs a vacation away from the women he cuts open with his metaphorical scalpel.

By referring to his womanizing as an "Es muss sein!" Tomas implies that he has no control over it. Not only does this make him appear powerless, it also implies that his womanizing, which is supposed to be light, is actually heavy and weighing him down.

PART 5, CHAPTER 22

Tomas wakes in the middle of the night and realizes that he had a series of erotic dreams, and the last one was of an extremely overweight woman in a pool. Tomas wonders why he was excited by a woman who would repulse him in real life. The human brain is like two cogwheels, Tomas decides, with images on one and the body's reactions on the other. The naked woman image corresponds with the erection cog, but the wheel can get knocked out of sync. The erection cog can correspond with a swallow, for instance, and then the sight of a bird would cause excitement. So, if Tomas's cogwheel was knocked out of sync and he got an erection looking at a bird, it would have nothing to do with his love for Tereza. Equating love with sex is one of the Creator's strangest ideas, Tomas thinks.

This passage more thoroughly explains Tomas's understanding of sex and love, which frames them as completed unrelated and quite arbitrary. With this understanding of sex and love, Tomas is able to completely detach love from sex, which Tereza finds impossible to understand. But while Tomas is able to sleep with women without loving them, he's also starting to find that he can't separate his love for Tereza *from these other sexual encounters, which is why he must drink alcohol before he can have sex with other women. In other words, Tomas tells himself that sex and love are unrelated, but his actions suggest otherwise.*

PART 5, CHAPTER 23

Several half-naked women were pulling at Tomas when he saw the woman on the couch. She was half-naked, too, wearing only underwear, and Tomas knew that she was his ideal woman. He began to feel himself waking, and he tried to hold onto the dream but wasn't able to. He sits straight up in bed. According to the myth from Plato's **Symposium**, people were hermaphrodites until God separated them, and now everyone wanders around looking for their other half. In other words, love is the desire for the other half of ourselves. Tomas didn't find his other half; Tereza was sent to him in a basket and borne of six ridiculous coincidences.

Here, Tomas again implies that his relationship with Tereza is based on chance, and he further implies that Tereza is not *his ideal woman, or, in other words, not his true love. This isn't to say that Tomas doesn't love Tereza, because he certainly does, but he doesn't appear to think that she is the other half that can make him whole. Kundera's reference to hermaphrodites again blurs the line between binary opposites and implies that it is impossible to be entirely one thing or the other.*

PART 6, CHAPTER 1

In 1980, the *Sunday Times* reported how Joseph Stalin's son, Yakov, died during World War II. He had been captured by the Germans and held in a camp with some British officers. Yakov repeatedly left a disgusting mess in the latrine, and when they told him to clean it up, he was terribly offended. He didn't think that he should have to clean it, and he took his argument all the way to the commander, but when Yakov got there, he wouldn't talk about "shit." He was humiliated, and he threw himself onto the electrified fence that lined the perimeter of the camp.

Joseph Stalin led the Soviet Union from the 1920s to the 1950s, and he was revered as almost godlike by the Communist party. As Stalin's son, Yakov enjoyed the privilege that came along with being the son of a god, but none of this mattered in the prison camp. In this way, Yakov became the exact opposite of what he once was, again suggesting it is impossible to embody only one side of any dichotomy.

PART 6, CHAPTER 2

Stalin's son, Yakov, had a difficult life. Evidence suggests that Stalin killed Yakov's mother when Yakov was just an infant, and Yakov was largely rejected by his father. Yet since he was the son of a powerful Bolshevik leader, people mostly feared Yakov. "Rejection and privilege, happiness and woe," the narrator says, "no one felt more concretely than Yakov how interchangeable opposites are, how short the step from one pole of human existence to the other." Since there is no difference between rejection and privilege, or "the sublime and the paltry," human life "loses its dimensions and becomes unbearably light."

This passage again rejects either/or thinking and polar opposites. By collapsing the differences between opposites, these dichotomies become meaningless: Yakov is both happy and miserable, accepted and rejected. As these opposites are meaningless, Kundera associates them with lightness, and he sees Yakov in this way, too. Yakov is also meaningless and light, and he throws himself through the air to his death, never to return again.

PART 6, CHAPTER 3

Ever since childhood, the narrator has had a theory that the idea of God's intestines is sacrilegious. God and "shit" are not compatible, he says, leaving him in an "either/or" situation. Either man has intestines because he was created in God's image and God has intestines, or God really doesn't have intestines and man is nothing like Him. As God has given freedom to humankind, He is not responsible for any atrocities that humankind may commit. God is, however, completely responsible for shit.

A couple of chapters later, Kundera also uses the word "shit" to explain his idea of kitsch and the role it plays in communism and politics. He says that kitsch is ignoring any "shit" that might be incompatible with life or a certain ideology, and ignoring God's intestines is an example of such disregard. In this way, while God isn't responsible for humankind's atrocities, He is responsible for kitsch, which often leads to such atrocities.

PART 6, CHAPTER 4

The narrator further claims that when humankind lived in Paradise, either they did not "shit" at all, or they did not look at it as something repulsive until after the fall from Paradise. It wasn't until after Adam was expelled from Paradise that humankind started to feel disgust.

Kundera's mention of humankind's aversion to "shit" parallels Tereza's aversion to the human body and her disgust with bodily functions. The narrator claims that humanity's disgust did not occur until after Adam's fall, which suggests this repulsion is rooted in sex and bodies, just like Tereza's.

PART 6, CHAPTER 5

According to the narrator, humankind's "objection to shit is a metaphysical one." The daily emptying of the bowels proves that Creation is unacceptable. And, this produces another "either/or" scenario: either shit is completely acceptable, or humankind has been created in an unacceptable way. It can easily be agreed that humankind lives in a world where shit is denied even though everyone knows it exists. This aesthetic ideal, the narrator says, is known as kitsch. Kitsch is the denial of literal and figurative shit, and it excludes from the world that which is considered unacceptable.

This passage, of course, is more concerned with metaphorical shit than with literal shit. The metaphorical shit that is consistently ignored throughout the book—the atrocities of communism, Tomas's infidelity—is what Kundera means by kitsch. Ignoring what is unacceptable while simultaneously pretending that one lives in an acceptable way is the problem as Kundera sees it.

PART 6, CHAPTER 6

Sabina's objection to communism is an aesthetic one, not an ethical one. She hates the "mask of beauty" worn by communism, which Sabina calls "Communist kitsch." A prime example of "Communist kitsch," according to Sabina, is the May Day parade. Everyone dresses up in red, white, and blue, and they smile and cheer "Long live life!" which really means "Long live Communism!" but people mostly ignore this.

As communism suppresses what makes one an individual—such as opinions and personal desires and freedoms—Sabina believes that it masks beauty. The May Day parade ignores the obvious—that the people are all forced to be there—and this is why Sabina considers it kitsch. In this case, communism is the metaphorical shit.

PART 6, CHAPTER 7

Ten years later, Sabina is living in America, and a friend of a friend, who just happens to be a United States Senator, takes Sabina on a drive with his children, whom he drops off at a stadium with a skating rink in it. As the children play and laugh, the senator points at the children and, making a circle with his arms like the circle of the stadium, says, "Now, that's what I call happiness!" The smile on his face, Sabina thinks, is just like the smiles of Communists at the May Day parade.

The circle of the senator's arms and of the stadium, as well as his comment that the children are the epitome of happiness, again points to Kundera's argument that happiness is a cyclical existence. The man's smile and Sabina's thought that it looks like the smiles at the May Day parade implies that the senator is ignoring some kind of metaphorical shit—or in Kundera's terms, kitsch—in order to live this ideal, which suggests that all political ideologies are the same and they all involve kitsch.

PART 6, CHAPTER 8

Kitsch cannot depend on anything unusual. It must be derived from commonplace images of people, like the happiness of smiling children. Kitsch leads to two tears falling from one's eyes. The first tear acknowledges how nice it is to see children playing, and the second tear acknowledges how nice it is to be moved by such things. "It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch," the narrator says.

Kitsch can be understood as something completely cliché and also insincere. The example here is less about the actual happiness of children and more about what the image of happy children implies—a happy and successful society. This implication likely isn't true and is simply ignored.

PART 6, CHAPTER 9

No one knows kitsch better than politicians, the narrator says, as kitsch is present in all political parties and movements. Politicians kissing babies in front of large crowds is the absolute height of kitsch. Whenever one political movement takes complete control, this is "*totalitarian kitsch*," and everything that threatens said kitsch is outlawed for life, such as individuality, doubt, and irony.

Kitsch is what makes ideologies such as communism possible. The politician kissing the baby doesn't really care about the baby—they care about appearing *to care about the baby. The idea of "totalitarian kitsch" outlawing anything that threatens it mirrors Sabina's claim that communism masks beauty.*

PART 6, CHAPTER 10

When Sabina thinks of Soviet kitsch becoming reality, it sends a shiver down her spine. She feels much like Tereza felt during her reoccurring dream of being marched naked around the pool. Sabina and Tereza's fear is the point of kitsch: it is "a folding screen set up to curtain off death."

Kundera's language here that communism is a "folding screen" connotes images of the Iron Curtain, which separated those in Communist countries from the capitalist West during the Cold War. Unlike Tereza and Tomas, Sabina did not return to Prague and managed to escape communism, and so Soviet kitsch is not her reality anymore.

PART 6, CHAPTER 11

In the world of totalitarian kitsch, questions are not permitted, which means that one who asks questions is the complete enemy of kitsch. Asking questions is like cutting through the backdrop of kitsch with a knife, exposing exactly what is below. Sabina once took part in a German exhibit in which her biography in the exhibit's catalogue identified her as a Czech refugee who suffered horribly and escaped persecution. "My enemy is kitsch, not Communism!" Sabrina yelled. After that incident, Sabina does not tell people that she is from Czechoslovakia.

Cutting through the backdrop of kitsch with a knife and exposing what is below harkens to Tomas's profession as a surgeon and the literal and metaphorical scalpel he uses to cut and expose. Sabina doesn't have an ethical objection to communism; she has a problem with kitsch. In parading her around as a poor refugee who endured persecution, Sabina herself becomes kitsch, which is why she begins hiding her Czech identity.

PART 6, CHAPTER 12

Kitsch is Sabina's nemesis, and she has spent her whole life trying to avoid it. Her idea of kitsch is the traditional notion of home with a mother and father, and this idea took hold sometime after the death of Sabina's parents. In America, Sabina lives with an elderly couple who refer to her as their "daughter." No one, the narrator says, can completely escape kitsch, even if you try your whole life to avoid it.

In moving in with the elderly couple and mimicking a traditional family, Sabina effectively becomes kitsch. The relationship she forms with the couple ignores the fact that they aren't, strictly speaking, family. Traditional families are cliché (which is precisely why Sabina considers this idea kitsch) and yet Sabina willingly participates in creating an image of one, which shows how inescapable kitsch is.

PART 6, CHAPTER 13

While there is "American kitsch," and "Jewish kitsch," and "feminist kitsch," there is also "*political kitsch*," and a sure sign of political kitsch is the idea of the Grand March. The Grand March promotes brotherhood, justice, and equality, and the ability to turn any idea into the kitsch of the Grand March is the defining factor that "makes a leftist a leftist."

The Grand March is kitschy because it effectively ignores the fact that it is completely ineffective in promoting brotherhood, justice, and equality. The Grand March keeps moving (another example of eternal return) but there is still injustice. The left has a tendency to see injustice everywhere, and there are numerous Grand Marches to match. The significance of the Grand March, however, is lost in its repetition—another problem, Kundera points out, with eternal return.


PART 6, CHAPTER 14

Franz is not dedicated to kitsch—in fact, he doesn't even vote—but he is drawn to the idea of the Grand March. One day, Franz receives a call from a friend in Paris asking him to join a Grand March of intellectuals into Cambodia, another country suffering under Communism. The country has been struck by widespread famine and is occupied by Vietnam, another extension of Russia. Doctors have been denied entrance into the country to help the dying people, and the purpose of the Grand March is to force the government to allow doctors to enter the country.

Franz doesn't protest because he feels passionately about one cause or another; rather, he protests because he feels passionately about the idea of protesting injustices, like communism and oppression. This is similar to Franz's obsession with Sabina—he doesn't actually love Sabina. Instead, he loves the idea of Sabina as a Czechoslovakian who has struggled and escaped oppression. Similarly, Franz doesn't really care about Cambodia; it is simply another chance to protest Communism.

Not wanting to leave his young girlfriend, Franz initially declines the offer to join the Grand March, but then he thinks about Sabina. Franz decides that Sabina would want him to go, so he calls his friend back and accepts the invitation. Days later, he leaves from Paris aboard an airplane with 50 other intellectuals—a sampling of writers, professors, and actors—and 400 reporters and photographers.

This is further proof of the misunderstandings between Franz and Sabina. Sabina hates the idea of the Grand March (it is, after all, kitschy), and she definitely wouldn't want anyone to go, but Franz goes all the way to Cambodia because he thinks she would want him to. The ratio of protestors to reporters also illustrates the kitsch of the Grand March, as there are more people to watch than to participate. If the march were really about the Cambodians, they would all *participate.*


PART 6, CHAPTER 15

Franz arrives in Bangkok, Thailand, to several upset Frenchmen. The Grand March had been their idea, but the Americans have completely taken over. The main meeting is being held in English, but when the Frenchmen ask why (in French, of course), no one understands them and they have to ask in English. An interpreter is found, and the meeting takes twice as long because every word is said in both languages. At the meeting's close, one of the Americans raises his fist into the air, because he knows that Europeans are fond of such a gesture during times of protest.

This meeting again underscores the arbitrary nature of language, especially since most of the people don't understand what is being said by the French interpreter. The French interpreter is there only to appease the Frenchmen, who, ironically, understand English as well. The raising of the American's fist expresses this arbitrariness too (and it is also kitschy), as he doesn't know exactly what the gesture means; he simply knows it is something Europeans do under similar circumstances.


PART 6, CHAPTER 16

It is interesting, the narrator notes, that leftists want to join a Grand March against communism when communism has always been a leftist idea. Kitsch itself is not a political strategy; it is a strategy of images and metaphors, which makes it possible for a leftist to march against communism.

The narrator claims that communism is a leftist idea because it is supposed to be about equality and justice, although, in reality, it isn't. Leftists are able to ignore this and participate in the Grand March anyway, and this willful ignorance is precisely why it is kitschy.

PART 6, CHAPTER 17

The next day, Franz and the other intellectuals get on a bus and head to the Cambodian border. The road is guarded by armed soldiers, and they have to walk the last few miles. At the front of the Grand March is a German pop star, who, incidentally, has written nearly 1,000 songs about peace. He carries a white flag, and every now and then, a member of the press calls his name. When the pop star turns to look, the shuttering of hundreds of cameras can be heard.

This scene is another example of why the Grand March is considered kitsch. The march is supposed to be about the Cambodians suffering under the oppression and violence of Communism, but it is really just a photo opportunity for the pop star and, later, the American actress, too. The pop star pretends he is there for the Cambodians and everyone ignores his true motive, which makes the march kitsch.

PART 6, CHAPTER 18

The American actress, who had been near the back of the Grand March, moves quickly to the front. A doctor from the middle of the parade yells at her, asking why she even bothers taking part in the Grand March. These people need medicine and doctors, he screams, not entertainment. The actress is highly insulted. "You won't get anywhere without stars! It's our job! Our moral obligation!" she yells back.

Obviously, Kundera is being sarcastic here, but what the actress says is undoubtedly true. The suffering of the Cambodian people, sadly, will not draw large-scale attention; however, a famous actress marching for the rights of others does garner attention. Thus, the actress considers the march to be her "moral obligation."

PART 6, CHAPTER 19

At the front of the line, the American actress begins to march next to the German pop star. An American photographer notices the photo opportunity and stands back, so he can get both the actress and the singer in the shot, along with the singer's white flag. Stepping onto the grass, the photographer triggers a hidden mine and is blown to pieces. Blood splatters the white flag, and the actress and singer, stunned for a moment, continue to march.

Ironically, the singer and the actress are marching to save the lives of others, but they seem to care very little when the photographer is violently killed right in front of them. The red blood splatter on the white flag is a vivid image of this violence, but they again ignore it and move on because such violence interferes with their ability to keep marching.

PART 6, CHAPTER 20

A small river separates Thailand from Cambodia, and even though they are not visible, Vietnamese soldiers wait to gun down anyone who tries to cross. An interpreter lifts a megaphone and yells out in Khmer. These people are doctors, the interpreter says, and only want to give medical attention to the people. The request is met with silence. The only sound is the clicking of cameras, and Franz worries that the Grand March is over.

Kundera implies from the very beginning that the Grand March will fail to help the Cambodian people, but since it is kitsch, it isn't really about helping the Cambodian people in the first place. The Grand March is about creating the image *of helping people, so leftists like Franz and the actress can appear to fight injustice.*

PART 6, CHAPTER 21

The request to enter Cambodia is again shouted through the megaphone, but the silence remains. Franz looks around and decides that the Grand March is definitely over. But like the editor's petition to free the political prisoners, they always knew that the Grand March wouldn't amount to much. The point of the Grand March, the narrator says, is to prove that there are still some people who aren't afraid. As Franz scans the crowd, he sees one of his friends from the Sorbonne raise his fist into the air in the general direction of Cambodia.

Again, the Grand March accomplishes nothing, except for getting an innocent photographer killed, and it is more about resisting the regime for the sake of resistance. The raised fist of Franz's friend suggests that this resistance will continue indefinitely, regardless of whether or not it is effective—another example of eternal return within the book.

PART 6, CHAPTER 22

The request to enter Cambodia is yelled for the third time through the megaphone, but it is again met with silence. Franz feels a sinking depression that quickly turns to anger. Why did he even bother coming here? Franz has the urge to run into Cambodia anyway, sacrificing himself for the cause, "putting his own life on the scales." He desperately wants to prove that the Grand March "weighs more than shit," but instead, he walks back to the bus.

The Grand March is meaningless, therefore it is light according to Kundera's understanding of lightness and weight. Franz wants to cross into Cambodia and put "his own life on the scales"—that is, add weight and meaning to the cause—but Franz's life is meaningless as well and also has no weight, so he goes back to the bus, defeated.

PART 6, CHAPTER 23

All people need someone to look at them, the narrator claims, and everyone fits into one of four categories. The first group of people, like the American actress and the German pop star, require infinite eyes looking at them. The second group—to which Franz's wife, Marie-Claude, and his daughter, Marie-Anne, belong—need to be looked at by many familiar eyes, like at parties and dinners. The third group, such as Tereza and Tomas, need the constant gaze of one specific person. The fourth group, where Franz fits, require imaginary eyes. These people are the dreamers, the narrator says. Tomas's son, Simon, belongs in the fourth group as well, and he is only interested in being seen by Tomas.

Simon needs to know that Tomas is looking at him, which is why he sends him letters with no return address (as described in the next chapter). Simon doesn't really care if Tomas writes him back; he just wants Tomas to have access to his life. After Tomas's death, Simon begins sending letters to Sabina, as he believes that having his father's mistress look at him is the next best thing to having his father look at him. Simon and Franz are dreamers because no one is actually looking at them (Sabina, for instance, ignores both of them) but they disregard this, which again points to kitsch.

PART 6, CHAPTER 24

Simon lives in the country like Tomas, and a few years back, he began to send his father letters. By Simon's third year in the country, Tomas sent him a letter asking him to visit. Simon and Tomas had a nice visit, and then a few months later, Simon found out Tomas and Tereza had been crushed by a truck. Simon heard about Sabina, his father's former mistress, and took to sending her letters, because he badly wanted someone to look at him.

Tereza and Tomas's death, in which they are crushed under a truck, again implies weight despite the fact that Kundera argues that life is unbearably light. Even though Kundera claims that human life is light because it does not return, he also argues that it is impossible to completely escape weight, or burden, and their death under the weight of the truck is evidence of this.

PART 6, CHAPTER 25

Sabina receives many letters from Simon, but she doesn't read them, as she ignores most things from Czechoslovakia. The elderly man she was living with has died, so Sabina moves to California. She makes a good living selling her art, and she likes America well enough, but she only likes the surface of it. Deep down, America is alien to her, and she begins to fear being buried in the earth. Sabina immediately draws up a will, and stipulates that upon her death, she wishes to be cremated and scattered in the wind.

Sabina's attempts to ignore all things associated with Czechoslovakia is, in a way, its own kind of kitsch. To Sabina, Czechoslovakia is the metaphorical shit that she pretends doesn't exist because it isn't compatible with her life. Sabina endeavors to be light under all circumstances, even in death, as she would rather be scattered in the wind—a light end—than be buried under the weight of the earth.

PART 6, CHAPTER 26

By the time the bus pulls up to the Bangkok hotel, it is nearly dark. Thinking about Sabina, Franz takes a walk in the streets, and a man speaking an unknown language takes Franz's hand and leads him down a side street. Someone must need help, Franz thinks, and goes along. Two more men emerge and, speaking in English, ask Franz for his wallet. Franz thinks of Sabina. She always thought he was strong, so he refuses to comply. Suddenly, he is hit over the head and collapses. Franz wakes up sometime later at a hospital in Geneva with Marie-Claude by his side. Within days, he is dead.

Again, Franz has completely misunderstood Sabina. She thought he was weak, not strong, and the fact that he is overpowered by these men is further evidence of this. Furthermore, Franz's death, much like the Grand March, is meaningless. He has failed to gain any weight or significance, despite multiple attempts. In this way, Franz's life is unbearably light, and since it will never return again, it will fall into complete obscurity.

PART 6, CHAPTER 27

Marie-Claude takes great pride in handling Franz's burial. At the funeral, the pastor talks at length about Franz's loving wife while somewhere near the back stands Franz's young girlfriend.

Franz's funeral is completely kitsch. Marie-Claude didn't love him, and he didn't love her. Everyone knows this, and they even know about his girlfriend in the back, but they simply ignore this reality.

PART 6, CHAPTER 28

As soon as Simon hears about Tomas's death, he runs to handle the funeral arrangements. On Tomas's gravestone, Simon has the following words engraved: "HE WANTED THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH." Simon is pretty sure his father would not have said these words, but he believes he has the right to express the life of his father however he likes. Marie-Claude has the following words engraved on Franz's gravestone: "A RETURN AFTER LONG WANDERINGS." During Franz's last days, she was the only person he wanted. He couldn't speak, but Marie-Claude just knew that the look he constantly gave her was his way of begging for forgiveness, so she forgave him.

Neither Franz's nor Tomas's gravestone has anything to do with how they actually lived. Simon and Marie-Claude both know this (even if Marie-Claude denies it), which effectively makes both tombstones kitsch. Tomas likely did not believe in God, and Franz was not trying to return to Marie-Claude. Likely, the look Franz gave Marie-Claude was meant to question why she was even there (he probably wanted his girlfriend instead), but she ignores this and pretends that she belongs there.

PART 6, CHAPTER 29

All that remains of the Grand March is a picture of the American actress, and all that remains of Tomas is a tombstone that reads: "HE WANTED THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH." All that is left of Beethoven is "*Es muss sein!*" All that is left is kitsch, which, the narrator says, is "the stopover" between being and nonbeing.

The fact that Kundera refers to kitsch as "the stopover" between being and nonbeing implies that no one can escape kitsch, since everyone dies. People are powerless to avoid kitsch, and Kundera thus implies it is pointless to even try.

PART 7, CHAPTER 1

Tereza and Tomas sell nearly everything they own in Prague and move to the country. The country is their escape, and no one cares about politics there. Tereza is happy in the country, but she and Tomas had to "break" with their former friends and lifestyle to make the move possible. Small villages under communism do not have churches or bars, and the nearest theater is miles away.

Again, the narrative skips backward, describing what the reader already knows is the final phase of Tereza and Tomas's lives. Tomas and Tereza's break from their former friends and life is much like one of Sabina's betrayals. They are "breaking ranks," so to speak, and going into the unknown. Religion is often suppressed in Communist states as another way to control the masses, just like the suppression of alcohol and free speech.


No one owns any land in the Communist countryside, and they all labor for the collective farm. There are shared supplies and livestock, yet despite this, there is some still some autonomy. No one actually wants to live there, and country people are mostly left alone. Tereza and Tomas went to the country voluntarily, and they had no problem finding a small cottage and work at the collective farm. They become good friends with the collective farm chairman, Tomas's former patient, and his pig, Mefisto.

The farmers who labor on the collective farms represent the very bottom of the social hierarchy, so the regime cares little about them, as long as they continue to labor and keep the farms going. This neglect is exactly what Tereza and Tomas are after, as they want to get as far away from the regime as possible.

Tereza finds work tending to the collective farm heifers, and Karenin goes to work with her each day. Soon after moving there, Tereza notices that Karenin is limping, and after taking him to the vet in a neighboring village, the learns that Karenin has cancer. Tomas assists the vet in removing the tumor from Karenin's leg, and Karenin goes home to recover.

Karenin, as the reader is about to learn, doesn't recover, and he soon dies. Despite the fact that Karenin has lived a cyclical existence as a dog, his life eventually comes to an end as well, which again reflects Kundera's argument of the nonexistence of eternal return.

PART 7, CHAPTER 2

Weeks later, it becomes clear that Karenin's cancer is spreading, but he still goes to work every day with Tereza. Human goodness, the narrator says, if it is truly pure, can only exist if the recipient of said goodness has no power. Thus, humankind's "true moral test" is the mercy one shows towards animals.

Karenin has no power and is completely at Tereza's mercy. Tereza technically has nothing to gain by showing Karenin mercy—he has nothing to give her anymore—but she does so anyway because she is innately good. Kundera thus argues that true goodness can't exist if there is something to be gained by it.

PART 7, CHAPTER 3

The next morning, Karenin refuses to get up for his morning walk. Tereza marks a place out between two apple trees. Tomas asks her if she is marking Karenin's grave, but she doesn't answer.

By not answering Tomas, Tereza attempts to ignore, or deny, the fact that she is marking Karenin's grave, which again is a form of kitsch.

PART 7, CHAPTER 4

The word "idyll" has always been very important to Tereza. The "idyll" began in the Old Testament, and it expressed life in Paradise. Life in Paradise did not occur on a straight line, the narrator contends; rather, it moved along a circle, and this circle bred happiness. Living in nature, surrounded by animals and seasons, Tereza found some level of happiness. A person cannot give another the "gift of the idyll," the narrator claims, but an animal can. Human time does not occur in a circle, which is why human beings can never be truly happy. The desire for repetition is happiness, and this is what Karenin gives to Tereza.

This again reflects Kundera's central argument that the key to happiness is cyclical living. Humankind, while they may desire a cyclical existence, cannot achieve this on their own. This desire for cyclical living is reflected in Tomas and Tereza's move to the country, and it is also seen in the structure of Kundera's book. The book itself is cyclical—it does not unfold in a linear way and it frequently repeats—which represents a desire for happiness through repetition.

PART 7, CHAPTER 5

Tomas and Tereza decide that it is time to euthanize Karenin. He is suffering, and neither one of them can bear to watch it any longer. Tomas decides that he doesn't want to give the injection—he wants to wait for the vet—but when Karenin's suffering worsens, they know they can't wait any longer. They gently place Karenin on the couch, and Tomas cuts his fur from one leg while Tereza holds him and whispers in his ear. Karenin jerks when Tomas inserts the needle, and then his breathing increases and stops.

Again, Karenin is completely powerless, and he has nothing left to offer Tomas and Tereza. The mercy that they show him while they have absolute power over him is evidence of their innate goodness. This level of mercy, Kundera argues, can never exist if something can be gained from it.

PART 7, CHAPTER 6

Tomas sits at his desk holding a letter. He hands the letter, which requests his presence at the airfield in the next town, to Tereza. Tereza insists on going with him, and they immediately leave for the airport. When they arrive, they board a small plane, and, noticing it is completely empty, take their seats. When Tereza had read the letter, she didn't feel any love for Tomas, just an intense fear knowing that she was unable to leave him. Sitting next to Tomas on the plane, however, her fear subsides, and she is aware of a deep, limitless love.

This passage is another dream sequence. Both Tereza and Tomas know that he has been summoned to the airfield by the regime to be executed. Tereza feels immense fear because she knows that death is imminent, and her deep, limitless love for Tomas makes her incredibly sad, but she is still not able to leave him. This implies that Tomas is her fate, despite his opinion that their love is mere chance.

When the plane lands, Tereza and Tomas see three men outside wearing hooded masks and holding rifles. They step off the plane, holding each other around the waist, and one of the men raises his rifle. Tereza does not hear a shot, but she feels Tomas buckle and fall at her side. As he falls, he begins to shrink, until he becomes a small object that quickly runs off. The man who raised his rifle takes his mask off and chases after the object, which he catches and places in Tereza's hand. It is a rabbit.

Tomas's transformation into a rabbit represents his complete loss of power. Tereza has always looked at Tomas as a powerful man, but she later claims that his advancing age is making him appear weak, as is his inability to resist her. Tereza now has the power, and she is literally holding a completely helpless and vulnerable Tomas in her hands.

Tereza walks the streets of Prague holding the rabbit until she comes to her childhood home. She goes inside and goes up to her room. There is a bed, a table, and a lamp, and a butterfly flying around the lit lightbulb. Tereza sits on the bed with a strange sense of comfort and holds the rabbit to her face.

The return to Tereza's childhood home again points to cyclical existence and the desire for repetition. The room that Tomas and Tereza rent the night before they die resembles Tereza's childhood bedroom, including the butterfly.

PART 7, CHAPTER 7

Tomas is again sitting at his desk with a letter, but this letter is from his son, Simon. Simon has sent many letters over the years, but he gives no return address, and until now, Tomas has never told Tereza about them. Tomas tells her about the letters and adds that Simon's mother was a staunch Communist, but Simon broke from the regime when he left the house. Now, Simon finds strength in God and religion, which he considers the only "voluntary association" in Czechoslovakia.

The regime has absolutely nothing to do with religion since Czechoslovakia practices state atheism, in which the state neither believes nor explicitly disbelieves in god or religion. Religion is generally suppressed in Communist countries and by embracing religion, Simon rejects both the regime and his mother.

Tereza convinces Tomas to invite Simon to visit. They can tell by the postmark which collective farm he lives on, so they send a letter to the farm's chairman. When Simon arrives to visit, Tereza can't believe how much he looks like Tomas. Standing with his son, Tomas looks old to Tereza, and she is suddenly struck by how unfair she has been. If her love for Tomas had been true, she would have stayed with him in Zurich instead of running back to Prague. She told herself that she was doing Tomas a favor by leaving him, but really she was just testing his love for her.

Simon and Tomas's similarities, like those between Tereza and her mother, are another form of eternal return. Tomas, in a way, lives again through his son. This passage marks the moment when Tereza finally realizes that she now holds all the power over Tomas. Returning to Prague was a test of Tomas's love, because Tereza knew that if he truly loved her, he would follow her to Prague.

Later, Tereza takes a bath and thinks about how "aggressive" her weakness was, and how it "transformed [Tomas] into the rabbit in her arms." She is just stepping out of the tub when Tomas runs in, yelling for something strong to drink. One of the farmers has dislocated his shoulder, and since no one knew what to do, they immediately went to Tomas. The collective farm chairman helps the man into the house, and Tomas quickly sets his shoulder. The men look at Tereza in her pretty dress and decide to go dancing.

Tereza's weakness was "aggressive," which suggests that she is actually strong. By being both things at once, Tereza obliterates these two polar opposites and they become meaningless. However, since Kundera also implies that one person will always have power over the other, Tomas loses his power and becomes dependent on Tereza, even though he still appears to be strong.

They drive to a nearby town, where the hotel has a bar and dancefloor, and they rent two rooms for the night. They drink, and Tereza dances with the collective farm chairman and then Tomas. As they dance, Tereza apologizes for making him return to Prague. She says it's all her fault that he is no longer a surgeon and instead has to be a simple farmhand. He assures her he is happy, and adds that without his job he is completely free. She looks at Tomas and thinks about the rabbit. She wonders what it means to turn into a rabbit, and she decides that it means losing strength—no one is stronger than the other.

Tereza says that she is no stronger than Tomas, but this isn't exactly true. He is metaphorically a rabbit in her hands, which implies he is completely at her mercy. Notably, Tomas dances with Tereza here, which he won't do earlier in the novel, and there are no feelings of jealousy when she dances with the chairman. This implies that Tomas is secure in his love for Tereza, as she finally is in his as well.

After drinking and dancing, Tereza and Tomas go upstairs to their room. They feel both happiness and sadness. Sadness because they are "at the last station," and happiness because they are still together. Tomas opens the door to the room and flips on the light. A lamp on a table next to the bed illuminates the small room, and a single butterfly circles the lightbulb.

Tomas and Tereza are "at the last station" because they are going to die the very next day, as the reader knows from previous sections of the book. Kundera's use of the word "station" again recalls the novel Anna Karenina, whose title character dies at the end of the book at a train station. The room resembles Tereza's childhood bedroom, which again represents repetition and a form of eternal return. Even though they will both die the next day, the butterfly connotes hope and optimism. Tereza and Tomas are in love, and they are as happy as they can possibly be, and this implies that their lives are not meaningless despite the "unbearable lightness of being."

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