

English Comparative Essay

~~Topic: A story who how to love. Are the of Milan Kundera to say love is the
weight of love or the lightness of love.~~

Love is what many humans strive to find in their relatively short time. Love is a major component in both The House of the Spirits and The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Isabel Allende uses the characters Blanca and Clara in the novel The House of the Spirits to portray her views and show the defiance and independence of woman under Esteban Trueba's controlling grip. In the novel The Unbearable Lightness of Being by Milan Kundera, by combining a 'light' and 'weight' characters, Milan Kundera is able to show the benefits of 'light' and 'weight' in regard to love. Both of these authors have a distinctive take on the portrayal of love and the way it is represented in their novels.

Kundera portrays love through multiple lives based on Parmenides' question of "What shall we choose? Weight or Lightness?" [Pg5]. In The Unbearable Lightness of Being the reader is confronted with the philosophical idea or paradox that dictates the books and its characters. The reader is confronted with a question of which asks is it better to live your life as a 'light' character or a 'weight' character. Kundera uses Thomas, Tereza, Sabina and Franz to represent the broad spectrum of which humans approach life and love. He uses Thomas and Sabina to portray the negative and positive aspects of being a 'light' character, one that chooses to participate in many sexual relations, insisting that sex is only merely pleasure and fun and has nothing to do with commitment. The thought is that humans only live once and that one time they should enjoy life and be light and free and not have to worry about relationships; this can be seen when Kundera mentions the words "Einmal ist keinmal". This phrase is a philosophical phrase that questions "if we only have one life, we shouldn't live at all". On the total opposite we find Tereza who is a weight character, every responsibility and decision is seen as a burden. Kundera uses Tereza to show how both these opposites can find peace in the middle, shown by Thomas' end to sexual relations when they move to the country side.

Love is not universal and not the same according to Kundera; a human can either 'light' or 'weight'. Kundera puts both sides of the love spectrum into the book, not trying to be biased towards either one, insisting on the reader's judgment. He uses the characters to portray the way in which they approach love. With all these characters we can see positive aspects and negative aspects about both sides. **The reader finds Sabina at the end of her life just with memories of quick and meaningless sexual relations with men. Sabina feels used, and in her dwindling years she has nothing to show of her relations and has no one to share her life with or keep her company. But also we see Tereza, always worried and stressed about her life, she has horrible nightmares and most of her life, living and sleeping is consumed about her insecurities of her body and the fact that Thomas is sleeping with other woman. She doesn't stop worrying until she gets her way when she and Thomas move to the country side.** By assigning 'light' and 'weight' characteristics in which they approach love and life, the reader is able to truly grasp and understand the concept behind this philosophical idea. Kundera is also able to distance himself from the book and let the characters themselves portray the different kinds of love,

this letting the reader to make an educated assessment of whether 'light' or 'weight' is better. Kundera's portrayal of love as a way in which humans approach life is a look into the ways love can manifest. Instead of just showing life he analyses the merits and the negative aspects of both sides. The portrayal of approaching love as being 'black' and 'white' enables the reader to apply this to his own life, each finding similarities and differences with all the characters in a way the reader is able to empathise with them. Kundera's portrayal of the struggles of love with both 'light' and 'weight' characters is a fascinating read.

Unlike Kundera, Isabel Allende approaches the book with no philosophical idea about love; instead she presents love through a story of a three generation family going through the struggles of life. She embodies many different types of relationships into the story from all the way to hatred with Esteban Garcia and Esteban Trueba to the everlasting love of Blanca and Pedro Tercero. We find in this book a real melting pot of the Latin American culture, with hatred, political unrest and rebellion. In *The House of the Spirits* a important relationship is Clara and Esteban. Married not out of love but due to her idea of 'fate' this leads into a marriage of abuse and misunderstandings. Alba the part-narrator wrote "He did not know she had seen her own destiny, that she had summoned him with the power of her thoughts, and that she had already made up her mind to marry without love" [Pg 90]. This idea of fate and clairvoyance is a representation again of Allende's Latin American heritage. The fate also ties in with the concept of love. Although not in love this couple marries. This could represent that the women of that day were unable to follow their hearts and married because the man was deemed respectable by the family. It is almost portrayed that Clara's life was lead by destiny and she was just along for the ride, because of this her relationship lacks romance. Clara and Esteban are totally different, with Clara being the introvert and spiritually gifted woman and Esteban being the conservative, political power hungry and aggressive man. The 'Big house on the corner' was big enough to let them live their separate lives, with Clara being the housewife and talking to the spirits. Esteban on the other hand would either be off in Tres Marias or organising a political rally. The marriage sustains until Esteban causes irrevocable damage when he hits Clara. Like Sabina in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Esteban is left lonely in his final years, with no wife or company. Like Sabina, Esteban goes to his grave lonely with nothing to show for his relationship with Clara other than memories and regret. Blanca defiantly rebels against her father's wishes and follows her heart to love a young boy named Pedro Tercero. Like Tereza and Thomas these two characters were meant to be together, since their childhood they played with each other and got to know one another. This relationship grows and prospers throughout the novel even though condemned by Blanca's miserable and controlling father.

Isabelle Allende is a self confessed feminist therefore this has an effect on her writing style and portrayal of love. Like most writers, Allende uses characters to express her opinions and her ideas. As a women's rights activist, she is strongly against the oppression of woman. A key example of this is through the relationship of Clara and Esteban. Esteban tries to control Clara. Over time he becomes more controlling resulting to violence and beating when she doesn't obey. Esteban wanted control over Clara so she would be dependent on him. He was scared that if she gained independence she could live without him and this frightened him. cause he knew when she was independent she could live without him and this scared him. He wanted her to depend on him, thus giving him the power to control her, "Esteban began to feel uncomfortable in his own house. His wife had grown increasingly

remote, strange and inaccessible. There was no way for him to reach her. He wanted her to be completely dependent"[Pg 127]. Clara's defiance as a woman is strong symbolism of women breaking away from the grips of female oppression. Clara in *The House of the Spirits* and Tereza in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, are totally different with Tereza dependent on Thomas and his reassurance and with Clara, the introvert of whom by her independence makes Esteban loathe for her. We see some sort of irony in that the staunch male Esteban, the rapist, the control freak needed and emotionally depended on Clara. Isabelle Allende by showing such a array of relationships and love is able to communicate the struggles and the joy of love within all these characters. Her background of growing up in Latin America and her feminist ideas all help to dictate the tone of this book, with many references to oppression and rebellion. Isabelle Allende is able to turn this into a classical struggle for independence and love.

This essay has examined how both authors differently portray love. With Isabel Allende's family saga and oppression, compared to the philosophical writing of Kundera. These two different styles and portrayals set these two books apart. Despite the fact that both books deal with the idea of love and relationships they are portrayed very differently. Love is universal, but the way in which Isabel Allende and Milan Kundera portray love is very different.

Word Count:

Bibliography:

Allende, Isabel. The House of the Spirits. London: Black Swan, 1994.

Kundera, Milan; Translated From. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. New York: HarperCollins, 1987.