

EROS VERSUS THANATOS IN MILAN KUNDERA'S NOVEL *IMMORTALITY* (1991)

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ABSTRACT:

The article examines the dual and nondual interrelation of Eros and Thanatos, as respectively described by Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse, and as subsequently and involuntarily embodied in Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality* (1991). In the course of the interdisciplinary research, which is based on the literary text analysis from the philosophical and psychoanalytic perspectives, the author of the article argues that the characters in the novel are shaped by Sigmund Freud's and Herbert Marcuse's views on Eros and Thanatos. Eros, the living force, and Thanatos, the death instinct, are presented in a dual interrelation through the character of Agnes, the protagonist in Milan Kundera's novel. This artistic representation of Eros and Thanatos, in which the drives constantly confront each other and determine human behavior, follows Freud's views as reflected in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) and his later works. Nondual interrelation of Eros and Thanatos is embodied in the character of Agnes' younger sister, Laura, who is juxtaposed with the protagonist. Laura's behavioral pattern is grounded in Marcuse's theory of nondual instincts, as described in his work "Eros and Thanatos" (1955). If unrepressed, according to Marcuse, Eros transforms the destructive powers of Thanatos into creative energy. This kind of transformation is illustrated in Kundera's characters of Laura and the episodic artist Rubens, who has received his nickname after a famous 17th-century Flemish painter. The novel finds its artistic closure in the celebration of the unrepressed Eros - through the characters of Laura and Rubens. The research findings contribute to the expansion of Kunderian studies and to the analysis of the foundational novel by Milan Kundera (1929-2023), who is considered the prominent European writer of the 20th-century. Moreover, the study of Kundera's work from the philosophical and psychological perspectives reveals the novel's relation to the theories of two great thinkers – Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse.

KEYWORDS: Eros, Thanatos, Kundera, Freud, Marcuse, Agnes, Laura, Immortality.

1. Introduction

Milan Kundera (1929-2023) was one of the prominent figures in 20th-century European literature. Czech-born, exiled to France after his criticism of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, he achieved recognition in his home country and across Europe. Kundera taught comparative literature at the University of Rennes (1975-1980) and later at the premier École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (1980-1992). Banned from publishing his works in Czechoslovakia until late 1980s and deprived of his homeland citizenship (Czech Republic restored it in 2019), Kundera was awarded the Médicis Prize (1973), Mondello Prize (1978), Europa Prize (1982), Los Angeles Times award (1984), the Jerusalem Prize (1985), Académie Française Critics prize (1987), the Austrian State Prize for European Literature (1987), the Herder Prize (2000), the French Grand Prix de Littérature (2001), the Czech France Kafka Prize (2020), the Golden Order of Merit from the president of Slovenia (2021), and other accolades. Kundera's oeuvre was translated into over 80 languages, and his novel *Immortality* (1991) alone was translated into more than

40 languages (Prague Exhibition Highlights Kundera's Relationship to Translations, 2019).

Kundera wrote and published *Immortality* in Czech in 1988 under the title *Nesmrtelnost*. This publication was followed by its translation into French and the publication of *L'Immortalité* in 1990. The English translation of *Immortality* by Peter Kussi, published in 1991, became the primary source in our study.

It should be noted that *Immortality* is a metafictional novel. Therefore, it acknowledges its own creation and violates the boundaries between the author, the text, and the reader. Moreover, the novel contains several layers of characters, which is pivotal for the current research. These layers are intricately interwoven in the novel's chapters, which explains why the literary interpretation is both compelling and challenging for the reader. Therefore, at certain instances, some parts of the current study may resemble the fragmented style of Kundera's novel, and some other parts of the research may look excessively descriptive. Descriptions and explanations are necessary due to the fragmented nature of the plotline, which is obstructed by several narrative techniques, including stratification and numerous retrospections. The

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functions of these techniques can provide a foundation for a separate study, which is not in the scope of the current research. Yet, it is essential to clarify what stratification is in Kundera's novel.

The novel is stratified into three distinguishable but intertwined layers of characters. The most evident layer contains the "fictitious" world of Agnes, her husband Paul, her sister Laura, her daughter Brigitte, and her lover Rubens. The less obvious yet more playful layer is represented by the narrator Kundera and his alter ego Professor Avenarius. And finally, the most complex for the analysis layer combines the great minds of the past who meet and converse in the unknown continuum, disregarding their differences in time and space. At this layer, the German Romantic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) corresponds with his young admirer and biographer, German writer and composer Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859), and also strolls along the streets and converses with the American modernist writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). What brought together Goethe and Hemingway? This was one of the questions answered in my previous research on the novel *Immortality* (see Babenko, 2023). As for the current study, it is focused on the most evident layer (Agnes, Paul, Laura, Brigitte, and Rubens) and attempts to restore the fragmented plot within the framework of the hypothesis and the chosen research approaches.

Kunderian studies are relatively novel and still developing. Most scholarly works on Kundera are focused on the themes of identity, memory, and exile (Kunes, 2019, MacMillan 2021, Rupnik, 2024, and Orság, 2026), political and sociological issues (Tighe, 2014, Janiec-Nyitrai & Zelenková, 2025), and Kundera's narrative style (Che, 2011, Novák, 2023). The writer's own "philosophy of the novel", as embodied in his fiction, essays, and interviews, is described by Sherlaimova (2014). However, the scholar has not researched Kundera's literary works in the context of philosophical theories. There have been a few attempts to highlight the distinctive philosophical significance of Kundera's renowned novel *life-instinct* (1984). Some scholars relate this novel to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger (Just, 2015), and Michel Foucault (Danyali, 2020). Yet, the novel *Immortality* has not been studied from a philosophical perspective. The scholarly works on the novel *Immortality* have mainly studied the cultural issues of modern European societies (Ross, 2000), feminism and gender (Ricard, 2004, McAlpin, 2005), and Kundera's narrative style and authorial games (Lightfoot, 1998, Sztorc, 2006, Paliy, 2020). Considering the existing unaddressed area in the research, we have decided to analyze Kundera's novel *Immortality* (1991) from the philosophical and psychological perspectives within the context of the closely related theories. While conducting the study of Kundera's novel *Immortality* (1991), we have arrived at the hypothesis that the main characters, Agnes, Laura, and Rubens, are shaped by the theories of Eros and Thanatos as described in Freud's and Marcuse's works. Our research findings, presented further, are provided to support this hypothesis.

2. Sigmund Freud's and Herbert Marcuse's Views on Eros and Thanatos

In his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), Sigmund Freud explained the evolution of his views on the "sexual instincts" that he later named with the collective word Eros. The sexual instincts, initially understood by Freud as the ones that mainly carried the sexual function, were later developed in his interpretation into the ones "at work from the beginning of life", demonstrating themselves "as the *life-instinct* in contradistinction to the *death-instinct*" (Freud, 1920/1955; italics in original). Finally, Freud concluded that two conflicting instincts competed with each other for dominance from the very beginning of human life. Thus, Eros and Thanatos were presented as constantly contesting drives of a dual nature. While Eros stood for preservation and reproduction of life, love, sex, and survival, Thanatos represented the death instinct, which incorporated drives for aggression and destruction. The eternal opposition of these two instincts was fundamental in Freud's theory. This opposition, as Freud claimed, shaped the individual actions and the dynamics within societies.

Herbert Marcuse, who was heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud, departed from him in the interpretation of Eros and Thanatos. Marcuse understood Eros and Thanatos as nondual, inseparable, and intertwined in their conflict, produced by the civilization's "surplus repression". In his "Eros and Civilization" (1955/1966), Marcuse posited a synthesis of Eros and Thanatos, in which the unrepressed Eros would not obliterate Thanatos but would transform its destructive power into creative energy that would oppose oppression. Marcuse saw the possibility for societies to become non-repressive through reclaiming and liberating Eros, which would not be merely juxtaposed with Thanatos but would actively transform it into a positive force.

Marcuse acknowledged Freud's contribution to the study of the human psyche. Owing to Freud, we understood that sexuality took a predominant place in the instinctual structure. He also built his nondualistic interpretation of Eros and Thanatos on Freud's early assumption of the common origin of these two instincts (Marcuse, 1955/1966, pp. 22–23, 28). Freud, according to Marcuse, achieved a breakthrough in considering death as a part of life's essence. The Frankfurt School theorist then continued Freud's findings, claiming that "the death instinct is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension", and, therefore, the movement "towards death is an unconscious flight from pain and want" (Marcuse, 1955/1966, p. 29). Marcuse, along with Freud, claimed that social systems, which restricted and suppressed Eros, thereby diminished the life instincts and, proportionately, empowered the forces of destruction. Therefore, Marcuse proposed liberation of Eros as a solution for social struggle against destruction.

There was no direct evidence of Milan Kundera's intentional reference to Freud's and Marcuse's philosophy in his fiction. But Kundera was aware of Freud's views on the unconscious, as his major work in literary criticism, *The Art of the Novel* (2005/1986), exposed the writer's perspective on the subject. Kundera

also asserted that “the novel dealt with the unconscious before Freud, the class struggle before Marx, it practiced phenomenology (the investigation of the essence of human situations) before phenomenologists” (Kundera, 2005/1986, p. 32). Thus, Kundera inverted the conventional “philosophy within the history of the novel” into “the novel within the history of philosophy”, claiming that philosophy as science was secondary, whereas the European novel was innately the source of philosophy. Kundera saw the novel as a philosophical narrative per se, but he was also aware of the proper philosophical canon and indirectly referred to it (Sutton, 2024). Throughout his oeuvre, Kundera alluded to Parmenides, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

3. Agnes and Laura between Love and Death

In *Immortality*, the adversarial relationship of two sisters, Agnes and Laura, along with the polarity of their personalities, brought to light the notions of love and death, the life forces and urge for destruction. Laura’s temporary suicidal mood was opposed to Agnes’ deeply internalized longing for death. Agnes saw death as an act of liberation from her body and all her earthly, i. e., bodily, issues, which also included her immediate family, the unloved husband Paul, and detached grown daughter Brigitte. The behavioral lines of two sisters correspondingly illustrated the Freudian-Marcuse’s evolution of Eros and Thanatos.

Eros and Thanatos, as formulated by Freud, were profoundly engaged by Kundera in the two chapters of his novel. In reality, the chapters carrying the identical titles “The Body” were part of the broader framing, while the entire third part of the novel was titled “Fighting”. Upon the analysis of those chapters, we concluded that their titles reflected one of the major novel’s thematic lines, developed in the characters of Agnes and Laura, – fighting against the body and fighting for the body. Both sisters won their personal fight. Agnes, who “fought against her body”, achieved her victory over Paul and Brigitte through her death, even though her demise seemed to be the result of the unexpected car accident, but indeed was caused by Agnes’ unspoken inclinations and unconscious choices. Agnes’ posthumous “peculiar smile”, which tremendously struck her husband when he saw his wife’s lifeless body lying on the hospital bed, was evidence of her victory. Agnes desired to escape from Paul and Brigitte so much that she even “hurried” to pass away fifteen minutes before the arrival of her family at the hospital. Alternatively, Laura, who “fought for her body”, not only survived her suicidal mood and preserved her life, but also reproduced herself through her daughter born in marriage with Paul, a husband that Laura “inherited” from Agnes after her sister’s demise, which the reader surprisingly learnt in the last chapter of the novel.

In the story of Agnes, one of the most important questions was why she died. The answer could be found in Freud’s theory of drives, Eros and Thanatos, according to which human behavior was conditioned by two opposing fundamental drives that generated constant internal tension and dictated all spheres of human life,

starting with survival instincts and ending with self-destructive inclinations (Freud, 1920/1955). Agnes’ internal death call started unfolding for the reader with her wish to escape from the ugliness of the surrounding modern world, from pain aroused by this ugliness, and from her “non-solidarity with mankind”:

Not only have people stopped trying to be attractive when they are out among other people, but they are no longer even trying not to look ugly! [...]

her right ear was assaulted by a tide of music, the rhythmic thumping of percussion instruments surging from shops, beauty parlours, restaurants; her left ear picked up the sounds of the road: the composite hum of cars, the grinding rattle of a bus pulling away from a stop (Kundera, 1991, pp. 22–23).

From the abovementioned citations, we concluded that Agnes felt herself an outsider among people and even among her family members. For this very reason, she was compassionate towards beggars and gave them alms “not because beggars too, belonged to mankind but because they did not belong to it, because they were excluded from it, and probably, like her, felt no solidarity with mankind” (Kundera, 1991, p. 44). When Agnes was younger, she used to escape from the ugliness of the world into the reviving tenderness of Eros – into her secretive runaways with her lover Rubens. Those rare meetings helped her to continue living in the disappointing world as it was. When Agnes aged, she stopped seeing Rubens, and that was what opened a pathway for the death drive, as we could assume. Assuming and guessing-these were steps offered by Kundera to his readers, as he described his characters, including Agnes, vaguely, like hastily drawn pencil sketches, following his signature narrative style, which set the stage for the reader’s imagination and interpretation.

Assuming that Kundera’s Agnes was driven by an internal death call, we tried interpreting her character through the lens of Freud’s theory of two drives. According to this theory, the death drive comes on the stage as a result of the repression of Eros, or sexual and living forces in their broad and multifaceted interpretation (Freud, 1920/1955). Agnes felt dissociated from her own body since adolescence. She felt ashamed of her body, even when she was a young girl. She was ashamed not of her body’s look but of the fact of its mere physicality, its material weight, and its impact on her real “self”. Kundera profoundly described Agnes’ feelings: “The basis of shame is not some personal mistake of ours, but the ignominy, the humiliation we feel that we must be what we are without any choice in the matter, and that this humiliation is seen by everyone” (Kundera, 1991, p. 276). The shame about her body grew stronger with Agnes’ ageing, and her body became too heavy to bear.

Agnes’ ageing, the way she perceived it, became the final straw for her. She could not stand herself getting older. During the intimate meetings with her lover, she observed herself as a spectator in the theatre. Her inner spectator could not stand seeing wrinkles and growing imperfections of her body. Agnes’ frustration with her body was combined with her growing emotional detachment from her husband Paul, along with their

daughter Brigitte. Adding to this, Agnes' lack of self-actualization and creative activity aggravated her frustration. Agnes remained alive as long as she could escape from the ordinary into two rarely happening, secretive activities – her meetings with Rubens and journeys to Switzerland. She even contemplated her permanent relocation to Switzerland, her trackless disappearance from Paul's and Brigitte's lives. Factually, Agnes died for Paul and Brigitte long before her actual bodily death, and her temporary escapes served as evidence of her mental and emotional detachment. Agnes' aging induced her hypertrophic inclination toward death. Feeling ashamed of her physical look, Agnes voluntarily stopped meeting her once-or-twice-a-year lover, when she discovered her body had become much older than before. Agnes was overburdened with her changing body:

Agnes looked upon old men with envy: it seemed to her that they aged differently: her father's body slowly changed into its shadow, it dematerialized, it remained in the world merely as a carelessly incarnated soul. In contrast, the more useless a woman's body becomes, the more it is a body: heavy and burdensome; it resembles an old factory destined for demolition, which the woman's self must watch to the very end, like a caretaker (Kundera, 1991, p. 109).

Here we argued with Ricard (2003/2004, p. 5), who stated that Agnes' inclination to death was sudden, and she was "dissociating from herself and betraying herself", and "also betraying her family awaiting her in Paris", when she stopped her car on her way home from Switzerland. We argued that Agnes, on the contrary, had always been inclined towards dying or disappearing from the unappealing world, and she intuitively brought herself into a car accident in response to her innate death call. Thanatos was growing stronger after unsatisfied vital forces, Eros, allowed her innate death drive to dominate her psyche. Going back home from Switzerland was, in fact, a betrayal of herself, as Agnes did not feel at home there for a long time. Indeed, Agnes would have remained alive if she had demonstrated enough courage not to return from Switzerland. In fact, Agnes' homecoming was a betrayal of herself for the sake of duty, and it also signified suppression of her living forces, Eros. That is why Agnes' survival instinct failed to protect her, when she had a couple of seconds to decide – to drive her car into the ditch or to hit a suicidal girl, who sat in the middle of the road.

After Agnes drove her car into the ditch, avoiding the collision with the suicidal girl who sat on the road right in the middle of the right lane, she found herself dying at a nearby hospital. Agnes was not sad, horrified, or astonished. The nurse informed Agnes that her husband was on his way, and Agnes showed a peculiar smile, which later, frozen on her corpse, struck Paul so much. She decided to leave earlier, before Paul would arrive: "She had to hurry with her dying" (Kundera, 1991, p. 299). Agnes succeeded. That is how she posthumously confirmed her separation from her husband. This separation was attempted by Agnes well ahead of her death.

Long ago before her fatal car accident, Agnes separated herself from Paul in her mind. She used to imagine a "strange, kindly man", visiting her and Paul. The visitor used to come from nowhere, from another world, and ask them one question, disregarding his obvious omniscience. The question was if they wanted to stay together in their next life. Agnes used to reflect on her unwillingness to remain together with Paul after dying, but she used to feel hesitant to vocalize this unwillingness in Paul's presence, even though the whole scene was created in her imagination. Yet, one day she openly admitted her feelings: "We prefer never to meet again" (Kundera, 1991, p. 47). Agnes used to "play" this scene in her mind many times and was proud of her courage to expose her feelings in the imaginary presence of Paul. Therefore, Agnes' urgency to die before Paul could see her, acquired even a deeper meaning. Agnes was disillusioned about the love between Paul and herself long ago and had nobody in the world who would keep her from dying.

Contrary to Agnes, her sister Laura took her body and her possible death differently. She thought of herself as being her body. She did not separate herself from it. Agnes appreciated her own body only in the moments of excitement. Laura, on the other hand, always thought of her body as sexual, *a priori*, and "loving somebody, meant delivering to him one's body as a gift" with all its insides and surfaces, as an erotic gesture, regardless of its beauty, age, or liveliness (Kundera, 1991, p. 178; italics in original). That is why it was completely natural for Laura to contemplate suicide in her lover's house, thinking about how she would present her dead body to him, the one who abandoned her. In Laura's mind, if Bernard Bertrand had found her dead body in his villa in Martinique, he would have been bound to her. Killing herself, Laura would stay with him forever. Laura, who only felt alive when having a shared love, felt attracted to death, as this death would tie her to her life's meaning – her lover. Agnes, knowing her sister's attitude to her own body, put a lot of effort into fighting against Laura's suicidal idea. Finally, Laura was convinced not to kill herself.

When Laura's lover Bernard Bertrand, who was much younger than her, started distancing himself from Laura in reaction to her unreasonable and unexpected demand for marriage, Laura's unrealized Eros gave way to its inseparable part, Thanatos. In line with Marcuse's theory, Laura's fiasco triggered her death drive. She became preoccupied with suicidal thoughts after she failed in the sphere of Eros. She was on the threshold between existence and non-being. And what finally cured Laura's wound was the liberation of the forbidden and repressed – her attraction to her sister's husband Paul, and subsequent rivalry with Agnes for his affection. Following the nondualistic interpretation of the Eros-Thanatos relationship, "the elimination of the Death instinct is dependent on the qualitative rise and expansion of Eros" (Kli, 2018). At a certain point, the reader might be astounded, realizing, together with Laura's sister Agnes, that Laura forgot about her lover Bernard Bertrand and focused on Paul, her sister's husband. The

more inaccessible Laura's prey was, the more attractive he became in her eyes.

The most astounding scene, revealing Laura's new object of passion, occurred when she returned home from Martinique. She went to Martinique following her lover on the assumption that he was heading there. In disappointment, Laura realized that she had arrived earlier than him and intended to commit suicide in her lover's villa as an act of eternal imprinting of her body into his memory, if he would find her there upon his arrival. After her cancelled suicide and return home, she visited Agnes and Paul, and this was where and when Laura's unrealized Eros found its new embodiment and realization. The argument between the two sisters turned into a theatrical performance, with them on the stage and Paul watching the acting. Laura acted for Paul, pathetically advocating her feelings and accusing her sister of being unable to experience love. With astonishment, Agnes understood that Laura's attention switched from her lover Bernard Bertrand to Paul and that the "entire suicidal drama had nothing to do with him; most probably he would never find out about it; that drama was intended only for Paul and for Agnes" (Kundera, 1991, p. 202). Laura's magnificent, dramatic performance ended with her standing with her face turned to Agnes and her back directed towards Paul, while having both her arms stretched and her palms pressed against Paul's thighs. Laura's head was inclined back, touching Paul's chest. That is how Laura, even before her sister's unexpected demise, "forced her body" into Paul's life and "engraved herself forever" on their memories (as Agnes phrased Laura's behavior in another instance)

While Agnes rejected her ageing body, along with its sexuality, and allowed Thanatos to drive her towards self-destruction, Laura stayed balanced and alive owing to her unrestrained Eros. Laura's liberated Eros, as if drawn from Marcuse's hypothesis, led her to the positive and creative outcomes – to the "celebration". The final chapter of the novel was titled "Celebration" and stood as a vivid illustration of Laura's victory over death through the unrepressed Eros. In the "Celebration", Laura married Paul, her late sister's husband, and gave birth to their daughter. Laura, as Paul said, became the woman of his life, and this was exactly what Laura yearned for – to go through her partner's life as a common theme, unforgettable.

The chapter "Celebration" opened with the narrator celebrating some unspecified anniversary. He was meeting Professor Avenarius, and then Paul joined them at the table in the swimming pool. Avenarius, their third companion of quite a vague nature, introduced the narrator as the writer and the author of *Life is Elsewhere!* (the title of Kundera's real novel). Here, at the very end of the novel, the reader returned to the novel's opening scene – the swimming pool, in which Agnes, who forgot about her age, waved to a young guard, performing the "gesture of agelessness", as Kundera named it. And now Laura, Agnes' younger sister, who married Paul, was also getting out of the pool, being watched by three people. These were the two metafictional characters, the narrator Kundera and his friend Professor Avenarius, and a proper fictitious character Paul, now the husband of his late

wife's younger sister. Laura performed a similar gesture, which "seemed to us a golden ball had risen from her fingertips and remained poised above the doorway", as the narrator described it (Kundera, 1991, p. 382). The narrator suggested that an extraordinary gesture was directed at Avenarius, the narrator's alter ego. This gesture, which serves as a frame for the plot, could be interpreted as the completion of the story of the two sisters.

Later we learnt that the narrator celebrated the anniversary of Agnes, who was created as a fictional character two years ago: "I had finished the novel and I wanted to celebrate it in the place where the first idea for it was born" (Kundera, 1991, p. 387). In the last chapter of the novel, Kundera demonstratively highlighted the fictitious nature of Agnes, Laura, and Paul. Grotesquely, Kundera played with Paul's behavior and age, making him look drunk and aged, starting from an attractive, energetic man in his 50-60s and ending as a weak old man in his 120-150s, and then returned him to the way he was. Kundera passed on to Laura her sister's "gesture of agelessness" and then accused her of being unfaithful to Paul and having an intrigue with Avenarius.

Meanwhile, we realized that Professor Avenarius was a metafictional character: he was the narrator's second self, the bearer of his philosophy, his friend and drinking companion, the rebellious fighter against the modern world's superficiality and kitsch, which he named "Diabolum", the moralistic criminal who slashed car tires in revenge for immoral modernization, and finally, he was Laura's occasional lover. The love affair of Avenarius and Laura, along with the novel's last scene, intertwined two layers of characters – the one with the "real characters", the narrator Kundera and his friend Professor Avenarius, and another one, which exposed the fictitious nature of Agnes, Paul, and Laura.

4. Rubens and the Unrepressed Eros

The analysis of the character of Agnes would not be complete if we had only compared her to her sister Laura, entirely forgetting the seemingly episodic character of her lover Rubens. The lifelong story of Rubens' sexual endeavors depicted the evolution of Eros, which could be universalized and applied to human experience beyond Rubens' character. Rubens received his nickname after Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), the famous Flemish Baroque artist. Kundera's Rubens had to suppress his natural inclination to creativity, giving place to a more ordinary specialization, law, and directed his libido to where it really belonged – to his private life. Surviving his failure as an artist, Kundera's Rubens found his solace in the unrestricted Eros. He abandoned his ambitions and passion for art and liberated himself for the sake of real life, immersing himself in his devotion to women. Ironically, the real Rubens found fame and fulfillment by merging art and Eros; meanwhile, Kundera's Rubens achieved the highest of his Eros by abandoning art. Curiously, Rubens "didn't even bother to ask himself why women, as he thought, represented "life itself" (Kundera, 1991, p. 314). Rubens saw "women as life" naturally and undoubtedly. That explained why Kundera chose Sir Peter Rubens as a prototype for his character.

In his oeuvre, the real Rubens celebrated a nude human body, especially a woman's body. Rubens' large-scale explicit paintings, such as, for example, "The Three Graces" (c. 1635) and "Het Pelsken" (c. 1638), in detail depicted his admiration of the female body. Similar admiration of a woman's body shaped the entire life path of Kundera's Rubens.

Rubens' sexuality and creativity started as intertwined with each other, inclining Rubens' focus from one to another at different periods of his life. Kundera's Rubens, in retrospection, divided his lifetime into sections depending on the evolution of his sexuality and relationship with women: *the period of athletic muteness, the period of metaphors, the period of obscene truth, the period of Chinese Whispers, the mystical period, and the period beyond the border of life* (italics in original). Kundera highlighted the titles of these periods with a cursive. Reaching the period *beyond the border of life*, Rubens also found himself beyond the border of art. Having the 20th-century European art personified by the image of Rubens, Kundera implied its decline and direction towards the river Lethe, "the river of death and forgetting" (Kundera, 1991, p. 321; italics in original). When Rubens met Agnes during his period, called by Kundera *beyond the border of life*, he understood she would become his "beloved beyond the border of love" (Kundera, 1991, p. 334; italics in original). Agnes, in her turn, had a similar attitude towards Rubens – a gentle indifference towards each other's lives and an extreme tenderness during their rare meetings. They both found pleasure in secretiveness, and they both kept their relationship beyond the border – beyond their lives, beyond their present, and beyond their future.

The fragmented lifepath of Rubens' romantic affairs found its resolution in a relationship with Agnes, who *concealed herself behind her image* (italics in original) and became the element closing his love circle. Rubens' love circle started with an image of a young dancing girl and ended with a "lute-player", Agnes. Thus, she encompassed in herself all Rubens' women; for him, she became bodiless and timeless – she became immortal. Agnes' long-standing desire to become bodiless and to go beyond time was accomplished, and sadly, she never learnt about it. One day, Agnes' body became too heavy for her, with all its wrinkles, and its aging was unbearable for her to observe, and she decided to stop meeting Rubens, not knowing what kind of woman she had become for him.

Rubens never understood why Agnes stopped seeing him. After Agnes left him, "the hands on the dial had brought his sexual life full circle", and Rubens understood he had no time left for anything important or new to happen (Kundera, 1991, p. 358). Agnes also did not have any time remaining, and when Rubens called her on the landline after four years since they last talked, his call was answered by an unknown female voice (Laura) that informed him about Agnes' death. Why did Rubens have an urge to talk to Agnes after many years, when she had clearly said she did not want to see him again?

This urge was provoked by an image he saw at one of the art galleries in Rome. It was an installation based on the Christ crucifixion scene, but with a topless woman

instead of Jesus, tied to a cross, while two men held her arms behind her back, thus making her breasts completely bare and conspicuous (Kundera, 1991, p. 363). The woman on the cross, surrounded by a noisy crowd, made Rubens remember Agnes, the woman who was alpha and omega of his sexual life, the one who started and completed the circle, the one who also referred us to Leonardo da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man". Da Vinci's man within the circle stands for ideal human proportions as a symbol of the Renaissance, with his relationship between a man and the universe, perfectly fitting into both a circle (the godly) and a square (the earthly). The "crucified" unknown woman in the art gallery, who seemed to be Agnes, became a symbol of Rubens' creative and sexual life, which turned into a circle, finding its natural end in its relation to his whole existence and the universe. Thus, in Ruben's mind, the image of the "crucified" Agnes with two men holding her arms behind her back, in the light of her death, as Rubens learnt about it, acquired a sacred meaning. Some years later, the image of dead Agnes was haunting Rubens during his intimate moments, and he stopped seeing other women, postponing his meetings, until one day he understood "that there would be no next time" in his life (Kundera, 1991, p. 367; italics in original).

Rubens' life story represented the evolution of the unrepressed Eros in its relation to art and self-actualization. Although Rubens failed in the area of art and remained unrecognized by the world, he found his solace in his lifelong multiple relationships with women. Women became his world. His liberated Eros transformed Thanatos into positive energy. This energy sustained Kundera's Rubens, notwithstanding his failure as an artist and despite his obvious contradiction with his famous prototype Peter Paul Rubens.

5. Conclusion

Having studied Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality* (1991), we concluded that the characters, which Kundera depicted in a light sketching manner, served as the embodiment of the writer's philosophical concepts and alluded to prominent thinkers and their theories. In *Immortality*, the roughly sketched characters of two sisters referred to the evolution of Sigmund Freud's concept of Eros-Thanatos duality into Herbert Marcuse's theory of nonduality of the two drives.

Eros stood for the life instinct, which included drives for love, sex, and survival. Meanwhile, Thanatos stood for the death instinct and encompassed drives for aggression, destruction, and a return to an inorganic state. Freud interpreted the nature of the Eros-Thanatos interrelation as dualistic, when the two drives constantly conflicted with one another and prevailed in the human psyche at times, thus shaping social and individual dynamics. Marcuse's nondualistic interpretation of Eros and Thanatos originated in Freudian theory and later developed into another one, which offered an alternative to the destructive powers of the death drive. Marcuse claimed that Thanatos would be transformed into a positive social and individual power if Eros was liberated.

The character of Agnes, the older sister in the novel, was created in accordance with Freudian interpretation of two main drives in the human psyche – Eros and Thanatos. Freud understood the interrelation between the drives as a duality, in which one disputed with the other, and a human's life choices were induced by one of those drives. Kundera's Agnes died seemingly unexpectedly and unintentionally during the car accident, but in fact willingly and readily responding to her innate death call that dominated her psyche when she suppressed her Eros.

On the other hand, the character of Laura, the younger sister, who mentally tortured Agnes and Paul with her threats to commit suicide, stayed alive owing to her unrepressed Eros, which found its realization in Laura's new affection – her sister's husband Paul. Laura had her Eros liberated and expanded, which induced the transformation of the death drive, Thanatos, into the positive power, into her "celebration". This transformation of Thanatos was aligned with Herbert Marcuse's theory of Eros-Thanatos nonduality and its beneficial social outcomes.

The seemingly episodic character of Rubens, who was found to be indeed more meaningful, also served as an illustration of Marcuse's interpretation of the Eros-Thanatos correlation. Owing to his liberated Eros, Rubens was saved from physical and mental decline when he failed as an artist. Contrary to his prototype, Rubens did not become famous and immortal, but he continued living joyfully, along with all his losses and imperfections, due to his self-comforting decision to find solace in women, as he came to understand women as "life itself".

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إيروس ضد ثاناتوس في رواية ميلان كونديرا "الخلود" (١٩٩١)

الخلاصة:

يتناول هذا المقال العلاقة الثنائية والعلاقة غير الثنائية بين إيروس و ثاناتوس كما وصفها سيغموند فرويد وهربرت ماركوز وجسدها لاحقاً ميلان كونديرا في روايته "الخلود" (١٩٩١). في سياق البحث المتعدد التخصصات، يستند إلى تحليل النص الأدبي من منظور فلسفي ونفسي، يجادل كاتب المقال بأن شخصيات الرواية تستند إلى رؤى سيغموند فرويد وهربرت ماركوز حول الإيروس والثاناتوس. وتتجلى العلاقة الثنائية بين غريزة الحياة، إيروس، وغريزة الموت، ثاناتوس، في شخصية أغنيس، بطلنة رواية ميلان كونديرا. إن هذا التجسيد الفني لإيروس و ثاناتوس، حيث تواجه القوتان إحداها الأخرى وتحددان السلوك الإنساني، يعكس آراء سيغموند فرويد في مقاله "ما وراء مبدأ اللذة" (١٩٢٠) وأعماله اللاحقة. ويتجلى التفاعل غير الثنائي بين إيروس و ثاناتوس في شخصية لورا، شقيقة أغنيس الصغرى، التي تقابل البطلنة. يستند سلوك لورا إلى نظرية هيربرت ماركوز عن الغرائز غير الثنائية كما هو موضح في عمله "إيروس و ثاناتوس" (١٩٥٥). فيحسب ماركوز، إذا لم يُكبَّت إيروس، فإنه يُحوَّل قوَى ثاناتوس التدميرية إلى طاقة إبداعية. يتجلى هذا النوع من التحول في شخصيات كونديرا مثل لورا والفنان روبنز، الذي حصل على لقبه نسبة إلى رسام فلمنكي شهير منذ القرن السابع عشر. تختتم الرواية بنيتها الفنية بالاحتفاء بابليس غير المكبوت من خلال شخصيتي لورا وروبنز. تسهم نتائج البحث في توسيع الدراسات المتعلقة بكونديرا وفي تحليل إحدى أهم روايات ميلان كونديرا (١٩٢٣-٢٠٢٣) الذي يعد أحد أبرز الكتاب الأوروبيين في القرن العشرين. علاوة على ذلك، فإن دراسة أعمال كونديرا من المنظورين الفلسفي والنفسي تكشف عن علاقة الرواية بنظريات اثنين من كبار المفكرين، وهما سيغموند فرويد وهربرت ماركوز.

الكلمات الدالة: ابروس، ثنائيتوس، كونديرا، فرويد، ماركوز، أغنيس، لورا، الخلود.

نیرۆس دژ به تانهتۆس له رۆمانی "نیمۆرتالیتی" ی میلان کوندیرا (۱۹۹۱)

یوخته:

نعم توئزینەمیە لیکۆلینەوه له پەیمەندی دووانەیی و نادووانەیی نیوان نێرۆس و تانەتۆس دەکات، بەو شیویمییە لەلایەن سیگموند فرۆید و ھێربەرت مارکۆز باس کراون، لە ڕێگەی شیکردنەوەی ڕۆمانی 'نیمۆرتالیتی' ١٩٩١ نووسینی میلان کوندیرا. نووسەری نعم توئزینەمیە، بە بەکارھێنانی شیکردنەوەی فەلسەفی و سایکۆلۆژی دەقی نعم رۆمانە، ئەو ڕوون دەکاتەوہ کہ کاراکتەرەکانی رۆمانەکە لەسەر بنەمای بۆچوون و نیوبریەکانی فرۆید و مارکۆز دەربارە ی نێرۆس و تانەتۆس دروست کراون. لەم وێنە ھونەرییەدا، پەیمەندی دووانەیی نیوان ھیزی ژیان (نێرۆس) و غەریزە ی مردن (تانەتۆس) بە شیویمیکی دیار لە کاراکتەری ئەگنئیس، کاراکتەری سەرکی رۆمانەکە، بەرجەستە دەبێت. لەم روانگەیەدا، ھێزە غەریزەکان بەردوام لە ڕووبەر ووبوونەمدان و ڕەفتار و ھەڵسوکەوتی مەرف دیاری دەکەن. نعم تێرواینە گونجاوہ لەگەڵ بیرۆکەکانی سیگموند فرۆید، بە تاییەتی وەک ئەو ی لە توئزینەمی 'الە دەرەمی بنەمای چێژ' ١٩٢٠ و نووسراوەکانی دواتریدا باس کراون. لە بەرەمبەر نعم چوار چۆنیەدا، پەیمەندی نادووانەیی نیوان نێرۆس و تانەتۆس لە کاراکتەری لائورا، خوشکی بچوکی ئەگنئیس، بەرجەستە دەبێت؛ کاراکتەریک کہ بە شیویمیکی ڕەھەندەیی لەگەڵ ئەگنئیس دادەنرێت. ڕەفتار و ھێلی بێرکردنەمی لائورا لەسەر بنەمای تێوری غەریزە نادووانەکان دامەزراوہ، کہ پەیمەندی راستەوخۆی لەگەڵ شیکردنەمیەکانی ھێربەرت مارکۆز ھەیە، وەک ئەو ی لە کتێبی 'نێرۆس و تانەتۆس' ١٩٥٥ ڕوون کراوەتەوہ. بە پێی مارکۆز، ئەگەر نێرۆس سەرکوت نەکراوایە، دواتر ھێزە وێرانکەرەکانی تانەتۆس بگۆردرێن بۆ وزیمکی داھێنەرە. نعم گۆرانکارییە غەریزیمیە لە ڕۆمانی کوندیرا لە کاراکتەرەکانی لائورا و ھونەرمەندیکی لاوەکی بە ناوی رۆبێنس پێشان دەدرێت؛ ناویک کہ لەسەر ناوی وێنەکێشێکی ناسراوی فەلمێشی سەدی ھەحفە ھەم وەرگیراوە. رۆمانەکە لە کوتابی خۆیدا بە پێرۆزکردنی نێرۆسی بئەسەرکوت کردن کوتابی دیت، کہ ئەمەش لە ڕێگەی کاراکتەرەکانی لائورا و رۆبێنسەوہ بەرجەستە دەبێت. نعم توئزینەمیە ھەنگاویکە بۆ دەوڵەتمەندکردنی توئزینەمیەکانی پەیسەت بە میلان کوندیرا و شیکردنەمی بەیکێک لە گەنگترین رۆمانەکانی. کوندیرا (١٩٢٩-٢٠٢٣) کہ بە بەیکێک لە دیارترین نووسەرانی ئەوروپیی سەدی بیستەم دادەنرێت. لیکۆلینەوہ ھەر و ھا بە شیویمیکی فەلسەفی و دەر ووناسی بەر ھەمەکە دەخوێنێتەوہ و بپاشانی دەدات کہ چۆن رۆمانەکە بە بێر و تێوریەکانی سیگموند فرۆید و ھێربێرت مارکۆسەوہ پەیمەندیارە.

کلیله وشه‌کان: تیرۆس، تانه‌تۆس، میلان کوندیرا، سیگموند فروید، هیزبهرت مارکوزه، ئەگنئیس، لائورا، نهمری.