

How far does de
bernieres present
mandras as a 'lost
soul' essay



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In Mandras de Bernieres creates a character of immense complexity. He has many qualities, which allow " us" as readers to be critical of him, but he also has many admirable traits. De Bernieres creates a very human character, which makes it easier for the reader to identify with. However, the multifaceted presentation of his character makes the author's standpoint unclear.

Is one encouraged to feel sympathy for Mandras's vulnerability and need to be led or are we expected to see him as a cowardly individual who rejects all personal responsibility for his actions. From examining extracts of the novel and identifying some of Mandras's characteristic traits, one can see how de Bernieres presents Mandras and therefore reveal his somewhat ambiguous point of view. From the opening chapters of the novel the reader is presented with a Greek God like figure. Mandras is presented in a similar vein to that of a nymph, " was he a male sea-nymph, then?...

It was difficult to witness slipping through the water and not believe that such a creature would not, as Plutarch said, live for 9, 720 years. But this vision of Mandras possessed a quality of eternity, and Plutarch's imputed span life seemed too arbitrary and too short. " Throughout the opening chapters Mandras is depicted as, " a dream-like creature of frightening and infinite fragility, something too exquisite and ephemeral to be human. " This is demonstrated by de Bernieres presentation of Pelagia's perception of Mandras, " a man who was so sleek, so at one with the sea, so much like a fish, a man naked and wild, a man like Adam. This is further developed by Pelagia's fixation with Mandras's beauty; she is so infatuated with him she feels that there should " be a sacrifice of honey, oil, milk, or a goat".

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She creates an anthropomorphic version of Mandras, which the real one cannot live up to and refuses to believe that the real Mandras is different to her ideal view of him. This is shown when she notices his shoulders have peeled raw and “ she was surprised, even disappointed, for it revealed that the lovely boy was made only of flesh and not of imperishable gold”.

However, at the same time de Bernieres presents Mandras as an archetypical Greek male and a “ likeable lad. ” This is explored by de Bernieres employment of a comic tone, such as the first depictions of Mandras when he is flirting with Pelagia. Here Mandras is presented as charming and polite, and completely aware of the traditional cultural values of courting on the island; specifically asking the permission of the father of your chosen lover. In Chapter 8, the reader sees Mandras ‘ fumbling’ around for a reason to give Iannis for visiting Pelagia, “ O, Kalimera, Iatre.

I was just coming to see you, and as you weren’t here, I have been talking to Pelagia, as you see. I have trouble with my wound. ” This comic scene presents Mandras as a playful, optimistic and carefree spirit. Furthermore, de Bernieres portrayal of Mandras as a polite and respectful suitor gains admiration from the reader; “ Then I have your permission to talk to your daughter. ” The reader’s response can be likened to that of Iannis, as Iannis is the reader’s moral guide. In addition, Mandras’s “ playful” and flirtatious behaviour towards Pelagia, engages the reader, “ She prodded him playfully with the implement and he caught it and twisted it out of her grasp.

“ Give it back,” she said, laughing. “ I’ll give it back... in return for a kiss.

" Mandras's love for Pelagia is presented in a very conventional manner, almost that of ' Romeo and Juliet' with Pelagia playing the role of the pragmatist and Mandras being the emotional romanticist, "' For a kiss, ' he said, ' I would lick a pigsty clean. ' ' You don't honestly think I'd kiss you after you'd licked a pigsty? ' I'd kiss you even if you'd licked the slime from the bottom of my boat. " Here de Bernieres is playing with stereotypes by presenting Mandras as at ' typical' male, using cliches to try and impress his suitor. De Bernieres use of grand declarations such as, " I fought for you more than I fought for Greece" highlight Mandras's immaturity, however it also allows the reader an insight into Mandras's character and his inexperience of life, which creates great sympathy for Mandras as it allows the reader to feel superior. One could also take an alternative reading and see Mandras as representing a young de Bernieres.

There is great emphasis placed on Mandras being " too young" and unknowing, unassuming and possibly de Bernieres is revealing an element of his own naivety and immaturity at that age through Mandras. However, this is not the line of argument taken when you consider the idea of artists separating from their work and furthermore the post-modern narrative theory which takes " a lessened belief in the importance of the author as the creator of the text. " Nevertheless it is possible to have empathy for Mandras but not sympathize with him. Therefore one would see de Bernieres as an omniscient narrator. De Bernieres illustrates great clarity when observing his characters but refuses to attach himself with them.

What happens to Mandras is horrific despite this de Bernieres narrates with such impassion and objectivity, which might suggest that the author does <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-de-bernières-present-mandras-as-a-lost-soul-essay/>

not himself sympathise with Mandras but instead empathise. This is evident in his writing and therefore reflective of the way in which de Berniere encourages the reader to see Mandras. The idea of Mandras's love for Pelagia is further explored in Chapter 9. There is once again a very comic tone to the chapter, " it's Mandras, Papakis. He's fallen out of the olive tree and he fell on a pot, and he's got some shards of it.

.. you...

know... in his seat. " Here Mandras's actions illustrate how easily he is influenced by his feelings, specifically his infatuation with Pelagia and his need to prove himself.

This scene illustrates the way in, which Mandras is used by de Bernieres. The novel has been described by Olivia Opello as, " Swinging between antic ribaldry and criminal horror, between corrosive satire and infinite sorrow. [2] This is exemplified through Mandras, de Berniere employs a technique of using Mandras' injuries; he is treated three times in the novel for numerous injuries. The first time, he has been shot by Velisarios, " there was a colossal roar...

a wonderful spitting of dust as the projectiles tore with the surface of the road, and a long moan of pain" however this scene is not depicted by de Bernieres as serious but instead de Bernieres employs a comic tone, " Mandras was to later thank Velisarios bend at the entrance to the village" because it is at the doctor's house that he meets Pelagia. The second time, Mandras needs an operation because he has been swinging in the olive tree, while flirting with Pelagia, and he falls onto a terracotta pot as Pelagia
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reveals to the reader, " He's fallen out of the olive tree and he fell on a pot, and he's got some shards of it. You know...

in his seat. " As the doctor is removing the ceramic pieces from Mandras' bottom the patient explains that he was " giving Pelagia an idea" of a " Tarzan film" he'd seen and the conversation is broken up with exclamations of " Ow! " from Mandras. It is evident that de Bernieres is encouraging the reader to laugh at this scene, in particular at Mandras. This introduces the cyclic notion of history as a revisiting, with " this same scene..

. enacted generation after generation since Mycenaean times". The author is possibly exploring the idea of history repeating itself as Karl Marx (1852) writes, " Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak twice. He forgets to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. " De Bernieres is perhaps unconsciously remarking on the circles of history and accepting that what will happen will happen, he himself writes, " History repeats itself, first as tragedy, and then again as tragedy.

However, in chapter 21, when Mandras returns from the front, Mandras' condition is not intended to be seen as a joke. De Bernieres encourages the reader to share in Pelagia's revulsion at the " feet... with bandages..

. caked with old, congealed blood and the bright stains of flesh", " the reek of... suppurating wounds, dung, urine and ancient perspiration", the " scurrying of the grey-bodied parasites", the " septic excoriations and the eczema" and the " pitted" scalp " with inflamed scratches that glistened with fluid".

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The previous times that Mandras has needed to seek treatment he has been presented by de Berniere as foolish, yet still in the peak of masculine physical health. He was fit and attractive, transfixing people with his beauty but now he is shown to be sick and repellent, emasculated and reduced to a dependent parasite. De Bernieres uses this device to encourage the reader to sympathise with Pelagia's reaction, which, makes the reader share in Pelagia's revulsion rather than sympathise with him more, as perhaps we should. Pelagia's main attraction to Mandras, and therefore the reader's too really, was his physical beauty, and now that that has gone, the reader feels confused and less 'engaged' with him.

So perhaps de Bernieres is following the ideology that " history repeats itself first as comedy and then as tragedy. " However, Mandras's efforts are enjoyed by Iannis and therefore by the reader. Furthermore, Mandras's naivete gains sympathy from the reader, this is given clarity by his explanation as to why he was in the olive tree, " I saw a Tarzan film when I was in Athens," " And I was just giving Pelagia an idea of what it was about. This confirms the immaturity of Mandras but also the loveable nature of his character. This also supports the idea of Mandras conforming to the social schemata of the patriarchal society by taking inspiration from socially accepted icons of masculinity such as ' Tarzan' and attempting to reproduce their behaviour. This further supports de Bernieres presentation of Mandras's as a follower and a character who has the inability to reject social norms by not being his own person but a character that is lacking a moral guide.

De Bernieres presents Mandras as young and foolish through his actions; for example the pinning of Pelagia's skirt after proposing to her, at the feast of <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-de-bernières-present-mandras-as-a-lost-soul-essay/>

Saint Gerasimos; " she could not stand; an invisible force seemed to have glued her to the seat. She sat down hastily, examined her skirts, and realised that Mandras had pinned them to the bench. Her new fiance threw himself backwards upon the grass and howled with mirth. " This is the first indication qualification of a slight defect on Mandras's character.

It is the first sign of de Bernieres undermining Mandras by making a mockery of such an important societal value. This is further supported by Pelagia's response to Mandras's effort, " she was troubled by the curious way in which she did not feel as happy as she ought. " This scene is also a possible pre-echo of Mandras's violent attack on Pelagia when he returns from fighting. Upon his acquaintance with Dr. Iannis Mandras begins to form something of a complex over his education.

Mandras has not had the luxury of education he is more of a primeval hunter gather, " arranging a buoyed net with a mesh tiny enough to catch whitebait" than a ' modern man. This is accentuated by de Bernieres presentation of Pelagia as one of the most highly educated women on the island as her father, the doctor, has passed on all his knowledge to her, " I have taught you to speak Katharevousa and Italian. " Mandras, however is uneducated and therefore ill-informed, the reader is made aware of this fact when he does not reply to Pelagia's letters " Mandras looked up wearily, and said, as though it were he that pitied her ' I can't write'. " He is rightly aware that Pelagia will be surprised at his illiteracy, and has hidden it from her for all this time because of his shame. Pelagia's reaction to Mandras's admission clarifies this, " Pelagia was more repelled by this admission than by his filth.

Had she betrothed herself to an illiterate, without even knowing it.

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" This juxtaposition of polar opposites could be seen as a deliberate attempt by de Berniere to undermine Mandras whilst at the same time create sympathy for him. Mandras's need to volunteer to fight for his country, is on the surface presented as an honourable deed. However, de Bernieres presentation of Mandras as a character who has a need to prove himself to Iannis and Pelagia and it is this that motivates him to join up. This again is a sign of his immaturity, which is exemplified by de Bernieres exploration of the inner monologue of Mandras, " I want to improve the world, I want to play my part in things. " On the first sight this seems like an admirable suggestion. However, when de Berniere reveals the reasons behind this somewhat grand proposal, the reader is once again made to feel that Mandras is young and naive and therefore feel sympathy for him; " I love Pelagia, but I know that I will never be a man until I've done something important, something great, something I can live with, something to be esteemed.

That's why I hope there's going to be a war. " This is further reinforced by de Bernieres presentation of Mandras as a character with conventional ideas about the role of men, " No man is a man until he has been a soldier. " Perhaps de Bernieres is making a more general comment and mockery of men in general through Mandras. This is supported by Mandras enlisting in the Greek army in the hope that he can earn the respect of the community but more importantly to increase Pelagia's love for him " " that's Mandras who fought in the war. We owe everything to people like him. And not to Pelagia and not to her father.

" Mandras is representative of a generation of young men who wished to prove themselves by taking part in the war in order to have a more respected position in society. Those like Mandras who were uneducated, would have realised that there was little other way of furthering their social status then voluntarily serving in the war. However, on returning from war de Bernieres presents Mandras as a, " shabby caricature of a man" he once was. He is no longer the fun-loving " Tarzan" character who would do anything to gain Pelagia's love and prove himself as her rightful suitor.

But instead de Bernieres creates a character that Pelagia believes has " a pathological need to enslave others by means of manoeuvring himself into a condition of complete dependency. " This is exemplified by Mandras's behaviour, " he had neither urinated nor defecated for days until the very time that Drosoula stopped trying to make him do it. Then he soiled the sheets so copiously that she had had to run outside and gag in the street. Although this account would seem to support the argument that Mandras is spiteful and instinctively malicious it could also be seen in support of the idea that Mandras is a " lost soul. " His actions would suggest that he has a predisposed nature, which warrants a need to be dependent on others.

So although superficially the presentation of Mandras's actions seem to suggest that the author is discouraging the reader to empathize with Mandras, on closer inspection this is not necessarily the case. The relationship between Pelagia and Mandras however is best summed up " but sometimes the petals fall away and the roots have not entwined... he trees have no roots and have fallen over. " We are aware earlier on in the book that the relationship between Pelagia and Mandras is somewhat superficial, <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-de-bernieres-present-mandras-as-a-lost-soul-essay/>

both are fixated only on physical attraction, we can see this in Pelagia as she watches Mandras swimming with the dolphins “ she was transfixed by his beauty”, Mandras is the same, and often reflects on her beauty and the smell of Rosemary in her hair, this love is soon swept aside after the war when he sees what effect the malnourishment has had on her and is “ confused and appalled”.

Pelagia feels much the same way “ she... ooked at those gross and transfigured features and felt a pang of horror”.

On closer inspection of the symbolism used by de Bernieres to show the dissolution of her feelings for Mandras and the build up for those of Corelli we notice a more well hidden analogy; that of the crocheted bedspread she is making for her wedding to Mandras. She begins this before the war, but as Mandras is away on the front, it gets smaller and smaller “ Pelagia realised that she was tired of crochet”, we can link this to the slow diminish of her feelings for him. Her feelings for Corelli are strong, even when he is forced to leave the island “ putting the finishing touches to the blanket that she had crochet for her wedding... which had burgeoned flawlessly from the day of Antonio’s departure”.

The difference between the attitudes of these two suitors can also be examined on how they react to Pelagia’s embroidered waistcoat. Pelagia makes the waistcoat as a gift for Mandras, but Mandras rebukes her as he feels it is not symmetrical. This further supports the idea that Mandras needs everything to be conventional; otherwise he is unable to relate. This is seen

throughout the novel such as his conventional ideas and families, he remarks that Pelagia and Iannis are “ not a typical family...

unconventional. ” Mandras also presents very traditional views about the role of men, is the author possibly making a distinction here between uneducated and ill-informed men such as Mandras and the polar opposites such as Corelli, who asks to purchase the waistcoat from her. When she informs him of Mandras’ opinion, he replies that it is in not being symmetrical that things are beautiful, he uses the human face as an example “ it is these things that make you beautiful...

. otherwise you would be a statue”. This insight into the attitudes of the two suitors serves to highlight de Bernieres presentation of Mandras’s ignorance and somewhat egocentric view. However, it could be argued that by de Bernieres presenting Mandras as ignorant and completely blind to his own naivety, he is encouraging the reader to sympathise with him. Rather than presenting a character that is innately evil, de Bernieres is depicting a far more human character, a character that is innately a follower not a leader, searching for an object of worship.

This is demonstrated by the presentation of Mandras beating the old man, “ He hesitated appalled with himself somewhere in the back of his mind. He could not do it. ” It is simply Mandras’s perception that “ he could be a god” which lures him into performing these dreadful actions and not an innately evil instinct. Hector is presented as deliberately appealing to Mandras’ vanity, his pride, his need to be thought of as a man. He seduces Mandras by offering him an education and presenting him with clear beliefs and ideals,

which he can prescribe to and follow without having to think about them, himself.

“ He had learned from Hector that he was not a fisherman, but a worker, and he had learned that what he and a carpenter and a man in a factory had in common was that capitalists got all the profit from their work. Except that profit was called surplus value. He did not understand yet how any of this surplus value went to someone else, but it was only a matter of time. He felt very angry against the King for making it that way, and he had learned to scowl or laugh every time that someone mentioned the British or the Americans. It was what everyone else did.

” Hector uses Mandras’ naivety and ignorance to manipulate him.

Furthermore, Mandras’ desire to be accepted means that he is easily corrupted. He learns like a child, copying from others, saying things that he hopes will gain him ‘ teacher’s approval’. Mandras is spoon fed and he swallows them willingly and he is seduced by expressions such as “ comrade” that make him feel like he is part of a brotherhood striving for a better Greece. However, an alterative reading could see Mandras a weak individual who rejects all personal responsibility for his actions by allowing himself to be over-powered by a figure which he perceives to be in authority, “ Anyway, it was Hector who was the executioner, he was only the hand. This is exemplified by Mandras’s account of his first meeting with Hector, “ it was good to have found a leader who might know what ought to be done.

“ This could be interpreted as a very naive assumption on Mandras’s part, this is his first encounter with Hector and yet he has assigned himself under

the command of a complete stranger. If this were the case then it would support the idea that de Bernieres encourages the reader to see Mandras as a “lost soul... young enough to be impressed and delighted by the attaching of resonant names to lofty concepts, lonely and sad enough to be befriended. Furthermore, Mandras’s preoccupation with his image and how others perceive him, can be seen behind all of his actions and his justification of his behaviour, for example his explanation for beating the old man reveals the depths of his insecurity, “He could not lose face.

It was a question of being man in front of other men, a question of honour.” This closely relates to Mandras’s perception of others, and how that can alter his behaviour in particular his observation of Hector, “Hector was so inspirational, so clear in all his explanations. He was a man who understood everything.” All of these remarks reveal Mandras as an impressionable character and support the argument that Mandras lacks the ability to be his own person.

However, it is still unclear as to whether de Bernieres is presenting Mandras as a character who has allowed himself to be perceptible to the elusive powers of the Communist party, or has a character that does not have the power to prevent himself becoming indoctrinated. Here lies the difference between a “lost soul” and as de Bernieres describes them a “communist andartes of ELAS” who had “no reason to shake himself out of his parasitic lethargy.” [1] It could also be suggested that de Berniere employs Mandras to highlight the cleverness of the Communist brainwashing, so rather than de Berniere creating a character for which we feel sympathy he is remarking on the influence of the Communist party and this in turn makes us feel

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sympathy for Mandras. The influence that Hector has over Mandras is seen through de Bernieres presentation of Mandras's behaviour, " Hector laughed and so Mandras laughed.

" This is further reinforced by de Bernieres account of just how " overwhelming impressed" Mandras was by Hector and why, " Mandras was beginning to feel enlightened and knowledgeable, and he worshipped Hector, that stronger and older man who had been in the thick of the fight at Guadalajara and routed the Italian Fascists. This account confirms Mandras's preoccupation with the conventional ideas about the role of men, " No man is a man until he has been a soldier. " It is the presentation of these beliefs held by Mandras, which encourages the reader to feel sympathy for him. These conventional ideas, which Mandras presents, encourage one to think of what Mandras represents in terms of history. Mandras is simply a " little man" caught up in history.

De Bernieres presents Mandras as a lifeless pawn to be brainwashed and used. If one refers to the poem at the beginning of the novel, there is reference to " young men walking together, slim and tall" this could be seen as evidence of a sympathetic mourning of men like Mandras, " the young, the golden-hearted of the world, that they were robbed of in their quiet paradise. " Is de Bernieres a realist overcome by something more human? Possibly de Bernieres is unconsciously presenting Mandras as, as much of a victim of war of any of the characters in the novel. If this were the case it would suggest that the author does encourage the reader to see Mandras as a ' lost soul' and therefore sympathise with him. However, despite this sympathy created by de Bernieres.

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Mandras still performs a character changing action when he decides to ignore his instinct and beat the old man when Hector instructs him to; " He could not lose face it was a question of being a man in front of other men, a question of honour. " This is a turning point for development of the character of Mandras because this is when he changes and becomes a hard lined Communist, a chauvinistic brute and most certainly a " shabby caricature of the man who had replaced him. By choosing to become a member of the ELAS, he is sacrificing his beliefs, morality, Pelagia and most importantly, his mother. When Mandras attempts to rape Pelagia, he " slapped her repeatedly about the face, attempting to subdue her. Her head was flung from side to side at every blow, and suddenly he tried to wrench up her skirt," he is breaking away from the women in his life: Pelagia and Drosoula, " I am no mother and you are not my son..

. I disown you. " De Bernieres depiction of Mandras's attempted rape of Pelagia and the subsequent cursing of Mandras by his mother and finally his realisation before his death that everything has " turned to dust and ash (and) a joy that had once shown brighter than the summer sun..

. had ...

disappeared... " is the turning point for the reader in terms of their sympathy for Mandras.

Mandras' ' take' on reality has changed since he joined ELAS; during his " three years of omnipotence" he has been conditioned to believe that the violation of women is " a natural right" and he has ceased to see anything

morally wrong in this behaviour. Hence why de Bernieres re-establishes <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-de-bernières-present-mandras-as-a-lost-soul-essay/>

Mandras as a rejected son, “ he was a little cowering boy again, trembling before the fury of his mother” and naive youth who went astray and lost touch with personal values rather than a barbaric “ Nazi rapist. ” It would be very easy to condemn Mandras, and to see him as nothing more than the coarse, egocentric rapist. However, he is as much a victim of the war as any other characters in the novel. One must look back to his early appearances in the novel, young innocent and illiterate, contented to work as a fisherman and to swim with the dolphins, to fall in love with Pelagia. With the war, all that changes and Mandras is so easily influenced by the indoctrinating figure of Hector and the corrupt way of life of the Andartes he becomes almost unrecognisable, even to Pelagia and his own mother.

By returning back to nature and being accepted by the dolphins, it is almost symbolic of the readers’ feelings towards Mandras; as the dolphins are the only creatures, which love him unconditionally and do not judge him. We as readers are encouraged to see Mandras’s death as a realisation and return to childhood “ a place where all had sparkled with delight and innocence. ” The lyrical description of his death establishes Mandras as a “ lost soul” searching for an object of worship hence why the author presents Mandras striving to return to a prelapsarian state where everything is pure and untainted consequently de Berniere places him once more in the mythic world. ” One could see de Bernieres chosen ending as a reinforcement of his earlier image; Mandras is like a “ sea-nymph” a simple and “ a dream-like creature”; who would have had a trouble-free, playful existence if he had not been tangled up in the complications of other people’s beliefs and ambitions.

He is used to encourage the reader recognise that Mandras is as much a victim of war as any other characters in the novel. Before condemning Mandras consider, " He was a statistic, one more life warped and ruined by a war, a tarnished hero destined for the void. "