

# Captain corelli's mandolin essay sample



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Louis de Bernieres places Dr Iannis in the situation of having a problem writing about the history of Cephallonia without personal feeling. He indicates to the reader that history is impossible to write objectively and that he also would not be able to achieve this task. Captain Corelli's Mandolin is a novel and not a history textbook; however his use of narrative techniques has still caused disputes and comments amongst particular groups of people.

The wide variety of narrative techniques that de Bernieres has chosen come together to create a hybrid form that portrays both his anti-war feeling and the miracles of humanity, from the story as a whole, and each individual character. de Bernieres' link to the greatness of humanity, love and miracles is done through constant comparison to ancient mythology, artistic use and music. His anti-war stance, is made obvious straight from the beginning, and carries it on throughout the book. This can be seen in a variety of his narrative techniques, but perhaps the one causing the most controversy is his portrayal of history.

The narrative techniques in Captain Corelli's Mandolin vary to a wide degree. The novel starts with a miracle; Dr Iannis removes a pea from Stamatis' ear, giving full hearing back to him. The use of a miracle right away lends not only a sense of positivity to the pre-war island, but places Dr Iannis at our very highest estimations, which in turn gives his character huge power to influence the reader. He articulates de Bernieres values for a fair and happy society, and shows us the community's values for human nature. This miracle is used as a structural device and reveals the theme, and optimism of the human spirit.

This was a physical miracle, however de Bernieres also uses other miracles intertwined in the novel. The miracle of music plays a large but subtle part of the book. The central character (Corelli) is made different from most soldiers in the novel by his passion for music. We soon learn that this passion is actually a love, and gives his character freedom and humanity. His mandolin is a source of harmony to himself, his soldiers and Pelagia. It adds a crucial soft touch to the hard jagged edges of war. Corelli also beautifully achieves this with “La Scala”; our first introduction to which is the same time as Carlo.

De Bernieres uses periphrasis, elevated language for a basic experience, to show that it is an image of joy and fun. “..... only to see a row of soldiers shitting at their perches, red in the face, singing at full heart, hammering at their steel helmets with spoons.” It is this scene that is the beginning of Carlo's regeneration. With this de Bernieres softens the image and reminds us that the novel is not solely about war, but about love and passion too. This is also approached with the love that develops between Corelli and Pelagia.

Corelli's music symbolises his joy and emotion towards Pelagia, and even ends up writing a tune for her; ‘Pelagia's March’. The main focus of the novel is centred on this topic, and so the writing techniques employed throughout often have some relation to the subject. De Bernieres shows their love growing, and the style he chooses depicts this well. Although we warm to Corelli from his very entry, de Bernieres reminds us that he is an invader. He does this through using Pelagia's reactions and her small attempts at hostility towards a man she clearly cares for.

Pelagia smiled, against her will and against her resolutions” However de Bernieres does not let her hold out this attitude, and shows us that against her better judgement, Pelagia’s hostility towards Corelli is defeated as she can’t help but fall irredeemably in love with him. De Bernieres uses another technique straight away in the second and fifth chapters, switching the viewpoint with the use of dramatic monologues and satire. He emulates The Duce and Metaxas to be foolish, incompetent and arrogant. He also tells the story through personal opinions, and so we see diary entries and personal accounts and letters.

He uses this with Carlo, Mandras, Corelli and Pelagia at different points to bring the subjects down to a personal level. We also see the intriguing use of a Dickensian style of writing, which is mainly concentrated through the first third of the book. In the early stages of the novel, his descriptions of society on Cephallonia are a perfect example of this. They add an unpretentious effect to this pre-war society, and bestow a sense of life as it should be. Throughout the novel we see many episodes and classic Dickensian characterisations.

The book follows the growth of self-knowledge of its various characters; Mandras, Carlo, Corelli, Iannis, Pelagia, Velasarios, Father Arsenios; all of them reaching a better understanding about themselves before the conclusion of the novel. Towards the end of the novel there is certainly a noticeable difference from this style, into the stark unadorned prose of the 20th Century, with its hard-hitting language and imagery that creates its maximum effect on the reader. It also signifies a change in society and the country by that time; Cephallonia had been changed forever.

Magic realism also plays a large part in de Bernieres writing, particularly in reconciliation. "The fisherman who recovered the bloated body reported that when he had found it, there had been three dolphins taking it in turns to nudge it toward the shore" The use of magic realism in Mandras' case shows us that nature has reconciled with him, and he has gained forgiveness from it as he returns to the source of his existence. It is a technique used in many other literary novels such as *Waterland* by Graham Swift and *A Rainbow* by D. H. Lawrence, making going to the sea to take one's life almost cliché in English literature. Mandras and Carlo are both represented by de Bernieres in different ways. On our first encounter with both men they are innocent and optimistic and fighting for either side of a particularly horrific war.

Both become worn down and dishevelled by their experience. Carlo's war experience matures him and with it he becomes wiser although sadder. Mandras however seems to revert to a state of childhood, and with juvenility he becomes reckless and greedy. de Bernieres uses his structure of writing aptly here. He shows us two sides of combat, the side that is morally good, but still unhappy, and the side that results in evil and greed. The technique that de Bernieres uses to show the crushing decline of Mandras is a sharp contrast between his original and latter self. Before the war Mandras' image is that of a simple fisherman, innocent beautiful and loving. He has an optimistic view on love and on the war and de Bernieres often describes him dancing, playing about and swimming. The contrast he sets against that is quite the refractory.

Pelagia describes him as an 'ugly monster'. He is primal, arguably demented, bitter and angry, pessimistic, spiritually dead and has lost his

sense of identity. The way in which de Bernieres writes Mandras' downfall, is to use ELAS and their leader Hector. Hector plants the seeds of vanity, greed and fascism into Mandras' mind. He gets Mandras wound up in his own lost ideology, and pulls him into a war without honour. De Bernieres uses a very effective technique of imagery to show us how far Mandras has destroyed himself, and how polluted his natural innocence has become.

He brings Mandras back to the sea, his natural place of innocence earlier in the novel; shown effectively by the quotation " He stood naked before the sea.... " However the weather is dramatically changed, with storm clouds close overhead. De Bernieres also uses the clever technique of describing all Mandras' movements at this point as slow, laborious and inharmonious. However none of these techniques have been contested for their use in Captain Corelli's Mandolin. It is though, the use of the historical content that has aroused complaint from sectors of the public.

Large numbers of Cephallonians are deeply ambivalent about the Corelli phenomenon. The Young Communist League writes " de Bernieres launches a despicable attack on Greece's wartime anti-fascist movement, portraying the partisans as inhuman sadists in a terrific barrage of misinformation and half-truths that completely distorts a period of history that the Greek working class are rightly proud of. " Many people who lived and fought on Cephallonia at the time have come forward openly in their horror at the way many sectors of the island have been portrayed in the book. The Morning Star' newspaper first proved its importance over this issue.

Initially it was a lone voice, but recent articles in the Guardian illustrate that the message is getting across. Due to the protests of the Greek people, the growing recognition in Britain of the bubble of distorted history and the hype put behind the issue, the filmmakers disowned the politics of the novel when creating a production based on it. The Greek people of Cephallonia claim that ELAS did not brutalise the Greek villagers, robbing, murdering and raping their way through Greece.

There were, in fact, only two recorded instances of rape by members of the resistance, but the culprits were executed. In fact, thousands of women fought alongside men in ELAS and far from being at odds with the peasantry, ELAS was extremely popular, according to German records of the time. 'Inside Hitler's Greece' by Mark Mazower actually describes how ELAS activists saved the lives of thousands of Jews by sheltering them from the SS and spiriting them into the mountains. De Bernieres makes two main charges against ELAS, the nationwide resistance movement that the Greek Communist Party and its allies created.

The first accusation is that the partisans were lazy, parasitic and did nothing in the fight against the Nazis. In fact, by the time the German army withdrew, 80 per cent of the countryside was in ELAS's hands and, according to the Germans' own figures: in 1943 the partisans killed 8, 000 German soldiers. EDES, the right-wing splinter group from the resistance of which de Bernieres approves, was motivated only by the desire for British gold and, in reality, confined its activity to a small part of western Greece and often collaborated with the Germans.

However when it comes to the account of the earthquake on Cephallonia, the use of history is completely uncontroversial. With the technical use of exact history in this part, de Bernieres shows us that this act was completely natural. Perhaps he is suggesting the revolt of nature against the horrors and atrocities that occurred on Cephallonia through the war. He writes about it in such a way that it is easily comparable to the reconciliation of Mandras. Nature retaliates and regenerates, not only itself but destroyed many symbolic relics of the past, like the old olive tree on which Mandras used to swing.

The upheaval of everyone who lived there forced them to start anew, putting the past to the back of their minds and out of sight. "... renewed their sense of life" De Bernieres was perhaps able to write a much more accurate portrayal of the earthquake than the war because it was actually the earthquake that changed peoples lives the most. He therefore had a much wider range of information available to him for this topic, as so much has been written about it.

Although his use of history in this context has not caused any quarrels, his use of war history has and is causing a great deal of anger; even to the point of literary war as some anti-Corelli protesters say. It is undoubtedly the most controversial of the many techniques used by de Bernieres in Captain Corelli's Mandolin. However one can argue that it is perhaps also the most crucial in setting a scene on which to base an love story with an anti-war spin; after all it is a story and not a factual account.