

**Analyse how 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' blends comedy and tragedy?**

'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' is a multifaceted novel that works on many levels: a love story, a war epic; and a deconstruction of just what determines the facts that make it into the history books. Set largely during World War II, Captain Corelli's Mandolin concerns the occupation of a Greek island, Cephalonia, by Italian troops. The writer with intent focuses on an 'insignificant' island beset by the larger problems of a world at war; de Bernières has mirrored perfectly the connection of the minor details of individual lives with the great sweep of history, the minor with the Meta. De Bernières has, thus, set up a microcosmic society. The novel says something profound about humanity and how cyclical history is without ever having to spell it out.

Throughout de Bernières' novel: there is a constant juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy. Much stress is placed on the fine line between the two: Comedy and farce rub shoulders with tragedy and horror. "Germany is taking everything, the Italians are playing the fool, the French have run away, the Belgians have been overrun whilst looking the other way..." from early on in the novel it is apparent that there is a tonal element with much interchange between tragedy and comedy. Comedy is usually associated with social role reversal i.e. from master to slave and visa-versa. Questions of gender identity always emerge in comedies. Comedy is usually to do with reconciliation and characters are usually rewarded for their growth and reforms in character. A lot of comedy is about the body, it is very physical, and almost feminine in contrast with tragedy which has more masculine qualities. The definition of a comedy is a dramatic composition, or representation of a bright and amusing character, based upon the foibles of individuals, the manners of society, or the ludicrous events or accidents of life; a play in which mirth predominates and the termination of the plot is happy; opposed to tragedy. As a rule, tragedies occur on the battlefield or in a palace's great hall; a more likely setting for comedy is domestic surroundings such as the kitchen, bedroom or bathroom.

The definition of a Tragedy is a drama or literary work in which the main character is brought to ruin or suffers extreme sorrow, especially as a consequence of a tragic flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with unfavourable circumstances. Tragedy depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of *hubris*, fate, and the will of the gods. The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably encounters limits, usually those of human frailty (flaws in reason, *hubris*, society), the gods (through oracles, prophets, fate), or nature. Aristotle says that the tragic hero should have a flaw and/or make some mistake (*hamartia*). The hero need not die at the end, but he / she must undergo a change in fortune. In addition, the tragic hero may achieve some revelation or recognition (*anagnorisis*-- "knowing again" or "knowing back" or "knowing throughout" ) about human fate, destiny, and the will of the gods. Aristotle quite nicely terms this sort of recognition "a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate."

In Corelli's 'Rules of engagement' for La Scala we see how he mocks the language of the army, Corelli's makes it clear throughout the novel he is a musician and entertainer before he is a soldier. "'Don't worry about him,' said Carlo, 'he is always being foolish. He can't help it.' Corelli's comic spirit is emphasised by the way he allows a lower-ranking officer (Carlo) to break down the military hierarchy. As mentioned earlier Corelli is a musician and before that he is an individual. Corelli names his mandolin Antonia because it is the other half of him. Corelli blends the masculine and the feminine and is therefore the personification of everything anti-fascistic. Furthermore, Pelagia and Corelli's relationship is exogamous. Corelli is

Italian the Pelagia is Greek. This also opposes the fascistic obsession with purity and it's rejection of diversity, Corelli and Pelagia's relationship is also tragedy within the novel because the war prevents them from staying together. Corelli contradicts fascism's uniformity and ridicules its quest for perfection, Corelli on the whole satirises the army.

De Bernières' amalgamation of tragedy and comedy is demonstrated in Chapter 43 "The Great Big Spiky Rustball". Once Corelli is made aware that there might be an unexploded mine about, the comedy sets in. Corelli uses this opportunity as a theatrical publicity stunt to win over the respect of the locals, and ultimately impress Pelagia and her reluctant father. The farcical nature of this chapter acts well as a comic interlude. In this chapter a corporal explicitly points out the incompetence of Captain Corelli's plan to detonate the mine "the hole is in the wrong place". Ironically, the last sentence corporal utters is "a dead man can't press charges. If you want to die, OK, I'll watch". Captain Corelli persists with his plan, the consequences disastrous. After the 'sporaccione' of an explosion, Corelli, who was lucky to have survived, is described as "indistinguishable from the wet sand because he was perfectly covered in it." The comic elements of the novels emerge here were the downright slapstick and the comic absurdity surface. The on looking crowd become aware of the presence of the corpse of ironically the smug corporal. The crowd are comically unaffected by the death. Carlo makes a joke about the corporal and even an innocent Lemoni refers to him as "puttana[whore]". The macabre death of this officer shows how a tragedy, the death of a fellow officer and human being, is manipulated by de Bernières and belittled by the people into a passing joke, the irony overrides and desensitises the reader.

Tragedy is drawn out in Chapter 19 "L'Omosessuale (6)". Here, Carlo has come to inform his comrade's mother and wife that he has been killed in action; much emphasis is placed on the futility of war. This chapter is written in a unique fashion, one might argue that it is actually written in two sections that are intertwined. The first section is written in an aesthetically pleasing manner, in which Carlo describes his comrade's death in a heroic, gallant and brave manner, in order to avoid causing unnecessary grief to his comrade's mother and wife and arguably it glorifies war. Carlo is the only witness to the truth; he is actively lying, because the reality of what happened might be too much for Francesco's mother and would unnecessarily upset "the small grey woman". What really happened is told in the second section. Francesco's mother asks whether Francesco had experienced a happy death, Carlo replies "he died with a smile on his lips". However the truth, is told in brackets underneath, the style is similar to that of a diary entry "He began to sob. I felt him trembling in my hands". Carlo's testimony acts almost a punch bag and allows Carlo to get his real feelings out. In the last sentence Carlo indirectly defers responsibility for all the atrocities of war "I took no part in the dismembering of Greece or Nazis the shameful triumphalism". This personal tragedy put Carlo in an extreme state of shame and grief. Tragedy upholds sense of hierarchy in the novel. Carlo removes a pistol from a wounded Greek, and in a moment of cold calculation he shoots himself through the flesh of his thigh. The book is pervaded with a sense of helplessness in the face of evil. Hope is found only by clinging to the created: beauty, music, human love, rather than God. It's a sad but accurate picture of the way many people deal with the complexities of life.

In chapter 41: "snails" the comic elements are shown. There is a lack of food as a direct result of the British blockade on the island. Consequently, that evening an hour before the setting of the sun; Pelagia, Lemoni, Dr. Iannis and Captain Corelli go to obtain some snails to eat. There is an element of absurdity in the idea that three adults would be absorbed in the task of "crawling through the impossible tangle animal runs and briars" in the hope of finding snails, it is a reversal of social roles

from adults to children. Without realising the group become separated. Captain Corelli and Pelagia find themselves separated from the other two. Corelli hears an anti-aircraft gun crack and thinks Pelagia is injured. Farcically, it had only been a thorn that had scraped her cheek, making her jerk her head back resulting in her hair getting caught on the briars. After helping Pelagia, Corelli plants a kiss on Pelagia's cheek, she starts to cry. Pelagia's tears roll down into the bucket where they had collected the snails. "You're drowning them" Corelli jokes, Pelagia begins to cry again. Pelagia's feels her nose begin to run and she describes her anxiousness that "she might leave mucous on the epaulette of his uniform" as they embrace. Pelagia sniffs harder in order to prelude this eventuality. The extract moves from the sublime to the ridiculous. Much emphasis is placed the simplicity of life on the island, there is a sense of joy in the everyday, a delight in the absurdities of normal domestic life, even under difficult circumstances.

The transcendence of beauty, the nobility of the oppressed, the futility of war and the power of love, are the recurring themes throughout the novel. These themes surface throughout the novel, co-existing in the comic and the tragic scenes.