

### **What is the significance of music in 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin'?**

Music is an essential theme within Captain Corelli's Mandolin. It is, of course, a traditional accompaniment to the rituals of courtship and love and it is the means, by which Corelli engages Pelagia's interest and later captures her heart, music charts the development of Corelli and Pelagia's relationship in the novel. Appreciation of music is used as an important indication of character in the story and Corelli's love of music is what endears him to all, Iannis even notes Corelli's musical abilities as 'worthy of forgiveness'. The book is pervaded with a sense of helplessness in the face of evil. Hope is found only by clinging to the created: beauty, human love and above all music, rather than God. It's a sad but accurate picture of the way many people deal with the complexities of life. Music serves as a means to recover the spirit from war and the mandolin plays a healing and cleansing role in the novel. Set largely during World War II, Captain Corelli's Mandolin concerns the occupation of a Greek island, Cephallonia, by Italian troops. The writer 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; in Cephallonia's society music provides an escapade from the mundane and monotonous. Music's unifying influence is none better demonstrated than in the feast of the saint, St. Gerasimos, here music, drinking and religion interlink perfectly to embody the solidarity of the villagers.

The mandolin is not only an instrument of music but also a device that acts to spiritually cleanse, this notion that music has a greater symbolic resonance as a healing channel emerges through out the chapter and indeed the novel. Music, of all the arts, surfaces as a potential healer of international folly and strife. Pelagia takes on allegorical significance and becomes a symbolic of individual over masses, homogeneity, uniformity, and conformity. Pelagia is described as wanting "to share the journey" on this soundscape and goes on to describe the music played by Corelli "to those who understood it an emotional and intellectual odyssey". "The same two notes, ritarando, played four quaver chords" the action of Corelli playing the mandolin is described with all of attention to tedious details.

Chapter 42 'How like a woman is a Mandolin', is written from Corelli's perspective. Throughout the chapter internal monologue and the internal voice of Corelli is used to allow the reader to enter Corelli's mind. Here, the mandolin becomes a metonym for music. The whole chapter is set in a domestic environment, in domestic scenes Corelli and Pelagia are allowed to escape their cultural identities. Music is transcendental, and creates a world beyond time, where Pelagia and Corelli are allowed to escape history and are released from the restrictions of race and social roles. Music transcends history; and is associated with a mystical world; this world combines magic and reality. Music is feminised in this chapter by its title; Corelli gives the mandolin a gender. Corelli clearly views the mandolin in physical and erotic terms "I wake up moistened by my own lust, clutching Antonia, pricked by the scratching ends of strings, sweating." Corelli has given the name Antonia to his Mandolin; this is an extension of his own name; much like woman is an extension of the word man. Corelli extends the musical metaphor to his thoughts of Pelagia. "I see her breasts are the backs of mandolins moulded in Napoli...and I see that each buttock is the rounded pear-shaped singing mandolin...I think of Pelagia in terms of chords." Corelli views the chords on his mandolin in terms of Pelagia's facial expressions, her gestures and moods. Corelli compares Pelagia spiritually, psychologically and physically to his

Mandolin. When Pelagia flicks water at Corelli, he entertains a dual identity (Antonia and Captain Corelli); however he manages to escape as Captain Corelli.

Corelli uses music to parody and satirise the values of the army and indeed fascism. Corelli coins the name La Scala (a prestigious opera house in Milan) to the aqua division he captains. This comes over as a mockery of everything soldierly, Corelli juxtaposes the sublime and the ridiculous here, the army represents everything masculine such as heroism, pride and machismo whereas opera represents everything feminine because it mostly deals with relationships, emotions and the drama that accompany them. La Scala even has rules of engagement, which act further to mock the language of the army and the absurdity of human pride, among these rules cited "all aficionados of Wagner shall be shot peremptorily", in this musical world Corelli has created, musical composers act as opposing leaders. When Gunter Weber first encounters Corelli he is told "I am the breve, Carlo here is the semibreve, he is the crochet, he is the quaver, and that lad in the sea is a semi-quaver." Corelli explains, "In the opera club we have our own ranking system" this illustrates how Corelli views his division in musical terms. Music is used to form our impression of 'La Scala' and it greatly affects our perception of them as an occupying force because they almost voluntarily emasculate themselves by choosing not to conform to the stereotypical role of a supposedly 'tyrannical' oppressive force.

Music within the novel is the constructive force which neutralises the destruction and futility of war. In chapter 27 'A discourse on Mandolins and a concert' we enter an omniscient and all-knowing narrative view-point. Here, Corelli wakes up early to find Pelagia fast asleep "He looked down upon her and experienced the urge to crawl in beside her" instead, however Corelli chooses to avoid disturbing her, Corelli returns to his room "and took Antonia out of her case". Corelli becomes frustrated by the fact that he cannot get his mandolin to sound as he wishes. Pelagia is "Half way between sleep and waking. Pelagia's lucid dream took on the distant rhythm of the piece" Pelagia incorporates the music she is hearing Corelli play. In her dream "the horse caracolled to the tempo Paganni" magic realism is incorporated into the narrative here. Eventually Pelagia is awakened and begins to have a conversation with Corelli who returns to the kitchen. Pelagia describes Corelli's mandolin as "very beautiful". The narrator describes the mandolin in great detail, "It was purpled about the rim of the soundbox with trapezia of shimmering mother-of-pearl, and it had a black strike plate in the shape of a clematis flower, inlaid with multicoloured flowers", the emphasises placed on the mandolin's beauty shows its importance within the novel.

Captain Corelli is similar to the mythological character of Orpheus. Orpheus was a celebrated Thracian musician whose music was so beautiful that when he played, wild beasts were soothed, trees danced, and rivers stood still. A parallel that might be drawn when Corelli asks Gunter Weber whether he's related to the famous composer of the same name. He's slightly disappointed that Weber has never heard of Arcangelo Corelli, his own famous musical namesake. Paradoxically, Arcangelo Corelli who composed in the 17th century was often referred to as the "Orpheus of the Violin": Corelli mentions how he experimented with playing the violin.

The mandolin is of great significance, however because it symbolises the individualistic nature of Corelli's personality; Corelli prefers the mandolin to the violin because the violin is part of an orchestra, and is therefore viewed as just another violin just like fascism and Nazism views people, as statistics and numbers. The mandolin represents the characters defiance of fascism's conformity. Corelli is protective of his mandolin "people don't realise how many of the great masters wrote for the mandolin. Not just Vivaldi and Hummel, but even Beethoven." Corelli finds offensive how the Mandolin is under-rated and overlooked; he takes this personally, as though the mandolin is truly an extension of him. The Mandolin grants Corelli

Godlike creation powers, God created landscapes in the creation story, whereas Corelli constructs sound-scapes with his music. Corelli almost communes God as a musician and acts as a medium to celebrate the female spirit associated with fertility and life to counterbalance the male spirit epitomizing death and destruction. Corelli accredits Pelagia a heroic status. His composition Pelagia's March is a celebration of this spirit; and represents the merging of Greek and Italian culture. The breakdown of nationality represents the desire for hybridity and fusion, both in direct conflict with Fascism.

Music carries great significance with 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin' it takes on many levels such as it's role as a healing medium, it's defiance of fascism and conformity, it's escapism qualities and unifying nature and above all