

Corelli's Mandolin Study Guide

Corelli's Mandolin by Louis de Bernières

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Plot Summary

Corelli's Mandolin is the story of a group of people whose lives become intertwined on the Greek island of Cephallonia during the Italian and German occupation of World War II. Dr. Iannis lives on the island with his beautiful daughter, Pelagia, who is engaged to a local fisherman named Mandras. When Italy invades Greece, Mandras leaves the island to join the resistance fighters and an Italian unit occupies the island under the command of Captain Antonio Corelli, who is housed with the doctor. The light-hearted Corelli is a musician by training and brings with him his mandolin, with which he entertains the doctor and his daughter. Soon Pelagia and Corelli have fallen in love.

The story turns tragic when the Allied forces invade Italy and the Italian troops in Greece are cut off. Their former German allies are now their enemies and the Italian soldiers are rounded up and executed. Corelli himself survives a firing squad because of the heroic action of a fellow soldier named Carlo Guercio, a secretly homosexual soldier who is in love with him. Corelli is found alive and taken to the doctor, who treats him, hides him from the Germans, and helps him to escape the island. Before leaving he promises Pelagia he will return after the war so they can be married.

When the German troops are ordered to withdraw from Greece, the former Greek resistance fighters led by the communists take control of Cephallonia. The doctor is arrested and sent away by the communists. Mandras returns, now an important figure among the Greek communists. He is angry at Pelagia, who shoots him while he is assaulting her.

Pelagia and Mandras' mother live together and raise an orphan girl, who they name Antonia. The doctor returns from his imprisonment when the communists lose control, but is killed when a devastating earthquake hits the island. Pelagia raises Antonia with Drousula's help until Antonia marries a successful lawyer named Alexi. She has a son, named Iannis, who takes an interest in playing the mandolin.

Pelagia grows old on the island, never hearing from Corelli and believing him to be dead. One day Corelli returns. He has in fact been traveling the world as a musician, finally settling in Greece. He had attempted to return to Pelagia years before, but had seen her holding the young Antonia and believed her to be married. Pelagia is angry at first that he never made contact, but soon forgives him. The novel ends as the two ride off on a motorcycle as they had done many times in their younger days.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

Chapter 1 is called "Dr. Iannis Commences his History and is Frustrated." Dr. Iannis is a widower doctor on the Greek island of Cephallonia, who lives with his beautiful daughter, Pelagia. As the novel opens, Dr. Iannis has just cured the lifelong deafness of a village man by removing a pea that had been stuck in his ear since childhood without his knowledge. Dr. Iannis is paid for the miraculous operation in food and livestock and returns home, where his daughter is preparing supper. He is writing a history of Cephallonia, but is dissatisfied with his latest introduction. He writes a new beginning and takes a break, returning to find his daughter's goat has gotten into the house and eaten his latest manuscript.

Chapter 2, "The Duce" is a one-sided conversation of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, called the Duce, as he discusses plans with his advisors to invade Greece without the foreknowledge of Adolf Hitler. He describes his intention to put the Greeks at ease, then to strike quickly.

Chapter 3 is called "The Strongman." A strongman named Velisarios has come to the village on Cephallonia and is performing his act in the town square. As part of his act, he holds an ornate Turkish cannon as he fires debris collected by the audience down the main street of the village. As the dust clears from the explosion, it is seen that a young fisherman named Mandras had turned onto the street just as the cannon was fired, and was wounded. Mandras is taken to the house of the doctor, where he first lays eyes on the 17-year-old Pelagia and falls immediately in love.

Chapter 4 is called "L'Omosessuale (1)" and is the first part of a confession of a homosexual Italian soldier named Carlo Piero Guercio. Guercio is writing for posterity, indicating that he intends his words to be read after his death. He describes the burden of keeping the secret of his homosexuality and his attempts to appear "normal." He explains that he was inspired to join the army by the Greek philosophers, who saw no contradiction between homosexuality and manliness. As the section ends, Guercio mentions that he has found love.

Chapter 5 is called "The Man Who Said 'No'". The Prime Minister Metaxas of Greece is worrying about both Mussolini and his daughter Lulu. Mussolini, he knows, wants to add Greece to his empire and Metaxas is unsure of whether he should resist. His daughter has made him a laughing stock owing to her reputation for wild partying and her open mocking of his policies. Metaxas resolves to himself that he will stand up to Mussolini. He wishes he could stand up to his own daughter.



Chapters 1-5 Analysis

In the first five chapters, the author introduces most of the primary characters and establishes the setting. The first chapter depicts the peaceful setting of the Greek island of Cephallonia. Dr. Iannis and his daughter live a quiet and simple life. The doctor cares for the local villagers and is paid in produce. He has the leisure time to work on an extended writing project on the history of the island. Chapter 3 continues the portrait of this quaint scene.

There are hints that this is about to change, however. Chapter 2 is a stream-of-consciousness monologue by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in which he outlines his plan to occupy Greece. This thread of the plot is furthered in Chapter 5, as the more cool-headed Prime Minister of Greece contemplates his options in the face of the mad dictator.

Carlo Guercio is introduced in Chapter 4 without much explanation or backstory. His writings will become a commentary on the events of the novel as seen through his own eyes.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

Chapter 6 is called "L'Omosessuale (2)" and continues the testimonial "confession" of Carlo Piero Guercio. He describes being moved around in the Julie Division of the Italian army prior to the invasion of Greece, and the secret love he has for a fellow soldier named Francisco, who has become his friend without suspecting the true nature of Carlo's affection.

Chapter 7 is entitled "Extreme Remedies." Father Arsenios is the obese and gluttonous priest of the church on Cephallonia. Earlier in the day he had been publicly embarrassed when Velisarios the strongman had lifted him up onto a wall. Regretting their treatment of the priest, the villagers start to bring gifts of food, wine and clothes to the church in apology. Arsenios secretly gorges on the wine and is discovered behind a screen by Dr. Iannis, passed out in a pool of his own urine and vomit. The strongman carries the fat priest to the home of Dr. Iannis.

Stamatis, the man from whose ear Iannis had taken the pea, also come to see the doctor. He wants him to replace the object so he will be partly deaf again. The reason is that he can now hear his wife's nagging and complaining more clearly. Dr. Iannis refuses to put it back and advises Stamatis to simply be kinder to his wife.

Chapter 8 is called "A Funny Kind of Cat". A young girl named Lemoni comes to Dr. Ianni to tell him she has found a funny looking cat that is caught in a barbed fence. She takes him to the animal, which turns out to be a young pine marten. He releases the animal from the tangled wire and tells the girl he will take it home to help it, but he intends to kill the animal and tell the girl that it died from its injuries. When he gets it home, however, he is unable to kill it and instead begins to care for it.

In Chapter 9, called "August 15, 1940," Dr. Iannis is engaged in heated but friendly conversation at the village cafe with Stamatis, Arsenios, and Kokolis, an outspoken communist. He is called away by Pelagia to attend to Mandras, who, while flirting with Pelagia has fallen out of a tree and landed on a pot, receiving several shards of pottery stuck in his backside. The doctor removes the shards and asks Mandras if he intends to ask to marry his daughter. Mandras replies that he is waiting to see what happens with the war, as he would not want to leave Pelagia a widow. When Dr. Iannis returns to the cafe, his friends are subdued. Word has come over the radio that the Italians have sunk a Greek battleship. Indignant, the men leave and go to the church in solidarity.

Chapter 10 is called "L'Omosessuale (10)". Carlo is called before a Colonel named Rivolta and asked to bring a reliable man with him for a special mission. He takes Francisco with him. The men are told that some bandits have taken over a watchtower near the Greek border, and they are to take the tower back after dark. They are suspicious when they are issued Greek uniforms and a British machine gun for the



attack. They successfully burn down the tower, killing the ten men in it. They realize afterward that the men are also Italians and the incident has been set up to look like an attack by the Greeks. They were not expected to live, but to be found dead in Greek uniforms.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Carlo's memoirs are continued in Chapters 6 and 10, and outline his service in the Italian army under increasingly absurd conditions. The plan laid out in Chapter 2 is being implemented, causing confusion among the troops. The character of Carlo is further developed, and his loyalty, devotion and bravery are displayed.

Chapters 7 and 8 continue the light-hearted portrait of life on the quiet island. The character of Arsenios is developed. He is a drunkard and a glutton and not especially devoted to his calling. This character will be transformed significantly over the course of the novel.

Chapter 9 marks a turning point in the narrative. Cephallonia has been isolated from the fighting up to this point, but in the summer of 1940 Greece is drawn into the war with Italy. Mandras, the young man in love with Pelagia, intends to fight as a soldier rather than stay and marry the doctor's daughter. The older men of the village for whom the issue has always been philosophical realize that a real change is coming. They group together to face it.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary

Chapter 11 is called "Pelagia and Mandras". The two young people, now in love with one another, go about their daily routines while holding an internal conversation with themselves. Pelagia worries that Mandras has not yet come to see her and frets about the fact that her father has told Mandras she will have no dowry. Mandras sets about preparing his nets for his day of fishing and resolves to ask Pelagia to marry him, but also to volunteer to serve in the Greek army. They will wait until he comes back from fighting to marry.

Chapter 12 is entitled "All The Saint's Miracles." The body of St. Gerasimos, the patron saint of Cephallonia, is preserved and cared for in the village. Twice a year the village holds large feasts in his honor during which his body is taken out and passed over several inmates of the insane asylum in hopes that he will miraculously cure them. Dr. Iannis, Pelagia and the rest of the village watch the ritual and are overjoyed when a young boy who was unable to move is apparently cured. Another insane woman is also apparently cured. Afterwards, the entire village descends into a drunken revelry during which Mandras proposes to Pelagia.

Chapter 13 is called "Delirium," a title that describes Pelagia's emotional state when she does not see Mandras for several days following the feast. She decides not to stay around her house waiting for him and goes walking. She wanders down to the seashore where she sees a beautiful young man, fully naked, swimming in the sea setting up a net. She realizes it is Mandras, and watches him for a time.

Chapter 14 is called "Grazzi." It is a first person account by the Italian envoy to Greece who describes his own complete surprise at Mussolini's sudden decision to attack Greece. It is his unhappy task to deliver a telegram from Mussolini to Prime Minister Metaxas of Greece demanding that Greece allow Italian troops to occupy the country. Metaxas refuses.

Chapter 15 is called "L'Omosessuale (4)" and is a continuing installment of the testimonial of Carlo the Italian soldier. In his narrative, he reveals that he is writing the story from the island of Cephallonia during a peaceful time. Francisco, the young man for whom he had once felt such great desire, has "vanished" and been replaced in his thoughts by a Captain Antonio Corelli. This is all that is mentioned of future events before Carlo returns to his narrative. Carlo and Francisco were put in charge of training Albanians to infiltrate Greece and make more provocation to war. They know nothing about how to train men, and in the end the Albanians simply run off. The Italian troops are eventually sent into Greece, encountering no resistance at first, but unaware that the Greek soldiers are falling back to consolidate. The Italians are drawn out and surrounded and face heavy casualties.



Chapters 11-15 Analysis

In Chapters 11, 12 and 13, the villagers of Cephallonia carry on as usual for the most part. There is a large feast attended by everyone, and Pelagia and Mandras develop their youthful love for one another. They become engaged but agree they will wait until after the war to become married. This engagement becomes a source of conflict later in the novel as Pelagia later falls in love with Corelli but is still engaged to Mandras. It also sets a theme that is repeated later, of Pelagia putting off her romantic interests until after the war is over. This will ultimately be a cause of sorrow for her.

Chapter 14 continues the supporting thread of the historical narrative that explains how the Italians and later the Germans come to occupy the island of Cephallonia. This occupation is foreshadowed in Chapter 15, as well, in which Carlo reveals he is on the island as he is writing his memoir. It is the first mention of Captain Corelli, who is not yet introduced.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

Chapter 16 is called "Letters to Mandras at the Front." Mandras has gone to war and Pelagia writes him faithfully, although she does not hear back. She does not know if her letters are reaching him. She gives him news of the island. The older men who used to argue about politics have come together to support the war. Italian families are sometimes harassed in the village. With all the young men gone, the festivals are subdued.

Chapter 17 is the fifth installment of Carlo's testimony, called "L'Omosessuale (5)". The conditions fighting in Greece have become deplorable. Extreme cold, a lack of adequate clothing and food, and the persistent attacks of the Greeks have driven Francisco nearly mad. Francisco writes a letter to his mother and gives it to Carlo to deliver in case of his death. Carlo writes that he did eventually deliver the letter.

Chapter 18 is called "The Continuing Literary Travails of Dr. Iannis." The doctor continues to struggle writing his history of Cephallonia. He worries over his daughter, who is obviously depressed over not receiving any response to her letters to Mandras. He tries to distract her by making her angry at him, and is pleased when she seems to become less upset by Mandras' absence.

Chapter 19 is entitled "L'Omosessuale (6)". Carlo describes the day he delivered Francisco's letter to his mother. He comforts her with lies that Francisco died on a bright day, shot valiantly through the heart as he whispered the name of his mother and the Virgin Mary. In reality, he writes, Francisco committed virtual suicide by advancing alone against Greek forces and died in Carlo's arms in a muddy and filthy trench.

Chapter 20 is called "The Wild Man of the Ice." Dr. Iannis has gone into the mountains to tend to a shepherd and Pelagia is home alone. She comes into her house to find a crazed-looking man sitting inside. He is emaciated and his hair and beard are long and matted. He is filthy and is dressed in crude clothes made from furs. His body is covered with sores. Pelagia is shocked, and tells the man he cannot stay, but can return when her father comes back. She suddenly realizes the man is Mandras, unrecognizable in his state.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Pelagia demonstrates her considerable intelligence and literary ability in her letters to Mandras, but her efforts are largely wasted because the simple man cannot read. This is not known to Pelagia, and she assumes the reason Mandras does not write back is because he has lost interest in her. The letters are not meaningless to Mandras, however. He holds on to them as a symbol of his love and desire for Pelagia. This symbol is to be destroyed later in the novel. When Mandras returns in Chapter 20, he is

practically insane, driven by an instinct to return home. He has lost everything except Pelagia's letters.

Chapters 17 and 19 are installments from Carlo's memoirs explaining how his beloved Francisco met his death, and how he represented his death to Francisco's mother. The conditions endured by Carlo are unimaginable, and his fortitude and loyalty to his friend in spite of the deplorable state of the war are admirable.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary

Chapter 21 is called "Pelagia's First Patient." Pelagia runs to fetch Mandras' mother, and together they cut his hair and bathe him. Pelagia finds she is able to recognize the cause of many of his sores and injuries and knows the treatment her father would use for them. When Dr. Iannis returns home, he finds Mandras and his mother sleeping in his home. He examines Mandras and praises his daughter for her excellent diagnoses and treatment.

Chapter 22 is called "Mandras Behind the Veil." It is the internal narrative of how Mandras came to his present state. His military unit was wiped out by German troops and he was the only survivor. He made his way through ice and snow back to Cephallonia, driven by the memory of Pelagia and home. He had not answered any of Pelagia's letters because he could not read. He carried the letters with him in hopes that she would read them to him aloud when he returned.

Chapter 23 is called "April 30th, 1941," referring to the day that Italian troops arrive to occupy Cephallonia. Prior to their arrival, Mandras has slipped into a series of unresponsive mental states, sometimes not moving for several days. He has been moved to his mother's home, where he requires complete attention. Oddly, he sometimes awakes from his stupors and is completely normal and sociable for several days before sinking back into unresponsiveness.

On April 30th, Pelagia and Dr. Iannis watch as a small troop of Italian soldiers, led by Captain Corelli, march past their house. As they pass, Corelli spies the young women and calls out an order of "eyes left" to his men. They all look in Pelagia's direction and strike humorous poses, making comic faces. Pelagia suppresses a laugh.

Chapter 24 is entitled "A Most Ungracious Surrender." The narrator is once again Carlo Guercio, who has been transferred to the Acqui Unit that is occupying Cephallonia. He is heartbroken about the loss of Francisco but has been charmed by the irreverent Captain Corelli, who recruits him to join a group of soldiers led by Corelli who meet every morning to sing as they use the latrines.

Chapter 25 is called "Resistance." In exchange for access to medical supplies, Dr. Iannis has agreed to allow Captain Corelli to stay in his home. He berates Corelli openly, but Pelagia is entertained by his irreverent behavior. He explains to Pelagia that he is a musician, and indicates his mandolin, which he has named Antonia. He sleeps in Pelagia's bed and she sleeps in the kitchen.



Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Mandras' madness continues, and his return is an upheaval for Pelagia. She did not know he could not read. She misunderstood his lack of communication for a cooling of his love, and based on that assumption her own love for him cooled. She does not want to hurt him, and reads her letters to him as he asks her to, but changes the words where she explains she no longer holds him to his promise of marriage.

Chapter 21 more fully introduces Drousula, Mandras' mother, who will become a more central figure in the later portion of the novel. Captain Corelli finally arrives in the narrative in Chapter 23, a turning point in the book when Italian troops occupy the island. The presence of the troops is a violation of Dr. Iannis' principles, but he finds it partially helpful as well, since he is able to get medical supplies from the Italians that he could not get before. Corelli moves into the doctor's house, a development that sets up the central theme of the narrative, the burgeoning love between Corelli and Pelagia.



Chapters 26-30

Chapters 26-30 Summary

Chapter 26 is entitled "Sharp Edges." Corelli continues to be somewhat baffled by Pelagia, who intentionally treats him brusquely. She begins to soften more, however, when she finds him playing happily with the girl Lemoni. On the day the Italians arrived, Mandras had climbed from his bed, cured. He decided he would go away and fight with the resistance, and comes to Pelagia to tell her his plan. She is upset.

Chapter 27 is called "A Discourse on Mandolins and a Concert." Corelli wakes up early and quietly practices his mandolin so as not to wake Pelagia. She does waken and is pleased to hear the music. Later, Dr. Iannis and Pelagia insist that Corelli play a piece for them, but Dr. Iannis is frustrated when Corelli silently taps out the orchestral parts when the mandolin does not play.

Chapter 28 is called "Liberating the Masses (1)" Mandras has connected with some other young men who want to fight the occupying Germans and Italians. The small group wanders aimlessly for a time before being found out by a group of Communist resistance fighters who force Mandras to join with them. Mandras has no firm political beliefs, and is happy to join what seems like an organized group. He is taken to a small village and initiated into the group after he brutally beats an old man and shoots him dead.

Chapter 29 is called "Etiquette." Corelli feels guilty about imposing on Dr. Iannis and Pelagia and decides he should at least learn to greet others in Greek. He goes to Dr. Iannis and asks him how to say "good morning" in Greek. Dr. Iannis teaches him a Greek phrase, but it does not mean "good morning." It is instead an obscenity. Corelli insults several of the islanders before learning what the words actually mean.

Chapter 30 is called "The Good Nazi (1)." German troops are stationed near the main group of Italian troops on the mainland opposite the island. A young German officer named Günter Weber is alone on the beach when he sees Corelli, Carlo and a group of other Italian soldiers arrive with a group of prostitutes. The women strip naked and go swimming, and Günter approaches the men to get a closer look at the women. Corelli greets him openly and makes him an honorary member of his singing group.

Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Pelagia and her father both find Captain Corelli likeable, but are torn between their natural inclinations and the feeling that they should resent his presence as a soldier from Italy who is part of an occupying force. Their dilemma is relatively benign compared to the choices Mandras is forced to make. Cut loose from his native island, the young man is easily led by the dogmatic Hector, the leader of a group of thugs organized supposedly to fight the Italians and Germans.

Gunter Weber is introduced in Chapter 30 under the heading of a "good" Nazi. Like several of the other characters, he is drawn to Corelli personally. The author hints in this chapter at the tragic end their friendship will reach.



Chapters 31-35

Chapters 31-35 Summary

Chapter 31 is called "A Problem with Eyes." Despite her intention to remain aloof from Corelli, Pelagia finds herself unable to keep from looking at him as he sits at the table of her father's house working on paperwork. They repeatedly catch one another's eyes, and then quickly look away. Pelagia decides she will not look away the next time he catches her looking, and the two engage in a comical staring contest that ends in laughter. Dr. Iannis scolds them lightly, and realizes the attraction that is forming between them.

Chapter 32 is called "Liberating the Masses (2)" and rejoins Mandras in his resistance group under a leader named Hector. Hector is stealing a sheep from a villager over the protests of the sheep owner. The other resistance groups supported by the British always pay for the sheep they take, he complains to Hector. Hector derides the villager and threatens violence. Mandras witnesses this and adds his own scorn for the villager in order to gain favor with Hector.

Chapter 33 is entitled "A Problem with Hands," and mirrors Chapter 31. Pelagia is fascinated watching Corelli compose music at the table. She moves behind him to see what he is writing and is surprised to find she has placed her hand on his shoulder. She is uncertain what to do, not wishing to pull it away quickly or to leave it there too long. When the pet pine marten scratches at the door, she uses it as an excuse to leave his side. When she does, Corelli realizes her hand had been on his shoulder. The two young people proceed to tease one another.

Chapter 34 is called "Liberating the Masses (3)." Hector has been called before a British officer named Lt-Col Myers. The British are supporting various Greek resistance groups with money and supplies, but the officer is angry with Hector because his communist group is stealing from Greek people and raiding the other resistance groups, killing them and taking their supplies. Myers delivers a written ultimatum to Hector to stop his infighting or he will be cut off. Hector takes the ultimatum, but has no intention of heeding it.

Chapter 35 is called "A Pamphlet Distributed on the Island, Entitled with the Fascist Slogan 'Believe, Fight, and Obey'." It reproduces a sarcastic propaganda pamphlet aimed against Mussolini. It describes the Italian leader as a madman and a liar using sarcastically false praise.

Chapters 31-35 Analysis

Three chapters describe the budding romance between Pelagia and Corelli, each with a similar title. The first two, Chapters 31 and 33, are called "A Problem With Eyes" and "A Problem With Hands." At first, the two characters find themselves catching each other's



eyes frequently. In Chapter 33, Pelagia feels so comfortable with Corelli that she unwittingly begins to touch him as if he is already a close friend or relative. The third chapter in this theme is Chapter 40, entitled "A Problem With Lips."

Interspersed with the chapters on the young romance are chapters outlining Mandras' adventures with the Greek communist fighters. These fighters will become more prominent near the end of the novel, and their background is being laid here in the central part of the book.

Chapter 35 stands alone as a propaganda pamphlet denouncing Mussolini in humorous and sarcastic language. It is partly produced by Dr. Iannis, but this fact is not revealed until later in the novel.



Chapters 36-40

Chapters 36-40 Summary

Chapter 36 is called "Education." Hector and his men, including Mandras, are roasting the sheep they have stolen and talking around a campfire. Hector reads to the men from a book by Lenin, lecturing them on the principles of Marxist communism. Most of the men silently dismiss Hector. They serve under him because he has threatened to kill them if they do not. Some will abandon him that night, but Mandras will stay. He does not understand much of what Hector says, but wants to learn more.

Chapter 37 bears the long title "An Episode Confirming Pelagia's Belief that Men do not Know the Difference Between Bravery and a Lack of Common Sense." The episode referred to in the title is Pelagia's realization that her father and Carlo are the ones responsible for writing and distributing the anti-Mussolini pamphlet that has been circulating on the island.

Chapter 38 is called "The Origins of Pelagia's March." Captain Corelli awakes with a severe hangover, unable to remember the night before. Pelagia is offering him water and explains his ridiculous actions. His soccer team had won its match the previous day and he had been brought home by the German soldier Weber. In his inebriation he had kissed Pelagia's feet professed his undying love and sung to her loudly. As Corelli lays in his discomfort and watches Pelagia move about, a tune runs through his mind. He begins to develop it and imagine the notes as he plays them on the mandolin.

Chapter 39 is called "Arsenius." The war has transformed the priest, who feels he has let down God as well as the Greek people. He gets a dog and sets out on foot to preach. He travels from outpost to outpost, being turned away by the Germans but welcomed by the Italians, who do not understand his dramatic preaching in Greek, but enjoy the spectacle. Living on handouts and walking everywhere, he eventually loses his great bulk and becomes emaciated. He neglects his parish on Cephallonia.

Chapter 40 is entitled "A Problem with Lips." It continues the inadvertent flirtation of Pelagia and Captain Corelli. As he is entering the house one day, Pelagia passes him in the doorway. Without thinking she puts a hand on his face and gives him a kiss on the cheek and continues walking into the yard. She stops cold when she realizes what she has done. She turns to find Corelli staring at her. She dismisses the kiss as a mistake, she was thinking Corelli was her father, she explains. Despite her insistence that he not tease her about it, Corelli drops to his knees and makes a comic scene. As she is walking through the door, he takes her face and gives her a long kiss on the forehead. He immediately apologizes, saying he had mistaken her for the doctor.



Chapters 36-40 Analysis

The indoctrination of Mandras into the communist philosophy continues at the feet of Hector, the thuggish leader of the communist fighters. The other members of the group do not buy into his lecture, but Mandras is susceptible to his influence.

The origin of the anti-Italian propaganda pamphlet is deduced by Pelagia, who is astonished that anyone would take such a risk. Corelli is aware of it but does nothing to search for the authors. Later it is learned that he suspects the doctor but deliberately does not follow up on his hunch. Corelli's attraction for Pelagia grows, and they share a quick kiss.



CHapters 41-45

CHapters 41-45 Summary

Chapter 41 is called "Snails." Faced with a food shortage on the island, Dr. Iannis proposes that the villagers collect snails from the forest to eat. He, Pelagia, Corelli are led by the young girl Lemoni to where she knows there are many snails. Corelli and Pelagia become separated from the others and share their first romantic kiss.

Chapter 42 is called "How like a Woman is a Mandolin." It is a reverie in the voice of Captain Corelli in which he imagines Pelagia in various romantic situations and ponders her beauty.

Chapter 43 is called "The Great Big Spiky Rustball," which refers to an unexploded mine from World War I that washes ashore near the village. It is discovered by Lemoni, who climbs all over the potentially explosive device and then mentions it to Corelli. Alarmed, Corelli rushes to the mine and directs his soldiers to bring dynamite in order to blow it up. Corelli moves the villagers to the top of a nearby cliff to watch. He has a trench dug nearby in the sand where he intends to stand for protection when he detonates the dynamite.

One soldier is decapitated by a piece of metal. Other villagers are wounded slightly by the hot falling metal. Corelli is blasted out of his hole and partly buried in the sand, where he is discovered by Carlo. He survives, but is temporarily deaf.

Chapter 44 is called "Theft." Kokolis is awakened by sounds from his chicken pen. On investigating, he finds two Italian soldiers stealing his chickens. He catches the soldiers and marches them to Dr. Iannis' house to present them to Corelli. Corelli surprises Pelagia by pulling his gun on the soldiers and forcing them crawl on their bellies to lick Kokolis' boots.

Chapter 45 is called "A Time of Innocence." Pelagia and Corelli pursue their romance, finding opportunities to be alone together. They do not sleep together, both understanding the potential complications should she become pregnant. Instead, they talk together about what they will do after the war is over.

CHapters 41-45 Analysis

Corelli becomes something of a local hero when he entertains the islanders by exploding an old mine that is found washed up on the beach, and when he punishes two of his men for stealing chickens.

The romance between Pelagia and Corelli becomes more serious, and the two begin to make plans for after the war. Chapter 42, called "How like a Woman is a Mandolin" Corelli reflects on his attraction for Pelagia. The title of the chapter also suggests an

interpretation for the title of the novel. "Corelli's Mandolin" refers not only to his instrument, but to Pelagia herself.



Chapters 46-50

Chapters 46-50 Summary

Chapter 46 is called "Bunnios." The solitary goatherd Alekos watches the war unfold below him, unaffected by the turmoil. One day he witnesses a British spy parachute from a plane and feeds the man for several days, believing him to be some kind of angel sent from God. Alekos takes the spy to Dr. Iannis, who learns his name is "Bunny" Warren, a British lieutenant. Dr. Iannis gives him some clothes and sends him on his way.

Chapter 47 is entitled "Dr. Iannis Counsels his Daughter." Iannis sits down with his daughter and offers practical advice to her about her growing romance with Corelli. She at first denies any feelings for him, but he sees through her denial. He reminds her she is still betrothed to Mandras, and that if she decides to marry Corelli she would have to leave Greece because other Greeks would not accept her marrying an Italian. Pelagia listens, but is still indignant, which her father takes as a sign of her integrity.

Chapter 48 is called "La Scala." Corelli's singing group has taken to gathering at the doctor's home, including Günter Weber, the young German officer. Before singing, Corelli and Weber discuss ethics and morality and the German theories about the master race.

Chapter 49 is called "Dr. Iannis Advises Captain Corelli." Iannis approaches Corelli and gives him much the same advice as he had given his daughter earlier, but with one contradiction. He tells Corelli that he would have to live in Cephallonia, because Pelagia could not live anywhere else. That would mean he would have little opportunity to be a musician.

Chapter 50 is called "A Time of Hiatus." The Allied powers are winning the war in Europe, but they do not come to liberate Greece. Instead, they attack Italy. Corelli is worried about what will happen when Italy surrenders but Germany does not. The nearby German garrison where Günter Weber is an officer will become the enemy of the Italians, and without any action or support from the British or Americans, his situation will become dangerous.

Chapters 46-50 Analysis

A comic episode appears in Chapter 46 when a hapless British spy parachutes onto the island and is taken for an angel by the simple goatherd, Alekos.

Dr. Iannis decides to address the romance between Pelagia and Corelli. He approaches each of them with sound advice that acknowledges the difficulty of their situation. He is somewhat discouraging in his advice, however, reminding Pelagia she is still engaged



to Mandras and warning Corelli that he will never be able to be successful as a musician in Greece. This assessment turns out to be incorrect on the doctor's part.

Chapter 50 sets the stage for the tragic end of the war when the Germans and Italians become enemies. Corelli foresees the potential conflict and is frustrated that his commanders appear to be ignoring the situation.



Chapters 51-55

Chapters 51-55 Summary

Chapter 51 is called "Paralysis." The Italian troops in Greece are under the command of General Grandin, who shows no leadership in anticipating the potential conflict with the Germans. Corelli and the other officers in his command grow impatient and frustrated at Grandin's inaction. The Italians have more numbers than the Germans, but delays are allowing the Germans to reinforce.

Chapter 52 is called "Developments." It is a series of short episodes from different aspects of the increasingly tense situation between the Germans and Italians in the area. The Italian officers fear the worst, and Corelli and Carlo give some personal items to Dr. Iannis to hide for them in case of their death. Corelli gives him his mandolin and Carlo his package of manuscripts, to be opened on his death. The final episode of the chapter depicts a British officer decoding the German message to prepare to attack the Italians. Rather than send help for the Italians, he does nothing so as to prevent letting the Germans know he has cracked their code.

Chapter 53 is called "First Blood," which is drawn by the Italians as a group of German troop carriers are coming ashore. An officer, acting independently, orders his men to fire on them. German planes arrive in support and bomb the nearby city of Argostoli, where General Gandin has stupidly congregated most of his forces, believing the promise of the Germans that they would provide the Italians with safe passage back to Italy.

Chapter 54 is called "Carlo's Farewell." It is a letter from Carlo to Captain Corelli describing the true nature of his love for the captain. The letter is placed with Carlo's other manuscripts that he has entrusted to Dr. Iannis to be opened only after his death.

Chapter 55 is entitled "Victory." The Germans continue to route the Italians, shooting all prisoners as well as innocent villagers trying to flee. Dr. Iannis and Pelagia sit worried in their home. Corelli has not been there for several days and Pelagia is distraught. Finally Corelli arrives, taking Pelagia into an embrace and telling her he must return to his men and that he will not see her again. He leaves, and Pelagia sits quietly, listening to the sounds of the German guns.

Chapters 51-55 Analysis

The conflict between the Germans and Italians comes to a head in Chapters 51 through 55. The Italian general in charge of Corelli's unit is paralyzed with indecision and finally makes the fatal mistake of trusting the Germans, who promise to evacuate his troops. Their real intention is to execute the Italians and Corelli and his men know this. His departure with Pelagia is dramatic.

The last installment of Carlo's memoirs is included, in a letter that is to be read only after his death. It's presence in the narrative foreshadows his fate at the hands of the Germans.



Chapters 56-60

Chapters 56-60 Summary

Chapter 56 is entitled "The Good Nazi (2)." Günter Weber has been ordered to round up and execute the Italian soldiers on Cephallonia, including Captain Corelli and his friends from the singing group. Weber goes to his commanding officer and formally requests to be excused from the order because he feels it is illegal. The Italians are prisoners of war, he says, and it is against war conventions to kill them. His commander admires him for his principles, but explains that if he does not follow the order he will himself be shot.

Meanwhile, Corelli and his men are taken by truck to the impromptu firing range where they are to be executed. Some are weeping and crying, knowing they are about to be killed, and Corelli suggests they all sing. Carlo begins with an improvised song and others join in, singing through their tears.

The men are all taken before the German execution squad commanded by Weber. Weber speaks with Corelli, explaining that he tried to stop the execution. Corelli forgives him and shakes his hand, but Carlo speaks at him angrily. Weber gives the order to fire and the scene turns bloody. Carlo, loyal to Corelli to the end, holds him behind his large body in an attempt to shield him. Carlo falls on top of Corelli, dead, and the shooting stops. Corelli has been hit, but he is still alive. Trapped under Carlo's body, he sees as Weber approaches and bends down to look at him. Weber sees that he is still alive and takes out his revolver, pointing at Corelli's head. Weber puts the gun away, however, without shooting.

Chapter 57 is called "Fire." Velisarios the strongman comes to the scene of the execution and sees the large body of Carlo, whom he recognizes. He lifts Carlo's body and finds Corelli beneath him, still showing signs of life. He picks Corelli up and carries him off toward the doctor's house.

The bodies of the executed are piled up by the Germans and fires are set to destroy them. After the Germans leave the fires, the people of the island approach and pull out the bodies they can recognize, hiding them away in order to give them proper burials.

Chapter 58 is called "Surgery and Obsequy." Velisarios barges into the doctor's house, where Pelagia is home alone, anticipating the arrival of German soldiers. Velisarios lays Corelli out on the doctor's table, and Pelagia runs to get the doctor from the cafe. Together they operate on Corelli, removing the bullets from his body and cleaning his wounds. Learning from Velisarios that Corelli had survived because of Carlo, the doctor asks Velisarios to retrieve Carlo's body. The strongman gets the body and digs a grave for Carlo in the yard of the doctor's house, where the three of them bury him following Corelli's surgery.



Chapter 59 is called "The Historical Cachette," referring to the small underground room the doctor has hidden under the floor of his kitchen. This is where Corelli is hidden from the Germans while he recovers. He develops a fever, but it subsides and he is eventually able to stand. He grows a beard to look more like a Greek.

Chapter 60 is entitled "The Beginning of her Sorrows." After Corelli has recovered, he is moved to the abandoned house where he and Pelagia had been having their private trysts. At night he comes to the doctor's house to be with Pelagia. Pelagia contacts Bunny Warren, the British spy, and asks him to arrange for Corelli to escape the island.

Chapters 56-60 Analysis

Chapter 56 is a major turning point in the narrative. Gunter Weber, the German officer who has befriended Corelli and several other soldiers, is placed in a difficult moral situation when he is ordered to execute the Italians. He attempts to stop the executions with a formal objection to his commander, but is told he will be shot himself if he refuses to follow the orders.

Weber ultimately gives the command to kill his friends, but allows Corelli to live when he finds he has not died. Carlo dies in an act of great valor, holding his large body in front of Corelli to protect him.

Corelli survives, and is reunited with Pelagia when he is carried secretly to the doctor's house for treatment. He takes some time to recover, and when he is able to move Pelagia and the doctor help him escape the island. Before he leaves, he makes a promise to Pelagia to return and also not to rejoin the Italian military. The parting is bittersweet. Corelli has survived and Pelagia is optimistic, but in Chapter 60, the author indicates that her life is destined to be filled with sorrow. The suggestion is that she might have ultimately been happier had Corelli died.

Father Arsenios is redeemed in the gruesome chapter called "Fire." He has gone practically insane over the moral outrage of the German executions and attacks them with his walking stick.



Chapters 61-65

Chapters 61-65 Summary

Chapter 61 is called "Every Parting is a Foretaste of Death." On his last day before leaving the island, Corelli does not hide in his shack but spends it with Pelagia. He renews his promise to return to her after the war is over. Dr. Iannis tells him he will always be welcome, and formally gives his blessing to their marriage. After dark, Bunny Warren leads the three of them to the seashore where he signals a waiting fishing boat. Corelli boards the boat and is gone. Pelagia stands in the surf and cries.

Chapter 62 is entitled "Of the German Occupation." With the Italians gone, the Germans occupy the island until 1944, when the tide has turned against Germany and they are ordered to withdraw. Günter Weber, ashamed to face Pelagia and the doctor, secretly leaves the phonograph player and records he had promised to give to Pelagia at the doorstep of their house. Along with the player he leaves a photograph taken of him and Corelli, arms around each other's shoulders, standing on the beach.

Chapter 63 is called "Liberation." The Germans are gone, but in their place the communist Greek "andartes" take control of the island, terrorizing everyone. Doctor Iannis, along with some of the other men of the island, are accused of rebelling against the communists and taken away. Drousula, Mandras' mother, moves into the house with Pelagia.

Mandras, who has risen to a position of some importance in the group, returns to the doctor's house. He is dressed in an old Italian uniform and carrying a rifle. He has become fat, and Pelagia does not recognize him at first. He also does not recognize her because she has become so thin and her hair has started to gray. Mandras angrily confronts her. He has learned that in his absence she had been in love with an Italian officer. He strikes her and begins to assault her, intending to rape her. Pelagia grabs the small pistol she has kept in her apron pocket and shoots him in the shoulder, just as Drousula is returning to the house.

Drousula understands immediately what is happening. She angrily disowns Mandras, who runs out leaving his pack and gun. Half-crazed, he is drawn to the seashore. He remembers a happier time when he swam nude with the dolphins and removes his clothes. He swims out to sea and his body is found on the shore the next day.

Chapter 64 is called "Antonia." Pelagia and Drousula find an orphan baby girl on the doorstep of their house. They take it in and name it Antonia. After two years, Dr. Iannis returns. He is frail and broken, and does not speak. Along with Pelagia, he resumes his doctoring and helps care for the girl. Pelagia encourages him to resume writing his history, and takes his papers from the hiding place. She rediscovers Carlo's papers and reads them for the first time.



The three have a setback when they are forbidden to practice medicine because they fail to pay a bribe. The island has started to become a tourist destination by this time, however, and Drousula provides them with support by renting out her small house to a Canadian poet.

Pelagia hears nothing from Corelli, but is sometimes haunted by what she thinks is his ghost. One day while she is holding the baby Antonia, she thinks she sees Corelli at the end of a street. The figure turns and walks around the bend. She sees the same figure in following years at about the same time. Also, once a year, a rose mysteriously appears on the grave of Carlo.

Chapter 65 is called "1953." Antonia has grown into a beautiful and tomboyish girl. Pelagia teaches her Italian. The four of them are at home one day when the animals around the island begin to act strangely. Suddenly the ground begins to rumble and shake. The doctor rushes from the bedroom and yells for them to get out of the house. It is the first time he has spoken since returning. A devastating earthquake has hit the island, toppling most of the houses. Antonia, Pelagia and Drousula escape the house, but the doctor is crushed to death in the rubble.

Chapters 61-65 Analysis

Time is compressed at this stage in the novel and begins to pass more quickly. The Italians are gone, but the Greek communists take over and terrorize the island as ruthlessly as the Germans did. Mandras returns, once again a transformed man. He is presented as a mockery of Corelli, dressed in a stolen Italian captain's uniform. He abuses and assaults Pelagia almost without understanding why. When he is rejected both by her and his mother, he reverts to his boyhood much as he did the first time he returned. He goes to the seashore and swims nude in the surf.

A foreshadowing of Corelli's return takes place in Chapter 64 when Pelagia imagines she sees his ghost on the main street of the village. As it happens, the figure she sees is Corelli, but he does not make contact with her, believing her to have married. This misunderstanding, which is explained later in the novel, is the central source of tragedy in their romance.

Another major turning point in the novel takes place in Chapter 65, when a devastating earthquake demolishes the village and kills the doctor.



Chapters 66-70

Chapters 66-70 Summary

Chapter 66 is entitled "Rescue." The international response to the earthquake disaster in Greece is strong. The British and Americans send construction and engineering help to rebuild. The Italians send firemen. On Cephallonia, Velisarios emerges as a local leader, organizing the rebuilding of the village and encouraging everyone to help. An Italian fireman who is part of the rescue effort comes to the island, which continues to be rocked by aftershocks. The fireman is standing outside the fallen house of the doctor when one of these aftershocks hits. Briefly, the earth opens up and he sees the exposed bones of Carlo in his grave. The earth closes up again, burying the remains.

"Pelagia's Lament" is the title of Chapter 67. It is a short chapter in Pelagia's voice, lamenting the loss of her father and the loss of Corelli.

Chapter 68 is called "The Resurrection of the History." Pelagia is deeply depressed after the death of her father and Drousula and Antonia try to help her. Drousula suggests that she take up her father's project of writing a history of the island. Pelagia does start writing, recreating much of her father's manuscript from her own memory and adding to it and transforming it. She writes to libraries and universities and is delighted to find there are people who are willing to help her in her research. She works on the project for several years. Meanwhile Antonia had grown into a young woman of 17. She surprises Pelagia by declaring that she wants to get married.

Chapter 69 is called "Bean by Bean the Sack Fills." Antonia falls in love with a man of 32 named Alexi, who is a sharp young lawyer. The two are married and Pelagia begins to look forward to having a grandchild. The tourists continue coming to the island in greater numbers, and Drousula capitalizes by opening a small restaurant which becomes very successful. When Drousula dies quietly in her rocking chair, Pelagia takes over the restaurant in partnership with Alexi. Finally, at the age of 34, Antonia becomes pregnant. She has a boy and names him Iannis.

Chapter 70 is called "Excavation." Alexi and Antonia each become successful businesspeople, Alexi as a lawyer and developer and Antonia as the owner of a string of souvenir shops. Iannis spends much of his day in the restaurant, growing up under the eye of Pelagia. As he approaches his teens, he becomes fascinated with a musician who plays at the restaurant named Spiro. Spiro plays the bouzouki, a Greek instrument like a large mandolin. Thinking it will help him attract girls, Iannis asks to be taught to play.

Spiro agrees, but tells him a bouzouki is too large for a child to begin with. He tells him he should start with a mandolin, which is tuned the same way. Pelagia recalls the mandolin that is buried in the rubble of the old house, in the secret room, and tells Iannis about it. He and Spiro go to the house, but cannot get the door to the



compartment open. Velisarios happens to come by. He is carrying a rose. It is he who has been leaving the rose on Carlo's grave, and he tells the two about him. Although he is now an old man, Velisarios uses his great strength to pull the door to the compartment open. Spiro and Iannis find the mandolin in perfect shape, along with some photographs, the doctor's original manuscript, Carlo's papers, and the old phonograph.

Chapters 66-70 Analysis

The narrative continues to move quickly in time in Chapters 66 through 70. Pelagia, Drousla and Antonia all become successful women in their own right without the direct support of men. The narrative begins to close into a circle when the young Iannis takes up the mandolin and excavates Corelli's old instrument from the rubble of the doctor's house. The resurrection of the items in the old house reconnects Pelagia with that earlier part of her life, setting the stage for the return of Corelli in the final part of the novel.



Chapters 71-73

Chapters 71-73 Summary

Chapter 71 is called "Antonia Sings Again." Iannis takes the items from the secret room to his mother, who is emotionally overwhelmed to see them again. Spiro helps him string the mandolin and begins to give him lessons. Iannis show promise.

Chapter 72 is called "An Unexpected Lesson." Iannis is practicing one day when a stranger approaches and gives him some advice on his technique. The stranger turns out to be Corelli himself, and he is surprised to find the boy is playing his old mandolin. He asks Iannis about his family and learns he is the grandson of Pelagia. He is surprised to learn that Pelagia was never married.

Chapter 73 is called "Restitution." Corelli reunites with Pelagia. He explains that the figure she had imagined was his ghost was in fact him. The first time he returned, he saw her holding the young Antonia and assumed she had married and had a child. He had come back a few times since, but never made direct contact. He had become a successful musician and was living in Athens. Pelagia is angry at him at first for never contacting her. He apologizes and buys her a goat in "restitution." The novel ends as the two ride off on a motorcycle together as they once did in their younger days.

Chapters 71-73 Analysis

In the final three chapters, the narrative pace slows once again. Corelli is reunited with his mandolin as well as with Pelagia. The explanation of the misunderstanding that led him to stay away for so long is revealed. It is also revealed that Corelli had indeed returned to the island several times, but never made contact with Pelagia or, apparently, made any inquiries about her. They renew their romance, although they are both now quite old. The novel ends abruptly, but on an optimistic note as the two lovers ride off to look for the old house where they used to meet.



Characters

Captain Antonio Corelli

Antonio Corelli is a musician and an officer in the Italian Army in the Acqui Division. When Italy occupies Greece in World War II, Corelli is assigned to the Greek island of Cephallonia. He is a lighthearted man, prone to making goofy jokes and having fun.

Corelli is an accomplished musician and he carries his mandolin, which he has named Antonia, with him everywhere. He practices every day and intends to have a career as a musician after finishing his army service. He also organizes an informal singing group among his men, which meets in the latrines every day.

Corelli falls in love with Pelagia, the daughter of the island's doctor, and promises to return to her after the war. When he does return, he mistakenly assumes she has married someone else and does not contact her. He moves to Athens and builds a successful career as a musician. After many years he reunites with Pelagia on Cephallonia.

Pelagia

Pelagia is the beautiful daughter of Dr. Iannis, a doctor on the Greek island of Cephallonia. Her mother has died, and she maintains their household herself. Her father has raised her to be an independent thinker and taught her to speak Italian. She has also effectively learned to be a doctor by observing her father.

Pelagia is engaged at a young age to a fisherman named Mandras, but the young lovers delay their marriage until after the war. She is a devoted fiancée, and writes to Mandras regularly, but does not receive any response. Gradually her love for him cools.

Pelagia is attracted to Corelli despite his position as an officer of an enemy force. She somewhat reluctantly falls in love with him, and promises to marry after the war. She helps Corelli escape the island.

Corelli does not return after the war, and Pelagia never marries. After her father dies, she takes over the role of island doctor until she is forced to stop. As the island becomes more and more a tourist destination, she operates a successful restaurant. When a baby girl is abandoned on her doorstep, she takes it in and raises the girl along with the help of another woman, Drousula. She also takes up the unfinished history of the island started by her father and finishes it.

Pelagia thinks she is haunted by Corelli's ghost, not knowing that she is catching actual glimpses of him as he observes her from time to time. When he finally returns, she is angry at first, but soon resumes her old feelings for him.



Dr. Iannis

Dr. Iannis is the sole doctor on the Greek island of Cephallonia. He is a widower who lives with his beautiful daughter, Pelagia, whom he has raised to be an intelligent and independent young woman. He cares for his fellow villagers and is often paid back with favors or with food.

Iannis is an educated man and has traveled widely. Before the war, he spends his days talking with other men in the village cafe or writing his proposed history of the island of Cephallonia. This writing project is an ongoing one that the doctor restarts several times.

When the Italians occupy the island, Dr. Iannis is made to house Captain Corelli. He is cordial to Corelli and eventually grows to genuinely like him, but he also maintains a strain of resistance to the occupation, secretly authoring an anti-Italian pamphlet that circulates on the island. When the communists take over after the war, Dr. Iannis is taken away to prison for two years before returning home. Upon his return, he stops speaking.

Dr. Iannis dies in 1953, when a devastating earthquake strikes the island and demolishes his house, crushing him.

Carlo Guerica

Carlo Guerica is an Italian soldier who serves under Captain Corelli. He is a very large and strong man. Carlo is homosexual, but has hidden his homosexuality his entire life. Inspired by the ancient Greeks, he decides to join the military and use his love for a fellow soldier to inspire him. He falls in love with a soldier named Francisco, and bravely carries him from the battlefield after he is mortally wounded.

Carlo shoots himself in the leg to escape the fighting. He is eventually assigned to Corelli's unit, where he falls in love with Corelli. When the Germans are executing the Italian officers on Cephallonia by firing squad, Carlo places himself in front of Corelli, saving his life. He is buried in the yard of the doctor's house.

Carlo keeps a confessional memoir, which he entrusts to Dr. Iannis to hide for him when it appears he is about to die fighting.

Günter Weber

Günter Weber is a German officer stationed in Greece near the island of Cephallonia. He is a Nazi. He is befriended by Corelli and his men, joining their informal singing group. When Germany and Italy become enemies, Weber is ordered to execute his friends. He protests, but goes through with the order. After the war, Weber enters the priesthood.



Mandras

Mandras is an attractive young fisherman from Cephallonia who falls in love with Pelagia and asks her to marry him. He leaves the island to fight in the Greek military, and is the sole survivor of his unit after an attack. He walks across the country back to the island, going nearly insane and arriving in a state where nobody recognizes him. From his return until the Italian occupation, Mandras behaves erratically. He stays in bed without speaking for long stretches, emerges and acts normally for several days, then returns to bed. When the Italians come, he leaves the island to join the resistance fighters.

Mandras is taken in by a group of communist resistance fighters who are supported by the British. They do not fight the Italians, but undermine the other resistance groups. After the war, the communists take control of parts of Greece, including the island of Cephallonia. Mandras returns to the island an important communist officer, but is shot by Pelagia as he is assaulting her. He swims out to sea and is later found dead.

Drousula

Drousula is the mother of Mandras. She grows close to Pelagia, connected at first through Mandras, but eventually coming to rely on one another more and more. After the doctor is taken away and Pelagia is left alone, Drousula moves into the house with her. She opens a restaurant which becomes successful. Drousula disowns her son when she discovers him assaulting Pelagia.

Drousula helps Pelagia raise the young Antonia. She dies peacefully at an old age in her rocking chair.

Antonia

Antonia is an orphan left on the doorstep of the doctor's house and raised by Pelagia and Drousula. She marries a successful lawyer named Alexi and has a son named Iannis, after Pelagia's father.

Young Iannis

Young Iannis is the son of Antonia and Alexi. Inspired by an older musician, Iannis decides to learn to play the mandolin and excavates Captain Corelli's instrument from the ruins of the doctor's house.



Velisarios

Velisarios is a large and very strong man who lives on Cephallonia. He occasionally entertains the villagers by lifting heavy things and firing a large cannon while holding it under one arm. After the earthquake that devastates the island, Velisarios becomes a leader of the reconstruction.

Father Arsenios

Father Arsenios is at first a comic figure of gluttony and drunkenness. He is transformed by the war into a wandering preacher and religious zealot. He meets his end when he is shot by a German officer after attacking some soldiers with his stick as they are burning piles of Greek bodies.

Stamatis

Stamatis is a Greek man who lives on Cephallonia. He is a friend of Dr. Iannis.

Kokolios

Kokolios is a Greek man from Cephallonia and a friend of Dr. Iannis.

Bunny Warren

Bunny Warren is a British spy who parachutes onto the island secretly. He assists Corelli in escaping after the German massacres.



Objects/Places

Cephalonia

A Greek island where most of the events of the novel take place. There is a high mountain in the center of the island, where goatherds have their goats.

Dr. Iannis' House

The home of the doctor on Cephalonia, it is a relatively large place with a walled yard.

Italy

The European country west of Greece. Under Benito Mussolini, Italy allied with Germany in World War II and invaded Greece to expand its territory.

Albania

A region north of Greece controlled by Italy prior to the invasion of Greece.

Acqui Division

The unit of the military in which Carlo and Corelli serve.

Corelli's Mandolin

The stringed instrument owned by Captain Corelli and left behind by him when he leaves Cephalonia. Corelli named his mandolin Antonia.

The Cachette

A secret room under the floor of Dr. Iannis' house where Corelli recovers from his wounds in secret and where his mandolin and other things are hidden.

Carlo's Manuscript

A written memoir by Carlo Guerica, intended to be read only after his death. His manuscript is hidden in the cachette.



The Kaphenia

A cafe where the men of Cephallonia gather socially. Women are not allowed.

The Feast of St. Gerasimos

A semi-annual festival on the island where the remains of a saint are displayed with the belief that they can cure the insane.



Themes

Love

Corelli's *Mandolin* is at heart a love story. It contains a thread of romantic love, like that between Pelagia and Corelli, but other characters are also motivated by other forms of love.

The romantic love between Antonio Corelli and Pelagia develops as a classic "forbidden love" story. They are theoretically enemies on opposite sides of warring countries, but in their relatively peaceful surroundings love begins to grow. Although they personally overlook their different backgrounds, they understand that the external circumstances make their partnership socially unacceptable. Pelagia would be cast out from her society for marrying an enemy Italian, and Corelli could not expect to be made welcome on the island permanently. In the end, a misunderstanding keeps them apart for most of their lives. Theirs is a tragic love.

The author also explores the paternal love of Dr. Iannis for his daughter. He has treated her more like a son would be treated in his traditional culture, educating her and giving her freedoms that most young women do not enjoy. This has made her almost unsuitable for her own society, as she is ill-prepared to settle into the purely domestic role that most women in her culture are expected to assume. Dr. Iannis' love takes the form of allowing his daughter freedom to choose her own way, which he realizes is not to become the quiet wife of an illiterate fisherman.

Another form of love the author explores is the valiant love of Carlo Guerica. Carlo is homosexual, and has grown up suppressing his true feelings for his companions. Inspired by the tradition of the ancient Greeks, he becomes a valiant soldier, using his love for Francisco and later Corelli as motivation to great acts of courage. Out of love he carries the dying Francisco from the battlefield and puts himself between Corelli and the firing squad, saving his life.

The Absurdity of War

World War II is a central event in "*Corelli's Mandolin*" and the author includes several episodes that relate to the sometimes absurd situations that war creates, both comic and tragic. Some characters are able to make their way through these unimaginable situations, while others descend into madness.

In the chapter called "The Duce," the character of Benito Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, appears in a stream-of-consciousness monologue. He is shown to be a possibly mentally unstable individual who makes contradictory statements and orders. He keeps his military plans secret even from the commanders who will be carrying out the orders, creating a situation where nothing is what it seems to be.



One such situation develops in Albania, where the character Carlo Guerica, a soldier, is sent on a mission he is not meant to return from. While he is told his mission is to blow up an enemy watchtower, he figures out he has actually been sent to attack a friendly base in order to give an excuse for the Italian invasion of Greece. Successful in his mission, he is ordered to train Albanian soldiers in sabotage, which he knows nothing about.

When the Italians occupy Cephallonia, they are under the command of Captain Antonio Corelli, a musician turned soldier who does not seem to take his responsibilities very seriously. In return, the Greeks on the island treat the Italian soldiers more like slightly bothersome houseguests rather than military occupiers. Corelli's outgoing and friendly nature leads him to befriend Gunter Weber, a German officer from a nearby garrison. The friendship of these two men is turned upside down when their corresponding countries become enemies toward the end of the war, and Weber is ordered to shoot Corelli and the other Italian soldiers he has grown close to. The realities of war intrude on the idyllic life of the soldiers enjoying a relatively peaceful corner of the hostilities. Weber is driven nearly mad over the incident.

Madness also strikes Mandras the fisherman, who makes his way back to the island after he is the only surviving member of his unit after a fight with Italian troops. He is filthy and dressed in furs and spends months at a time nearly motionless in bed. Father Arsenios descends into a kind of religious madness after the Italian occupation and begins wandering from place to place preaching. Likewise, Carlo's beloved companion, the young soldier Francisco, enters into a kind of suicidal madness when he realizes the direness of his situation.

Morality

The characters of Günter Weber and Father Arsenios present two apparently opposed viewpoints of morality in Corelli's *Mandolin*. Through the development of these characters, De Bernieres examines the theme of morality and what happens when a person is pushed to his limits by war.

Father Arsenios is a central religious figure on the island of Cephallonia. Although he commands respect from the villagers because of his position, he is widely known to be a glutton and drunkard. Through the character's own internal dialogue, the author reveals that he is not especially devoted to his calling. An early comic episode in the novel shows the priest passed out drunk in a sacred part of the church.

The war transforms Arsenios. He undergoes a kind of religious conversion that leads to a form of madness. He becomes an itinerant preacher and enters into a life of poverty driven by a devoutly religious ethic. Arsenios meets his end at the hands of German soldiers when he flies into an outrage over a gruesome murder of a Greek child. In the end, Arsenios gives his life while standing up against murder.



The figure of Günter Weber is almost exactly opposite that of Arsenios. Where Arsenios is fat, sloppy and dark, Weber is a fastidious and fair German officer. Where Arsenios is emotional and impulsive, Weber is cool and calculated. The chapters that focus on Weber are entitled "The Good Nazi," an apparent contradiction in terms that suggest the author is provoking the reader to look more closely at the character. When the Italian and German occupying forces in Greece become enemies, Weber is ordered to execute the Italian troops. The order is a difficult one for him, because he has befriended many of the Italians, including Captain Corelli. He lodges a formal protest, believing the order to be illegal, but is told that he himself will be shot if he does not carry out the execution.

Weber follows the orders and brings his friends before the firing squad. Afterwards, when he sees that Corelli has survived, he leaves him rather than killing him as he was expected to do. This sparing of Corelli's life hints at the limits of Weber's morality, however later in the novel it is mentioned that the episode drove him nearly insane and that he became a priest, possibly in an attempt to atone for it.

Both men are given the opportunity to die themselves in defense of their principles. Arsenios chooses to do so, attacking a group of armed German soldiers with nothing more than his walking stick. Weber does not make the same choice, and is driven nearly mad with remorse.



Style

Point of View

"Corelli's Mandolin" is written in several different voices representing several points of view. The main sections of the narrative that take place on Cephallonia are written in the third person with an omniscient narrator. The internal thoughts and motivations of all the characters are revealed in the writing. In some chapters only one character appears, giving these sections a distinct point of view of one character. The chapters that outline the adventures of the fisherman Mandras once he leaves the island are an example of this point of view.

Woven throughout the narrative are chapters that are presented as the written accounts of a single character, Carlo Guerica. These chapters are written in the first person, as if the character himself is writing. They are addressed overall to Captain Corelli. Other similar chapters represent personal accounts written in the first person, such as the account of the Italian diplomat who meets with the Greek Prime Minister.

For the most part, the narrative unfolds in the immediate past tense, with events described as they unfold. The chapters written in the first person, however, are reflective and are written from a point of view that is removed in time from the events. This shifting back and forth between points of view creates foreshadowing in the narrative as future events are referred to in the reminiscences of some of the characters.

Setting

The largest part of "Corelli's Mandolin" is set in a village on the Greek island of Cephallonia. The island is connected to the Greek mainland by a bridge. There is a high mountain on the island, where goatherds keep their flocks. Fishing is a large part of the economy. The inhabitants of the island are mostly religious, belonging to the Greek Orthodox faith. There are two religious feasts every year honoring the local patron saint.

The novel spans about fifty years in time, with most of the events occurring during and immediately after the years of World War II when the island is occupied first by Italian troops, then by the Italians and Germans, and finally just by the Germans. The final portion of the novel skips quickly ahead in time as the main characters become separated and lead separate lives before being reunited in modern times.

There are also passages that are set in other parts of the region. One chapter is presented as the ramblings of Benito Mussolini in Rome. Another recounts a fictionalized meeting between an Italian diplomat and the Greek Prime Minister in Athens. The written account of an Italian soldier's service in Albania and mainland Greece is also presented.



Language and Meaning

De Bernieres employs a wide range of styles in the narrative of "Corelli's Mandolin." The central narrative of the novel takes place on the island of Cephallonia as seen through the eyes of Dr. Iannis and his daughter, Pelagia. The doctor is an educated man who has raised his daughter to be an inquisitive and intelligent young woman, and their internal thoughts as they are presented are insightful and witty. The author employs a good deal of dialogue, using a conversational style with Greek words and sayings sprinkled throughout. The novel is written in English, but the characters speak a wide variety of languages. The author sometimes alters the English dialogue to represent the difference in the dialects or language of the characters, such as employing archaic English to represent the ancient Greek spoken by one of the characters.

The language is personalized in the chapters that present a single character's point of view, as well. One chapter is a stream-of-consciousness monologue by Benito Mussolini that employs some strong language and demonstrates that character's seemingly unsettled state of mind. The chapter that presents an anti-Italian propaganda pamphlet employs witty sarcasm and satire.

De Bernieres uses rich descriptions to convey the great beauty of the Greek landscape. He pays special attention to the light, which seems to have a particular property unique to the area.

Structure

Corelli's Mandolin is structured as 73 relatively short chapters, each one with a title that refers to its contents. The overall narrative of the story is in chronological order, however interspersed within the narrative are chapters that are presented as documents written after the events that surround them. These documents, such as the manuscripts of Carlo Guerica that appear under the title "L'Ommosessual" serve to anchor the narrative in history as well as provide some foreshadowing of future events.

The narrative is centered primarily on the island of Cephallonia, and will focus on events on the island for several chapters, then depart for a chapter or two to focus on peripheral characters. It is told from several points of view and uses several different techniques, including dialogue, rhetorical writing, monologue, and third person narrative.

The novel expands and compresses the passage of time, allowing the events on Cephallonia unfold at a slower narrative pace than events outside the island. The author compresses time in the chapters that provide supporting information, such as developments in World War II that affect the Greek island. At the end of the novel, after the death of Dr. Iannis, the narrative shifts to a compressed time where many years pass by quickly. Finally, it ends with a brief narrative passage about the reunion of Pelagia and Corelli.



Quotes

"Dr. Iannis had enjoyed a satisfactory day in which none of his patients had died or got any worse." Chapter 1, p. 1

"I, Carlo Piero Guercio, testify that in the Army I found my family. I have a father and mother, four sisters, and three brothers, but I have not had a family since puberty." Chapter 6, p. 30

"St Gerasimos, withered and blackened, sealed inside his domed and gilded sarcophagus by the reredos of his own monastery, dead for five centuries, rose up at night." Chapter 12, p. 70

"The doctor heard Pelagia singing in the kitchen and took up his pen. He reached a finger to twirl his moustache, experienced a peculiar irritation when he remembered that he had shaved it off as a gesture of defiance against Hitler, and then looked down at the black armband that he had worn ever since the death of Metaxas. He wrote." Chapter 12, p. 121

"...this was made more easy by a small miracle whose name was Captain Antonio Corelli. He became my source of optimism, a clear fountain, a kind of saint who had no repellent trace of piety, a kind of saint who thought temptation as something to play with rather than something to be opposed, but who remained a man of honour because he knew no other way to be." Chapter 24, p. 159

"Nobody liked them, although relations between Germans and Italians were superficially friendly and co-operative. The Germans thought of the Italians as racially inferior negroids, and the Italians were perplexed by the Nazi cult of death." Chapter 30, p. 198

"Pelagia was fascinated by the way in which he seemed to be able to hear the music in his head, and now and then she went to inspect the progress of the incomprehensible squiggles on the page. At one moment she stood with her hand on his shoulder because it seemed the most natural and inevitable pose, and it was only after a couple of minutes that she realised what she was doing." Chapter 33, p. 211

"How like a woman is a mandolin, how gracious and how lovely. in the evening when the dogs howl and the crickets chirr, and the huge moon hoists above the hills, and in Argostoli the searchlights search for false alarms, I take my sweet Antonia." Chapter 42, p. 248

"The captain was so taken aback by the frankness of the question that he was utterly stumped for an answer. Things had only been able to proceed on the basis that no one ever brought the issue out into the open; things could only work at all on the understanding that it was a dark secret that everybody knew." Chapter 49, p. 288



"My dear Antonio, I want you to know that in return for your inextinguishable laughter, your great music, your incomparable spirit, I have loved you with the same surprise and gratitude that I see in your own eyes when you are with Pelagia, and I shall remember you always, even when I am dead." Chapter 54, p. 312

"Pelagia was to remember the time of Corelli's recovery and his escape not as a period of memorable and intoxicating adventure, not even as an interlude of fear and hope, but as the slow beginning of her sorrows." Chapter 60, p. 342

"The earthquake changed lives so profoundly that to this day it is still the single greatest topic of conversation. When other families elsewhere are arguing about whether or not socialism has a future or whether or not it was a good idea to abolish the monarchy, Cephallonians talk about whether there will be another earthquake and whether it will be as vicious as the last." Chapter 68, p. 391



Topics for Discussion

Discuss how morality is explored in the novel. Does war change morality?

Compare the characters of Günter Weber and Father Arsenios. What motivates them? How do they differ in their feelings about war?

Chapter 42 is called "How like a Woman is a Mandolin." How do Pelagia and Corelli's mandolin share a similar fate in the novel?

What different types of love motivate the characters in "Corelli's Mandolin"?

Why did Corelli never contact Pelagia after leaving the island? Is this part of the novel believable?

How is the character of Mandras transformed over the course of the novel? Is he a sympathetic character?

How does Carlo's presence affect the events of the novel? How does this character develop?

What is the role of religion in "Corelli's Mandolin"?