

## Reconstructing the Odysseus Myth: The Postmodern Condition in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*

Tatiana Golban

Namık Kemal University, Turkey  
tgolban@nku.edu.tr

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### Abstract

Louis de Bernières' novel entitled *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* is one of those postmodern works that revives the myth in order to explore the socio-cultural and historical moments which are of essential importance for the contemporary world. Since this novel is based on myth, there are multiple mythical perspectives that could be investigated. This article focuses solely on Odysseus myth, in general, and on character Mandras, as an Odyssean figure, in particular. Our purpose is to dissect the Odysseus scenario into mythemes, which are the smallest constitutive units of a myth, in order to observe the succession of the events and the association of these units to each other. Although the detected mythical units are easily recognizable, we discover that Louis de Bernières applies new signifiers each time he uses the mythemes, signifiers which prove to be pertinent to the age we live in. These signifiers include, among others, the association of the lover to the land, "museumification", simulation, hyperreality, "language games", use-value vs. exchange-value, and emancipation. We attempt to present myth as a system of signs and mythemes, which is universal but also dynamic, as it tends to recombine and create new meanings perpetually. The exhaustion of the mythical symbolism included in the detected units of Odysseus myth is prevented, because the reader is engaged, first, in the process of discovery of these mythemes; second, in the deconstruction of earlier established meanings; and, third, in the creation of his/her own meaning and symbolism, produced in relation to his/her cultural code.

**Keywords:** myth, constitutive units, mytheme, patent mode, latent mode, museumification, simulation, hyperreality, language games, use-value, exchange-value, knowledge.

### 1. Introduction

One of the most fascinating myths represented in Western literature is the one of Odysseus, or in its Latinized form, Ulysses. Starting with Homeric epos, we find this heroic paradigm in various literary texts belonging to different historical and cultural backgrounds, as in the works of Virgil, Dante, Racine, Tennyson, Joyce, Giraudoux, and Kazantzakis, among others. So frequently the writers of different literary backgrounds have looked through this mythical paradigm that one would expect Odysseus myth to be a finished or an exhausted one. However, Odysseus is one of those myths that was extremely appealing not just to ancient audience, but continues to fascinate even the readers of the contemporary world.

Louis de Bernières' novel entitled *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* uses myth as a framing device to explore the socio-cultural and historical moments that have a great impact upon the contemporary world. The novelist presents some recurrent heroic mythemes, such as the Trojan War, Odysseus journey, and heroic quest, as well some mythemes deriving from the relationships of Odysseus and Penelope, Paris and Helen, Hector and Andromaque, Osiris and Isis, Eros and Psyche, Orpheus and Eurydice, Hades and Persephone, and so on.

Although there are multiple mythical perspectives to be explored in Louis de Bernières' novel, this article focuses solely on Odysseus myth. According to Daniel-Henri Pageaux, the rise of a myth represents the birth of a scenario as a system, or an arrangement, of various constitutive parts or elements (Pageaux, 2000, p. 136), to which we further refer in this study as mythemes. While exhibiting various recurring mythemes belonging to Odysseus' scenario, the novelist plays with the expectations of the readers by subverting the predictable situations or character developments, reloading them instead with new meanings, such as self-accomplishment, nationhood, knowledge, history and ideology, truth and reality, and the relationship of man/woman to land, which become characteristic concerns of the late twentieth century fiction.

At the same time, the task of this study is to reveal that the use of myth as a framing device proves the flexibility of myths, since ancient myths have the capacity of living and perpetually regenerating new meanings pertinent for artists, writers, and readers of the succeeding periods.

Louis De Bernières is one of those contemporary writers who does not remain indifferent to the appeal and the semantic potential of Odysseus myth. In his novel entitled *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, he makes use of Homer's original

archetype as a framing device in order to reveal the concerns of the postmodern individual. As it could be expected from a postmodernist writer, however, he uses this paradigmatic frame of reference just in order to deconstruct it or to reconstruct the key components of this mythical scenario to express some new ideas pertinent to his era. Consequently, in this novel, the myth of Odysseus reveals the well-known characteristic of mutability as a key element of this myth. Nevertheless, simultaneously with this aspect, a new one appears, when we become aware that Louis de Bernières' Odysseus acquires a kind of protean appearance, being delivered in the novel not only by one protagonist, but by few characters at the same time. James Joyce used a similar device in his novel entitled *Ulysses*, in which he split the characteristics of the mythical hero between his two major protagonists.

Louis de Bernières goes further and develops this myth at some lengths, exploding the social, cultural and even gender key components of this myth. His protean Odysseus is revealed through Mandras, the yearning for adventure young man, Antonio Corelli, the soldier-musician, Dr Iannis, the old autodidact from a rural environment, and Pelagia, the young and brilliant woman from the invaded island. Our study, however, focuses only on Mandras as Odysseus, whereas the rest of possible interpretations of characters and structures that are seen as belonging to Odysseus could be the concern of another study.

Claude Levi-Strauss, in his famous volume *Anthropologie Structurale*, explains that each myth is made up of "unités constitutives" ("constitutive unit", in English) which form the language (Levi-Strauss, 1973, p. 241). However, as a result of structural complexity of myth which depends on language, the units come to be termed as "grosses unités constitutives" ("large constitutive units") (Levi-Strauss, 1973, p. 241). As in Levi-Strauss' method revealed by the example of Oedipus myth, each "constitutive unit" is distributed in a mode that permits the diachronic and synchronic reading of the units concurrently, a fact that allows the possibility of gaining new associations and new significances.

According to Gilbert Durand, the identity and peculiarity of a myth are provided by its set of mythemes. The topic, theme, fundamental situation, and archetype represent the content of a mytheme, which is "the smallest unit of discourse bearing mythical significance", situated "at the core of the myth", being of a "structural nature", or "schematic" nature, where "the verbal dynamic dominates the substantiality" and which can be used by authors from different periods "depending on the repression, censorship, morals or ideologies of a certain period and certain milieu" (Durand, 1998, pp. 303-304).

Our purpose is to attempt the breaking down of the mythic scenario into the smallest constitutive units in order to observe the succession of the events and the association of these units to each other. In other words, we conceive the myth as a system of signs and mythemes which are universal and tend perpetually to recombine, and, consequently, to transform the pre-existing mythological constituent units into a new system. The newly constituted system will prove the capacity of the same units to appear in another form, even in an inverted one, creating as a result new meanings.

Moreover, while the same mytheme could be used frequently in various circumstances, as Gilbert Durand explains, a double usage of the same structural mytheme becomes possible, each utilization being stimulated by political repressions, censorship, or ideologies of certain periods or certain backgrounds. Durand considers that the same mytheme has the potential of manifesting itself and create a semantic impact in two different modes: patent and latent (Durand, 1998, p. 304). The *patent* mode is revealed through the explicit recurrence of the content of a mytheme, brought to light in the representation of clear-cut characters, situations, symbols, etc. The *latent* mode makes itself visible through the repetition of its initial scheme veiled under an unexpected vestige and surprises by the novelty of representation of the well-known or even forgotten situations.

Louis de Bernières uses mythemes both patently and latently as a framing device, re-contextualizing the mythical structures, altering some stereotypical images derived out of these mythemes, and supplying them, in most of the cases, with new metaphors and associations driven out of the context or environment in which the narrative was created. De Bernières uses some mythemes patently in order to deconstruct or challenge their established meanings. At the same time, he makes use of the latent mode of representation of a mytheme, transforming the mythical story into almost a parable, the meaning of which has been suggested by the new cultural codes or dilemmas.

## 2. Mandras as Odysseus

Louis de Bernières' novel, when acknowledged as a structural system, is composed of certain constitutive units (Levi-Strauss) or mythemes (Durand) which are present in Odysseus myth as well. When we refer to Mandras' experience, various mythemes, which are well-known in Odysseus scenario, become also recognizable here. The most important structural components as mythemes or constitutive units, which can be arranged both synchronically and diachronically (based on Levi-Strauss' ideas), are the following:

- (1) The hero in love with a lady.

- (2) The departure from the homeland.
- (3) The hero joins the war.
- (4) He thinks of Pelagia as his lover/land.
- (5) He fights for his land.
- (6) On his return hero traverses wild environments.
- (7) Obstacles/Creatures threaten his homecoming.
- (8) The arrival of a stranger.
- (9) The recognition scene.
- (10) The expected hero's greatness/wisdom.
- (11) A new departure from the island.
- (12) The hero joins of the war again.
- (13) The attempt of emancipation and self-assertion/attaining the supreme knowledge.
- (14) The dream of return home.
- (15) The final departure – death.

These mythical units are not a novelty in the trajectory of many mythical characters, but the novelist has attributed new signifiers to the well-known units, preventing the exhaustion of the mythical symbolism, and, therefore, conferring new meanings to the pre-existent mythical constituents through their interconnection.

### **3. The Hero in Love with a Lady**

To start with the hero in love, we can say that this is a universal mytheme, clearly reminding of Odysseus' ardent desire to reunite with his beloved Penelope. The intimacy explored in the case of Odysseus is revealed by Mandras' adolescent fixation for the young Pelagia. Apparently nothing is new in this eternal situation when two young people fall in love with each other, but we acknowledge that this mytheme, as any other one, constitutes meaning through associations to other mythemes. These "paquets de relations" ("pack of relations"), as Levi-Strauss calls them, create new meanings. By the legacy of Western culture, because Mandras is in love with Pelagia, he becomes associated directly to the status of a young man presumably of noble origin and brave heart. Now we recognize the rise of a postmodern Odysseus, who subverts the mythical expectation of superiority and greatness, being presented instead as a simple young man from the rural environment and his ambitions go just to the length of conquering Pelagia. This new postmodern Odysseus transgresses the mythical boundaries and reveals himself into a totally new hypostasis, which is that of a wounded, vulnerable, and, above all, humiliated subject in front of his lady.

The binary oppositions of superior vs. inferior and male vs. female are deconstructed through the inversion of the hierarchies between the two lovers, Mandras, a fisherman, and Pelagia, the doctor's daughter who herself practices medicine. The reworking of Odysseus myth emerges clearly from this inversion of hierarchies, especially by the superiority of Pelagia, who reveals not necessarily a social pre-eminence as an intellectual one. A fatal blow is given to the postmodern Odysseus who is inferior both intellectually and resourcefully. The degeneration of the classical Odysseus is presented latently, suggesting a profound discontinuity and rupture from the Western ideals of man's empowerment through reason and intellect.

### **4. The Hero's Departure from His Homeland and Joining the War**

Mandras, as Odysseus, wants to test and taste the individual freedom, which seems to be a reasonable solution amidst the chaos and disorder of his world. The patent mytheme of the hero's departure from his homeland and joining the war creates the expectations of glory and power, aspired much by any hero. Relying on the assumption that war will transform him into an immortal hero or a superman, and everyone will worship him, Mandras hopes to balance the disorder in hierarchy between him and Pelagia. The mytheme of fighting for glory and power is completely subverted by the novelist, the binary opposition between freedom and entrapment revealing the postmodern awareness that the human being, although apparently free at the individual level, is subject-ed by the group power, and therefore becomes annihilated as an authority or autonomy. Moreover, the earlier reasonable expectations from the war collapse as well, giving way to a tangible sense of absurd.

Mandras' expectations of glory, power or change in hierarchy are stimulated mostly by mythical goal of Enlightenment, which projects emancipation as the end of the line, along which the Western society moves through time. Having only one view of history, which is a linear one, Mandras imagines that he will progress, improve himself, and, eventually, fulfil his goals. In this context, the myth of Odysseus becomes a pronounced frame of reference, and "paquets

de relations" between the constitutive units of this myth have their function while contrasting the ever resourceful Odysseus, who always emerges victorious in any enterprise, with Mandras, who fails to gain glory skilfully; or, while fighting heroically and sacrificially, no meaning is discovered beyond this effort. The contrast between the mythical reference and Mandras serves as an emphasis of the fact that at the end of the *line* the reward or emancipation is not an absolute certainty; on the contrary, it might not be true at all.

Moreover, in agreement with such postmodern thinkers as Lyotard and Baudrillard, Vattimo also has come to admit the nonlinear view of history. He goes further in his explanations, claiming that "the idea of a progressive temporal process, and even of such a thing as history, belongs to a culture of masters. As a linear unity history is actually only the history of those in power, of the victors. It is constituted at the cost of excluding, first in practice and then in recollection, an array of possibilities, values and images" (Vattimo, 1984, p. 154). In the light of this idea, considering Mandras' initial status, it becomes extremely difficult to imagine any progressive development as well as the attainment of his aim.

## 5. The Hero's Association of His Lover to His Land and His Fighting for this Land

Another mytheme present in Odysseus myth is the hero's association of his lover to his land. The great longing of Odysseus to regain Penelope overlaps structurally and symbolically with his yearning to join Ithaca. Several times Mandras makes this association of the lover-land that has been enrooted in Western culture from Odysseus on. The suggestion that the island is feminine, with all its sexual and emotional references, has been frequently made in many narratives. In this respect, Baudrillard, in his work entitled *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970), has explored the correlation between "the body" and "the feminine". As he claims, "it is woman who orchestrates or rather around whom is orchestrated this great Aesthetic/Erotic Myth. We have to find an explanation for this which is not simply of an archetypal sort along the lines: sexuality is the sphere of Woman because she represents Nature, etc." (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 137).

Mandras relates Pelagia to his homeland when he says:

*I feel so useless and insignificant here on this island. This is a time for men to be about their business. (...) I'm going to make her [Pelagia] understand that in defending Greece I will be defending her and every woman like her. It's a question of national salvation. (...) And if I die (...) I'll die with the name of Pelagia and the name of Greece equally on my lips, because it amounts the same thing, the same sacred thing. (De Bernières, 1995, p. 82)*

This relation alludes to the romantic admiration of Nature, revealed, among others, by Jean Jacques Rousseau in the famous book *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* (1776-1778). This admiration for Nature, which has grown into a mytheme on its own, is used by the novelist as a frame of reference to relate to the admiration and the spiritual bond Mandras experiences for Pelagia: Pelagia – Land – Nature. Such a romantic and refreshing framework of love charms the contemporary reader immediately, who is tired of discovering in most postmodern narratives various alienated individuals who suffer from different kinds of neuroses. Very soon in the novel, the reader finds out the skilful strategy of the novelist to play with the expectation of the readers, while exploding totally this frame. Consequently, the idealized love of Mandras for Pelagia becomes nothing else than the picture of the man's transgression into perversion of nature's femininity, deconstructing the widespread Romantic ideological concept of Nature's superiority and beauty. This is revealed when Mandras' desire for revenge becomes obvious, and, especially, when he rapes the young and helpless girls from his native land, his transgression culminating in his attempts to rape Pelagia.

Sexuality is constantly interwoven in the very texture of social structure to which the individual belongs. When the social structure collapses, as in the time of chaos and disorder produced by war, the erosion of sexual order is frequently noticed as well. Therefore, in the postmodern works narrating the collapse of social structure, no more can we witness the charmed and charming postmodern Odysseus who succeeds in every sexual endeavour. Mandras' sexual disorder reflects the erosion of his communal structures. Estranged by his sexual counterpart from various reasons, he diverges from the idealized feminine and discovers instead the Natural (Nature), which helps him cope with his forced separation.

The eroticism of Nature, a frequent element in the postmodern ecological discourse, is revealed powerfully in Mandras' encounter with Circe, on his way back home, when he confuses the real with the imaginary realm. Only in the world of fantasy, taking Circe for Pelagia, could he accomplish his sexual desires. His sexual fulfilment with an old hag constitutes Mandras' de-humanization, his denial of humaneness revealing the perversion of nature's beauty to alluring sexuality. Louis de Bernières subverts the mythical component referring to Odysseus' perception concerning Circe's trick with the pigmeat and the sexual deceit. His Odysseus, unable to perceive the entrapment, decays into carnality, which is still suggestive of femininity – the Nature. Mandras' de-humanization is presented as a human condition in the time of

crises or chaos, when the individual is betrayed by his reason and is incapable of finding out a moral exit out of his labyrinthine existence. He decays into depravity, since the carnality or sexuality substitutes his need for the feminine of Nature.

Estranged from his society – land – beloved, Mandras abandons himself to the more natural and fundamentally de-humanized realm of Nature. This de-humanized nature is represented symbolically in the novel through the wild environment that he traverses, and the wild beasts and the old hag that he encounters on his way home. All these are well-known mythical units which are brought together by the novelist in order to convey the alteration or even the degeneracy of now empty social structure, elements which lead inevitably to the depravity of the individual's morality and sexuality.

## 6. The Hero's Homecoming Threatened by Obstacles/Creatures

Louis de Bernières overlays the mythemes of the hero's encounter with his detainers on various lands, such as Circe, Cyclops and Calypso, into one image – that of the old hag Circe – where the resonance of the mythical units becomes extremely explicit. The old crone is named Circe, a witch-like creature, possessing a swineherd and allures Mandras sexually like the mythical Circe, making him, as Odysseus, forget for a while his homeland. She is extremely ugly and one-eyed, like the mythical Cyclops, and, though one may be repelled at first by her physical appearance, one could notice that, like Cyclops again, "she was a simple soul to whom God had given a kind heart" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 172). Mandras, like Odysseus, intrudes into her simple and peaceful environment, bringing with him pain and chaos. This old crone represents also Calypso in that she takes fancy to Mandras and opposes his leaving her, crying and begging him to reconsider his decision about leaving her land.

Such overlaying of the mythical units should be considered always in relation to other mythemes, especially the one regarding Nature. As it is mentioned above, these constitutive units are suggestive of the wilderness of Nature, and Mandras' recess into this kind of natural evokes his moral and sexual perversion. Mandras' transformation in the realm of this de-humanized Nature is described as following:

*On the third night that I was there, I slept more peacefully than for many months, and because my body was healing itself thanks to the hogmeat I did not dream of bombs and corpses, but of Pelagia. In my dream she frowned and became impatient because of my delay, and for the first time in all my visions I ran to her and kissed her. She melted in my arms and returned my passion, so that very soon we were rolling together on the floor of the forest. She clasped me to her and ran her hands about my body so that I became inflamed, and her lips were as hot as fire. She bit my lip and squirmed, and I tore her clothes away, so that my hands knew her breasts and her thighs, and I trembled with the winds of Dionysus, and entered her. In no time at all I felt the surge in my loins, and it was as I wrenched with the supreme moment that I awoke. (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 172-173)*

Of course, Mandras' transgression from the spiritual to sexual and wild instincts reveals the profound changes in the postmodern world and individual, at the same time serving as an opportunity to deconstruct the sexual percept imposed by societal morality. Concurrently, the collapse of social structure leads to the destabilization and especially fragmentation of the individual, who is incapable of coping with reality and, consequently, creates an alternative to it, a dream world where his fragmented self could find its natural complement. This newly emerging world is not organized according to social structure because it is a product of Mandras' fragmented psyche and acquires a new perverted element due to his estrangement from the feminine and, thereby, from Nature. His destabilized psyche makes him alternate one dream with another, in each one the connection Pelagia – Homeland – Nature being present. As he confesses in one of his dramatic monologues,

*Do you know what kept me going? It was Pelagia, and a sense of beauty. For me, Pelagia meant home. You see, I wasn't fighting for Greece, I was fighting for home. I was getting it over with so that I could come back. Unfortunately my dream of Pelagia was better than Pelagia herself. I can see and hear that she is disgusted with her returning hero, and I knew before I went that I was not good enough for her. It means that if she loves me than she is being patronizing, making a sacrifice, and I cannot stand it because it makes me hate her and despise myself. I am going to go away again when I am well so that I can reclaim the dream of Pelagia and love her without bitterness (...) and when I return I shall be remade and renewed, because next time I am going to make sure that I have done things so great that even a queen would beg to be my bride. (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 169-170)*

Mandras, like mythical Odysseus, moves fervently through all the obstacles in his obsessive desire to reach his homeland and reunite with his beloved woman. The war and the sense of failure have destabilized his psyche, and,

having experienced the collapse of the social structure and its values, he traverses ardently all the spaces, wishing to reach his native land at any cost. He naively changes the illusion of war with the illusion of home. His shattered psyche associates his land to a terrestrial paradise, outside any historical or social referent. He is not aware that his land and the image he perceives of it is not a real one. As Jean Baudrillard considers, the real exists only as a limit. All the things could be real only inasmuch as they continue to cross the limit, continually appearing and disappearing. Once disappearing, the things become mere illusions. Baudrillard continues explaining that "[as] long as an illusion is not recognized as an error, it has a value precisely equivalent to reality" (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 51). Having no referent in reality, Mandras' illusions of his land and Pelagia keep him going.

## 7. The Arrival of a Stranger and the Recognition Scene

Mandras' return to his homeland reenacts the motif of the arrival of the stranger, which, among other mythical scenarios, is representative of Odysseus myth. Though this is an invariable motif, standing at the core of Odysseus myth, in Louis de Bernières' novel, this motif brings variations. Of course, these variations are provided through the postmodern tendencies of deconstruction and inversion. The mythical Odysseus counts on a self-imposed anonymity in order to act rationally, to access knowledge, and to exert his power when necessary, and, to achieve these purposes, the hero manipulates his anonymity each time at great length in order to suit his particular aim.

The inversion used by the postmodern novelist reveals an anonymous, unrecognizable person, but this time his anonymity is not self-inflicted. Mandras has neither will nor wit to disguise himself for any purpose. On the contrary, he is willing to reveal his identity, but he is neither recognized by his beloved Pelagia nor even by his mother. The structural reworking of this motif has as its purpose the emphasis on the porcine existence to which he had succumbed while in his journey. His decay into primitiveness, stressed in the novel by the title "The Wild Man of the Ice", shows the degeneration of the rational human being, whose identity has been erased by his decay. When Mandras' identity is erased and no man is able to decipher any familiar features in this stranger, only an animal proves the capacity to accept him in this environment:

*Psipsina entered the room and sniffed the air, her whiskers twitching as she sampled the strong and unfamiliar smells (...). She approached the neolithic man and burrowed in the remains of a pocket, emerging triumphantly with a small cube of white cheese that she demolished with evident satisfaction. (...) The man smiled (...) and he petted the animal about the head. 'Ah, at least Psipsina remembers me', he said, and silent tears began to follow each other down his cheeks and into his beard. (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 155-156)*

Mandras' tears reveal his sadness vis-à-vis his incapacity to reconnect with the human world and social structure. In a way, he mourns his loss of connection to his society and the people he loved. The fact that only Psipsina, the pine marten, recognizes him deconstructs the motif of Odysseus' mythical recognition by his old dog, since the postmodern, decayed Odysseus can connect only in the natural/animal world.

Mandras' decay into such primitiveness is by no means idyllic. He never gives up his social structures in order to choose the natural. He has been driven to this state by war as well as by his imbecile nature, succumbing to psychological and moral degeneration without any resistance. The image of this Neolithic Mandras deconstructs the myth of Enlightenment concerning the progress of the human being who, relying on his reason, succeeds in everything. Louis de Bernières remixes these mythemes, counting on their second order meaning or ideological semantic resonance, just to reveal their collapse and futility. The result of this semiotic inversion invites the reader to reflect once again upon the triumph of the human reason.

The recognition motif, a *sine qua non* part of Odysseus myth, is developed in Louis de Bernières' novel as well. The novelist clearly relies on the impact created by the repetition of the same units, although this time they are veiled latently, as presented under an unexpected vestige. Odysseus arrives as a vagabond, his legs are washed by Eurykleia, and he is recognized by the old woman due to the scar on his foot. He restores his identity as a king and a hero in front of his community due to his bow and his ability of using it. He is re-established as a husband due to the trick of his matrimonial bed. In all cases, through his *kleos*, power and resourcefulness, Odysseus manages to reaffirm his identity and his dominant role.

These well-known mythical units, while being used by Louis de Bernières, form an intertextual relation with the hero of the ancient myth, but in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* they become completely subverted. There is nothing remarkable about Mandras, nothing to prove his identity, no story to narrate his glorious deeds, no scars to demonstrate his courage. Both Pelagia and Drosoula take great difficulty in recognizing him; even after he has been washed, the two

women are sickened by Mandras' deplorable situation and malodour. Attended like a baby by the two women, Mandras is revealed as totally emasculated and unmanly, dominated completely by Pelagia and Drosoula.

It is interesting that the process of Mandras being embalmed and later cured alludes somehow to Baudrillard's concept of "museumification" (based on his play on the word "mummification") and "demuseumification" (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 10-11). In his famous book, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard refers to a primitive subject from a "lost tribe" who is removed from his cultural framework and is destroyed by being exhibited to the damaging light of the contemporary culture. In the novel, Mandras' both inner world and his body become frozen ("museumified") as a result of the horrors experienced by him during the war. As Baudrillard claims, "these savages are posthumous: frozen, cryogenized, sterilized, protected *to death* (...) as "historical" witnesses of their period" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 8). Pelagia, relying on her knowledge, tries to do her best in her attempt to "sterilize" and "protect" as much as possible the authentic Mandras. Once the irreparable damage has been done to Mandras, there is no way to hope that his "return" to the "original" setting would be ever possible. Baudrillard explains that

*mummies do not rot from worms: they die from being transplanted from a slow order of the symbolic, master over putrefaction and death, to an order of history, science, and museums, our order, which no longer masters anything, which only knows how to condemn what preceded it to decay and death and subsequently to try to retrieve it with science. (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 10-11)*

Therefore, any effort to create an artificial space which is based upon the contemporary knowledge of restoring and protecting the primitive/old would inevitably fail. The mythical Odysseus is cured and restored to his identity only because he belongs to the realm of myth. Meanwhile, Mandras is completely destroyed in the attempt of "returning" him to his authenticity and reality through the reconstruction of a simulation. According to Baudrillard, "we only know how to place our science in service of *repairing* the mummy, that is to say restoring a *visible* order, whereas embalming was a mythical effort that strove to immortalize a *hidden* dimension" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.10).

The fact that the human is able to restore just a *visible* order of things questions directly the concept of the *real*. If the modernist writers presented a nihilistic attitude toward the real by focusing on its uncertainty, the postmodern nihilists, such as Lyotard, Baudrillard and Vattimo, reject completely the existence of any real. As Baudrillard claims,

*The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control - and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. (...) It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2)*

In this context we acknowledge that in the case of first and second-order simulation the real could be perceived, as we are inclined to evaluate the quality of simulation while opposing it to the real. It is with third-order simulation that one grows aware that the real is not a part of the equation and the only way of apprehending and understanding the world is by what Baudrillard calls "hyperreality". By the constant substitution of the signs of the real for the real, we will never have a chance to experience the real.

The impossibility of reaching the real is presented by Baudrillard in terms of the difference between dissimulation and simulation. As he explains, "to dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3). In other words, dissimulation is regarded as a form of pretence, a masking of one's true feelings, displayed in order to maintain a kind of control in a certain situation. Therefore, with dissimulation, the reality principle is not shattered, but remains unbroken, as in the case of a person who fakes an illness and goes to bed to make everyone believe that he is ill. The difference between the feigned and real symptoms is always clear. However, the simulation is much more complex, because it is not a pretense any longer. When some "real" symptoms are "produced", the difference between "true" and "false", "real" and "imaginary" becomes subverted.

Baudrillard's ideas emerge as relevant while considering them in relation to Louis de Bernières' novel. His protagonist, Mandras, reveals the difference between the dissimulation and simulation very well in the events following his return from the war. The novelist blurs completely the distinction between the real and the imaginary when Mandras arrives home in a deplorable situation. At first, neither Pelagia and Drosoula nor we as readers can develop any doubts about his health, since he was at war and lived the most horrible experiences of his life. The description of many scars on his body, produced by various wounds or parasites only strengthens our impression that Mandras' illness is "real". However, we become aware of his dissimulation in the chapter entitled "Mandras Behind the Veil", when he refuses to be treated as a patient who needs help, willing to mask the need of being helped. As Mandras meditates, "they talk about me

as if I were not there, Pelagia, the doctor, and my mother. They talk about me as though I were senile or unconscious, as though I were a body without a mind. I am too tired and too sad to resist the indignity. (...) I am like a piece of furniture that is treated with oil and wax" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 168). Apparently, the reality principle remains intact, the difference is always clear, although there is an obvious attempt to preserve an image of control, but even Mandras in his state grows aware that his "reality" differs from their "reality". The word "veil" used by the novelist in this context fortifies the awareness of the plurality of reality. However, though we are aware of the different "realities", the reality principle is not completely broken.

It is when he continues to tell his thoughts that we grow alert: "Everything has become a dream. There is a veil between me and them, so that they are shadows and I am dead, and the veil is perhaps a shroud that dims the light and blurs the vision. I have been to war, and it has created a chasm between me and those who have not" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 168). This time we cannot dismiss this situation as a simple pretense, since it is a clear example of simulation, which occurs when we cannot negotiate the differences between "true" and "false" any longer. Moreover, these differences are themselves threatened, because simulation manifests itself when a model precedes the "real" thing and it clearly reveals the intention of being the model. Therefore, it produces a "real" by itself and is not moulded on a pre-existent reality.

To speak in terms of semio-linguistic sign that Baudrillard has developed, the referent, or any other concept indicating "the real", is reduced to the level of a mere shadow cast by the sign. Therefore, the words "they are shadows and I am dead" from the above mentioned fragment indicate clearly the lack of a certain referent in "reality". Mandras is the sign that produces its referent – "I am dead" – as a horizon of its transcendence, without ever being able to transcend this horizon. Mandras simulates being dead, feigning to establish a relationship with "the real", and feigns to catch the real in its signifying function, but this real is maintained only as an external, independent, pre-existing reality, and, therefore, cannot be "reality". After Mandras' body is cured, he has apparently no reason of staying in bed and acting like a dead, but he "produces" all the symptoms of a dead, moulding his behaviour on a model of a cadaver. The simulation is all more obvious when he rises from his bed for the Easter feast, joins the procession to the monastery, and he "seemed to be his old self", just in order to return to his bed, acting dead even more than earlier. In his case, anyone would

*draw back from Cartesian certainties and hesitate to make the distinction between true and false, between the "produced" and the authentic symptom. (...) all crazy people simulate, and this lack of distinction is the worst kind of subversion. It is against this lack of distinction that classical reason armed itself in all its categories. But it is what today again outflanks them, submerging the principle of truth. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 4)*

Consequently, we could say that Mandras represents, in a way, a copy of a cadaver without the original model, since he precedes and "produces" the so-called original or the essential needed to sustain the simulation.

## 8. The Acceptance of the Hero's Knowledge and Supremacy

Another motif standing at the core of Odysseus myth is the acknowledgement of the hero's supremacy over the others. Frequently, this supremacy is revealed by the hero's wisdom which is based upon the knowledge he possesses about the world, as well as upon his ingenuity of using language to serve his purposes. Unfortunately, Mandras cannot impress anybody by his wisdom or ingenuity of using language. Louis de Bernières deconstructs completely this image of an all-knowledgeable hero when he presents instead an illiterate young man, intellectually inferior to Pelagia. Reduced both as man and human being, Mandras experiences one more humiliation when he admits to her that he cannot read and write. Moreover, the wisdom he expected to gain during the war has become materialized in his only knowledge – death. At the same time, Louis de Bernières deconstructs again the myth of modernity concerning progress and emancipation. Enlightenment and the modern proclaimed that people investigate nature for the sake of knowledge, whereas the novelist, in line with the postmodernist thinkers, questions the nature of knowledge that we gain and goes even further, claiming the impossibility of attaining knowledge. As Lyotard states, "the old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 4).

With a shattered image of the self and of the reality of his world, Mandras wants to rely desperately on a certainty, on an absolute truth, which is the knowledge of Pelagia's love for him. He imagines that in his world there exists an immobile truth, recorded by the help of a "universal language", which will preserve its intact meaning forever. He is not aware that "reality" is made up by "language games". These "language games" go back to Saussurean description of language as a system of signs, where the signs do not correspond directly to things, but are divided between signifier and

signified, word and concept. This gives way to arbitrariness and difference, since there is no continuous or direct relation between signifier and signified. Moreover, such a naïve expectation from language is rejected by Wittgenstein, who coins the term “language games” (in *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953), and who points to the fact that the rules of sentence usage and language games represent an irreducible multiplicity, and thus being heterogeneous among themselves.

Jean-François Lyotard continues considerably Wittgenstein's preoccupation with language games, and uses in his work entitled *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) the same term “language games” as introduced earlier by his precursor. In employing this term, Lyotard explains that Wittgenstein means by this concept “that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put – in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 10).

While applying the same term, Lyotard feels the need to make some observations which are relevant for our purpose. In his reference to language games, Lyotard considers as necessary the following explanation:

*The first is that their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are the object of a contract, explicit or not, between players (which is not to say that the players invent the rules). The second is that if there are no rules, there is no game, that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game, that a “move” or utterance that does not satisfy the rules does not belong to the game they define. The third remark is suggested by what has just been said: every utterance should be thought as a “move” in a game. (Lyotard, 1984, p. 10)*

It is interesting to observe that to Lyotard “to speak is to fight” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 10). Therefore, he understands communication in terms of “moves” and reciprocally “countermoves” which are not necessarily programmed, but which occur in an attempt to “balance the power”. One should not be surprised by an “unexpected move”, a new statement, which represents a reaction to a newly acquired position. Moreover, it should be mentioned that Lyotard wants us to understand social relations as “flexible networks of language games” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 17). All social relations are based on communication; therefore, antagonism as the founding principle becomes a *sine qua non* part of these relations.

If we are to translate this language games into the relationship of Pelagia and Mandras, we would see an interesting situation. Mandras had displayed an extremely humble attitude towards Pelagia before he joined the war. While speaking to her, there was not even a trace of attack or defence, for he would frequently address her as “Siora”. His modest “moves” could be considered as an assertion of an enamored young man deeply in love with his sweetheart, as in the case in which he declares: “Siora, will you marry me? Marry me or I die” (De Bernières, 1995, p. 95). As sender of a statement, Mandras did not even give a thought of “balancing the power” with his addressee, since to him the rule of that game seemed to be pretty clear: she is superior to him. When confronted by Pelagia with a “countermove”, asking him “Why do you call me Siora?”, his answer comes plainly: “Because you speak Italian and sometimes wear a hat” (De Bernières, 1995, p. 95). It appears obvious that at this moment of his existence his humbleness is a result of his incapacity to speak any other language except his own. Moreover, his inability to read and write, while Pelagia is able to do them both, silences him even in his own language and, in these circumstances, erases from his mind every possible thought of balancing the power. If there was anything to be said, he had programmed it to be uttered after the war, since a war would, presumably, empower a man by gaining knowledge.

In this case one should ask what is understood by the word “knowledge”. If we look at Lyotard's answer, we would find out that

*knowledge is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple determination and application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or color (auditory and visual sensibility), etc. Understood in this way, knowledge is what makes someone capable of forming “good” denotative utterances, but also “good” prescriptive and “good” evaluative utterances (...). From this derives one of the principal features of knowledge: it coincides with an extensive array of competence building measures and is the only form embodied in a subject constituted by the various areas of competence composing it. (Lyotard, 1984, pp. 18-19)*

Judging from this perspective, Mandras really gains knowledge during the war, namely the knowledge that life is like war, that war is a game where no applicable rules exist, that every move incites a countermove, and that the balance of power inclines towards you if you attack well and constantly. This newly gained knowledge makes him capable of building competence that will contribute to his ability of forming some “good” utterances, helpful to him in his confrontation with Pelagia as well as the rest of the world.

At first Mandras should have thought that wisdom and great knowledge slipped from him since he was not trained

enough in matters of reading and writing. In his naivety, he imagines that he could develop into a "civilized" and knowledgeable man only after he has mastered these skills, and, eventually, he will be able to make an apt "move", but before he conquers that tower of "supreme knowledge", Mandras chooses to apply the competences that he built during the war, and among the first strategies is the confrontation of your opponent. With a destabilized image of the self and the reality, Mandras needs a certain or absolute truth which in his hopes is to be found in Pelagia's love for him as recorded in her letters and sent to him while he was at war.

As one of the strategies of the language game, Mandras imagines a world in which there is truth which is certain and which is recorded by the help of a universal language that preserves its meaning fixed forever. He also imagines that he will imprison Pelagia forever by the words she has written once to him, words which declare her passion and her desire for Mandras. In order to prevent an insufficient transmission of his wanted truth in a virtual two-dimensional space, he never gives Pelagia's letters to be read by any of his friends. Instead, he keeps them close to his heart, hoping that Pelagia's presence, in a three-dimensional space through reading, will provide him with the expected satisfaction from this strategy. He believes that reading/hearing the words from Pelagia's mouth will help him to name all the things correctly; in other words, he will fit the word "love" to the thing.

However, when he thought of his strategy to be a perfect "move" for detaining Pelagia with her love forever, Mandras has unwisely overlooked that the letter is a narrative and that there is the effect of time upon any narrative. Though Pelagia is addresser/narrator and the addressee/narratee is Mandras, and though the narrative of Pelagia's love for Mandras is preserved in an absolutely fixed form, the "beating time", "in a language whose meaning is obscured by lexical and syntactic anomalies, [this narrative becomes] sung as interminable, monotonous chants. It is a strange brand of knowledge, you may say, that does not even make itself understood to the young men to whom it is addressed!" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 21). A paradox occurs in the following: when both the sound and the graphic letter remain intact, where is the meaning produced by them?

As Lyotard tries to explain in his book *Discourse, Figure* (1971), there is only a "graphic" function of the letter and in the plastic form of letters no value is preserved. In fact, the letters' capacity to signify relies only on their oppositional graphic dissimilarity. The precise plastic shape of a letter is irrelevant, since all that a reader is requested to do is to make the distinction between the form of "t" and the form of "r", as well as to accept this distinction. When a letter functions only in connection with its opposition to the rest of other characters of the system or code to which it is a part of, this letter becomes plainly decodable, because it exists exclusively in the virtual textual space of the system or code.

Lyotard explains that the situation changes in the case of the line: since a line is seen, not read, it operates by a reference to corporeal resonance, not to the code, and it is a figure on a space, not an arbitrary mark. It is essential that for Lyotard the line supposes a figural space and possesses the characteristic of being unrecognizable; it suggests unreadability which is an essential part of the possibility of recognition. As he explains,

*the distinction should be between the visible and the invisible. To feel will mean to draw the interior, the unpenetrated of the visible silhouette, in which case to see is simply to identify. The visible, recognizable silhouette covers the object and the person, familiar in their immediate exteriority, as if transformed into letters. The eye that sees in this way does no more than read or recognize; sooner or later it will cease to see altogether. Sensory power is that of the eye deployed not in the field of legibility, but in that of form that escapes from legibility, not in the field of immediate exteriority, but concurrently in the fields of exteriority and interiority. (Lyotard, 2011, p. 221)*

To clarify it better, the act of reading a line in a letter suggests an indistinct activity, a seeing bereft of any signification, where the interiority of the line is completely abandoned and any attempt made to decipher it as a recognizable meaning becomes futile. However, Lyotard admits that the same letter or the visible could function as a figure in the plastic space of a line, as in the case of medieval illustrations, where the aspect and the angle of a body represent conventional codes and the illustrations become texts as well. Therefore, one should realize the figural coexistence of the textual and the plastic, of the line and the letter. The figural opacity does not create a "second discourse in discourse". The figural is the thing which triggers our awareness that something we wish to represent cannot be represented; it is the Other to representation.

In this context, one should think of the function of the figural in case of a love letter. Since the reading of a text is reduced to a reversible and oppositional graphic distinction of the letter and the meaning of any narrative becomes lost with the passage of time, is there a chance to preserve and transmit desire in a discourse?

When Mandras implores Pelagia to read those love letters to him, so he could "know" everything, Pelagia is horrified. She is aware that he will notice immediately "the steady diminution of endearments, the greater concentration on the factual as the order of the letters proceeded. He would perceive it with a clarity far greater than if he had read them over successive months" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 157). To put it in other words, Pelagia thinks that her love and desire

will be transmitted by the letters and she also thinks that Mandras will not fail to understand that these emotions dissipated with the passage of time and are not a part of reality any longer. Therefore, terrified to reveal the truth, thus unwilling to hurt this young and sensitive man, she tries to avoid this confrontation as long as possible. Mandras, in his deplorable situation, feels too exhausted to make a move or think of a strategy. He relies on the fact that these letters are there, in his hands, and that their message and meaning are fixed, unchanged, and the only thing he can do is to sigh in resignation. Being too overwhelmed by the reality, he prefers to succumb to the illusion that one day she will read the letters and will reproduce the love and desire which are immobilized in those letters.

It is only after his convalescence that he has time to meditate upon reality and take away the veil off his eyes when he insists that Pelagia should read to him her letters. She began reading the letters in which her love and pain caused by the separation were tremendous, and her desire for him filled the paper in the most lyrical manner:

*Agapeton, Agapeton, I love you and miss you and worry for you, I can't wait for you to come back, I want to take your dear face in my hands and kiss you until my spirit flies with the angels, I want to take you in my arms and love you so that time stops and the stars fall. Every second of every minute I dream of you, and every second I know more clearly that you are life itself, more dear than life, the only thing that can life can mean (...)* (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 184-185)

It has been mentioned above that any narrative can “beat the time” and remain “fixed” in its form, though lose its initial meaning. Therefore we, as readers, are not surprised to learn that to Pelagia this text becomes devoid of any meaning, in that she stopped loving Mandras as a man, but, again, as readers, we have the expectation that Mandras still loves Pelagia passionately and, at least to him, this text will gain some worth and meaning. We are completely shocked to discover that this “love” has lost its meaning for Mandras as well and the only value he confers to this text is that of an instrument of Pelagia’s torture. He uses the letters to make a “countermove” in his game. To him, Pelagia is now a simple opponent in a game in which he can accomplish his earlier suppressed desire to balance power. What is mostly astonishing in his behaviour is the skills/knowledge of abuse which he gained during his war days and which he applies later in his game to overpower Pelagia. The young woman feels aghast at his demand to read him again and again the emotions transmitted in those letters, cringing each time from loving words that now stuck in her throat, making her situation unbearable. Moreover, his aggressive demand to subdue her even in those parts of letters where the emotional element is less present is amazing: “Mandras suddenly yelled, and hammered at his thighs with his fists, ‘I don’t want that, I don’t want those bits, I don’t want to hear about how upset everyone is (...) I want the other bits’. His voice, as querulous as that of a spoiled child, irked her, but she feared his strength and his vindictive madness, and she continued to read the letters” (De Bernières, 1995, p. 185).

What one also notices in this situation is that the reading of the lines about desire in Pelagia’s letters becomes an unrecognizable activity, an act of seeing which is devoid of meaning. The literalness of the letter makes us aware of the figural, as the holding up together of the textual and visible spaces. The figural here is the love and desire that fail to be represented by those letters, which cannot be remembered in the present state of antagonism between Mandras and Pelagia, but which cannot be forgotten either. The figural makes us aware that the meaning is evanescent, therefore ungraspable. As Lyotard explains,

*misrecognition of the respective orders of discourse and world – rendering unrecognizable the former’s units and the latter’s objects – is the sign that desire pursues its fulfilment by appropriating givens organized according to rules alien to it, in order to impose its own law on them. The essential characteristic of the figures to which desire gives rise, in language as well as in the field of vision, is that they disconcert recognition. At best (...) they allow themselves to be recognized as unrecognizable.* (Lyotard, 2011, p. 282)

Subdued completely by the situation, Pelagia is only able to simulate love that does not exist anymore:

*Mandras made Pelagia read all the letters, handing them to her one by one, so that, with tears in her eyes, she endured a purgatorial hour of utter panic, each letter a torment of Sisyphus, the sweat pouring down her face and stinging her eyes. She begged to stop, and was denied. She felt herself deaden inside as desperately she invented endearments for this man she had grown first to pity and then to hate.* (De Bernières, 1995, p. 186)

In order to avoid this never ending terror, Pelagia provides Mandras with words that create a fantasy representation of reality or, what Baudrillard calls, a simulation of the real. It is a first-order simulation, when the representation of the real is obviously artificial. In her despair and torment, Pelagia is not even able to produce a second-order simulation, which is to feign love in its absence. To Mandras, however, with his shattered image of truth and falsehood, Pelagia’s simulation of love represents a reality as real as the real. One would say that simulation has become

Mandras' only way to establish a relation with the real; therefore, while Pelagia feigns love, he is not looking for her reasons to lie, and he is not interested to negotiate the degree of truth or falsity beyond whatever he is offered, because to consider the truth would signify to accept one more humiliation – his failure as a lover.

While looking at Mandras from the perspective of mythical Odysseus, we observe that the postmodern counterpart of the mythical hero fails again. Odysseus is capable of manipulating language by revealing his ingenuity and natural charm, thus successfully imposing his supremacy over men and especially women, whereas Mandras reveals his only ability to impose power by his brutality, creating thus a false image of self-sufficiency and superiority. Since reality does not allow him to experience any of his wanted satisfactions, he prefers to simulate them, and he is also ready to accept simulated love instead of admitting its absence.

From the above mentioned, we may conclude that Mandras' relation with the real has become traumatic, and he gradually slides into a hyperreality, and this kind of reality becomes his dominant way of experiencing and understanding the world.

## 9. The New Departure of the Hero and the Rejoin of the War

This situation brings about a new mytheme inherent in Odysseus myth, more exactly the new departure of the hero who is in search of fresh adventures and knowledge. When the mythical hero becomes a captive of one or another world or being, Mandras, as a postmodern Odysseus, in this new departure, becomes the captive of hyperreal, or of what Baudrillard calls the third-order simulation. This is a world without a real origin, and, as Baudrillard explains, the hyperreal is a space

*whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth (...) It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real (...) A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences. (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 2)*

Louis de Bernières restructures the myth of Odysseus, a myth of an ardent and passionate hero who expects and experiences every journey with great intensity. The novelist presents the reworking of the postmodern Odysseus, Mandras, who has neither enthusiasm nor a sense of patriotism necessary to join a war. He has exhausted all his passion and idealism during his first war experience. However, what stimulates him to return to normality (to restore his health miraculously) and to go to fight has nothing to do any longer with his land or Pelagia. It is his feeling of inadequacy experienced in his land. He expected it to be his paradise, but, unfortunately, it did not prove to be so. He has grown aware that it was an illusion to think of his home and Pelagia in idyllic terms, and, being incapable of grasping the wanted "reality", he changes the illusion of home with the illusion of war again. Unlike his first experience, when he felt the enthusiasm of gaining glory and prestige, this time Mandras goes to fight in hope of attaining a sense of terrestrial paradise in terms of power and authority that might contribute to his construction of identity. This time, he is not interested in perceiving the real, since the hyperreal becomes his prevalent way of perceiving and understanding the world.

Mandras' expectation to find his Garden of Eden on his native island, at home, with his beloved Pelagia, has collapsed; in other words, his anticipated ideal relation between him and the rest of the world through his needs and the rule of Nature failed to become materialized into a reality. Baudrillard describes the word "nature" in terms of "use-value", which represents a system of production where the man is defined by his capacity for labour. He also explains that

*the natural law of value – which the system of political economy and the market law of value also appropriated as their imaginary system of reference ('Nature'): 'nature' leads a ghostly existence as use-value at the core of exchange-value. But on the next twist of the spiral, use-value is seized as an alibi within the dominant order of the code. Each configuration of value is seized by the next in a higher order of simulacra. (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 2)*

In other words, the concept of use-value results from the ideological construction of exchange-value and the use-value functions as an "alibi" for the exchange-value, maintaining thus a naturalized justification for its existence.

As we might see in Louis de Bernières' novel, which was influenced by Baudrillard's ideas, this logic of equivalence of value is just an abstraction or a code, since any object in order to become exchangeable must be conceived and be justified in terms of its utility. The code relates the object to its utility and its function becomes an ontological finality. Unfortunately, we acknowledge that most frequently the value is not determined by the object's utility.

If we try to transfer this logic of equivalence to social relations of use-value, we should imagine the existence of a subject/individual, that is, a person with needs, desires, motivations, with a sense of "self", in the privacy of his

psychological finality. In case of Mandras as an individual, his need now is to defend his country with its people, his desire is to contribute to the establishment of an utopian world where everyone will be equal and his motivations are related to his construction of an identity, which will provide him with a sense of his own utility in his society, a sense that should justify his existence in this world.

However, the value system of the postmodern Odysseus, a system which determines individual's use by his productivity or labour becomes a model from which "simulacrum of the second order" emerges, and which simulates the capitalist economic ideology. It happens so because there is certainty neither in any social substance of production nor in the retraction of any truth of labour power. As Baudrillard explains,

*[t]his is because labour is not a power, it has become one sign amongst many. Like every other sign, it produces and consumes itself. It is exchanged against non-labour, leisure, in accordance with total equivalence, it is commutable with every other sector of everyday life. (...) Like most practices, it is now only a set of signing operations. It becomes part of contemporary life in general, that is, it is framed by signs. (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 10)*

The creation of an earthly paradise, an eternal dream of human kind that requires human "labour" for the production of a utopia, which is a myth in itself, has been consumed and even abused in the course of the twentieth century history to such an extent that it has led to the detachment of the sign from its referent, the signifier from reference to the signified. In other words, the use-value and the utility have been forsaken in this set of signing operations in order to create an economic structure of exchange where values become variable and random, completely detached from their referent, and this way they can no longer be fixed down within any logic of equivalence.

Mandras with a small group of "andartes" have been "driven by something from the very depth of the soul, something that commanded them to rid their land of strangers or die in the attempt" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 228). In their desire to liberate the masses, the "natural law of value" should have signified freedom and the establishment of happiness and harmony for people. Instead, we admit that there is a split between signifier and signified, a split which anticipates the possibility of the increasing autonomy of the signifier. When Mandras and his group set fire to the lorries and killed an enemy soldier for the sake of the native villagers, it did not comfort the defended people because it ended up by the burning of several houses of the local people by the enemies so that the priest and the schoolmaster begged them to leave before anything worse happened. In this context, the use-value of Mandras and his crew cannot satisfy the logic of equivalence brought by the exchange-value. Instead, their natural law of value becomes referential for a new system, in which exchange-value is no longer determinable but constantly adjustable; consequently, it loses its naturalized rationale for its existence. In Baudrillard's terms, this is the passage from the second order to the third order, which he sees as "a higher order of simulacra", a passage which signals the establishment of the hyperreal order, where the explosion of the sign value takes place.

Searching for a justification of their existence, Mandras and his "andartes" join a group which, as they thought, should have been moved "in their souls" by the ardent desire to be useful to their country and an incessant need to establish a world of justice, equality and harmony. As we are told in the novel, the name of this group was ELAS,

*which was the military wing of an organization called EAM, which in turn was controlled by a committee in Athens whose members belonged to the KKE. Intelligent people realized immediately that any group with such credentials must have been Communist, and that the purpose of having such an attenuated chains of control was to disguise from ordinary citizens that they were a Communist organization. (De Bernières, 1995, p. 229)*

This is an example of an operation of simulation in the third order level of signification where the sign value has been completely exploded. We observe the increasing autonomy of the signifier, which takes its meaning not from its relation with the signified but from its floating and plural position within a chain of signifiers. In other words, the Communist organization as signifier should have the meaning of a movement of liberation of people from all forms of oppression as signified, while in fact it enjoys a complete autonomy, constructing its meaning and value in "fluctuating and random combinations", like seizing power after the war among many others. The Communist organization, as a sign, should have had an "identity", without any possible "other" or "different"; instead, it entertains itself in its capacity of being free of meaning and value. As we are told in the novel, most of the members of this group

*came from all walks of life, and included Venizelist republicans and Royalists, as well as moderate socialist, Liberals and Communists, all of whom were easily duped into believing that they were a part of the national liberation struggle, and not part of some convoluted hidden agenda which was more to do with seizing power after the war than beating the Axis. (De Bernières, 1995, p. 229)*

At the same time, we understand that the Communist organization, as a sign, becomes incapable of signifying a reality, whether historical, sociological, or even imaginary. This is hyperreality, a level of representation in which the signifier fails to make a solid and fixed relationship with the signified, because in a certain degree the signifier slides into another signifier again and again indefinitely in its continuous interconnection with the political, ontological and epistemological aspects.

When the group to which Mandras adhered proves incapable of producing and preserving intact an "identity", Mandras, as the postmodern Odysseus, fails in his attempt to build an identity for himself. The mythical hero creates his identity through each of his achievements (like in the episode when he exclaims "I am Odysseus, the sacker of cities"), to a degree that in Tennyson's famous poem entitled *Ulysses*, he is able to claim with certainty "I am become a name", a fact that gives this hero a definite character, which can never be confounded with any other.

Louis de Bernières subverts the accomplishment of a certain distinguishable character, presenting instead an indistinguishable hero as a collective ideological referent, with a constantly fleeting self and indefinitely shifting value:

*He had learned from Hector that he was not a fisherman, but a worker, and he had learned what he and a carpenter and a man in a factory had in common was that the capitalists got all the profit from their work. Except that profit was called surplus value. He did not understand yet how it was that any of his surplus value went to someone else, but it was only a matter of time. He felt very angry against the King for making it that way, and he had learned to scowl or laugh sarcastically every time that someone mentioned the British or the Americans. It was what everyone else did. (...) He thought of all the fish he had given to Dr Iannis in payment for treatment, and felt bitter. The doctor was richer than he was, and in a fair world it should be the doctor whose surplus value came to him. (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 254-255)*

Mandras develops his "identity" at a level of representation where there is a constant shift of signifiers, a play of sign values (signs that function as exchange-values, and commodities that function as signs), and where the "simulated" real is more real than the "natural" real. In addition, he operates in the realm of the hyperreal, where the meanings, values, signifieds and concepts of reality configure the reality in accordance with a code that semiologically produces infinite possibilities of interpretations. The example of this *modus operandi* is revealed by Hector, Mandras' mentor:

*'We're taking this sheep on the orders of Allied High Command in Cairo.'*  
*The peasant heaved a sigh of relief, and said, 'And I thought you were thieves.'*  
*Hector laughed, and so Mandras laughed also. The man held out his hand. Hector looked at the horny, grimy palm, and a frown crossed his face. 'One gold sovereign' explained the farmer.*  
*'Get lost', said Hector. 'Are you a Fascist yourself, or something?'*  
*'The British always pay one gold sovereign for a sheep', said the man. 'It's the standard payment. Aren't you with EDES? Surely you know that?'*  
*'We are ELAS, and we don't consider the loss of a sheep much of a hardship when you consider what we are trying to do on your behalf. We'll pay you later. Now do as I say and get lost. The new order from the British is that we take the sheep, and that they pay you later'. (De Bernières, 1995, pp. 255-256)*

In the hyperreality, the same sign has an ambivalent function, the floating models precede the real and this becomes the principle of structuring the contemporary economic value and signification, where the explosion of sign value becomes the impeccable form of social control. As Baudrillard explains, "the fundamental code of our societies, the code of political economy (both commodity form and sign form) does not operate through alienation of consciousness and contents. It rationalizes and regulates exchange, makes things communicate, but only under the law of the code and through the control of meaning" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 147).

"One gold sovereign for a sheep" as an exchange-value cannot be preserved into a fixed and constant form. The exchange-value becomes easily regulated within a "law of the code" which generally configures communication by the logic of binary oppositions as input/output, encoder/decoder system, where the sign is not just a "semiological supplement" to the exchange-value of commodities but, as Baudrillard says, is "an operational structure" that could be easily manipulated through its production of meaning and difference. Interesting enough, any exchange-value is symbolic and, therefore, is relational and acquires meaning just within the "law of the code", while outside this code the meaning vanishes. Viewed from this perspective, the communication in the contemporary society is not based on perceiving a certain meaning, but on control of the meaning by power.

## 10. The Hero's Emancipation through Supreme Knowledge

In this context, the attempt of emancipation of the hero and the attaining of supreme knowledge, which stimulates the individual self-assertion, gain an ironic stance. Mandras always thought that knowledge and experience will help him to

advance from his "primitive" state; it would cultivate a progression from the concern with survival to "higher things". He has even solved the great mystery of reading, imagining that now with such a supreme knowledge he would attain a kind of revelation. He naively imagined that a copy of such a "great narrative" as *What Is To Be Done?* would help him find a way for his self-enlightenment and eventually manage to liberate humanity from class, religious and other forms of oppression.

As Hector – Mandras' mentor – explains:

*It is absolutely scientifically true that what we are about is the political and economic emancipation of the masses, but we know only too well that the proletariat must be led by an intelligentsia with sufficient education and leisure to theorise; Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin, they were all bourgeois intellectuals who sacrificed their own interests in order to raise the consciousness of the world-proletariat who still do not fully understand the nature of the structures that have to be put in place. What we are aiming at is the effacement of all distinctions between workers and intellectuals, and so we need sufficiently trained, developed and experienced leaders to guide the spontaneously awakening masses away from erroneous theories that deviate from the perception of the necessary and inevitable nature of the materialist conception of history. We need leaders who are not susceptible to tailism, leaders who do not give in to working class aspirations, but who help them to form correct aspirations. (De Bernières, 1995, p. 281)*

Mandras, as many others, is easily trapped by the factitious, fabricated code presented here by Hector. We also grow aware that there is no passion for liberating the masses from all forms of oppression as there is no passion for the code that will provide him with the position of a leader. This code regulates both the subjects and the objects, determining their position as well as value; it subordinates them to itself and therefore easily manipulates them into an ever changing and convenient scenario. The reality of this leading intelligentsia is clearly a hyperreality, ironically a paroxysm and parody simultaneously. Any attempt at understanding or interpret such a "reality" will fail inevitably, since it no longer makes sense.

Such concepts as linear temporality or linear unfolding of history break down in such a world. As Baudrillard claims,

*Nothing moves any longer from cause to effect: everything is transversalized by inversions of meaning, by perverse events, by ironic reversals. (...) [T]his deregulation of the system is actually the work of the system itself (just as Marx said of the proletariat, that its emancipation would be the work of the proletarians themselves: ironically, the formula also applies to the self-annihilating system). Pushed to extremes of sophistication and performance, to a point of perfection and totalization (...), the system reaches its breaking point and implodes all by itself. (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 78)*

The greatest "ironic reversal" exposed by Mandras' system lays in the ambition to awaken the masses to a level of emancipation and to abolish all class distinctions, while in fact, in their extreme willingness to perform this, the system annihilates itself by generating power and ranks. Nietzsche's concept of "the will to power" is re-worked in Louis de Bernières' novel, revealing the human eternal strife for something more, to accumulate, to gain without loss, beyond the moralizing necessities of life.

Consequently, Mandras' acquisition of knowledge and emancipation has brought him nowhere; it ironically deconstructs itself by his constant desire for appropriation and wasteful expenditure. The only thing he seems to have truly experienced is his constant engagement with the objects and in this "duel" he has easily lost his hegemonic position. When the object, in terms of wealth or power, becomes the priority and dominates a subject's life, this subject annihilates himself or herself. Mandras' conventional expectation that knowledge will provide the subject with the dominance over object implodes by itself, since he has lost control both over himself and the objects.

Among the objects that he strives to appropriate, we can enumerate all the women that he rapes during his departure and after his return home, because by his will to power and appropriation he objectifies them. He proudly quotes to Pelagia the *Communist Manifesto*, which claims that "Bourgeois marriage is in reality a system of wives in common" (De Bernières, 1995, p. 447). Ironically, he has condemned himself to his own objectification:

*This violation of women was something that he could not help, it seemed. It was some irresistible reflex that welled up from deep inside his breast, a reflex acquired in three years of omnipotence and unaccountability that had begun with the armed appropriation of property and ended with the appropriation of everything. It was a natural right, a matter of course, and its violence and animality was infinitely more exhilarating than the feeble stings of lust with which it ended. Sometime one had to kill at the end of it to draw back a tiny remnant, a vestige of the prior joy. And then there was a weariness, an emptiness that whipped one on to repetition after repetition. (De Bernières, 1995, p. 449)*

Curiously enough, Mandras is thinking that now, in terms of power and authority, he has made his last and definitive move in his language game, regarding both his social position and his relation to Pelagia, a move that will determine social prestige and value to remain forever intact. However, he represents a case of what Baudrillard calls "objective irony", given the excess of his omnipotence and unaccountability, for in his desire to appropriate both objects and humans positions as objects, he has lost access to real experience, real pleasure, and real historical events. Paradoxically, the overabundance of his power forces him to produce more experimental procedures or strategies, like torturing or killing, in order to simulate a satisfaction or joy which has no referent in reality. The excess of his consuming the objects brought to an automatization, which produces the withdrawal of the satisfaction and Mandras, by his self-objectification, achieves his self-annihilation. Ironically again, by the abuse of the others he has abused himself to the level of self-extermination.

## 11. The Final Departure: Death of the Hero

Mandras' encounter with death – his suicide – is an acknowledgement that this world is completely unintelligible. The man strives throughout his life to develop scientifically, intellectually, or mentally; however, no matter how much he strives to attain any sense of rationality, nothing makes meaning and nothing can be discovered beyond the man's personal objectification. Everything is a meaningless illusion of the living. This represents his final death. Mandras, as Odysseus, has no referent in reality; his existence is possible only within the structures of a myth.

## 12. Conclusion

Myth, accepted as a structural system, assumes the existence of a centre or an origin (mytheme), both universal and contemporary, both patent and latent. Louis de Bernières challenges his reader to discover this centre or the mytheme, especially when, once found, this mytheme becomes dislocated, constantly transferring to another system, revealing the capacity of a mytheme to render numerous meanings and proving continuously its protean attributes. This transformative quality of myth becomes fundamental, especially in the context of postmodern mythical meta-narratives, where the previously established structures and meaning become deconstructed, since no absolute truth or certainty is ever validated. Louis de Bernières fiction, understood as a structural system, allows the transformation of mythical units into its ultimately postmodern form whose lack of an established meaning engages the reader into the privileged role of author himself, creating his or her own meaning and significance according to his or her own cultural code, restricting or accepting the established meanings of the modern mythical discourse.

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