Candidate 1 evidence

Is La vita é Bella principally a comedy or a tragedy? Discuss.

The Oscar winning film *La Vita È Bella* (1997) directed by, and starring, Roberto Benigni is based on a true story. Guido, played by Benigni, is at the heart of this tragic tale. Set in Italy during World War II, Guido is an Italian-Jewish man who moves to a city in Tuscany where he works as a waiter in a hotel restaurant while he waits for his dream of opening a bookstore. In the meanwhile, he meets the love of his life, Dora, who is about to get trapped in arranged marriage. Guido wins her over amongst many coincidences and unexpectedly hilarious moments. They later have a son and on his fifth birthday, him and his dad are sent to a Nazi Concentration Camp, and Dora follows them of her own will. While there Guido uses his humour and imagination to protect his son during their imprisonment. While *La Vita È Bella* begins as a comedy it becomes tragic as the film goes on. It can best be described as a tragicomedy, combining humour and suffering to highlight Guido's sacrifice and love.

In the beginning of the film, Guido moves to a city in Tuscany to pursue his dream of opening a bookstore. He is immediately seen to be a funny, energetic and playful character who is full of life. The first part of the film is more romantic and funny than tragic. He has his first encounter with Dora where she falls into his arms from a balcony and he says "Buongiorno principessa," and after that encounter they both became curious of each other. They meet again in the town where he bumps into her on his bike and he repeats "buongiorno principessa," and they have the strangest encounters. As said by film director Daniele Falleti, 'Il primo atto: la commedia favolistica'. Because it seems more like a romantic comedy Falleti says: 'che nel primo atto del film non possiamo che amare'.

They both had feelings for each other, Guido left wondering about this woman, and Dora was happy for the first time since her marriage was arranged. She had no interest in her supposed partner, and she was excited by the idea of Guido. Guido finds out that she is going to the theatre, so he gets a ticket to go and hope to see her by the end of the night. It is pouring with rain and he steals her partner's car and he takes her with him and end up having their first real talk and communicate and they shared a kiss. Meanwhile a couple of days later, Dora and her partner are celebrating the announcement of their engagement at the fancy hotel where Guido works. He tries to grab her attention many times until one moment he is cleaning food under the table, and she then notices and goes under too and they share a kiss and she asks him to take her away. From then on, they get married and have a child, Giosuè. The first part of the film is more comedic than tragic, since it focuses on romance, marriage, and the birth of Guido and Dora's son. It also makes the audience feel safe and comfortable by watching a romantic story start. The comedic and romantic story makes the later action more shocking.

The second half of the film is more tragic but still has many comedic and wholesome elements. Fast forward five years after Giosuè is born, him and Guido are preparing for his fifth birthday at home, when Dora returns to find the house empty and ruined. Giosuè and Guido both got taken away by German Nazi soldiers. Dora isn't Jewish herself, and so is spared. Unable to deal with her husband and son being taken, she goes to the train station to demand she's allowed on that train with her son and husband. Dora trying to sacrifice herself in order to be with her family is tragic, as it shows she would rather die than be separated.

They are all sent to a concentration camp where the men and women are split up. From the beginning of this journey Guido uses his imagination to invent a game for his son: whoever gets to 1,000 points first wins a real, full-size tank. Guido's rules are, for Giosuè to gain points he needs to hide away from the guards and stay quiet. He loses points by complaining that he is hungry, crying and asking for his mother. Guido invents this game to keep his son away from the trauma while distracting himself from the reality they face, all while limiting the chance of getting killed. The children and older men were the ones to get in the "shower" first, so Guido uses this invented game to hide Giosuè from the soldiers. Here, the film becomes more tragic, and the humour becomes more protective as Giosuè is being shielded from the reality of the camp.

However, despite the film taking an extremely tragic turn, during their time at the camp, there are still comedic and sweet moments where Guido finds opportunities to make his son laugh, and even to communicate to his wife Dora, to let her know that they are safe. He sneaks himself and Giosuè to a room with a Tannoy and they say things through it to make her feel relieved that they are safe and to let her hear their voices.

The ending is tragic. The final night, Guido was still, as Falleti put it: 'sorridere alla morte'. Guido had a plan in his head where he was going to escape with his son, which unfortunately didn't get executed the way he thought. While the German soldiers were clearing camp after a couple of hectic days, he saw this as his opportunity: he hid Giosuè in a small box and made it clear not to leave unless Guido returned. He told him these are the rules you need to follow to win the game's prize and that he had to stay quiet and not leave the box until the whole camp was dead silent. Guido takes the moment to try and go to the women's side of the camp to look for Dora so that they

could all escape. But Guido was caught and the soldier took him and walked him to a quiet area. While walking past the box his son looks, and Guido stays in character and acts as if it's all part of the game: he made up a funny walk to make his son laugh. The soldier takes him to the corner and kills him. Giosuè leaves the box when he sees there is no one left. A tank with American solders comes by and picks him up, leaving Giosuè believing he has won the game. Giosuè spots his mum in the crowd of people released from the camp, and they reunite, ending the film on a bittersweet moment.

This film directed by Roberto Benigni taught us a what it was like for Jewish families during World War II. It is based on a real-life story which adds an extra layer of tragedy for the viewer. The film is both tragic and comedic because it split into two halves: the first part is sweet, romantic and funny, while the second half is very tragic as they were sent to the camp when their son was only five years old. The tragic death of Guido at the films finale is heartbreaking, but the very end has a sweet moment where Giosuè and his mother reunite which shows that's there is always beauty in sad moments. As stated by Lisa Modiano, "The point of the film lies in its name: Life is Beautiful." This gives the watchers an overwhelming sense that there is hope. Falleti says: "il senso dell'esistenza umana, una gioia incontrastata che ci ricorda che siamo fortunati, e che sì: la vita è bella." So, as it is both a tragedy and a comedy, this film is best described as a tragicomedy - it uses humour and jokes to in the face of tragedy to demonstrate the power of love and sacrifice.

Word count: 1358

Bibliography

The film

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