

Moise Andrew Walters

Professor Greeves

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Media Ethics

This chapter sixteen media reflection will be based on the gray box titled 72 Tragedy Lite. Roberto Benigni was the director, writer, and star of the 1998 film *Life is Beautiful*. I saw this movie in my film class in high school and thought it was very informative and entertaining as well. The story is set around a guy named Guido who is actually an Italian Jew. He falls in love with a woman named Dora who he carried off on a white horse ending the first half of the film.

The second half of the film was not as uplifting and disturbing where they were going. While in the middle of planning for a birthday party, Guido and his four year old son Joshua are taken away to a Nazi Concentration Camp. The reason many people were critical of the Roberto Benigni and this film is because of the second half of this film. Even though they are in a concentration camp Guido uses humor to lighten the mood and also trick his son into not getting scared. To protect Joshua from the harsh reality of the concentration camp, he tells his son that they have come here to participate in a game as a birthday present.

He tells his son that the whole point of the game is to compete with the other prisoners for a prize of a real tank. The humor I previously spoke about in the film really came into play when they arrived to the camp. A German Nazi officer enters their barracks, and although Guido is not fluent by any means in German, he offers to translate the camp instructions into their native

tongue of Italian. The motives behind him doing this is so his son will only hear his invented rules for the fake game.

While the Nazi guard was listing rules in German, Guido translated it to say, “ You’ll lose points for three things: One, if you cry. Two, if you want to see mother.” Personally for me, watching that scene was pretty funny because that is obviously not what the prison guard was saying, but it made a very dark situation they were in more lighthearted. That being said, I can understand why people of Jewish descent who had real family members pass away in the Holocaust would be upset about this. I think that their perspective is that regardless of how terrifying the situation was, Guido should have been honest with his son because that was their reality.

The next scene after this is when the kid’s grandfather was sent to the showers which was a gas chamber. Thankfully, he ignored the call for the children to take a shower because his demise could have been next. At the end of the film, the father (Guido) is seen carrying Joshua back to sleep and covering his eyes as they go past a mound of dead bodies. That part even for myself was very much disturbing. This transitioned to the Allies coming in for the rescue and overthrowing the Germans. Guido tell his son Joshua to hide one last time, but is unfortunately murdered by a soldier off the screen.

It is so ironic that this boy survived the Holocaust and thought he was in a game the entire time. Obviously after some time had passed he knew that his father had passed away and the whole situation, but it was honestly so precious the way his father protected him. To come to Robert Benigni’s defense, movies have to be made interesting because although this story is very authentic it had to be made in an interesting way. Reflecting back on the movie, I honestly felt like they did a great overall job and I did cry at the end when Guido got killed. I am not sure if it

is a true story or not, but good actors and a good director make the audience get emotionally attached to the characters which is what happened to myself. It gave a glimpse of what they were going through which made me really invested. I thought it was cool that they had a voiceover of an older Joshua at the end saying that, “ This is the sacrifice my father made. This was the gift he gave to me.” There were three major criticisms of the film that holocaust survivors and others related to it had problems with.

It might have been cute to some people that Joshua was thought he was in a game, but some people got upset about the lack of violence, depression, and terror which the unfortunate reality of those who were there. They also felt a bit awkward and uncomfortable about such a traumatic situation was used for any sort of humor. They did not want to hear one bit that the humor was for the movie because they had real family members die over such brutal conditions. The third major criticism of the film was that Roberto Benigni came across as sort of delusional or insensitive. He seemed to be pushing the idea that having love and a sense of adventure and imagination were all it took to get off this dire situation.

He later did an interview saying that the reason he did not use a lot of blood, gore, and horror is simply because that is not his style and was not the theme he was trying to present in the movie. I still do think that a director has an ethical obligation such as this to shed light on what really happened especially with the Holocaust. That being said, I do not think he did anything morally wrong in terms of how he made this film. If people had an issue with it, they could have chosen to watch a more straight forward depiction of the Holocaust such as Schindler’s List on something along those lines.

I also think most people what happened in the Holocaust in terms of Hitler killing these enslaved people by use of gas chambers and other things such as that. It could also be triggering survivors who suffer from post traumatic stress disorder if they see the movie.