

Candidate 2

'Io non ho paura' expresses the loss of childhood, moral values and innocence. Discuss.

'Io non ho paura' follows a 9-year-old boy, Michele, and his life in Acqua Traverse, a small fictional village in southern Italy. Michele's discovery of a young boy, Filippo, chained up at the bottom of a pit challenges his view of the people he is closest to. Eventually, Michele discovers his parents, and other adults from the village, are responsible for Filippo's imprisonment and are using him to get a ransom. He realises Filippo is in danger and sets out to try and save him. On this journey he is betrayed by his best friend: Salvatore, he loses all trust in the people he looked up to most: his parents, and his view of the world around him changes completely.

At the beginning of the book, Michele is portrayed as a typical innocent nine-year-old boy with an ordinary childhood. He is first introduced to the reader in the first chapter where he and his friends race up a hill on their bikes. They are portrayed to the reader as typical children: they ride their bikes, race, dare each other and play like any other children would do during their summer holidays. It is in the very first chapter that Michele discovers Filippo and that the reader is made aware of Michele's innocence and naivety. "*Le cose sono di chi le trova per primo, - aveva deciso il Teschio. Se era così il bambino in fondo al buco era mio.*"¹ As soon as he discovers Filippo he applies the typical childish mentality of "finders keepers" to him: "*Non avrei detto niente a nessuno....Era la mia scoperta segreta.*"² He sees Filippo like his special toy or puppet, like a prize for having stood up for Barbara and having completed Teschio's forfeit. These judgement calls that Michele make underline that he is a naïve 9-year-old who is totally unprepared to deal with the grave scenario that is presented before his eyes

¹ Ammaniti N, 2011, *Io non ho paura*, Einaudi, p. 36

² Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 36

the minute he pulls back the “*vecchio materasso*” that is used to hide the hole. Michele is mentally immature to understand that his priority is to alert an adult to the situation. This behaviour immediately grasps the reader’s attention.

This innocence and childlike behaviour is reinforced throughout the book as the reader is given an insight into Michele’s weird and wonderful imagination. Instead of seeing Filippo for who he is: a desperate victim who needs immediate help, Michele uses his imagination to shield himself from the reality of the situation. He explains his discovery as: “*Un lupo mannaro. Di notte diventava un lupo. Lo tenevano incatenato lì perché è pericoloso.*”³ or as his twin brother: “*Forse io e lui eravamo gemelli.*”⁴ When he finally decides to save Filippo he continues to use his childlike imagination as a safety blanket to face his fear of the dark and of the horrifying situation he has found himself involved in. He describes his journey to save Filippo as if narrating an adventure from one of his favourite comic books: “*Vai Tiger vai....Io sono Tiger, anche meglio, io sono il figlio italiano di Tiger. Cosa avrebbe fatto Tiger Jack al mio posto?*”⁵.

A further plot twist is when Michele manages to get Filippo out of the hole. The reader immediately feels a sense of relief when finally, Michele decides to help his friend out of captivity. However, the reader is left shocked and confused with this dialogue: “*Filippo é tardi. Ti devo portare giù.*”⁶ “*Posso tornare giù davvero?*”⁵. This exchange shows how neither of the boys understand that this is the moment for them to save each other. Their innocence makes them completely unaware of what is really happening.

However, it could also be argued that this perplexing act of putting Filippo back in the hole, is also partly due to Michele’s lack of moral values. At the beginning of the book, he is portrayed as a boy with sound moral integrity. An example of

³ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 56

⁴ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 75

⁵ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 51

⁶ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 155

this is when Barbara is being dared to pull her trousers down. Michele feels uncomfortable about it, knowing that it is the wrong thing to do: *“Era una penitenza pure per noi.”*⁷ He believes it’s not only cruel but also wrong since he actually lost the race: *“Io sono arrivato ultimo. La devo fare io.”*⁸ However, by the time he helps Filippo out of the hole and then puts him back, Michele is well aware of what his dad has done, he knows that : *“ Papà era l’uomo nero. Di giorno era buono ma di notte era cattivo”*⁹ So why does he put him back in? Why does he not help him to escape? The only possible reason for this is that by this point of the novel Michele’s moral values have faltered in order to protect his father, he is choosing to try and forget what his father did as he looks up to his father a lot.

The reader notices other examples of a loss of moral values on Michele’s part: *“Se ti dico un segreto, me ne dai una?”*¹⁰, *“E così gli ho raccontato tutto.”*⁹. Michele’s immaturity and childlike behaviour cause him to give up on his morals and reveal a dark, dangerous secret for a broken, incomplete Subbuteo team. This is where the reader sees that Michele is pushed to betray his friend just for his own benefit, knowing that it won’t help Filippo’s situation. He immediately regrets this as Salvatore didn’t really give him enough of a reaction to satisfy him: *“Mi sarebbe piaciuto tornare indietro nel tempo.”*¹¹.

Salvatore on the other hand, also uses this secret to gain something and, therefore, also shows a loss in morals. However, his betrayal of Michele is much worse as he tells the secret to a person he knows is aggressive, violent and dangerous: Felice Natale. He uses what Michele told him to get a chance to drive Felice’s car, putting his best friend’s life in danger *“Salvatore Scardaccione mi aveva venduto per una lezione di guida.”*¹⁰ This is Michele’s moment of realisation, it

⁷Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 25

⁸Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 26

⁹ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 97

¹⁰Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 144

¹¹Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 148

makes him feel even more alone in the world: “*Ma soprattutto il cuore. Salvatore me lo aveva spezzato.*”¹²

So, both boys betray friends for material reasons, however Michele does it with good intentions: to find help and to finally share his secret with someone. Salvatore does it for selfish reasons: to get a driving lesson. It goes to say, that, eventually, he does redeem himself when he tells Michele the new place where Filippo is being hidden so Michele can save him.

In the background of the story, there is one other character who experiences a loss of moral value: Michele’s dad, Pino. He goes from being a simple lorry driver who works hard for his family to one of the monsters haunting Michele. Why? Because he is trying to help provide for his family. Pressured by their poverty, Pino’s morals become so twisted, that he manages to justify kidnapping and harming another child for his family’s benefit. The reader is made aware of this as we see the contrast of the Pino Michele sees at the start of the book, bringing presents home from his long journeys, to then the reality of what is happening, threatening to chop off a child’s ear just to push another family to give him money. His loss in morals control him in the end making him accidentally shoot his own son.

A major cause for the ruin of Michele’s childhood and innocence, is the impact of the adults in the book. Without them, none of the story would have happened. After all, they did kidnap Filippo which is the main disturbing event that throws Michele’s childhood off course. Michele’s parents constantly tell him off for making up monsters “*Devi avere paura degli uomini, non dei mostri.*”¹³ when in reality they are the monsters in Michele’s life which cause him to have to grow up too quickly and make decisions that no nine year old boy should be have to make. The moral values of the children are lost at points, but they all manage to

¹²Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 160

¹³ Ammaniti, *Io non ho paura*, p. 56

redeem themselves. The one person who can’t is Michele’s father who doesn’t realise how far he has gone until he puts his own son’s life in danger.

Word count excluding quotes: 1204

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