

Candidate 3

How does Nicolò Ammaniti explore the theme of 'morality' in *Io Non Ho Paura*?

Nicolò Ammaniti's '*Io Non Ho Paura*' is a novel that explores many different themes such as courage, fear and betrayal. However, a theme that is most prominently portrayed throughout the book is the theme of morality as it is a topic of great importance in the novel. We see how this theme is especially depicted in the main character of the novel Michele Amitrano, a 9 year old boy living in the impoverished town of Acqua Traversa in the South of Italy, who is the one telling the story. The occurrences in the book take place in 1978. The novel does a good job at portraying the issues with people's level of morality and their blind selfishness as we can see to what extent they can go in order to benefit themselves, not caring about the damage they cause to others. In the book, Michele discovers a young boy from the North of Italy named Filippo, who has been kidnapped by the people living in the town, in order to receive a ransom. Michele's morality and sense of justice become very evident when he finds out who is involved in the kidnapping, he decides to help the boy who he befriends and free him from the kidnappers. Michele's morality is really emphasized when compared to the morality, or lack of morality of the adults throughout the novel.

Immediately, we are introduced to the group of children with whom Michele is friends with. The atmosphere amongst the children is very calm and quiet until they decide to race, during this race we first see Michele's ability of understanding the difference between right and wrong. Michele's morality can first be observed when his sister falls during the race, however Michele decides he won't leave her, even if that means he too, might lose.

"Ho pensato a mia sorella(...)Questo non si poteva fare. Non potevo lasciare Maria."

Michele shows how the well-being and feelings of his sister are very important to him and how he cares about her when he prioritises checking if she's hurt over winning the race, tarnishing his reputation amongst the kids and losing out on the fun. He tells us that he thought about his sister which further shows how just he really is since he thinks about others even before taking any action. Furthermore, Michele's morality soon once again becomes evident after the race ends and his friend Barbara ends up losing it and has to carry out a forfeit.

"Era una penitenza esagerata. Nessuno da noi aveva voglia di vedere la fessa di Barbara... C'era qualcosa di sporco, di...non lo so."

As a forfeit, Teschio demands that Barbara does a very embarrassing act and humiliates herself in front of the group of friends, however Michele can't stand watching his friend humiliate herself and steps up to take on the forfeit instead of Barbara, leading to a very dangerous situation where he has to walk across a plank into an abandoned house. This act is very admirable and shows Michele's compassion for others as he was brave enough to stand up against such an intimidating character as Teschio, even though he doesn't have to, to stop his friend from humiliation. He proves that he knows that what was about to happen

was wrong, and done what he could in order to keep the situation under control and stop others from getting hurt, putting their feelings and safety over his own.

Michele's morality is further highlighted during the forfeit, as he noticed Filippo in the hole, however he decides to not tell anyone about the boy in the hole, not even his own parents.

"Pensavo al bambino nel buco. Non avrei detto niente a nessuno(...) Era la mia scoperta segreta."

In order to not put Filippo in any more danger that he already is, Michele decided to keep his discovery a secret, this could possibly mean that Michele does not trust others and would rather keep this information for himself. Again Michele's morality is evident as he thinks of others before thinking about himself, showing how he differentiates right from wrong. Michele shows his high level of maturity and how morally right he is when he cares for Filippo. He assumes he must take responsibility for Filippo and treats him like a parent would treat their child.

"Quando mi sono svegliato mamma e papà dormivano ancora. Ho buttato giù il latte e il pane, sono uscito e ho preso la bicicletta."

Michele knows that taking care of Filippo is the right thing to do, and in order to do so, he needs to somehow provide for the boy. He sneaks out of his house without anyone noticing, as he doesn't want anyone to know about the boy, in order to give Filippo some milk and bread. Sneaking out of the house is breaking a rule within his household, however, Michele does it anyway because he knows that feeding and providing something to drink for the boy is more important than getting into trouble from his parents. He once again shows his morality and how he is really mature as he is ready to withstand the consequences of sneaking out, just to care for Filippo and his wellbeing.

Further on in the story, we start to question how Michele can be so morally just, especially when we see how ironically unjust is the moral compass of his parents. When Michele talks about being scared of monsters, his father Pino gives him some life advice.

"Piantala con questi mostri, Michele. I mostri non esistono. Devi avere paura degli uomini, non dei mostri."

Pino explains to Michele that he shouldn't fear monsters since they are not real, but he should in fact be scared of men. This suggests that Pino is becoming aware of how bad and morally wrong his actions are regarding the kidnapping of Filippo and that he is starting to regret what he has done. He is possibly hinting that he is aware of his own disgusting behaviour and is conscious of how wrong it is, so he doesn't want Michele to ever do anything as vile in the future. When it comes to morality, Michele's mother is not much different from his father, particularly when she tells Michele to never lie.

"non devi mai dire bugie...devi dire la verità"

This statement can be considered as one which is quite amusing, as Michele's mother tells him to not lie, while she herself has been lying a lot regarding Filippo and the kidnapping and she has kept him a secret. However, this may be what causes Michele's morality, since his mother's words are not morally wrong, but her actions most definitely are. Even though she herself is doing many bad things, she is trying to make sure that Michele knows better, and we can see this through what she says. She doesn't want him to make the same mistakes as her and she wants him to do the right thing. This shows us that even in such a horrible situation, his mother does have a good heart and does care for him and is trying to raise him right. This shows that she does in fact have some morality.

Before the climax of the story, Michele comes to the realisation that he can't trust anyone but himself. We can see this after he decides to trade Filippo's secret for a toy car, with his friend Salvatore and he disappoints him.

"Salvatore Scardaccione mi aveva venduto per una lezione di guida. Mi faceva male tutto... ma soprattutto il cuore, Salvatore me lo aveva spazzato."

After Salvatore betrays Michele and tells someone the secret for a driving lesson, Michele's sense of justice, innocence and morality are really emphasized as he really struggles to comprehend how Salvatore could have so easily betrayed him. This had really affected Michele as he describes Salvatore's actions to have "broken his heart". This highlights how whole-hearted and caring the character of Michele is as he cannot imagine doing such thing to anyone and is really confused about how anyone can simply betray another person. We can fully see the morality, sense of justice and goodness of Michele's character near the end of the story when he decides to put his own life on the line in order to help out Filippo and free him from his misery by attempting to help him escape.

"Ti aiuto io-ho detto, afferandogli per le cavaglie(...) Filippo, scappa!"

Michele's morality is truly visible in this situation as he knows that Filippo is in great danger and is going to get killed, so he once again puts someone else in front of himself and puts himself in a very dangerous situation in order to save Filippo's life. This is a very touching thing since Michele is very young, yet he knows that saving the boy's life is morally the right thing to do, and he manages to do so without any guidance or help from others. He understands how dangerous this can be for him, but he still values his friend's life over his own safety.

In conclusion, the theme of morality is a theme which is extremely important in Nicolò Ammaniti's novel, "Io non ho paura". This theme is not only well portrayed through the protagonist of Michele, but it's really emphasized through the lack of morality in the people around him. The contrast between the goodness and sense of justice of Michele's with the rest of the characters in the novel, makes it extremely realistic. The aspect of poverty in the novel highlights the goodness and pureness of Michele as even in such a difficult situation,

he is very caring, compassionate and generous towards others even if he himself has to live in such extreme conditions. This makes his character truly admirable.

1497 words

Bibliography

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