

A Gift from Above or Below?

The death of a community member in a small town often causes a good deal of grief, introspection, and upheaval within the town. The death of Ned Devine is no exception in the charming 1998 Irish film *Waking Ned Devine*. However, while the basic premise of the movie sounds like it should be a tragic picture, it proves to be a very ✓ entertaining comedy. The humor in the film is derived from the responses of the citizens of Tulaigh Morh, Ireland to the possible inheritance of nearly seven million pounds, courtesy of the Irish Lottery Commission.

Waking Ned Devine was a huge hit at every major film festival thanks to the writing and directing of the previously relatively unknown Kirk Jones. Cinematographer Henry Braham completed the picture with his artful use of music and landscapes. And, of course, veteran actors Ian Bannen and David Kelly used their talents to make the script come alive with undeniable spirit (Berardinelli ✓ 1998).

The adventure begins with long-time friends Jackie and Michael (Bannen and Kelly) hearing the news that someone in their small town is holding a winning lottery ticket. The men become determined to locate and befriend the winner in order to capitalize on the profits. Luckily, the town only contains a population of fifty-two people, so the men invite everyone to a chicken dinner to identify the lottery winner. All of the attendees deny having been so lucky, leaving Jackie to visit the home of Ned Devine, the only citizen not in attendance at the dinner. Jackie discovers that Ned died holding the winning ticket, so Jackie subsequently schemes to claim the money with his friend Michael. However, the whole town becomes involved in the fraudulent scam when a lottery official requires verification of Michael's identity as Ned. Through the

individual characterization of the diverse members of the small village, the movie provides viewers with intellectual commentary on materialism and spirituality along with a heaping spoonful of comedic sugar. good.

First, *Waking Ned Devine* puts a smile on viewers' faces from beginning to end. In the scene in which we are introduced to Jackie, he tricks his wife Annie (played by Fionnula Flanagan) into thinking they have legitimately won the lottery in order to get her to bring an apple tart to him in the living room. These types of laughs are continuous throughout the lighthearted film, despite the heavy subject matter. I must admit that upon reading about the movie prior to its viewing I feared that I may take offense to the abuse of the deceased lottery winner's identity. However, I enjoyed the film immensely as a result of the style, taste, and attention to detail with which the film was made. Jackie and Michael are extremely likeable characters who charm viewers with their littling lyrical Irish voices and boyishly twinkling eyes. The men are delightful to watch as their body language and behaviors are not necessarily what viewers would expect to see from men of their advanced age. The men expertly use physical comedy through naked motor scooter riding, and tactful yet witty handling of Ned's deceased body. The men also evoke laughter, and prove their enduring influence, with the shameless use of their aged status to manipulate a lottery official, Jackie's wife, and several townspeople. PThe editing of the film evokes laughter resulting from ironically linked short cuts from one scene to another. Perhaps the best example of this satirical editing is the short cut between an antisocial townspeople's accidental murder and a group of townspeople cheering in the local pub. Along with the editing, the music throughout the film provides

= irresistible

exceptional comedy relief. In the fore-mentioned scene the score changes from eerie slow-paced music with the death of the villain, to upbeat Irish tunes in the pub.

Although the comedy in *Waking Ned Devine* is impressive, the film has an excellent message regarding the corruption of materialism. The main storyline shows the ability of monetary gain to cause Jackie and Michael to sacrifice their pride in a number of ways. The friends attempted to manipulate the townspeople and the lottery official in order to obtain the jackpot. The two men even turned on each other after a night of drinking, accusing each other of attempting to hide the fact that they, not Ned, were the true lottery winner. Of course, the power of money is also illustrated by Ned himself dying of an apparent heart attack as a result of winning the money. Materialism is further polarized by the sub-plot of a pig farmer named Finn (played by James Nesbitt) who is denied the love of a young woman named Maggie (Susan Lynch) because of her distaste for his livestock-related odor. Of course, at the end of the film Maggie accepts Finn's love when he quits farming as a result of the lottery inheritance. Maggie redeems herself for her materialism, though, by sharing the inheritance money with the town even though she could have claimed it due to the fact that Ned was the legitimate father of her young son. This plot twist, I think, was a little unnecessary and unbelievable, but nevertheless it showed how Maggie sacrificed monetary gain for the happiness of Finn and her son.

Perhaps the most blatant display of greed is seen when the mean-spirited Lizzy (Eileen Dromey) attempts to obtain a bigger settlement than the one shared by the townspeople in return for reporting the fraud. Fate, of course, bites her in the ass when she is sent falling to her death in a phone booth ironically hit by the lottery official investigating the claim.

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undertone of the film still remains slightly shallow. The movie ends with the townspeople much happier than they previously had been, primarily as a result of the money. The security and alcohol obtainment that the money brought to the townspeople was enough to change their outlook for the time, but one is left wanting a little bit more at the end of the film. However, on second thought, isn't that life? *true (Be happy w/ what you can get!)*

Lastly, the film has an undercurrent of the supernatural that is evidenced by the title character's last name. The film begins with an omnipotent view of the solar system, and ends with a beautiful landscape of the ocean and majestic Irish coastline. Along with these views we are treated to a rich score by Shaun Davey featuring traditional instruments such as uilleann pipes (Berardinelli 1998). In contrast to these images of grandeur, we encounter a soft-spoken substitute village priest (Dermot Kerrigan) who offers companionship to Maggie's fatherless son, Maurice (Robert Hickey). Of course, the boy is somewhat skeptical of the priest's beliefs and asserts, "I don't think I could work for someone I never met and not get paid for it (Berardinelli 1998)." It is clear that although the priest is nonabrasive, his cause and impact on the town is mighty and just.

P As previously mentioned, even though the film is lighthearted, there is a great deal of respect shown for the handling of Ned's deceased body. Jackie gives a touching eulogy for Ned in the church, and visibly hesitates out of guilt before lying about Ned's identity in the church. Perhaps the most spiritual part of the film is the dream Jackie has of fishing in a golden boat with Ned. Ned offers Jackie a hopeful premonition when he tells him that they are going into the light and that, "...the tide will bring us there safely."

In conclusion, *Waking Ned Devine* is a delightful comedy that celebrates individual eccentricity as well as community collaboration. The movie leaves an

*nice.
a refreshing
optimistic look
at Irish
spirituality*

impression of the positive effects of capitalism, but draws the line at greed and materialism. The film also displays some spiritual themes including divine intervention in issues of life and death. I give the film four out of four stars as there are very few things amiss with this comedic gem.

Very good
film critique
well written.
Filled w/ vivid detail.
exp. in separate
analyses of scenes.
also very ~~well~~ detailed
for other words, & could hardly have liked
it more!
A.