

Bicycle thieves (1948)

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Review on Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves (1948) Review on Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves (1948) Introduction This paper is a critique on one of the greatest films of all time, *Ladri di biciclette*, which is the epitome of neorealism and still remains the best example to the movement that changed the face of Italian cinematography. Directed by Vittorio De Sica, the movie explores the economic, social and psychological conditions of Italian citizens, especially that of a poor unemployed father, in a post world war phase. The movie, based on the same titled novel written by Luigi Bartolini, was adapted for screenplay by the pioneers of Italian neorealism, among which the most significant are Cesare Zavattini and Suso Cecchi d'Amico. Being a neorealist film *Bicycle Thieves* features untrained actors such as Lamberto Maggiorani, Enzo Staiola, Lianella Carell, Vittorio Antonucci etc. The film, released in 1948, basically falls into the genre of drama and crime, however, the movie is so real that it hardly feels like a movie or staged performance, therefore keeping the audience engaged from the beginning till the end. The movie primarily revolves around the unemployed section of the society who has to stand in crowds hopelessly and wait for a miracle offering them a job. The story begins with Antonio Ricci, the character played by Maggiorani, being offered a job of hanging posters, which he is ready to accept with utmost happiness and joy. However, in order to be able to get the job, he needs a qualification, that is being an owner of a bicycle. He does not have a bicycle at the moment and when he gives his wife Maria Ricci (Lianella Carell) this news adding that he has been "cursed since the day (he) was born" and that he feels "like a man in chains," she momentarily grows unhappy and frustrated (De Sica, 1948). However, neither her

unhappiness nor anxiety restrains her from trading her dowry of linen sheets in return for Antonio's bicycle from the pawn shop. Antonio sets off for work next morning with his son Bruno (Enzo Staiola) getting the cycle ready after dusting it and dropping him at the bus stop. Once at his workplace where he is hanging posters on the wall, a young man comes and steals his bicycle. Antonio is hot on the thief's trail, however despite having followed him with the help of a car, the hero loses track of him. What follows next in the movie is hopeless days spent searching for the bicycle and restless nights spent feeling guilty of not having locked it in the first place. Though the entire movie portrays everyday life of a common man with a simple storyline, it addresses the grave issues present during that era as well as challenges the authorities such as the church and the police. The movie deftly illustrates the life of the poverty-stricken people through the dirty city which is in ruins at places, the tattered and worn out clothes of the people and the long queue for water, which shows unavailability of water at their homes. Therefore, it is seen that the movie precisely captures the economic conditions prevalent at that time in Italy through various instances as aforementioned. Another main theme of the movie is family and relationships, which is experienced through the bond between Maria and Antonio, but more than that through the relationship Bruno shares with his father. The small family stick together at all times, and the main reason Antonio pursues his bicycle throughout the whole corrupted and crime driven city of Rome, equivalent to searching a needle in a haystack, is to sustain his family. This academy award winning movie highlights the familial relationships but further communicates the message of sacrifices and hard work. Contrary to usual movies with happy

endings, *Bicycle Thieves* does not end on a happy note, however the audience still feels happy that the father and son still have each other. Antonio hocks his bicycle before the movie starts, and to get that back Maria sacrifices her dowry possession, thus indicating that in order to gain something, one must lose something first. The movie most skillfully communicates the message of life being a cycle of sacrifices and hardships, but however, through everything ultimately family remains. The characters in the movie albeit not having been trained, show true professionalism, but above that, it is the emotions and feelings they give to the audience with such reality. The viewers cannot help but feel sympathy for the poor boy and his poor father who were robbed off the only thing that could provide them a source of livelihood. The gravity of the situation is written on the faces of the characters just as it is written on the pages of a book, therefore appealing to the audience on a whole new level of reality. The characters are thus truly believable and the viewers can easily relate to them due to their imperfections. The movie, shot at Lazio, is devoid of studio sets, artificial lighting and professional cameras, thus the shakiness of hand held cameras is experienced through the movie, adding more to its realistic appeal. The camera pans out and pans in at the right places and it follows the characters, zooming in and showing close ups to bring to the audience the exact emotions the character feels at different situations. The alternative title of the movie is *The Bicycle Thief*, which is not an apt one compared to the original title or the first English title of *The Bicycle Thieves*, and this is mostly because the father towards the end of the movie attempts to steal someone's cycle so that he can escape the hopeless fate of not finding his

stolen bicycle. Therefore, when this film is released or distributed with the alternative title, it loses its essence, thus the alternative title should be avoided. Another problem viewers might find with the film is the subtitles, being of another language, the viewers need to depend on subtitles to understand what is happening. This however, prevents them from watching the movie properly as they concentrate on what is written underneath. Furthermore, the delay in subtitles also poses a problem as viewers do not get on the spot understanding of what dialogs are being exchanged, and at some places there are no subtitles at all. Although language is a problem, the emotions and expressions as well as body language of the characters make up for this loss, as their actions provide the viewer with much more than what dialogs can. Conclusion The paper at hand thus summarizes, analyzes and critiques the movie Bicycle Thieves directed by Vittorio De Sica. This neorealist movie addresses a simple theme on a superficial level, however on deeper analysis one observes that the movie serves a higher purpose of bringing to the fore the history and life of the people living in the post world war era. The characters in the movie are unbelievably real and the whole movie is more close to reality than any other movies. It presents the viewers with economic, social and psychological conditions prevalent at that time period, which people can still relate to when there is an economy crisis. The movie is a legendary classic and I feel lucky to have been able to watch such a distinguished film and write a review on it. I would highly recommend this movie as a must watch movie for all age groups. References De Sica, Vittorio. (Director). (1948). Bicycle Thieves [Motion Picture]. USA: Corinth Films.