

# Bicycle thieves

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A Review of The Bicycle Thieves (1948) Introduction The Bicycle Thieves is a 1948 movie directed by Vittorio De Sica, an Italian film director. The movie is based on a novel written by Luigi Bartoni and was adopted for screenplay by Cesare Zavattini (Haberski 45). The movie is regarded as one of the best films of Italian neo-realism, a movement which began in 1945 to give a new degree to realism in Italian cinematography (Haberski 57). Upon its release, the movie was critically received, earning an Academy Award two years after it was produced and in 1952, it was declared the best film of all time by Sight and Sound magazine. New rankings done by the same magazine, 50 years later after the movie's release, placed it as the sixth greatest movie of all times (Huda 24). The movie stars Lamberto Maggioni as Antonio Ricci, who is the desperate and poor father who has his most precious item, the bicycle, stolen from him. The movie also features Enzo Staiola as Bruno Ricci, who is Antonio's son, and Lianella Carell as Maria Ricci, who plays as Antonio's wife and Bruno's mother. The film director, De Sica, failed to get sponsors for this movie because he had just made another highly controversial movie, Shoeshine. He therefore sought financial support from his friends to finance the film. The movie was shot on location with untrained amateur actors. The film focuses on themes of unemployment and poverty experienced in Italy after the World War II. The movie is based upon a post war Italian economy that was characterized with high unemployment rates and poverty among Italians (Huda 44). Antonio, the main actor, is a poor man and unemployed for some time before he is offered a job of sticking movie posters on the streets. Since this job requires a bicycle for transportation and Antonio does not have one, his wife, Maria, assists him to get one. The bicycle is stolen on Antonio's

first day at work. Antonio and his son, Bruno, begin looking for a thief in the streets and when they finally find the thief, they could not pursue him due to lack of evidence. Antonio decides to steal the bicycle and is caught after a chase. The owner decides not to press charges and leaves Antonio free. The movie ends when Antonio and his son walking down the street with Antonio crying as they disappear in to the crowd.

**Actor's Roles/Performance** The movie stars Antonio Ricci, a desperate Italian man in search of a job. He gets a job of putting up posters for Hollywood movies. His wife, Maria, pawns a few households in a bid to help Antonio get a bicycle that would enable him walk through the street as he puts up posters. Bruno is Antonio's son, who helps him in his search for the lost bicycle in the streets. The three main characters help to bring out key themes in the movie such as poverty and unemployment. Antonio's poor family cannot afford a bicycle. Antonio struggles to look for a job so as to uplift the living standards of his family and when he gets one, it requires a bicycle which he doesn't have. After acquiring one, it is stolen from him on his first working day. This helps to illustrate the plight of poor Italian families during the post war era.

**Storyline/ Plot/ Location** The movie depicts a post war Italy that was greatly affected with the economic depression at the time. There was massive unemployment and poverty among a majority of the citizens. The movie begins with Antonio's search for a job, upon which he succeeds. He is offered a job of putting up movie posters in the street. He realizes that he will need a bicycle to help him move about in the streets as he works. Due to his poor situation, he cannot afford a bicycle. His wife, Maria, pawns a few households to help him raise money to acquire a bicycle. Antonio gets a bicycle and is

set to start his job. On his first day at work, the bicycle is stolen from him. He follows the thief but cannot get hold of him. His son Bruno joins him in his search for the bicycle along the streets. Even though he finally finds the thief, he cannot pursue the case further because he has no evidence linking the thief with the incident. Antonio sends his son to board a bus back home. Bruno misses the bus and gets back to his father only to see him being followed for stealing a bicycle. Antonio is caught and the bicycle owner decides not to press charges against him. A dejected Antonio cries as he walks with his son down the street and they finally vanish in to the crowd.

**Other Cinematic characteristics** The movie uses armature actors who are very helpful in bringing the main themes of the movie and help the movie meet its objectives. The real lives of some of the actors at the time reflected their roles in the movies (Huda 36). This helped the movie to look real. This movie, like many others of its time, helps to bring out the themes of Italian neo-realism. Other movies released in this historical period such as Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) have also been regarded as great movies in the Italian neo-realism. **Conclusion** *The Bicycle Thieves* is a very great movie to watch. It is regarded as one of the greatest movies of all time, and after watching it a few times, I absolutely agree with this opinion.

**Works Cited** Haberski, Raymond J. Jr. *It's Only A Movie! : Film and Critics in American Culture*, University Press of Kentucky, 2001. Print. Huda, Anwar. *The Art and science of Cinema*. Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2004. Print.