

BICYCLE THIEVES (*LADRI DI BICICLETTE*), ITALY, 1948

Directed by Vittorio De Sica.

Screenplay by Vittorio De Sica, Cesare Zavattini, Suso Cecchi d'Amico, Gherardo Gherardi, Oreste Biancoli, Adolfo Franci.

Story by Luigi Bartolini.

Music by Alessandro Cicognini.

Cinematography: Carlo Montuori

Starring Lamberto Maggiorani as Antonio Ricci, Enzo Staiola as Bruno Ricci, and Lianella Carell as Antonio's wife Maria.

It's important to understand that none of these people are professional actors; none of them has appeared in a film before; none of them has any acting experience whatever.

Production Company, Produzioni De Sica^[2]

1. Early Reviews

"Made with a cast of principals who were picked up in Rome's streets and had never before faced a camera, and with a story incredible in its simplicity as a basis for a 90-minute film, the picture is a pure exercise in directorial virtuosity. The beauty of it, however, is that that is never apparent. There are no obvious tricks and no obvious striving." – Variety (1948)

"Again the Italians have sent us a brilliant and devastating film in Vittorio De Sica's rueful drama of modern city life, *The Bicycle Thief* [*Bicycle Thieves*]. ... For once more the talented De Sica ... has laid hold upon and sharply imaged in simple and realistic terms a major -- indeed, a fundamental and universal -- dramatic theme. It is the isolation and loneliness of the little man in this complex social world that is ironically blessed with institutions to comfort and protect mankind." - Bosley Crowther, *The New York Times* (1948)

2. In Hindsight

"This is the most important film of the immediate postwar period; its extension of the traditional concepts of plot and dramatic structure exerted considerable influence on the development of the cinema...The film's main theme is unemployment in a country where unemployment seemed a chronic disease. Beyond this, however, it is concerned with the loneliness of man in a dehumanized society."- Georges Sadoul, *Dictionary of Films*

"The tight structure and the quietly effective social criticism are enriched by the gently romantic vein which enables De Sica to avoid the stridency of *Sciuscia* (*Shoeshine*)...*Ladri di biciclette* powerfully criticizes the forces - the Church among them - which reduce people to disillusion and despair; it remains both sharp and relevant, despite its apparently dated conventions."- *The Oxford Companion to Film*

"De Sica's direct and unadorned approach to cinema is at its best here. The film is compassionate where it could be cynical; severe where it could be complaisant; somber where it could be picturesque." - Peter Cowie, 80 Years of Cinema

"The Bicycle Thief is so well-entrenched as an official masterpiece that it is a little startling to visit it again after many years and realize that it is still alive and has strength and freshness.... But if the film is allowed to wait long enough--until the filmmakers are dead, until neorealism is less an inspiration than a memory--[it] escapes from its critics and becomes, once again, a story. It is happiest that way." - Roger Ebert

"...the film is moving, even if the attempt on our heartstrings is so blatant and so much at odds with the thing that is really striking and beautiful: the sense of the streets of a great city where nearly everyone is having a hard time....The nature of the tale is obtrusive, whereas the atmosphere of the streets is stunning. And that was what was really new: the untidy infinity of life made to seem like the crowd, or all of Italy." - David Thomson, Have You Seen...?

"The roles are played by non-actors, Lamberto Maggiorani as the father and Enzo Staiola as the solemn boy, who sometimes appears to be a miniature man. They bring a grave dignity to De Sica's unblinking view of post-war Italy. The wheel of life turns and grinds people down; the man who was riding high in the morning is brought low by nightfall. It is impossible to imagine this story in any other form than De Sica's. The new black-and-white print has an extraordinary range of gray tones that get darker as life closes in." - Bob Graham, The San Francisco Chronicle