

WELCOME!

Thanks for coming. We're looking forward to sharing this film with you. As always, we thank the members of our informal board for their help in organizing and advertising, in choosing films, and in setting up: **John Beerman, Bruce Chinery, Stacey Gamble, and Hilary and Merle Williams.** And as always we thank the Orange County Public Library for making this possible, and the Friends of the Orange County Public Library for their support; today we add the Hillsborough Arts Council to the list. (If you feel you can donate a buck or two to the Arts Council, there is a donation jar on the side table. And there are forms for joining the Friends of the Library; we urge you to think about joining.) Don't forget the free popcorn in the back, and the bottles of water.

The speaker today is **Laura Boyes**, film curator for the North Carolina Museum of Art. We're really lucky to have Laura as a speaker (and also as an advisor: she led us to the speakers for the next two films, *The Third Man*—Ken Wetherington—and *The Battle of Algiers*—Max Ovre). She has a movie website at <http://www.moviediva.com/>. Among her other activities Laura has a film series, <http://www.carolinatheatre.org/films/festivals/movie-diva>, at the Carolina Theater in Durham, and is featured with Frank Stasio and Marsha Gordon (our speaker for *Double Indemnity*) on "Movies on the Radio" on WUNC's State of Things. Here's a recent podcast: <http://www.wunc.org/post/living-life-crime-movies-radio>.

We've asked **Frank DiMauro** to say a few words about the language of the film before Laura speaks. Frank is a film buff who was raised speaking one of the many dialects of Italian, and he has a special interest in the connection between neorealism and use of dialect in film. He's put together a few notes which we have included in the program.

Mike and Gail

THE FILM

The film was made in 1948, and was set a few years earlier in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Italy, like much of Europe, had been devastated by the war; for many of the Italian people the situation was desperate. Roger Ebert begins his review, written in 1999 on the film's fiftieth birthday, like this:

"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. Given an honorary Oscar in 1949, routinely voted one of the greatest films of all time, revered as one of the foundation stones of Italian neorealism, it is a simple, powerful film about a man who needs a job.

"The film, now being re-released in a new print to mark its 50th anniversary, was directed by Vittorio De Sica, who believed that everyone could play one role perfectly: himself. It was written by Cesare Zavattini, the writer associated with many of the great European directors of the 1940s through the 1970s. In his journals, Zavattini writes about how he and De Sica visited a brothel to do research for the film—and later the rooms of the Wise Woman, a psychic, who inspires one of the film's characters. What we gather from these entries is that De Sica and his writer were finding inspiration close to the ground in those days right after the war, when Italy was paralyzed by poverty."

The dialects of Italian are not simply regional differences of pronunciation or inflection. The dialects are separate Romance languages, so that before the Tuscan dialect became the official, "standard," language of united Italy, and up until the second half of the twentieth century, Italians from one region struggled to understand Italians from another. In many cases the dialects are as different from standard Italian as Italian is from Spanish or French.

NEO-REALISM AND THE USE OF ITALIAN DIALECTS

Frank DiMauro

The use of local vernacular and dialects is one of the defining attributes of the Italian neo-realist film movement.

Until the dawn of the neo-realist film, Italian moviegoers were accustomed to films, foreign and domestic, dubbed in standard or Tuscan dialect. (Dubbing is the substitution in a film of different speech for the speech of an actor in the film. The dubbed speech may or may not be in a different language.) Dubbing was so common that even Italian actors' voices were dubbed with better sounding voices or with better diction.

One important reason why Italians chose to dub films rather than to subtitle them goes back to the first talking films in the 1920s. In a nation striving to overcome drastic differences in dialects, dubbing was a way to help create a sense of national unity, with a single national language. Thus even Italian actors who spoke regional dialects and so might have spoken standard Italian with a pronounced accent (or who may not have spoken standard Italian at all) were dubbed into the Tuscan dialect. At the beginning of her career, for example, Sophia Loren's lines were dubbed in by another actor, because of her regional accent: she was raised speaking the Neapolitan dialect.

After two decades of increasingly good dubbing, Italian moviegoers had become so used to standard Italian in films that when neo-realism appeared on the scene, with dialogues in the Sicilian, Neapolitan, and Roman dialects, it came as a shock to many Italians to realize that they didn't really understand many of their own countrymen. ("Precisely the point," said more than one of the neo-realist directors.)

In *Ladri di biciclette* the main dialect heard is Romanesco, one of the central Italian dialects spoken in Metropolitan Rome, especially in the city core. It is linguistically close to Tuscan and standard Italian, with some notable differences. [Ref. *Naples: Life, Death, and Miracles*.]

Here is an example of Romanesco from the writing of the modern Roman poet Trilussa, with non-standard vocabulary indicated in purple, followed by the Italian and the English:

Me chiede se l'amante	Mi chiede se l'amante	She asks me if her lover
je vò bene o je vò male...	la vuol bene o la vuol male...	loves her or hates her ...
lo, pe' falla più felice,	lo per farla più felice	I, to make her happier,
pe' levalla da le pene,	per levarla dalla pena	to take away her pain,
fo der tutto che la foja	faccio tutto che la foglia	do all I can to ensure that the petal
che je dice " Me vò bene"	che le dice "mi vuol bene"	which says "He loves me"
sia quell' urtima che sfoja .	sia quel ultima che sfoglia.	is the last one she pulls.

(Translated by Serena, <https://blogs.transparent.com/italian/parliamo-romanesco/>)