

Bicycle Thieves, the Origin of Iconic Films in World Cinema

Analysis of the Most Influential Work of the Italian Neorealism Movement

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Bicycle Thieves directed by Vittorio De Sica, the Italian filmmaker, is considered one of the most influential films in world cinema. The screenplay for this film was written by Cesare Zavattini and is adapted from the novel "Bicycle Thieves" by Luigi Bartolini, an Italian poet and writer. This article discusses this exceptional work.

The story begins with an exterior shot of a large crowd searching for work. The opening scene effectively captures the post-war struggles, particularly unemployment, which can pose a serious problem for society. Antonio, the main character, a man searching for a way to earn a living, finally finds a job at the post office, giving him hope. However, another problem arises immediately—this job is conditional upon owning a bicycle, and his bicycle is held as collateral by the bank. In distress, Antonio walks to his wife, who is filling a bucket with water, and calls out to her. He begins to complain and talks about his bad luck. Antonio believes he was born unlucky. At this point, his wife appears as an angel of hope, solving the issue. She washes and cleans her sheets to sell them, hoping to get the bicycle back for her husband. The problem is resolved, and hope returns. Antonio begins his work, but, as is typical in Neorealism, we witness the sinusoidal movement of life between hope and despair. Soon, Antonio's bicycle is stolen. Antonio goes to the police, but he quickly realizes that he must search for the bicycle himself. His wife, as always, provides encouragement and, instead of reprimanding him, she remains hopeful that the bicycle will be found.

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The story continues to depict the journey of Antonio and his son, Bruno, as they search for the stolen bicycle. We witness the desperation of a human being and how he acts contrary to his beliefs. At the start of the story, after the bicycle issue is solved, Antonio's wife goes to a fortune-teller who had previously predicted that Antonio would find a job. Antonio tells his wife he doesn't believe in it, but after becoming desperate and losing hope of finding his bicycle, he goes to the same fortune-teller in search of a sign. Despite not being religious, he finds himself at a church, searching for a man who might know where the thief lives, and unexpectedly finds himself in the middle of a religious ceremony. Antonio, overwhelmed by despair, vents his anger on his son, Bruno. A sorrowful Bruno walks away, and at that moment, a cry comes from the people by the river who have found a drowned man. Fearing that the drowned man might be Bruno, Antonio rushes toward the scene in a panic, only to find Bruno alive and well, which gives him a sense of relief. To comfort his son, Antonio

takes him to a luxurious restaurant, where we witness the confrontation between poverty and wealth. The two characters, like black and white dots, stand in stark contrast to each other. On one side, Bruno is content, happily eating a slice of bread and mozzarella cheese, while on the other side, a rich family's child sits with a full array of food on the table. Antonio, disheartened, watches his son and wonders, "Why should I worry about my own troubles when, in the end, I'm going to die anyway?" He wishes to live in the moment without thinking of his problems. But can this approach fit into his hard and difficult life?

Finally, Antonio, who has failed to retrieve the only means of earning his livelihood, suddenly notices a bicycle parked on the street and decides to steal it. His attempt fails, and he is caught by the people, but through Bruno's cries, he is saved and freed. Antonio, who has failed to recover his bicycle, walks with his son through the streets of the city, and with this frame, the story of the lives of ordinary people ends.

By depicting the post-war situation and the sinusoidal process of people's lives, which fluctuate between despair and hope, this work has become an impressive and memorable film that is worth watching many times.