

The Bicycle Thieves (1948)

[The Bicycle Thieves](#) is a film of humanity and love and has touched so many people around the world because of its powerful simplicities. Sometimes the simplest stories are the most important to tell, because they are the ones most people can identify with; this can create an emotional template of personal honesty and truth. Film critic Andre Bazan states, “The thesis implied is wondrously and outrageously simple: in the world where this workman lives, the poor must steal from each other in order to survive.” [Vittorio De Sica](#) was the director of *The Bicycle Thieves* and his films and the style he used started the Italian Neorealist movement alongside Roberto Rossellini's *Rome: Open City*, which attempted to give a new degree of realism to cinema.

Neorealism, as a term, can mean several things; it often refers to films of working class life and of the struggles and social conditions of people set in the culture of poverty. [Italian Neorealism](#) was a revolutionary breakthrough, not just for its technical style and raw filmmaking, but for the gritty realism of its story and poignant naturalism of its characters. Andre Bazin described Neorealism as, “No more actors, no more story, no more sets, which is to say in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema.” Neorealism includes films that

were mostly shot on a very low-budget and on real locations not using any stages or props. Neorealism was also a style where they used non actors because it brought a sense of reality to the characters, where the acting seemed more natural and real. After decades of Hollywood gloss, real people instead of actors were startling to audiences.

The bicycle in the story can be looked at as a justification to describe the lives of all the struggling working class people in Post World War II Italy. The mise en scene in the film contains powerful images of the city of Rome that the characters of Ricci and Bruno inhabit when searching for their bicycle. The city and streets of Rome and the poverty of its surroundings are in many ways a third lead character within the story and the bleak urban images sheds a powerful understanding of its place and time within history. The story of *The Bicycle Thieves* can be viewed as social and political commentary on the poverty of Postwar Italy during the late 1940's, as you see survivors after a devastating war trying to rebuild, start over and live once again. Critic Andre Bazan says, "Without the haunting specter of unemployment, which places the event in the Italian society of 1948, it would be an utterly banal adventure. There is a need to insist on the hundreds of other meaningful details...situating the event in political and social history, at a given place at a given time."

The editing style of Neorealism focuses on smaller unimportant day to day things which give the audience a different view on how to look at the little things when we normally wouldn't pay any attention to them. One of the theorists of Neorealism Cesare Zavattini described in his article "Some Ideas on the Cinema" that,

"No doubt one's first and most superficial reaction to everyday reality is that it is tedious. Until we are able to overcome some moral and intellectual laziness, in fact, this reality will continue to appear uninteresting. One shouldn't be astonished

that the cinema has always felt the natural, unavoidable necessity to insert a 'story' in the reality to make it exciting and 'spectacular.' All the same, it is clear that such a method evades a direct approach to everyday reality, and suggests that it cannot be portrayed without the intervention of fantasy or artifice.”

The Bicycle Thieves touches on so many universal issues of the human condition, portraying humans as genuinely flawed people who are vulnerable and when put under strenuous circumstances, will break down and do what is necessary to survive. Every character in the film is a victim of their surroundings and were made out to be criminals, and the society they inhabit is largely responsible for that. The crime Ricci commits at the end of *The Bicycle Thieves* continues the cycle of poverty, which unfortunately is still very relevant in our society today. With Neorealism's use of unknown actors, real live locations and a story that focuses on the simplistic day to day things, *The Bicycle Thieves* creates a tragic and relatable human tale about a father simply trying to put food on his families table, which not only is identifiable to an audience but its themes are timeless as well.