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Reconstruction and the Late '40s

1946 National Referendum selects republic over monarchy
Umberto II leaves Italy
1947 De Gasperi visits the United States to accept the Marshall Plan of economic aid
1948 Political elections, the Christian Democrats defeat a coalition of the PCI and the PSI
Unsuccessful assassination attempt against Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti
1949 Italy joins NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)
1950 CD-led government institutes the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* public works program to promote southern Italian economic development

In 1946 a referendum was held with universal suffrage to decide whether the future Italian constitution would be monarchical or republican. The voters' choice of a republic paved the way for a republican constitution with a weak executive branch and a parliament divided into two bodies with a large number of deputies. The victory for a republic demonstrated not only a desire for a break with the past but also some of the divergences between the north, which favored the republic, and Rome and the south, which favored a monarchy.[1] The Resistance had been more of a northern than southern phenomenon. Liberation began in July of 1943 with the Anglo-American invasion of Sicily, with northern Italy remaining under Nazi occupation longer than the south. In Southern Italy the monarchy was identified with political stability and a continuation of the political patronage system, a traditional source of employment. There was even a short lived movement to have Sicily join the United States after the war.

By May 1947, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi established a government comprising Christian Democrats and their political allies.[2] When the first parliamentary elections were held on April 18, 1948, the DC won 48.5 percent of the vote and the coalition of the PCI and the PSI received approximately 30 percent. Italy became politically divided between the PCI and the DC. An important factor for the DC victory was the split of the Socialist Party in January 1947 into pro-Soviet

and pro-Western factions. The Christian Democrats presented the elections as a choice between Western-style capitalism and Communism in anticipation of the coming Cold War between the Soviet block of Iron Curtain nations under Russian occupation in Eastern Europe and the countries in Western Europe liberated from the Nazis by Anglo-American forces. The Christian Democrats relied heavily on their identification with the anti-Communist policy of the United States. The Russian engineered Communist coup in Prague in 1947 confirmed suspicions about the Communists' intention to foment a worldwide communist revolution. With the Marshal Plan, the United States provided billions of dollars for Italian reconstruction. Over the reconstruction period the Italian government followed policies based on classical liberal economic theory with an emphasis on free trade, attenuation of state participation, and mobility of labor. Postwar unemployment remained high through 1948 until the postwar boom. But there were also concessions to the Left such as legislation regarding minimum wage, holidays, and cost-of-living adjustments. Despite the changes the new Italian republic remained under a system of legal statutes made by the Fascist regime.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between northern and southern Italy, in 1950 the government instituted the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* public works project. But the funds of the *Cassa* were tied to the political patronage system. These practices were a continuation of the *clientellismo* (political patronage) culture, which had perpetuated under Fascism but whose roots were actually centuries old. *Lottizzazione* (division of government contracts by party loyalty) and *clientelilismo* characterized the Italian political talent for *trasformismo* (status quo politics). However there were also protests in southern Italy when sharecropping or dispossessed peasants occupied arable lands during 1944–46. A crowd of May Day celebrants were massacred at Portella delle ginestre in Sicily on May 1, 1947, allegedly by a guerilla group tied to the bandit Salvatore Giuliano, an event depicted in Francesco Rosi's film *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and a situation alluded to in films such as Giuseppe De Santis's *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi/No Peace under the Olive Tree* (1950).

The DC reacted to the increase in civil strife with marginally successful land reforms, causing a backlash from their own supporters. The DC's delay of reform measures broadened their electoral hold on the conservative elements and effectively halted the rise of the monarchists and separatists in Sicily. Alcide De Gasperi, the Christian Democrat leader, hoped to avoid future DC losses by an attempt to reintroduce proportional representation with what has come to be known as the *legge truffa* (swindle law), echoing the Acerbo proportional representation law of 1923 passed under Mussolini. However after the proportional representation law was passed in 1953, the DC coalition with the monarchists and the neo-fascist MSI narrowly missed the required 50 percent needed to attain seats through the proportional representation law. These political battles demonstrate how the wartime coalition of the Resistance came to mirror the Cold War bipolarism that dominated international politics after WWII.

The success of the wartime CLN Resistance coalition had created a national desire for moral, political, and economic renewal. The prestige of the Resistance served as a basis for a culture of collective understanding and reaction against the

rhetoric of Fascism. In the postwar period, Italian culture came under the influence of the dictates of the Soviet Union, the Vatican, and the United States in popular and economic culture. The Communists clung to the image of the Soviet Union as a societal model. In an effort not to repeat the mistake of 1921 when Communist maximalists split with the Socialists, which helped the Fascists attain power, Communist leader Togliatti opted to tone down revolutionary rhetoric. The Catholic Church valued the status it had gained under the 1929 Lateran accords/Concordat and had to counter the impression of Pius XII's seeming inaction against Nazi–Fascism. The Church reacted to the political success of atheistic socialism by excommunicating all PCI and PSI voters in 1949. Catholic elements supported the Christian Democrats who were willing to incorporate the main points of the 1929 *Concordat* into the post war constitution. The third influence economically and culturally came from the United States, which in the postwar period exercised varying degrees of cultural and political hegemony over Italy and Western Europe. America provided a powerful model for the development of an international consumer culture driven by a mass media. These three cultural and ideological forces (Church, Soviet Union, United States) were also well represented in the cinema and popular culture. The Vatican sponsored parish/oratorio screenings. The Italian Communist Party did the same at their network of *Casa del popolo* (house of the people) recreation centers. The ideological undertone of Hollywood's optimistic cinema dominated commercial theaters, television, and the advertising industry.

In Italy, many authors who contributed to postwar culture had been active during the Fascist era, such as Ignazio Silone (1900–78), Carlo Levi (1902–75), Elio Vittorini (1908–66), Cesare Pavese (1908–50), Carlo Cassola (1917–87), Curzio Malaparte (1989–57), Alberto Moravia (1907–90) Vasco Pratolini (1913–91), Corrado Alvaro (1895–56), and Sibilla Aleramo (1876–60). After WWII these authors offered a new tone to Italian culture that sought to break with the rhetoric of the past. All of these novelists shared a commitment to the portrayal of grim, exploitative situations from which rebellious protagonists gain a renewed sense of humanism and meaningful action. Similar themes are evident in Primo Levi's (1919–87) Holocaust account *Survival at Auschwitz* (1947). Giovanni Guareschi (1908–68) with his *Don Camillo* (1948) series wrote comic tales, adapted with great box office success for the Italian cinema, that depicted the geopolitical cultural split between Catholics and Communists in the Cold War in the microcosm of a small town in the Po valley. Italo Calvino wrote a foundational novel depicting the Resistance period, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1947). Carlo Emilio Gadda's (1893–1973) detective novel *Quer pasticaccio brutto di Via Merulana/That Awful Mess on Via Merulana* (1957) depicted the often contradictory and messy reality of the Fascist period and was later adapted for the screen as an Italian *noir, Un maledetto imbroglio/ The Facts of the Murder* (1959) by Pietro Germi. There was also international recognition for the vibrancy of Italian postwar literature as poet Salvatore Quasimodo (1901–86) won the 1959 Nobel Prize for literature. The Italian theater featured the work of Neapolitan author Eduardo De Filippo (1900–84), brother of the actor Peppino De Filippo, who often played straight man to Totò, and author of plays such as *Napoli milionaria/Side Street Story* (1950)

adapted as a musical in 1950 and *Filumena Martiruana* (1945) adapted by De Sica as *Matrimonio all'Italiana/Marriage Italian Style* (1964).

Film: The Late 1940s

Luchino Visconti

With his film *Ossessione/Obsession* (1943), Luchino Visconti put into practice the realist theories of the *Cinema* group trained in the Italian professional cinema of the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the war Visconti was an active participant in the Resistance and was eventually captured and imprisoned in Rome by the Nazis, who planned to execute him. He managed to escape from prison just before the American Fifth Army entered Rome in 1944. In 1946, Visconti contributed to the multi-director documentary recreation film about the Resistance, *Giorni di Gloria/Days of Glory* (1945). After the war, Visconti returned to theater productions in Rome. At the same time, Visconti's interests continued to focus on two key figures who were to influence his next film, *La terra trema/The Earth Trembles*; novelist Giovanni Verga and the Communist theorist Antonio Gramsci. In 1948, Visconti turned his attention to the problems of Italy's rural poor with *The Earth Trembles* (1948), an adaptation of Verga's novel in the *verismo* style, *I Malavoglia/ The House by the Meddlar Tree*. Visconti originally intended to make a film trilogy about Sicily based on Verga's novels but only completed *The Earth Trembles* (1948), an epic-length film set in the Sicilian coastal village of Aci Trezza about a young fisherman Antonio Malavoglia who tries to raise his family out of poverty by fighting the exploitative owners of the village fishing boats. Antonio decides to take out a loan with the family house as collateral in order to buy his own boat. But the project ends in failure because Antonio is unable to enlist the support of the other fishermen in Aci Trezza.

Visconti's film is a faithful adaptation of Verga's novel and is close to Verga's realistic portrayal of the Sicilian poor, showing their passions, superstitions, and stoic nobility, which often involves a passive acceptance of fate. Visconti, influenced by Verga's attempt to accurately reproduce the speech of the Sicilian peasants, employed an entirely nonprofessional cast speaking their own Sicilian dialect. Incidentally the language used by actors is different enough from standard Italian that when the film was released in Italy, occasional voice-over commentary by Visconti was added to help non-Sicilians follow the story.

Visconti's film makes extensive use of close-ups with depictions of the day-to-day life of its characters. Visconti's pacing in the film anticipated the art cinema style with less emphasis on action and more emphasis on character development. The film has many long sequences that may at first viewing seem "unnecessary" for the development of the plot, but that are actually crucial to Visconti's study of the daily life in Aci Trezza. The film's patient depictions of the daily habits of the fishermen and their families recall the detached scientific tone of anthropological or wildlife documentaries. Following the ideas of Communist theorist Antonio Gramsci, Visconti's film concentrates on a rural rather than an industrial situation, and pays

close attention to the regional question by emphasizing Sicilian mannerisms and speech. *The Earth Trembles* is a convincing portrayal of a social struggle that fails to produce significant change. Nevertheless, at the end of the film it is evident that despite his defeat, the main character, Antonio, is still determined to overcome the exploitation in his village. In practical terms, the film was one of the first box office disappointments of the neorealist period.[3]

Giuseppe De Santis

Giuseppe De Santis, like De Sica, Visconti, Rossellini, Vergano, and Antonioni, gained valuable experience in the Italian professional cinema of the 1930s. Like Visconti he began his directing career in the multi-director Resistance film *Days of Glory* (1945) before making his first feature *Caccia Tragica/Bitter Hunt* (1946). The film starring Massimo Girotti, is in the *neorealismo nero* vein similar to the gangster film genre and reveals the the struggles between friendship, collaboration, and political duty during the Resistance. De Santis's later film *Riso amaro/Bitter Rice* (1949) also mixes elements of neorealism with the gangster or *noir* crime film genres depicting the seasonal harvest of the *mondine*, female rice pickers, who worked in the Po Valley in northern Italy. De Santis depicts sequences of the indigenous culture, such as the call and response songs of the *mondine* rice pickers while also displaying an understanding of pop culture in the early postwar years. He recognizes the attraction of American popular boogie woogie culture with the sexually charged performance of actress Silvana Mangano emblematic of the the natural background of the rice fields within a community of hard-working and sexually vibrant women rice pickers. Silvana also represents the desires of the Italian working classes for a life removed from hard work and the threat of poverty. She yearns for the materialism of consumer culture and admires *foto-romanzi* (pulp magazines) like *Grand Hotel*. Silvana is attracted by the ne'er-do-well thief and womanizer Walter played by Vittorio Gassman whose cynical attitude toward crime and mannerisms recall standard characterizations in Hollywood *noir gangster* films. In *Bitter Rice*, Walter is a contrast to the model of solidarity and hard work from the suitor Silvana rejects, the goodhearted soldier Marco, played by Raf Vallone.[4] The trio (Mangano, Gassman, Vallone) would appear later in similar roles the melodrama, *Anna* (1952).

De Santis's social message in *Bitter Rice* is that the individual can be saved through collective action. De Santis remained a committed leftist even after the Soviet suppressions of popular revolts in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). *Bitter Rice* shares a common theme with other neorealist-era films such as Pietro Germi's *Gioventù perduta/Lost Youth* (1947) with Carla Del Poggio and the Antonioni's episodic docu-drama about the nihilistic youth of postwar Europe *I vinti/The Vanquished* (1951), which deals with individual alienation in post war popular culture. *Bitter Rice* was also influential for the manner in which it conveyed an ideal of female physicality, which incidentally provoked threats of censorship in the United States.[5] De Santis also developed

innovative camera techniques such as his extended crane shot that moves from a close-up of a single character (full or medium figure) without any specific spatial or temporal localization, to the discovery of a space, often unlimited, natural landscape, and of a group or "chorus" to a close-up of another or the same character. The purpose of each shot was to underline De Santis's belief in the essential need for an individual to be closely connected to a community. A similar crane shot was later made famous in the opening long-shot sequence of Orson Welles's *A Touch of Evil* (1958).

Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini[6]

Vittorio De Sica (1901–74) appeared as the male lead in comedies of the 1930s including the so-called *telefono bianco* (white telephone) comedies directed by Mario Camerini such as *Men What Rascals!* (1932), *I'll Give a Million*, and *Il Signor Max* (1937). De Sica's directing career in collaboration with screenwriter Cesare Zavattini (1902–89), began with Camerini-style romantic comedies including *Teresa Venerdì/Doctor Beware* (1941).[7] De Sica seemed to break with the Camerini romantic comedy model when he and Zavattini turned to melodrama with *I bambini ci guardano/The Children Are Watching Us* (1943) and *La porta del cielo/The Gate of Heaven* (1945). De Sica and Zavattini's early postwar films *Sciucia'/Shoeshine* (1946), *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* (1948), and *Umberto D.* (1951) continued in the melodramatic vein and would become seminal films of Italian neorealism.[8]

The assumption that prewar and postwar Italian films are essentially different is central to discussions of Italian neorealism. Rather than representing a break with the past, the films De Sica and Zavattini made during their neorealist period develop themes that were staples of their earlier collaborations with Camerini, in which De Sica starred as leading man and Zavattini was the scriptwriter. But the trajectory from from Camerini to De Sica and Zavattini is most clearly evident in their use of plot elements. In Camerini's films of the 1930s, comedic elements derive from a Boccaccian exchange of roles between people of different economic classes. In *Men What Rascals!* for instance, Bruno pretends to own a luxury car in order to impress Mariucia. In *I'll Give a Million*, the millionaire Gold assumes the identity of a pauper in order to find true love. In *Il Signor Max*, Gianni impersonates an upper-class boat passenger in order to impress lady Paola. In *The Big Stores*, Lauretta steals an outfit in order to impress Bruno. In each film the theft of a class-related object (car, outfit, camera), makes the masquerade credible.

De Sica continued this theme/motif in his own films *Maddalena, Zero for Conduct* (1941) with the theft of a letter, *Doctor Beware* (1941) in which the title character impersonates the sister of a doctor. In *The Children Are Watching Us* (1943), *Sciuscia'/Shoeshine*, and *The Bicycle Thief*, an adaptation of a Luigi Barolini novel, the theft is finally presented from the perspective of the owner. By the time that De Sica directed *The Bicycle Thief*, a film in which an unemployed Roman searches for his stolen bicycle, he had been involved in at least eight films that centered on a class-identifying object.

In the bicycle theft scenes in *The Bicycle Thief*, De Sica relied on montage in the Russian formalist sense more than his other neorealist colleagues.[9] This could be expected recalling that Camerini considered his strength as a director to be in montage. The roots of this stylistic method are in the shot–countershot exchange that establishes the protagonist's desire for the object in question. In Camerini's montage of *Men What Rascals!* Bruno admires his boss's automobile, in *Il Signor Max* Gianni gazes longingly at flowers, suits, cigarette cases, or the mannerisms of bourgeois society. In *The Bicycle Thief*, De Sica follows Camerini's style by emphasizing bicycle imagery at the pawnbroker, on city streets, at the marketplace, and at the stadium. As in Camerini's cinema, the function of bicycle imagery in *The Bicycle Thief* is to reify the economic and social ramifications of the class-identifying object.

In all these films, the hero's ability to acquire the object in question in all of these films elevates his sexual status. Mariuccia accepts a ride from Bruno in *Men What Rascals!* once he replaces his bicycle with his boss's car, and Gianni is successful with Donna Paola in *Il Signor Max* after he adopts the dress of the leisure class. These sexual motifs are repeated in *The Bicycle Thief* when Maria sacrifices the family's bed sheets for the bicycle or rides on the handlebars of Antonio's bicycle after he accepts the job and reaffirms his dominance as head of the household.

Despite sexual elements that are central to the plots of their films, both Camerini and De Sica limit female displays. True, in *I'll Give a Million* Anna (Assia Noris) raises her stockings as Claudette Colbert does in Frank Capra's *It Happened*

Figure 4.1 Lamberto Maggiorani (Antonio) and Enzo Staiola (Bruno) in Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief.*

One Night (1934) and the bikini-clad Anna is brought out before a crowd on a float. However, each display scene is presented as if Anna were being violated. Also, Anna, displays her legs involuntary, because she is caught in a thorn bush, and she is forced to parade in a swimsuit because of pressure from her boss at the circus.

Like Camerini, De Sica's early films consciously limit female displays. This ran contrary to the current in neorealist films that featured Marina Michi as a showgirl in *Roma città aperta/Open City* (1945), Silvana Mangano in *Bitter Rice* (1949), and even Ingrid Bergman in *Stromboli—Terra di Dio/Stromboli* (1949). In De Sica's neorealist films, the reduction of sexuality arguably begins with *The Children Are Watching Us*, in which sex has a negative connotation. Prico's mother's display on the beach draws the attention of affected bourgeois admirers and foreshadows the abandonment of her son. In *The Bicycle Thief*, such deemphasis on female imagery begins as Antonio accepts his work assignment under a poster of Gale Storm in an evening gown advertising the American film, *Forever Yours/Gioia di vivere* (1945). Such female imagery continues during the scenes when Antonio works pasting posters of Rita Hayworth around Rome. The act of pasting reduces the sexual provocation of the image as the *femme fatale* from King Vidor's Hollywood film about a promiscuous wife, *Gilda* (1946), is reduced to a wet and floppy poster. In the basement vaudeville sequence, the rehearsing dance girls are dressed in everyday attire rather than in titillating costumes. The female imagery is similarly unprovocative in the *casa chiusa* bordello, where the thief seeks refuge. Although the wallpaper is of female nudes, the images are barely distinguishable and without great voyeuristic appeal in a full shot of a dining room.[10] In Camerini and in De Sica, the female body exists as an object whose value is determined by male viewing.[11] However both directors significantly reduce the emphasis on female bodily displays and focusinstead on the class-identifying object, the bicycle.

In general, the plots of Camerini's films question the prewar status quo of the property-conscious bourgeoisie. In the political climate of 1930s Italy, this criticism was well received in part because it was tied to the regime's autarkic policies under League of Nations economic sanctions after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. By the late 1930s, there were restrictions on foreign goods in Italy, including the luxury items favored by the leisure classes. Such goods had a negative political connotation in Camerini's films such as *Il Signor Max*, in which the affectations of the aristocracy are critiqued through the use of foreign words, products, and mannerisms. These class status objects and behavior are juxtaposed with what the patterns and what the working-class newspaper vendor protagonist of *Im Signor Max* is supposed to desire.

In *The Bicycle Thief*, there is a shortage not only of luxury goods but also of basic necessities. In Reconstruction Italy, the *borsa nera* (black market) was an important source of all goods, including basics. The black market became a running motif in Italian films of the early postwar period in films such as Lattuada's *Il bandito/The Bandit* (1946), Righelli's *Abbasso la richezza/Peddlin' in Society* (1946), and Camerini's drama *Molti sogni per le strade/Woman Trouble* (1948). There is even a postwar black market drama *L'angelo e il diavolo/The Angel and the Devil* (1946)directed by Camerini based on a story by Zavattini.

In De Sica's *Shoeshine* and particularly in *The Bicycle Thief*, organized crime and the black market replace the class-conscious and propertyowning bourgeoisie seen in Camerini's comedies. In *The Bicycle Thief*, the black market's new role as status quo is revealed by its to the police. In Camerini's comedies, by contrast, the police reestablish property and class-relationships disrupted by the theft of the class-identifying object, as in *Men What Rascals!* in which Bruno is arrested after crashing his boss's car. The police are also societal guarantors in De Sica's *The Children Are Watching Us* where they reestablish family order by rescuing Prico after his mother abandons him.

In *The Bicycle Thief* the black market's position as the protected status quo can be inferred from the police commissioner's indifference to Antonio's report and during the scene at the Piazza Vittorio market, where Antonio and friends search for the bicycle amid aisles of spare parts of dubious origin. When Antonio finally finds the thief in the Via Panico neighborhood, a mob forms, led by a figure wearing classic mafia style dark glasses and talking in a southern accent. Antonio's son, Bruno, locates a policeman, but he only seconds the neighborhood threats rather than arresting the thief. This encounter destroys Antonio's moral compass.[12] In desperation he decides to copy the black market model and fails because he lacks their organization and community protection.

Another example of Camerini's influence is the portrayal of proletarian political organizations in De Sica's film. Camerini's *Il Signor Max* (1937) features De Sica as Gianni, a newspaper vendor who impersonates a rich playboy to attract a leisure-class love interest, Lady Paola. The film depicts the fascist *OND* (*Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*)—working-class, adult versions of youth groups such as the *balilla* and *giovani italiane*, which promoted the autarkic program of the regime. In *Il Signor Max* an *OND* chorus of fresh faced, uniformed bus drivers sing Giuseppe Verdi's fatalistic slavery lament *Va' pensiero*, thereby underscoring an acceptance of class division. Lady Paola's servant Lauretta is attracted to Gianni's *OND* community and quits her job, rejecting the model of female emancipation through work outside the family. However rather than promoting traditional family values, a mendacious *OND*, corporate model replaces the façade of the leisure-class model. The root of the mendacity is that Gianni is not even an official member of the *OND* chorus, limited to public transportation workers like his uncle. Gianni's coworkers lie and break the rules for him at the newspaper stand and train station. Gianni's uncle lies about the stability of Gianni's character to Lauretta.

The Bicycle Thief continues the depiction of proletarian unions or political institutions along lines established in *Il Signor Max*. Antonio searches for his friend Baiocco in a *casa del popolo* basement meeting hall, where the local cell of the Communist Party holds a meeting. A bespectacled, Antonio Gramsci-like figure explains the communist interpretation of the unemployment situation in terms of the necessity for public work projects with the Ministry of Labor. His audience is the same intent, male, working-age group that had stormed the job placement office and perhaps attended the Party rally. Antonio interrupts the meeting, but the communists, like the police, tell him to be quiet and leave. Antonio's friend is on the other side of the hall preparing a vaudeville stage show

with the popular song, *Se mi volessi bene veramente (If you really loved me)*. The earnest *OND* chorus from *Il Signor Max* is replaced by a mistimed vaudeville whose female dancers are twirled like puppets by an incompetent singer. If the Party really loved Antonio they would offer him more help. Instead, the communists and the vaudeville troupe argue about who has the right to use the stage, leaving the impression that like the vaudeville troupe, the communist cell is only interested in putting on a show.[13] Antonio's garbage men friends help him to search for his bicycle. However, their honest approach to report the serial number to the police is naive.[14] The successful worker organization in *The Bicycle Thief* is the black market neighborhood, which, like the *OND* in *Il Signor Max*, is willing to lie for its comrade and to collude with the police to intimidate Antonio. As in *Il Signor Max* the strength of proletarian unions and political groups is not found in values of collective justice and worker solidarity but in their favor-mongering willingness to evade or subvert the enforcement of legality.

In Camerini's films that star De Sica, the Roman Catholic Church as an institution is largely absent.[15] There is a Catholic subtext in *I'll Give a Million*, whereby poverty is presented as a virtue that contrasts sharply with the affectations of the bourgeoisie. In Camerini's films, De Sica's dashing hero usually lives on the fringes of respectable society, eager for sexual adventure, his parents absent or avoided. The redemption and forgiveness that resolve the misunderstandings separating the young lovers reiterate regime- and Church-ordained dogma on family stability. The resolution of every Camerini comedy is the creation of a stable pair bond.

Similarly, De Sica's early efforts as director, such as *The Children Are Watching Us* and *Doctor Beware*, also champion the goal of a solid family unit. In *The Bicycle Thief*, Antonio Ricci's role as breadwinner echoes the identification of the nuclear family unit and its patriarchal structure as a microcosm of the super-structure of Fascist society.[16] However the black market scenes in *The Bicycle Thief* are based on an amoral familial model. However, this is not a holdover from the Fascist regime's family-centered social legislation. After the suffering of the war the family was simply one of the few universally accepted and viable institutions in Italian life.[17]

In contrast to Camerini, in his early films De Sica's continued to portray the Church as an institutional guarantor of familial stability. In *The Children Are Watching Us*, the priests who run the orphanage for the abandoned boy, Prico, are rare, stable characters in the film. And in De Sica's *The Gate of Heaven* (1945), a train of sick and penitent pilgrims travel to the shrine of Loreto to implore the Virgin for forgiveness and healing.

The recursion to Catholicism in the neorealist period is a reaction to the failure of the D'Annunzian and Fascist culture to ingrain nationalist myths into the Italian psyche. There is also an *Azione Cattolica* undertone concurrent with the Vatican shift from Concordat politics to a tepid anti-Fascism after the Allied invasion in 1943. However, in contrast to *The Children Are Watching Us* or *The Gate of Heaven*, in *The Bicycle Thief* Catholic prestige is not institutional. De Sica's themes of Catholic solidarity and brotherhood in poverty return to the interpersonal settings of Camerini as demonstrated in the bourgeois charity sequence in *The Bicycle Thief*. After unsuccessfully pursuing the thief for a second time, Antonio accosts, attempts to bribe, and finally threatens the beggar at a church where the

needy attend a service before receiving a ration of pasta and potatoes. Despite the church setting, this charity operation is run by a lay order, an indirect reference to the DC victory in Italy's first postwar election in 1948.[18] A lawyer shaves the beggar as an act of penance. A man in bourgeois coat and tie, not a priest, reads a liturgy on spiritual serenity. When the film was released, the Catholic press objected to the cynical repetition of Don Luigi Moresco's "Mass of the poor," by a congregation hungry for material rather than spiritual reassurance.[19]

The film has anticlerical elements in the urination scene and the manner in which the crowd/congregation are locked inside the church.[20] Nonetheless there is a Catholic undertone in *The Bicycle Thief*.[21] For instance, the policeman's search of the thief's room reveals a miserable existence, and an embarrassed Antonio discovers that the man who had stolen his bicycle appears to be an epileptic struggling to earn a living. Whether motivated by fear or grace, Antonio heeds the policeman's warning about the penalty for calumny and decides not to press charges. Antonio is repaid when he steals a bicycle and is caught and beaten by an angry crowd. The bicycle's owner compassionately looks at Antonio's son, Bruno, and decides not to press charges. One of Antonio's captors admonishes him in the last line of the film "Può ringraziare Dio (You can thank God)." Antonio's receipt of mercy may be interpreted as a demonstration of worker solidarity that once given was justly returned. However, the brand name of the bicycle, *fides*, faith or trust, points to a Catholic reading.[22] Antonio, the common man, survivor of the trials and shortages of the war, searches for faith in Reconstruction Rome. After finally finding work after a two-year wait, Antonio dreamed of prosperity. In the restaurant he drunkenly calculates the economics of happiness in terms of wages, overtime, and a family allowance. However, one day on the job and a weekend in Rome teach the supremacy of the black market model. Divine Providence imparts a further lesson in humility, redemption, shame, and forgiveness.

Italian films before the war relied on the popular tradition of the hero as defender of the weak. The muscleman Maciste rescues Cabiria in Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914, rereleased in 1931). There were Italian army war heroes or historically removed costume drama heroes in Goffredo Alessandrini's *Scipione l"Africano*/Scipio the African (1937) or Roberto Rossellini's *Un pilota ritorna*/*A Pilot Returns* (1942). In Rossellini's *L'uomo dalla croce*/*Man of the Cross* (1943) and *Open City*, the role of hero is transplanted to goodhearted priests and commoners, a model already developed in Alessandro Blasetti's *1860* (1933) with a debt to the self-sacrificing character of Fra' Cristoforo from Alessandro Manzoni's Catholic novel *The Betrothed* (1827).

De Sica had acted in some 28 feature films between 1932 and 1939, and stated that he had been typecast in the prewar romantic comedies as a caricature of the debonair *bello dannunziano*, the D'Annunzian handsome man.[23] This hero rescues loveinterests or orphaned girls in the Camerinian comedies and comes from the tradition of the strong man, who defends the weak and poor. In *Doctor Beware* the De Sica character surprises Teresa as she plays a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead of Romeo to Teresa's Juliet, the doctor claims he once played Ursus, the good giant from *Quo Vadis?* who is the source for the strongman character Maciste in Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914). Therefore the Camerini hero traded Maciste's

muscles for a bourgeois pedigree in the professional class. However De Sica's subsequent directorial efforts steadily turned away from the Maciste *bello dannunziano* heroic model. His early films feature nuns in *Un Garbaldino in convento/A Garibaldian in the Convent* (1942), schoolgirls in *Maddalena zero in conduct*, a female orphanage in *Doctor Beware*. These films were part of the schoolgirl comedy genre, in which a gender shift occurs as heroes become heroines and hegemonic positioning is challenged.[24] In De Sica's neorealist period, the Maciste *bello dannunziano* hero is completely absent. The protagonists are boys such as the defenseless Prico in *The Children Are Watching Us*. This thread continues in the postwar *Shoeshine* and especially *The Bicycle Thief* where Bruno, the only employed member of his family, assumes the heroic role by rescuing his father at the last minute from the black market and vigilante mobs (see figure 4.1).[25] Such dependence on innocent characters and children in particular seem to be a universal trend in Italian film that persists to this day. *Cabiria* (1914) centered on the rescue of a lost girl. Blasetti's *1860* (1934) and *Vecchia guardia/Old Guard* (1935) both center on the tragic death of young boys. Even Visconti's *Ossessione/Obsession* (1942) has shots that evoke sympathy for the damned lovers with references to children.

There is a melodramatic undercurrent in *The Bicycle Thief* whereby the Ricci family struggles against a hostile world to achieve economic security.[26] If *The Bicycle Thief* is a melodrama this raises the question of who is the villain? All factions of Italian society treat Antonio disrespectfully: the party, Church, police, mafia. Yet the chief candidate for villain in the film is the Italian state as the collective expression of society. There is also an antistatist current in Camerini's comedies. In fact, as mentioned above his *ll cappello a tre punte/The Three Cornered Hat* (1935) incurred the wrath of Fascist censors.[27] De Sica continued Camerini's criticism of extra-governmental functionaries such as the Giovanni Gentile-like high school teacher in *Maddalena zero in condotta* or the bankers in *Doctor Beware* and *The Children Are Watching Us*. Also like Camerini, by targeting extra-governmental officials, De Sica revealed the abuses of a bureaucratic mentality without risking state censorship.

The Bicycle Thief continues this negative portrayal of functionaries. Antonio struggles with the inefficiency of the state employment office in order to find work. When the bicycle is stolen, Antonio confronts the state's inability to control crime. As he exits the police station, he sees stacks of unread reports gathering dust on the shelves, repeating the images of stacks of bed linen and rows of bicycles at the pawnshop.[28] There are also depictions of inefficient public infrastructure: long bus lines, lack of running water, myopic functionaries crouching over their casebooks at the pawnbroker, the job center. Leftists could see the protagonist's struggle to claim his right to work in *The Bicycle Thief* as a criticism of the inefficiency and waste of the capitalist market system which rewards the hoarding of goods and denies necessities to the lower classes. The images of shortages are an indictment of the Italian state's reluctantance to allocate Marshall Fund resources for public infrastructure after the war in favor of anti-inflationary monetary policy. However, because of Mussolini's autarkic economic policies, the Fascist regime was also identified with state intervention. The tight monetary policy of postwar Christian Democrat governments was, in part, a break with the past.[29] Thus, De

Sica condemns both the Italian state's autarkic past and the liberal policies of the present government, a political stance that Tomasulo identifies as fitting the "social democratic modification of high capitalism."[30]

Given the Fascist regime's ideology, one would expect to find references to sports in the De Sica/Camerini comedies of the 1930s and 1940s. Camerini's films include representation of sports. There is a parade of bicycle racers at the opening of *I'll Give a Million*, the aristocratic fascination with bridge or horseback riding in *Il Signor Max*, and a spoof of the sickly physical education instructor in De Sica's *Maddalena zero in conduct. The Bicycle Thief* also portrays sports as a vital cultural phenomenon.[31] When the drunken Antonio visits the Santona fortuneteller, the soundtrack breaks into the chirping bird network signature of the RAI radio broadcast of Sunday's football game between the teams of Modena and Roma. Sunday is set aside for the stadium as well as for church. While wandering the streets, Antonio and Bruno see a truckload of exhuberant Modena supporters anticipating the match of the day. In the immediate postwar period, bicycle racing, with football, was among the most popular spectator sports in Italy. *The Bicycle Thief* has a brief shot of a group of bicycle racers during the final theft sequence. Desperate for a bicycle, Antonio endures the sight of bicycles being used for leisure as a final blow to his conscience. The image of the bicycle and the rivalry between racers Gibo Bartali and Fausto Coppi became linked to Italian national pride in a period of general depression and misery. Because of his background and personality Gino Bartali was often identified with the DC, and Fausto Coppi was often identified with the PCI. Bicycle racing gained political significance after the 1948 assassination attempt on Italian Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti. On the same weekend, Bartali won the Tour de France and reduced tensions by dedicating his victory to a recovering Togliatti.

De Sica's films were part of a current of realism or *verismo* that appeared as a reaction to the D'Annunzian rhetoric that dominated Italian culture early in the century and in the centuries-old mimetic traditions in Italian artistic expression. The plots of Camerini's comedies featuring the problems of humble protagonists provided a preparatory platform for De Sica's work in the neorealist style which would develop with more tragic plot elements and ambiguous endings that would become a trademark of the Italian art film.

As with the backdrop surrounding the wartime production of *Open City*, De Sica's ability to make *The Bicycle Thief* was an achievement in itself. He had to partially produce the film himself after it was rejected by Italian producers and Hollywood producers who suggested casting leading man Cary Grant as the protagonist. De Sica's faith in the project and his development of a neorealist style with Zavattini was eventually rewarded with critical awards including the equivalent of the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. *The Bicycle Thief* has a reputation for not being appreciated by the Italian public, and although it placed fifth in the Italian domestic box office of 1948 the film created some controversy among ministers of the Christian Democrat government who sought to deprive De Sica of government subsidies for this film and his later neorealist efforts for their stark portrayal of the social ills of Italy.