



[The Kid with a Bike](#) at [Cornerhouse](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) March 2012

The films of Belgian brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne portray lonely vulnerable characters fighting to survive. Filmed in an almost documentary style, they portray the reality of the lives of the poor. In *Rosetta*, the winner of the 1999 Palme d'Or, the child of an alcoholic lives in a trailer park and survives from pay day to pay day.

L'En

fant

tackled the story of a man who sells his newborn child to black marketeers. In their most recent film,

Lorna's Silence

they turned to a portrayal of Liege's criminal underworld.

The Kid With a Bike

returns to the industrial wastland of Seraing in Belgium and the world of the underclass.

Once again they observe a character drawing on their resources to survive poverty and neglect. Their hero is Cyril, played by a non-professional Thomas Doret, who is defined by his determination to escape from a care home and find his father. We first meet him biting the arm of a counsellor who is trying to keep him in the safety of the care in which he was placed after being abandoned by his father. Ostensibly a search for his bicycle which has been repeatedly stolen, it is really a search for his father and for love.



This is a simple and increasingly common tale of a son abandoned by his father. Cyril does not realise that Guy (Jeremie Renier) has abandoned the child and does not want to be found - like a modern day Oliver Twist. His journey brings him into contact with the beautiful and loving Samantha, the Nancy figure, played by Cecile de France and a local drug dealer, Egon Di Mateo who could fulfil the child's quest for a father. This meeting prompts the second half of the tale - the realisation of how dangerous the world can be for a child who does not have an adult's love.

In modern politics, I think the term underclass is often used about those who survive in the post-industrial ghettos of the first world, destroyed by finance capitalism, people who survive on minimum wage and sometimes turn to alcohol, drugs or crime to survive. The Dardennes treat their characters as real human beings, with thier own strengths and weaknesses – people whose stories deserve to be told. This is not a genre which appeals to Hollywood, and as European producers are also driven by profit, this is a film to catch while you can.

I am normally immune to the appeal of child actors, but in this simple and affecting tale the

Dardennes' brothers even touched my heart-strings.

It is a beautiful and simple film about love which harks back to De Sica's classic *The Bicycle Thieves*, but whereas in the Italian masterpiece the father risks everything for his son, here it is the son who dares explore the banlieues of contemporary France in his search for happiness. It is a tribute to the role of kindness in everyday life. Shot in a pared down, non glossy low-budget style, and coaxing astonishing turns from a young, non-professional lead, this is a raw modern fable that will have you hoping for a happy ending.