



LE GAMIN AU VELO (THE KID WITH A BIKE) is a Second Quarter 2017 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's Kino Ken's review of that film and dvd.

16 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

Belgium 2011 color 84 minutes subtitled live action feature drama

Les Films du Fleuve / Archipel 35 / Lucky Red / France 2 Cinema /

Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF) / Belgacom TV

Producers: Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Denis Freyd, Stefano Massenzi, Bernadette Meunier, André Michotte, Andrea Occhipinti, Arlette Zylberberg

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

2 Direction: Jean-Pierre Dardenne* and Luc Dardenne*

2 Editing: Marie-Hélène Duzo*

1 Cinematography: Alain Marcoen

Still Photography: Christine Plenus

1 Lighting: Tanguy Delhez

1 Screenplay: Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Script Supervisor: Marika Piedboeuf

2 Music: Ludwig van Beethoven; Didier Dauvrin, Raphael Mancini, Frédéric Migeot, Adam Aldridge, Pierre Constant, Xavier Lesenfans; John Hunter, Jr. and Jonathan Slott and Nicholas Seely; SRG

- 1 Production Design: Igor Gabriel**
Costume Design / Wardrobe: Maïra Ramedhan Levi
Makeup: Nathalie Tabareau
- 2 Sound**
Supervising Sound Editing: Benoit De Clerck*
Sound Recording: H el ena R evell ere* and Thibaut Vandermeerch*
Sound Mixing: Jean-Pierre Duret*
Sound Rerecording Mixing: Thomas Gauder*
- 2 Acting**
2 Creativity
- 16 total points**

Cast: Thomas Doret (j)* (Cyril), Cecile de France* (Samantha, a hairdresser), J er emie Renier (Guy Catoul, Cyril’s dad), Fabrizio Rongione* (Newsstand Owner), Egon Di Mateo* (Wesker), Olivier Gourmet (Caf e Owner), Batiste Sornin and Samuel De Ryck (Teachers / Counselors), Carl Jadot (Teacher), Claudy Delfosse (Man at the Bus Station), Jean-Michel Balthazar (Neighbor Val Polet), Fr ed eric Dussenne (Concierge), Myriem Akheddiou (Medical Assistant), Sandra Raco (Teacher), Hicham Slaoui (Director of Children’s Home), Romain Clavareau (Logan), Charles Monnoyer (Brian), Jasser Jaafari (Nabil), Mireille Bailly (Baker), Mourad Maimuni (Mechanic), Neda Lugi (Hairdressing Salon Client), Laurent Caron (Gilles, Samantha’s boyfriend), Selma Alaoui (Nadine), Youssef Tiberkanine (j) (Mourad, son of Samantha’s neighbor), Mich ele Romus (Wesker’s Grandmother), Bilal Covino (Mechanic Apprentice), Valentin Jacob* (Martin), Lara Persain (The Mediator), J er emie Segard (Minimarket Vendor), Sabrina Mastratisi (Cashier)

In some respects *Le Gamin au Velo (The Kid with a Bike)* is a typically dynamic, working-class drama from the Dardenne Brothers of Belgium. It focuses on marginal characters whose lives are upended by decisions influencing their futures imposed upon them from outside forces they cannot control.

Cyril Catoul, a boy of about twelve years of age, has been deposited by his father at a local orphanage in Saraing, a suburb of Liege. Provisionally. The arrangement is supposedly a temporary one. When his dad sells Cyril's bike to obtain some ready cash and moves without providing new contact information, the technically misplaced "orphan" goes into denial, refusing to accept the news he has been abandoned and his single non-essential material possession sold to a stranger. Cyril's mother is apparently dead and cannot intervene on his behalf. Government educators, counselors, and caregivers feel only vocational interest in the boy and their calculated involvement is consequently completely rejected by him. What is needed and wanted by the youth is an authentic home and parent. Not a substitute assigned by an impersonal bureaucracy.

In retaliation he lashes out at institutional overseers, replacing their rules with his own trespasses, rejecting immediately any advice coming from them. He's an unreachable island, immersed in his own despondency, racked with doubts about his self-worth.

Why does his father want to be completely rid of him?

Viewers discover Guy Catoul is incompetent to manage even his own life, let alone guide and support someone else's. His move to a smaller apartment is due only partly to financial necessity. Removal of an economic burden is also part of a desired goal. Too young to bring in money himself, Cyril is perceived as mere economic deadweight, a social obstacle to Guy's attempt to ingratiate himself on several levels with his new employer, a female restaurant owner with no interest in establishing any kind of maternal bond with someone else's child. Guy discards him as a relic of his past, something disconnected to his current situation.

Despairing of even finding his father, but utterly unwilling to docilely be led back to institutional management, the spurned dependent literally clings to an unfamiliar woman in a clinic office. He refuses to let go of her. She's not adopted as a preference. Only a tentative alternative to arbitrary authority. Cyril is still seeking reunion with his natural father, a validation of himself as an acceptable and dutiful son. This he cannot find in an unrelated female.

However, she can provide some social shielding. Which is more than a self-destructive youngster is able to devise for himself.

Apparently this unmoving rock of salvation feels selected by some kind of overriding destiny to become at least an advocate for the frantic child's welfare. She acts independently to recover Cyril's bicycle. At her own expense. In doing so, the woman sets in motion a chain of events that lead from chance encounter to deepening personal commitment. Samantha observes firsthand the unreliability, improvidence, and selfishness of Guy, whose word is as worthless as his identification as a father.

No reason for her mediation between father and son is provided in the screenplay. It merely suggests she sees a situation requiring amelioration and feels obligated to transform it into opportunity for altruistic action. If Samantha expects a reward, it would be solely the knowledge she helped salvage a life teetering on the edge of complete social dysfunction.

While she may anticipate a positive future direction in her relationship with Cyril, the object of her attention blindly continues his search for a meaningful paternal model. As his natural parent repeatedly fails to assume that role, he's drawn to a local junior Fagan. Amoral, undereducated Wesker is leader of a gang of local delinquents. Under his tutelage and encouragement, Cyril attempts armed robbery of a newsstand owner. He bungles the crime, gets himself recognized, is dumped a second time by a paternalistic figure more show than substance.

When he attempts to bribe his way back into Guy's life, this too ends in a rebuff. His father is more concerned about the police than worried over Cyril's increasingly inappropriate antisocial activities. He gives no indication whatsoever of interest in the fates of those individuals victimized by his son, leaving their potential retaliatory measures unchecked. Recognition of the vulnerability of others isn't his strong suit.

Samantha's left to pick up the broken pieces of her inadvertent foster child's undisciplined career. She receives no support whatsoever from a father who has totally lost track of his son's ambitions and undertakings. Displaying formidable physical strength, the hairdresser can match the energy of a reckless cyclist but not stem his inclination to independently manufacture enemies.

Two of those will continue to haunt him as the film moves towards its unanticipated climax and appropriately unsettling conclusion.

A modern update on Dostoevsky's insular, self-obsessed Raskolnikov, Cyril fights injustice by becoming flagrantly unjust himself. Then atones for that breach of responsible conduct by seemingly justified suffering.

Coincidences and repetitions are essential elements in constructing the story arc pursued by the Dardennes. Fortunately, they do not diminish the film's dramatic urgency and intensity. Maintaining a furiously kinetic present throughout the course of a Truffaut-like succession of shocking abortions and dissociations, the co-directors generate optimal suspense and sympathy for a perpetual underdog whose persistence is remarkable.

This film highlights physical, tactile elements of an environment significantly lacking grace, color, and perfection of form. Everything is functional. Otherwise barren. Niceness and courtesy are present. Not love or compassion. At least not obviously so. These are what Cyril unwittingly pursues, looking in all the wrong places. He is sensitive on some level to their absence, and only begins to understand what and where they are as interactions with Samantha evolve into mutual understanding. When he says towards the end of the film he's sorry he hurt her it reveals a new comprehension on his part that actions have consequences. He is not really alone in the world. What he does can either injure or support others.

Such strong emphases on choices and duty have always been hallmarks of Dardenne films. A reminder that, if a moral world is desirable, each individual can and should contribute toward its realization and improvement.

Sound is of paramount prominence in this film. Accompaniment of birdcalls, pounding heartbeats, traffic noise from passing cars, voices of playing children make a realistic sonic tapestry suggestive of both the external world and everyday life concurrent with spotlighted personal drama. Employing noble, tranquillizing sonorities of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto to soften the jagged outpourings of emotion in Cyril's ever more menacing crises was a brilliant decision of the filmmakers. In stark contrast is the strident, clamorous din Guy plays as he prepares food, using music to shut himself off from the world, an adult variation on his son's employment of running and bicycling to keep thought at bay.

There's exceptionally restrained acting, especially by Cecile de France as human punching bag Samantha, Fabrizio Rongione in the role of a hypocritical businessman whose self-serving fabrications set a monstrous example for his son to follow, and Valentin Jacob as vengeful Martin. These contrast sharply with more volcanic expressivity by Thomas Doret's hyperkinetic Cyril and Egon di Mateo's alternately ingratiating and castigating Wesker.

Production designer Igor Gabriel, making the most of minimal sets and wardrobes pre-selected by the Dardennes, keeps characters and locations harmoniously matched.

Marie-Hélène Duzo's remarkable editing keeps intact the pounding, galloping rhythms communicating Cyril's devotion to excessive expenditures of energy. It also thrusts viewers repeatedly into the heart of emotional maelstroms, uniting them with the protagonist's own heated frenzy. Rapid buildups of suspense are crafted with consummate skill.

Serviceable, but otherwise undistinguished, the Dardennes' screenplay dispenses with motivation, eloquence, poetry, and wit. In their places are silences teeming with unspoken hints of internal turmoil, indecisiveness, and mounting cynicism.

Lighting and cinematography are more than adequate, though neither falls into the category of superb achievement.

Another triumph overall for the Dardenne Brothers, *The Kid with a Bike* is likely to be just as impressive and emotionally wrenching years from now as currently, the kind of film conveying truths about life which aren't likely to become dated and irrelevant. It's highly recommended for viewers ages eighteen and older.

Criterion's dvd bonuses consist of a lengthy, very perceptive seventy-three minute 2012 conversation between the co-directors and film critic Kent Jones, a nineteen-minute interview from 2011 with actress Cecile de France which stresses her role as being just a participant in the moment, devoid of backstory or preconceived character motivations, a seven-minute interview with Thomas Doret that reveals his intelligence but not the creativity he brought to his performance, and a thirty-three minute highly detailed 2011 documentary titled, in English, *Return to Seraing*. This last featurette revisits five key locations

used in the film, specifying exactly the camera setups and role of each. A twenty-page booklet with an essay about the film by critic Geoff Andrew is also included.