



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Kid with a Bike

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Directors: Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne
Production Companies: Archipel 35, Les Films du Fleuve, Lucky Red, France 2 Cinéma, RTBF, Belgacom
Executive Producer: Delphine Tomson
Producers: Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Denis Freyd
Co-producer: Andrea Occhipinti
Associate Producers: Arlette Zylberberg, Andre Michotte, Stefano Massenzi
Unit Production Manager: Philippe Groff
Production Manager: Thomas Alfandari
1st Assistant Director: Caroline Tambour
Screenplay: Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne
Director of Photography: Alain Marcoen
Editor: Marie-Hélène Dozo
Art Director: Igor Gabriel
Costume Designer: Maira Ramedhan-Levi
Make-up: Natali Tabareau-Vieuille
Sound: Jean-Pierre Duret
Sound Mixer: Thomas Gauder
Sound Editor: Benoît de Clerck
Cast:
Thomas Doret (*Cyril Catoul*)
Cécile de France (*Samantha*)
Jérémy Renier (*Guy Catoul*)
Olivier Gourmet (*bistro owner*)
Egon De Mateo (*Wes*)
Fabrizio Rongione (*bookseller*)
Belgium-France-Italy 2011
87 mins
35mm

Brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have few equals in terms of consistently magnificent filmmaking. Their latest film *The Kid with a Bike* may differ from its predecessors in small, subtle ways, but its tale of 11-year-old Cyril has all the virtues we now expect from the brothers' work: dramatic suspense, precise *mise en scène*, social and psychological precision, moral complexity and a profoundly humane compassion.

How did the idea for The Kid with a Bike initially arise?

Luc Dardenne: When we were in Japan for the release of *The Son*, a judge there told us about a boy left in an orphanage by his father, who told him he'd come back for him but never did; the boy waited and waited, climbed on the roof, fled the orphanage. And we had a script that was going nowhere about a doctor called Samantha, so we thought of merging the two stories, so that Samantha came to love the boy and tried to soothe his anger about his father's disappearance. We felt a doctor was too heavily metaphorical, so we made the woman a hairdresser. And for some reason we'd always imagined the boy on a bike; he could express his violence through it, cycling fast or doing acrobatics with it.

The film's incredible energy comes from him.

LD: And the bike!

Your published diaries often mention literature and myths, but the press notes for this film describe it as a kind of fairytale.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne: I remember that during our long, intense discussions over the script, we did talk about 'Tom Thumb'. Of course our film's very different from that story, but this was the first time we'd spoken about the world of fairytales. In this film the characters, apart from Cyril, are complete, simple, straightforward. Samantha has no false or secret layers, no underlying thoughts; similarly, the older boy Wes is a 'baddie' who in the film really has only one objective. Characters drawn that way perhaps bring it closer to fairytale. But there's also its geography: the street, houses, road and forest. When we first filmed Cyril running into the forest, we used a medium shot, but it felt wrong so we moved the camera back. And there he was – tiny and, for all his inner strength, very fragile, surrounded by huge trees. That's when the idea of a fairytale really took hold.

This film differs from your others in that it doesn't have an inner-city setting.

LD: Also, we shot in summer for the first time! Besides the bike, from the start we had in our minds the idea of a fall – a chase that ended at a tree. If we were to keep that, there had to be leaves to hide behind, so we had to shoot in summer! That made a surprising difference: not only could we dress lightly instead of being all wrapped up, but there'd be a play of light – a warmer light which, without being too metaphorical, could reflect the love Samantha offers the boy. Besides, to have him on his bike out in the rain, wind and cold would have exaggerated his suffering too much.

J-PD: What we were trying to show was how the love Samantha offers the boy could save him. He doesn't save himself on his own. When he asks for help, she simply decides, for no particular reason, to save him from his destiny. We'd never tried to deal with such an impulse before; usually there's evil looming in our films, and even here Cyril's father abandons him – because that's the cause of his anger. But in creating a bridge between Samantha and Cyril, we had to find a way to show that relationship without being sentimental, at the same time as not being afraid of the emotions involved. So we decided just to have Samantha say, 'You're alone, abandoned, and I'll take care of you. You asked me, and I'll do it.' And we wanted to leave it at that. Many people who read the script said, 'Don't you think Samantha should have more objective reasons?' But we always said no; we liked the challenge of trying to make the audience believe in Samantha's gift.

So did you cast Cécile de France as Samantha because you felt she could play the role without any overt psychological explanation?

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30;

Mon 2 Oct 18:10

Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45;

Sat 30 Sep 15:40

Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40;

Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45;

Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

The Wind Will Carry Us

(Bad mara khahad bourd)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri, Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex);

Fri 15 Sep 20:40

Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45;

Fri 29 Sep 18:00

The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30;

Mon 18 Sep 20:50

The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40;

Tue 26 Sep 20:55

F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop. We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

LD: For years people have been telling us that as two straight men directing together, we wouldn't be able to work well with real professional actresses, because they like to respond to the vision of a single director. There's said to be such an element of alchemy or seduction that we felt quite intimidated – maybe we'd even get jealous! But we really wanted to work with Cécile. For starters, she's from Seraing [the Belgian town that has been the setting for most of the Dardennes' films to date]. But also we felt she could play someone who is really there, without lots of different levels of motivation. We felt the audience would see her and, by the end of the film, accept what she did, even if they weren't entirely certain why she did it

And she was great. She helped the boy, and understood that she needed to be like him: innocent and pure, without technique. It's precisely thanks to her technique that she was able to eliminate technique. She worked so hard! When Cyril first meets Samantha, he knocks her on to a concrete floor; we made Cécile do that scene 18 times and she never once complained. But please don't tell anyone that, or no one will want to work with us!

Why of all the boys auditioned did you select Thomas Doret to play Cyril?

J-PD: He was actually the fifth boy we saw on the first day, and even though we saw everyone else, we both immediately knew it would be him. We had everyone do a simplified version of the first scene in which Cyril tries to phone his father and gets no reply; with Thomas it felt as if he really was waiting for his father to answer. Also, he has an incredible memory (from the first day of rehearsals he knew all his lines), great concentration and real inner strength. At the age of six he was made to do karate because he was small and hyperactive, and he still has some of that: he speaks fast, moves fast, has quick gestures.

That reminds me of the lovely shot of Cyril cycling at night, one of a few instances where for the first time you use non-diegetic music – six bars of Beethoven's 'Emperor Concerto'.

LD: Those 22 seconds of the 'Adagio' have a feeling of immensely consoling tenderness. We wanted it to show what's missing from Cyril's life: love, which Samantha will offer him. It's as if this piece of music might diminish the fear of being alone and fatherless – of dying, for without love this boy feels he'll die. So the music's a measure of his suffering.

Because Cyril's father is played by Jérémie Renier, he could almost be the same person he played in your 2005 film The Child – but now older, of course.

J-PD: Maybe! But that's not why we chose him. We just find working with him hugely enjoyable; he likes to surprise us, and despite his precision, there's a real freedom in his acting that we love. Thomas was really happy to be working with Jérémie, because he'd asked us to show him [the Dardennes' 1996 film] *La Promesse*, in which Jérémie, as it happens, had been the same age as Thomas. So he could see Jérémie as a child of his own age as well as the adult he turned into, and in a way he identified with him. There was a very real communication between the two of them.

While it's more fluid than it was in your last feature The Silence of Lorna (2008), your camera style here is less kinetic than it was in Rosetta or The Son.

LD: We'd never rehearsed so much before, and this time we found the shots we wanted during rehearsals. During the shoot we tried new angles, but we nearly always returned to the shots we'd found earlier. It's as if they really were there out of necessity. And we had far fewer tracking shots and many more pans – much simpler. It's as if we wanted to be less shocking, more straightforward. But let's see what happens with our next film!

Interview by Geoff Andrew, *Sight and Sound*, November 2011