

Umberto D. (1952)

Directed by Vittorio De Sica

Writing Credits: Cesare Zavattini ... (story and screenplay)

Cast (in credits order):

Carlo Battisti ... Umberto Domenico Ferrari

Maria Pia Casilio ... Maria

Lina Gennari ... Antonia Belloni

Many in the film's cast were new to acting, including Carlo Battisti and Maria Pia Casilio, the two principal actors. Others, including Umberto's cruel landlady, Antonia (Lina Gennari), were professional actors.

There are two dogs used in the film. The trained one has a black head and its right side is white. Another dog, with a white muzzle and a black spot on its right flank, is used in two scenes - firstly, when Umberto is hiding from the police after the demonstration and, secondly, when he reclaims Flike from the pound.

This is the first and only film for non-actor Carlo Battisti, who plays the leading role in the film. His real occupation was that of a Professor of Linguistics at the Università degli Studi di Firenze.

Non-actress Maria Pia Casilio, who plays the role of the house maid in the film, got the part when she accompanied a friend to see the real actresses competing for the film's audition. Director Vittorio De Sica spotted her in the balcony and knew she was exactly what he was looking for in the role. Maria went on to work with De Sica in three other films. She continued to work in films until the late 1990s.

Vittorio De Sica dedicated this film to his father.

The film has been restored by Mediaset (Italy's biggest private television company) and presented again in theaters in New York, Rome and Milan in 1999.

Included among the "1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die", edited by Steven Schneider.

About an hour into the film Gian Lorenzo Bernini's monumental sculpture "Elephant and Obelisk" (1667) makes a prominent appearance. In November 2016 the statue was damaged in an act of vandalism that aroused worldwide condemnation.

Vittorio DeSica's wonderful *Umberto D* was one of the last films of the Italian neo-realism movement and by far its best one. The movie's premise is simple: it is a slice of the life of a poor lonely pensioner, Umberto. Throughout the movie, we see Umberto struggle to find money to pay rent to his horrible landlady, love his dog Flike, and deal with the loneliness and disillusionment of the postwar era.

Umberto D is a character-driven film. It works very well because of its sharp observations on loneliness and poignant gestures. The gestures evoke powerful feelings without necessitating dialogue. Many of the scenes, even the ones that do not necessarily advance the plot, are hypnotically beautiful in their simplicity. Take, for example, a beautiful scene where Umberto finally needs to beg for money but cannot physically bring himself to do it. He extends his palm up, but when a passer-by stops to give him money, Umberto quickly flips his hand over, as if testing for rain. The film is full of these small gestures that quietly emphasize the desperate loneliness and poignancy of Umberto's situation.

The acting in this film is absolutely superb. Carlo Battisti, despite having never acted before, is wonderful as the titular character; his face is a fascinating blend of stubborn dignity and weariness of life. Maria Pia-Casilio, who plays the maid, is just as good as evoking life's loneliness and quiet desperation. The supporting cast is also very strong.

Umberto D is the masterpiece of the Italian neo-realist era. It's a rather bleak and very realistic movie, but it makes some fascinating commentary on the human condition, specifically the loneliness we face.

Battisti's Umberto is retired, known fairly among his past employees, and living in a dank, infested one room who seems to be on the standard downward spiral for such a neo-realist effort (indeed, like *The Bicycle Thieves*, many of the elements against him are from society's natural pitfalls). His health starts to go, as he gets a fever, and is sent unsympathetically to the hospital and returns to find the place being torn at each wall. The landlady wants him out, since she will only accept full rent instead of partial rent, and the maid of the house (Maria Pia-Casilio), while kind and friendly, lives in a similar prism of fear and emptiness. However, even she can't help him in the financial difficulties. This leads him out into the streets outside of Rome, where the film plays out like a Chaplin movie, without the humor and female companion- only with his best friend in the world, a little dog named Flag.

Umberto D was made towards the end of the Neo-realist period in Italian cinema, following on from *Roma Citta Aperta* (1945), *Riso Amaro* (Bitter Rice 1946), *Paisa* (Paisan 1946) and *Ladri di Biciclette* (The Bicycle Thieves 1948). Many critics see *Umberto D* as the finest example of the genre and Vittorio de Sica, the director, himself considered it to be his best work. Set in post-war Italy, it is the story of a retired public worker, trying to survive on a meagre state pension and being threatened with eviction from his landlady. His only friends are his small dog 'Flick' and his landlady's young maid Maria who has just discovered she is pregnant. Filled with despair over his situation he finally contemplates suicide.

The film sticks firmly to **the neorealist conventions**; the lead actor is a non professional actor (a college Professor who agreed to play the role), the use of studio sets is kept to minimum and the everyday lives of people are examined in minute detail. One could say that for long parts of the film nothing much happens, for instance when we follow Maria's early morning routine of grinding some coffee, but from these detailed vignettes, we learn a great deal of the thoughts feelings and emotions of the characters. These sequences are why it is a great film. The acting is wonderful, the impossible situations of the old man and of the unmarried but pregnant Maria are really brought to life for the audience. Although a tragic tale it does include many moments of humour and the ending although non-committal is uplifting. All in all a classic.

An elderly retired civil servant in Rome is about to be forced onto the streets due to the loss of his pension, with only his little dog to comfort him.

This is storytelling at its simplest and most beautiful. An old man - his sole companion, a dog - tries to survive on a fixed, tight income while being mistreated by his landlady.

De Sica brilliantly captures the despair of his protagonist and makes this film unforgettably powerful.

This movie remains timeless, as potent as when it was made in 1952. You don't have to be old, you don't have to be a dog-lover (although it helps), and you certainly don't have to be a fan of neo-realist Italian cinema. All you have to be is a good human being. Watching this movie is a sort of 'humanity test'.

It's not all sad, and certainly cannot be called unrelentingly depressing. There are plenty of beautifully funny moments. The main character, Umberto, is one of the greatest characters I've ever met at the movies. It would be simple to make him just a man to pity: he is a poor old man who is down on his luck. But the artists behind the film have fleshed him out into an incredibly human character. The supporting characters, even those who show up for just a moment, are just as well created.

Vittorio De Sica once remarked that why should film makers go in search of extraordinary events when in the course of their daily lives they are confronted with ordinary events of extraordinary beauty. This statement sums best the very essence of this Neorealist classic. *Umberto D* directed by the master Italian filmmaker Vittorio De Sica is a sad albeit ordinary tale of the loss of human values in Italian society after the end of second world war. Everything about the leading character Umberto D is told in an ordinary indeed prosaic manner. It is rather bizarre but mention must also be made of the poor light in which women characters have been shown. This is due to the fact that in *Umberto D*, both the grumpy landlady and unmarried pregnant girl representing loss of moral values are women characters directly associated with the old man. The great thing about *Umberto D* is its canine protagonist named Flike who serves his master so well that he even prepares to die for his master's sake. In *Umberto D*, by showing a faithful dog who remains loyal to his old master, Vittorio De Sica has rightly depicted that animals are more truthful than some human beings.

But any attempt of total pessimism is swept off by two important elements. First, there's Flike, Umberto's dynamic pet dog and the second more important character. Flike represents Umberto's remaining bound to Life, whatever Umberto does is about surviving, but for Flike, it's a matter of living. Flike inspires a sense of responsibility and duty to Umberto preventing him from falling into the spiral of misery and sorrow. His room is Flike's room, his life is Flike's life, for men, working is living, for a retired man who can't work anymore, and being responsible is the ultimate way of feeling alive. Umberto is loved and trusted by Flike, and you can tell from the great chemistry they have. But the intelligence of the script is not to totally outcast Umberto and makes him more than 'the man with the dog'. Umberto has a poignant father-and-daughter relationship with the young maid Maria, abandoned in pregnancy by two soldiers, among who hides the father, she knows she'll be fired sooner or later, but like Umberto, she blindly hopes for a brighter future. Maria and Umberto's growing complicity, goes beyond their misfit status, reminding them that each one is carrying a something

significant enough not to make them feel useless, something whose weight gets more palpable as time goes by.

According to the director, De Sica, this film was a “neorealist” film, in that it shows a sort of polished version of real life people and events. Because of this, the plot is very simple (just as in his film *The Bicycle Thieves*) and the actors are not really actors but real people from the Italian streets.

Umberto himself is a wonderfully realized character. Embittered by his fall from the respectability of civil servant to the poverty, desperation and irrelevance of a needy old man in an uncaring world, he still has pride, and pride, along with his deep attachment to his nice little pooch Flag and his own real humanity, keeps him alive.

Umberto’s only human friend, the maid Maria, is the perfect complement to these characters. Young, but not innocent...kind and caring, but completely aware that life sucks, and that that’s just is the way things are. She empathizes with Alberto and shows him whatever kindnesses she can, but she accepts his tragedy as inevitable. She is pregnant, but understands that neither of her lovers will recognize her child, and that it’s her problem -- that’s life.

This movie from director Vittorio de Sica is a heartbreaking story of a destitute pensioner named Umberto Ferrari and his pet dog. The pensioner cannot bring himself to tell anyone of his difficult existence or to ask for help. Set in post-war Italy of the 1940’s and 50’s, the neo-realist movies of this period with their on-location shooting show the grinding poverty of many people at the time. With this vivid background, we see some very tender moments in the story that illustrate the bond between the man and his dog. We also get a sense of the mood in Rome at the start as police break up a protest by pensioners fighting for a decent income. Other scenes take the viewer into a hospital where patients recite the Rosary from their beds, have lunch at a pasta diner and go home to a walk-up apartment. With Umberto pitted against his cold-hearted landlady, we see how his life is made almost unbearable. In fact, the movie is very sensitive in its depiction of this man, one of many elderly people who were by themselves with little money. In this case, the elderly man, played by Carlo Battista, has a reason for living because of his canine companion. De Sica used amateur actors and Battista was a university professor in Florence who has captured the essence of his character. De Sica made his mark as the foremost director of the neo-realist school of cinema and as an accomplished character actor in his own right. I noticed the dedication to Umberto DeSica, who was apparently his father. In this film, De Sica has certainly produced an outstanding work of art about the plight of one aged citizen in a particular time and place.

Shot in precise black-and-white by G. R. Aldo, the action unfolds in a series of lengthy takes focusing on the characters’ relationship to their often dreary environments. Postwar Rome looks an unfriendly place with its deserted squares and dilapidated buildings. The Roman Pantheon is brilliantly used in one shot, its spires extending far into the sky proving the enduring nature of the ancient world, that contrasts with Umberto’s ephemeral world which looks to be enduring prematurely.

Umberto’s relationship to the dog Flick is the film’s emotional center. We share his worries when the dog goes missing; and his almost unendurable anxieties when he tries to leave the dog once more in the park. The final sequence looks to be cataclysmic for the man and beast relationship, but this is eventually resolved.