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Difficult Years for *Anni difficili* by Luigi Zampa (1948)

1. *Anni Difficili*

Anni difficili (*Difficult Years*), directed by Luigi Zampa in 1948, is one of the films of the 1940s that does not belong among the masterpieces of neorealism.¹ Based on Vitaliano Brancati's short story "Il vecchio con gli stivali" (824-57)² and scripted by Brancati³ with Sergio Amidei, Enrico Fulchignoni, and Franco Evangelisti,⁴ the film is set in Sicily between 1933 and the first years after World War II and very courageously depicts the Italian people's prevailing attitudes towards Fascism before and after the Regime's fall.⁵

The protagonist, Aldo Piscitello (Umberto Spadaro), a municipal employee in the town of Modica, Sicily, is forced by the *podestà* (Enzo Biliotti), on the threat of being fired, to join the Fascist Party. Piscitello becomes a card-carrying Fascist with the approval of his wife, Rosina (Ave Ninchi), and his daughter (Delia Scala), and despite the indifference of his anti-Fascist friends. Furthermore, when the Regime promises a two-thousand-lira prize to employees who have been enrolled in the Party since 1921, Piscitello's wife has his registration backdated in order to get the Party affiliation card as *Squadrista*. His son, Giovanni (Massimo Girotti), is a royal army soldier who takes part in all the wars declared by Mussolini in Ethiopia, Spain, Africa, and Russia. During one of his furloughs, he becomes engaged to Maria (Milly Vitale), the granddaughter of the town pharmacist (Aldo Silvani), and marries her. When the Allies land in Sicily and the armistice is proclaimed, Piscitello loses first his son Giovanni, who is murdered by two retreating Germans, and then his job. In this story, the end of the Regime and of the war do not coincide with a renewal of the political class: with the Allied forces in control, the old *podestà* becomes mayor and fires Piscitello because of his documented status in the Party as a *Squadrista*.

Even such a brief summary reveals why *Anni difficili* has aroused strong opposition on all sides of the political spectrum. The portrayal of Italians that the film conveys does not spare anyone and was quite new in the history of Italian national cinema. In addition

to showing that only the weakest (Piscitello and his son Giovanni) paid the highest price when Fascism fell, it parodies Sicilian anti-Fascism and has no misgivings about the Church's complicity with the Regime. The beginning of the review written by Pietro Secchia,⁶ the vice secretary of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) when the film was released, illustrates the film's unflinching portrayal of society at the time:

Comprendo benissimo come certi dirigenti democristiani ed ex ministri del tempo di Mussolini si scandalizzino per il film *Anni difficili* e furenti di sacra americana indignazione interroghino il Senato e la Camera perché venga tolto dalla circolazione. Ciò che non comprendo è che al coro degli ex ministri, degli ex podestà, degli ex gerarchi riparati sotto l'insegna dello scudo crociato abbiano fatto eco voci di antifascisti attivi e di compagni che, partendo da un diverso punto di vista, qualificano però anch'essi questo film insultante e diffamatorio per il popolo italiano. (Secchia 3)

Since its first appearance at the Venice Film Festival in 1948,⁷ *Anni difficili* has provoked differing opinions among intellectuals and politicians. The film triggered violent reactions among the political right as well as among some Christian Democrats who declared it "antinational" and called for its removal. However, it was openly defended by Giulio Andreotti, the undersecretary to the president of the Council of Ministers, who was also in charge of overseeing and regulating the entertainment industry. The film likewise divided some members of the Communist Party, like Pietro Secchia and Emilio Sereni⁸ (Secchia 3), and was harshly criticized by two film critics from the official newspaper of the PCI, *l'Unità*, Ugo Casiraghi⁹ ("Il festival" 2) and Lorenzo Quaglietti (2). While one of Italy's most authoritative film critics, Guido Aristarco, thundered against the film's *qualunquismo* (political apathy) from the pages of *Cinema* ("*Anni difficili*" 188-89), three young critics from *l'Unità*—Paolo Gobetti (3), Paolo Spriano (3), and Italo Calvino—agreed upon its substantial anti-Fascist quality. Italo Calvino's review, furthermore, was never published by *l'Unità* and remained unpublished until September 2004 when it appeared in the film journal *Millimetri* (11-15) with an

introduction by Luca Baranelli, who reconstructs the debate around the film giving particular attention to the role of the PCI.¹⁰

Despite widespread public success¹¹ and much intellectual consideration, the film remained 'invisible' for a long time, becoming available only in 2008, when the Cineteche of Milan and Bologna, in collaboration with the National Museum of Cinema in Turin and Briguglio Film, promoted its restoration. The film was then produced by the laboratory *L'Immagine Ritrovata*.¹² After its restoration and that of *Il Vigile* (*The Traffic Policeman*, 1960, restored in 2002), two retrospectives were devoted to Luigi Zampa by the International Film Festival of Rome, in 2009, and by the Bologna Il Cinema Ritrovato, in 2011.

This paper will analyze some of the reasons *Anni difficili* provoked such a contentious political debate and subsequently fell into obscurity. On the one hand, the courageous way in which it presented the historical and social events from the thirties to 1948 was particularly uncomfortable for the political arena of postwar Italy. On the other hand, its being forgotten as well as the lack of attention given to its director, Luigi Zampa, might be traced back to the Italian critics' greater interest in *auteur* cinema and in the *commedia all'italiana*, trends to which Zampa's cinema never fully adhered.¹³ This article will thus also determine to which genre this film belongs and examine Zampa's strategy of adaptation.

2. *Zampa's cinema-giornalismo or the "commedia di costume"*

In his review of *Anni difficili*, Calvino proposed a distinction between "cinema-arte" and "cinema-giornalismo."¹⁴ To explain the differences between the two forms, Calvino referred to the literary differences between a poem and a newspaper article.

Anni difficili, film di modestissime pretese artistiche, è un serio e pregevole esempio di "cinema-giornalismo," un saggio di costume pieno di notazioni acutissime sulla vita e sulla cultura di diverse classi e di diverse generazioni in un particolare periodo della nostra storia nazionale, ed i suoi stessi limiti ideologici sono ben netti e significativi e giustificabili storicamente. (Review 11)

Zampa created a “commedia di costume” that takes place in a specific historical context, freely adapting the plot from a literary source to talk openly about Italy and its middle class during and after Fascism. Through Brancati’s short story, the film presents stereotypical figures in order to “dare immagini tangibili agli umori, al moralismo pessimista dell’italiano medio, al suo giudizio sulle epoche recenti, e creare maschere contemporanee comiche o drammatiche” (Calvino, “La paura” 172).¹⁵ However, Zampa does not merely represent characters already present in the short story, he also invents other, perfectly plausible, characters, such as the dramatic figure of Piscitello’s son¹⁶ or the comic figure of his daughter.¹⁷

The subject and the civic-mindedness of the film correspond perfectly to neorealistic themes but the director’s use of actors and style is different. In Deleuze’s terms, while films like Visconti’s *Ossessione* (1943) or Rossellini’s *Paisà* (1946) belong to “time-image” cinema, which is characterized by the slackening of the organic connection between perception and action typical of Hollywood movies, *Anni difficili* belongs to the “action-image” cinema of traditional realism, in which the relations between environment and behavior and between perception and action are consequential (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 205-15 and *Cinema 2* 1-24). Zampa uses a quick and easy cinematic language that connects immediately with the spectator. It would be inappropriate here to speak of “pure optical and sound situations” (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 9) or of “the cinema of the seer” (2) because the novelty of Zampa’s style is to be found elsewhere. Having had experience with the mechanisms of comedy first as a screenwriter and later as a director,¹⁸ in the postwar period Zampa explores the themes and outdoor shooting typical of neorealism, developing a language that anticipates the commedia all’italiana.¹⁹ According to Alberto Pezzotta, Zampa’s comic effects come not only from the screenplay and dialogue but also from the composition of the frame and the play between actors (126).²⁰ What produces laughter and at the same time makes the spectator think is the contrast between the empty ideal of Fascism and the wretched reality of Italy during and immediately after the war (134).

Moreover, unlike the neorealist masterpieces, which Andreotti condemned,²¹ *Anni difficili* provides a regrettable yet not tragic or

defeatist image of Italy. The comical and grotesque approach mitigates the bitterness and skepticism of its message. Probably for this reason Andreotti not only gave a *nil obstat* to the film but defended it even after some Christian Democrat senators attacked it for vilifying national dignity.²² Andreotti writes:

È la storia di un povero diavolo che fa le spese di tutti i rivolgimenti politici: purtroppo questa è una realtà che tanti italiani hanno conosciuto e forse raramente capita, come di fronte a questo film, che ognuno, fascista, antifascista o afascista che sia, senta qualcosa che è stata una propria esperienza personale. (“I film italiani” 62)

From this film on, censorship would be much more harsh against Zampa in particular and the depiction of Fascism in general (Pezzotta 51). The reasons for Andreotti’s support for *Anni difficili* may be many, from not having fully understood the freedom with which the film depicts Fascism to the involvement of his friend Franco Evangelisti as one of the screenwriters (Brancati, “Ritorno alla censura” 1534). However, three other reasons should be considered. First, Andreotti was more concerned with the representation of poverty, as in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), than with the political opportunism depicted in *Anni difficili*. Secondly, the responsibility for Fascism and its consequences are attributed to all Italians. Thirdly, the anti-Fascists in the Sicilian province are represented by a do-nothing intellectual group.

Zampa’s *Anni difficili* does not belong to neorealism because of his comical approach to themes depicted seriously in Rossellini’s and De Sica’s films as well as because of his cinematic language. The ways in which Zampa uses neorealist techniques in a non-neorealist fashion are varied. Zampa inserted archival footage in his film, but not to create the mimesis of reality. As we see in the sequence of Maria and Giovanni’s marriage, documentary inserts are used as a counterpoint to expose the empty promises vaunted by Fascism and its collaborators, including the Church ministers. In contrast to neorealistic cinema, Zampa uses professional actors and the screenplay is well-structured and written in Italian. The thirties and forties are observed from the point of view of a small Sicilian town. Attention is

focused on the characters' individual stories, which are never linked to the larger historical context, as Secchia and Calvino underscored. According to Secchia (3), Calvino felt the film failed to properly insert the individual destinies of the characters into the framework of History "with a capital H" or to take into account the socioeconomic and political factors that were at the root of their personal dramas.²³

However, the debate on the film, rather than focusing on the missed opportunity of analyzing the Regime, was centered on the political-historical critique of the Italians' attitudes toward Fascism. As suggested by Luca Baranelli (11) the debate was especially strong within the Communist Party because at that time it was easier to discuss the public controversy surrounding a still-contentious topic such as Fascism and anti-Fascism through a comedy like *Anni difficili* than through a more intellectual "film d'arte."

3. *The Spectator in the Mirror*

Zampa's comedy realistically as well as courageously depicts the normal behavior of Italians regarding the Regime. According to Goffredo Fofi (110), both Brancati in his short story and Zampa in his cinematic narrative develop a "commedia di costume" as a cruel mirror of Italian society since 1933.²⁴ In the statements of Zampa and Brancati, as in many reviews, the film is often compared to a mirror that shows the point of view of many Italians and allows them to become aware of their condition.²⁵ During the film the spectator is led through the same process of reflection that gradually awakens Piscitello from his slumber and passive acceptance of Fascism. The mirror is not only a metaphorical device but appears more than once in the film, marking Piscitello's growth and awareness of his choices and their consequences. The first time we see Piscitello in front of a mirror he is wearing normal clothes and he is knotting his tie. While he looks at his image reflected in the mirror he tries to wake up his daughter, who stayed up late reading D'Annunzio's play *La pisanella o la morte profumata*. Piscitello wonders aloud how she will be able to become a serious teacher if she wastes her time reading empty literature. Through the character of the daughter Fascism is depicted as a bookish exaltation conveyed by literary myths.

The second time we see Piscitello looking at himself it is not in a mirror but in the eyes of his son Giovanni, who has just returned home on furlough and does not know his father joined the Fascist Party. Before they meet, a sequence shows Piscitello in the Blackshirt uniform diligently taking part in many Fascist activities, such as parades and military training exercises. Giovanni's astonishment provokes Piscitello's shame and he runs into his bedroom in order to change out of the uniform and to take off his boots.

The third time Piscitello looks at himself is in a real mirror while he is wearing the Blackshirt uniform, and he throws his hat at his own reflection. His anger stems from the fact that the pharmacist has been arrested by the same forces Piscitello represents with his uniform. Then the postcard arrives that draws his son back to the war. These moments mark Piscitello's progressive involvement in Fascism as well as the slow but inexorable process of recognition that will lead the character to confront his guilt and cowardice and acknowledge the casualness with which he and many others joined Fascism.

Vigliacchi, siamo stati tutti. Quelli che battevano le mani in piazza e quelli che fischiarono nascosti in casa. Dovevamo farci buttare in carcere, come hanno fatto certuni—pochi—ma abbiamo avuto paura del carcere, paura di morire, e abbiamo fatto morire i nostri figli. Vigliacchi. Io ho fatto morire mio figlio.

Piscitello's words are no less harsh for attributing the responsibility for Fascism to all Italians. On the contrary, they have a very strong impact on the audience who mirror themselves in Piscitello's despair as the comedy turns into tragedy. Moving now to an analysis of Zampa's strategy of adaptation I will show why the film is a more powerful mirror of society than the short story.

In 1948, Zampa and Brancati had a broader understanding of Italy than the writer had in 1944, when his short story was published. The film expands on the narrative by adding a number of details and characters that intensify the satirical dimension of the plot, where the relationship between Italians and political power, their ability to conceal the truth, their skepticism toward all ideologies, and their *trasformismo* are confidently denounced. Compared to the main plot

line of the short story, the film tightens the criticism directed to the Church by exposing the ambiguity of faith (in the Catholic church and in Fascist ideology), it intensifies the satire against Sicilian, and by extension Italian, anti-Fascism, and it adds the subplot of Piscitello's and the *podestà's* sons, which mirrors the relationship between the *podestà* and Piscitello, handing it down to the next generations.

The film also explores the relationship between the Catholic church and Fascism more fully. In the short story, Piscitello's wife quotes the Pope, who identifies Mussolini as the man sent by Providence (Brancati, "Il vecchio con gli stivali" 828-29), to convince her husband to join the Party. Paradoxically, the censor asked production to remove this line²⁶ from the film's dialogue but left intact other parts in which the critique against positions taken by the Church during Fascism is even stronger. During Maria and Giovanni's marriage, for example, the priest's words about family are completely discordant with the reality of historical facts. His exaltation of the family as a "tempio vivente" that the young couple have the good fortune to found in "un'Italia prospera, felice, arbitra dei destini del mondo" and "in una pace che si annuncia lunga, feconda, saldissima" is followed by a sequence of archival footage documenting explosions and destruction produced by the war from 1939 until Italy's declaration of war. And when Piscitello is in the hospital awaiting the birth of his grandson, another priest sees no problem in wishing for the death of one's enemies.

Greater space is given in the film to the satirical depiction of anti-Fascism, which in the short story is a reaction against what Piscitello is forced to accept from the *podestà* and his wife. The protagonist's transition from *qualunquista* to opponent of the Regime is rapid and a result of his wife's intrigue. Piscitello's opposition to the Regime is furtive: he insults Fascists behind their backs and spits or urinates on his party affiliation card or his black shirt. Open anti-Fascism, on the other hand, is depicted as consisting of a weak group of people who have never had Party affiliations but who are fascinated or frightened by the Regime, such as the lawyer Padalino, who exclaims: "Caro Piscitello, hanno ragione loro [i fascisti], non vede che vincono?" (838); the chief accountant, who admits that "Questo nuovo berretto con la visiera gli [a Mussolini] s'adatta proprio bene; è stato per me una rivelazione: ha il profilo della vecchia razza latina,

non c'è che fare!" (838); or the pharmacist Platania, who was in exile (*confino*), and asks Piscitello to speak softly for fear of Fascist retaliation if they are overheard.

While in the short story these characters appear only briefly, in the movie they become the parody of provincial anti-Fascism, emblemizing nothing more than a collection of idle chatterers who meet everyday in Platania's pharmacy to discuss the Duce's latest exploits. Their lack of political consciousness is revealed when they are asked to respond to the *podestà's* demands that the protagonist join the Party.²⁷ The absence of constructive advice and the appeal to the indifference of the masses before the historical process denounce their political and intellectual ineptitude.²⁸ Ironically, the only 'heroic,' but politically meaningless act, is the pharmacist's participation in a demonstration to protest Italy's declaration of war against France and Great Britain (made 10 June 1940), which results in his exile.

After the fall of the Regime the anti-Fascists witness Piscitello's dismissal while they welcome the *podestà* who, now boasting anti-Fascist sentiments, has become the new mayor. The *podestà's* conversion is an act of political *trasformismo* and as such it is a relevant element in the film (an element made even more significant since in the short story it is the pharmacist, who was persecuted by the Regime, who becomes mayor after Fascism's fall). The tragicomical events extend beyond the life of the main protagonists as Zampa involves their progeny in a destiny of failure and death. Although not a Fascist, Piscitello's son Giovanni is forced to fight in Mussolini's wars only to be killed on liberation day, his dream of a peaceful life in Modica dying along with him. A quiet character, Giovanni is never in violent opposition to the Regime. His acceptance of his fate seems to reflect that of many Italians of the time. On the other hand, the *podestà's* son is aggressive yet cowardly. He pretends to go to war when he in fact has plans to seduce Piscitello's daughter, who loves D'Annunzio's novels and poetry as well as military glory. Piscitello's son dies because of Fascism, while the *podestà's* son remains safely home, taking part in Fascist parades, but ready to declare his anti-Fascism as soon as the Regime collapses.²⁹

The attacks against the Church along with the depiction of the ruling class's *trasformismo* and the ineptitude of Southern anti-

Fascists angered Christian Democrats as well as Communists. Behind the defense of Italians that motivated much criticism of *Anni difficili*, there was a fear that such a harmless and yet disquieting depiction of the ruling class's attitudes toward Fascism would be understood by the majority of viewers and lead to widespread dissent leveled at the new political leadership. Popular films that accommodate the necessities and tastes of the audience while at the same time depicting the worst aspects of Italian society, possess a certain persuasiveness that Calvino recognized:

Il film d'arte è una bellissima cosa ma resterà sempre un'opera d'eccezione, è un film che ci facciamo noi altri e poi andiamo a vederlo strizzando l'occhio e schioccando la lingua. Ma il problema interessante del nuovo cinema italiano era vedere se il linguaggio dei Visconti, De Sica, Rossellini, Castellani riusciva a proliferare, se da stile poetico riusciva a diventare lingua corrente, e a dar vita a una buona serie di drammi popolari e di farse popolari di produzione media. Allora si avrebbe avuto la prova che non era solo un movimento culturale ma era dialetticamente legato a un movimento d'esigenze e di gusti nel pubblico. Perciò per me il regista più interessante era Luigi Zampa. Erano forse Steno e Monicelli. Anche Germi, sebbene Germi sappia sempre troppo bene cosa vuole. Ma i film come *L'onorevole Angelina*,³⁰ come *Guardie e ladri*³¹ —che sarebbero stati davvero utili al politico e allo scrittore come a tutto il pubblico che vuol prendere coscienza di se stesso, perché riflettevano movimenti non intellettuali ma, in una certa misura, di massa, esprimevano aspetti spiccioli di anarchismo o di qualunquismo, fermenti ribelli o conformismi tradizionali—sono stati pochi. (“Il realismo italiano” 262)

Films that make people laugh and reflect, provoking a certain—even partial—self-consciousness in the spectator, have been few and far between. This is the reason why it is so important to rediscover a forgotten film like *Anni difficili*. In 1948, it offered Italians a mirror in which to reflect themselves and reflect on themselves. Although the comic and grotesque tone trivializes and dampens the criticism of Italians' shortcomings and traditions and is sometimes comforting, the

film says a lot, honestly and without falsification, about Italian society, about the moods, values, and non-values, and about the philosophy of compromise and the art of getting by (*l'arte di arrangiarsi*) that has characterized Italy from the thirties and forties to the present.

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ENDNOTES

¹ *Anni difficili* and other films made in the second half of the forties address “pressing problems within Italian society... but some lack the artistic concentration typical of [Neorealist] works and may include a mixture of styles or film genres. Others drift away from a cinema of realism, actual or apparent, toward a more traditional commercial cinema, the very kind of cinema neorealist theoreticians such as Zavattini sought to avoid at all costs.” See the chapter “Exploring the Boundaries of Neorealism” in Bondanella.

² Brancati's short story was first published in 1944 in the journal *Aretusa*.

³ Besides the screenplay for *Anni difficili*, Vitaliano Brancati worked with Luigi Zampa on *È più facile che un cammello...* (*Twelve Hours to Live*, 1950), *Signori, in carrozza* (*Rome-Paris-Rome*, 1951), *Anni facili* (*Easy Years*, 1953), *L'arte di arrangiarsi* (*The Art of Getting Along*, 1954), and the episode *La patente* in the movie *Questa è la vita* (*Of Life and Love*, 1954).

⁴ Franco Evangelisti (1923-93) was a young member of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party). He was elected to the Italian Chamber of Deputies where he served from 1963 to 1987, and then to the Senate where he served until 1992. He was undersecretary for the president of the Council of Ministers under the cabinets led by Giulio Andreotti.

⁵ *Anni difficili*, 1948. Director: Luigi Zampa. Script: from Vitaliano Brancati's “Il vecchio con gli stivali” (“The Old Man and His Boots”). Screenplay: Sergio Amidei, Vitaliano Brancati (and Luigi Zampa, unmentioned in the credits). Collaborators on screenplay: Franco Evangelisti, Enrico Fulchignoni. Cinematography (b/w, 1:33.1): Carlo Montuori. Production Designer: Ivo Battelli. Costume Designer: Giuliana Bagni (unmentioned in credits). Music: Franco Casavola, directed by Ugo Giacomazzi. Editing: Eraldo da Roma (Eraldo Judiconi). Sound Director: Mario Amari. Assistant Directors: Francesco De Feo and Mauro Bolognini. Makeup: Euclide Santoli. Production: Briguglio Film. Origin: Italy. First public projection: 4 September 1948 (Mostra del cinema di Venezia). Distribution: Fincine. The English-language version of *Difficult Years* includes a narration written by Arthur Miller and performed by John Garfield.

⁶ Pietro Secchia (1903-73) was an anti-Fascist Italian politician and a historian of the PCI and Resistance. After World War II, he assumed crucial positions within the PCI, including Vice Secretary (1948-55), Deputy of the Constituent Assembly, and Senator. Also, he was in charge of the party's organization and Propaganda Division from 1946 to 1954.

⁷ At the Venice Film Festival that year, *Anni difficili* won the Coppa Enic.

⁸ Emilio Sereni (1907-77) was an anti-Fascist Italian politician and a historian of agriculture. As a member of the Central Committee of the PCI (1946-75), he was charged with the party's organization and cultural activities. He also served in the Constituent Assembly for the Italian Republic, was Minister for Postwar Assistance (1946-47) and Minister of Public Works (1947), and he was made a member of the Senate in 1948. He directed the journal *Critica Marxista* from 1966 to 1976.

⁹ Casiraghi would later change his opinion on *Anni difficili*, see "Non c'è via di scampo per Piscitello?" and "Quel galantuomo di Zampa" (31).

¹⁰ According to Luca Baranelli's introduction, "Gli anni difficili di Italo Calvino" (1-11), from a political point of view the most interesting part of the debate was in the PCI journal *Vie Nuove*, directed by Luigi Longo. The debate within the PCI was very lively and revealed unexpected points of view. For example, Pietro Secchia, who was generally faithful to the PCI's party line, had a very open attitude towards *Anni difficili*, as the quotation from his review of the film shows. In contrast, the intellectual Emilio Sereni criticized the film because it denigrated the civic-mindedness of the Italians and represented southern anti-Fascism as false and inconsistent. Also, Baranelli suggests that the reasons why Calvino's review was not published might have been political. On the one hand, Calvino intervened in the debate and recognized the substantial anti-Fascism of the film, citing Pietro Secchia without mentioning the position of Emilio Sereni. On the other hand, the party did not like the fact that Calvino affirmed that the Fascist Regime had not been fought by communist workers but by American allies, as the movie shows.

¹¹ *Anni difficili* earned 294 million lire and was the third highest-grossing film in Italy in 1948.

¹² Completed in June 2009, the restoration was made possible thanks to a positive original print nitrate preserved by the Fondazione Cineteca di Milano, a duplicate safety kept at the British Film Institute in London, and a negative made available by Site srl Briguglio Film. The restoration was carried out in digital 2K resolution. As for the digital restoration of the audio, the laboratory used the copy belonging to the Fondazione Cineteca di Milano and a positive safety kept at the Swiss Film Archive in Lausanne.

¹³ See also Pezzotta (14). After my presentation of this paper at the NeMLA convention on 15 March 2012, Pezzotta's essay on Luigi Zampa was published later that same year, in July. This book confirms some of my own conclusions and in many cases adds information and insights that are very useful to the reconstruction of what happened to *Anni difficili* and its director. Before Pezzotta's text, the last book on Zampa, written by Domenico Meccoli, was published in 1956.

¹⁴ On the distinction between "cinema-arte" and "cinema-giornalismo," see also Calvino, "Realismo italiano" and "Non credo."

¹⁵ I quote from Calvino's review of another Zampa's film, *La romana (Woman of Rome)*, 1954), because Calvino's words fit perfectly with *Anni difficili* too.

¹⁶ In his review of *Anni difficili*, Calvino says that one of the most interesting things about the film is the representation of young people who had grown up under Fascism: "tutto il film potrebbe essere definito un atto d'accusa delle nuove generazioni contro quelle che le hanno immediatamente precedute." About Giovanni, Calvino writes: "Il figlio sempre in guerra, che non è fascista ma che giudica il fascismo con pensosa moderazione ('Mussolini non sarà così cretino da fare un'altra guerra...'). 'Erano idee sbagliate ma molti ci credevano...'), il figlio che ci lascia la pelle proprio all'ultimo, è un sobrio e verissimo ritratto d'una generazione. La realtà della guerra lo fa guardare con distacco a tutte le pompe retoriche del regime, ma d'altra parte l'antifascismo parla un linguaggio che non è già più il suo, il linguaggio di un'altra generazione, con problemi a lui sconosciuti. È solo e indifeso, pur con il suo buon senso e la sua forza; tutti i suoi ideali sono in un semplice sogno casalingo; e morirà sacrificato da ambizioni altrui" (14).

¹⁷ About Piscitello's daughter, Calvino writes: "Un altro ritratto assai vero storicamente, anche se caricaturato e non sobriamente realistico come l'altro, è la figlia lettrice di romanzi dannunziani, portata al fascismo da attrazioni di 'cultura,' o meglio di 'gusto.' Poi verranno i due disumani marmocchietti gallonati della Farnesina; ma son ragazzi e avran tempo a salvarsi, o a perdersi" (14).

¹⁸ Under Fascism Zampa wrote many scripts in the "telefoni bianchi" style and directed several films. Between 1939 and 1943 Zampa collaborated on the screenplays of Max Neufeld's *Mille lire al mese* (1939), Mario Soldati's *Dora Nelson* (1939) and *Tutto per la donna* (1940), Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia's *Un mare di guai* (1939), Enrico Guazzoni's *Ho visto brillare le stelle* (1939), Mario Camerini's *Centomila dollari* (1940), Camillo Mastrocinque's *La danza dei milioni* (1940), Sándor Szlatinay's *Il capitano degli Ussari* (1940), Gennaro Righelli's *Manovre d'amore* (1941), and Marco Elter's *Gli ultimi filibustieri* (1943). He directed three comedies (*L'attore scomparso*, 1941, *C'è sempre un ma!* and *Signorinette*, both 1942), and two period films (*Fra diavolo*, 1942 and *L'abito nero da sposa*, 1945).

¹⁹ Enrico Giacobelli includes Zampa's *Anni difficili* and *Anni facili* among realistic (or "cattiviste") comedies that create a bridge between neorealism and commedia all'italiana (82).

²⁰ See also Casiraghi, "Quel galantuomo di Zampa": "La verità è che Zampa inaugurava fin da allora un genere di cinema senza dubbio legato al neorealismo, ma che anticipava la commedia all'italiana" (31).

²¹ On Andreotti's opposition to neorealism, see Sedita (51-70), and Andreotti ("Piaghe sociali").

²² On censorship and *Anni difficili* see the chapter "La censura, le istituzioni e la società" in Pezzotta (46-52). Andreotti gave a *nil obstat* to the film despite concerns expressed by the Head of the Central Office for Cinematography. Moreover, in spite

of the protests of Christian Democrat senators Emilio Battista, Mario Cingolani, and Giuseppe Magliano and of the Social Democrat Giovanni Persico, Andreotti denied that the film offended national dignity arguing that “è un’esposizione (che qui non ci interessa di valutare da un punto di vista tecnico-artistico) di situazioni comuni e stati d’animo fatta con un senso notevole di misura e con mano molto leggera” (qtd. in Pezzotta 51 and 230. See also Andreotti, “I film italiani”).

²³ “[. . .] Ma delle grandi cause di tutta questa situazione: il capitale finanziario da una parte e le lotte operaie e bracciantili dall’altra, e ancora le lotte tra i vari capitalismi nazionali su scala mondiale, non si ha coscienza: non si sa che sono questi fatti a muovere la storia e che il piccolo dramma di Piscitello si salva dalla sterilità e dal fatalismo solo se si aggancia a questi grandi fatti, solo se si aggancia alla Storia.” (Calvino, Review 13).

²⁴ It is a mirror “nel senso ‘russo,’ nel senso di uno ‘specchio’ crudele e, se necessario, estremo della realtà sociale del tempo” (Fofi 110).

²⁵ The metaphor of the mirror occurs many times in the debate surrounding *Anni difficili*, see Pezzotta (126, 127, 128, 132). In *Corriere della sera* (28 October 1948) Brancati said: “Perché difatti non esiste una commedia del costume in Italia? Perché la commedia del costume è uno specchio, e il pubblico italiano non vuole che il sipario si alzi su uno specchio in cui possa mirare se stesso” (Brancati, “Diario Romano” 1385). In the *Gazzetta di Parma* (20 January 1949) Attilio Bertolucci wrote: “È un film importantissimo, che mette il sale amaro e antico della satira su tante ferite non ancora chiuse della nostra vita: speriamo che serva a qualcosa, in questa lunga convalescenza. Che fascisti e antifascisti di scarso coraggio abbian ritratto inorriditi il volto da uno specchio così esemplare, nessuna meraviglia. Perché *Anni difficili* ci mostra con esemplare impassibilità il grottesco del ventennio nero, non risparmiando neppure i resistenti del retrobottega del farmacista, avversari abbastanza meschini e faciloni di una dittatura meschina e faciloni” (Bertolucci, *Riflessi da un paradiso* 251).

²⁶ Censorship gave a *nihil obstat* to the movie provided that the production removed the dialogue about the pope and Mussolini that was in the screenplay and had been taken directly from the short story: “E il papa? Che cosa ha detto il papa? Che quell’uomo l’ha mandato la Provvidenza.” In the final version of *Anni difficili*, the dialogue becomes: “Sai cosa ha detto Don Calogero? Che quell’uomo l’ha mandato la Provvidenza,” ascribing the association between Mussolini and Providence to a priest instead of the pope.

²⁷ This dialogue between the *podestà* and Piscitello depicts Piscitello’s resistance, however timid, to joining the Fascist Party: “Piscitello: Io non ho mai fatto politica... se potessi non... Podestà: Ma lei è impazzito! Ma lo sa che ci sono degli ex deputati, degli ex ministri che darebbero un occhio della testa per essere iscritti al partito e lei si fa pregare. Ma cos’è ci sputa sopra lei al Duce e al Fascio? Piscitello: Signor podestà sua eccellenza il Duce è Dio e io, con rispetto parlando, sono merda ma mi sono sempre trovato bene a non fare politica, creda. Podestà: Arrivederci Piscitello, arrivederci e a domani. Poi domani mi farà sapere se preferisce rimanere al suo posto o cambiare mestiere.”

²⁸ This dialogue shows how the characters are generally ineffectual when faced with political and intellectual matters: “Piscitello: Secondo loro che cosa dovrei fare? Onorevole: Caro Piscitello, è facile fare la domanda ma non è facile rispondere. Lei ci pone un quesito che trascende il caso personale, un quesito che affonda le radici nella storia. Avvocato: ... D’altra parte dare dei consigli come si fa. In linea di massima l’ideale sarebbe resistere, lottare... è dall’unione delle forze individuali che nasce la forza collettiva, quella che sola può abbattere la dittatura. Ma sarebbe necessaria l’unione di tutte le forze popolari e questo purtroppo... Un altro: Capisco a cosa vuole alludere avvocato ma ci tengo a riaffermare che se questa unione non c’è stata la colpa non ricade sulle nostre spalle. Onorevole: Io non ho fatto nessuna insinuazione. È lei che ha la coda di paglia. Un altro: Oh avvocato, potrei citare a memoria certi suoi discorsi alle elezioni del ‘21...” The conversation becomes animated and turns to the subject of personal responsibility with everyone forgetting about Piscitello until he interrupts, asking “Scusate ma che mi consigliate di fare?” To which all respond that it is up to him, and him alone, to decide. “Ah già, caro Piscitello qui è lei che deve decidere, lei e soltanto lei, capisce?”

²⁹ The character’s attitude reminds me of the *Squadristi*’s attitude described by Brancati in his short story: “Credo che anch’egli [Piscitello] fosse in Piazza Venezia, quando Mussolini domandò agli squadristi se amassero la vita comoda, e quelli appunto perché l’amavano teneramente, e non volevano essere incomodati da questurini, risposero con un urlo: No! Non l’amiamo, la vita comoda! Vogliamo la guerra! Ci piace star male!” (841).

³⁰ *Angelina* (Dir. Luigi Zampa 1947).

³¹ *Cops and Robbers* (Dir. Mario Monicelli and Steno 1951).

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