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NARRATING A PARTISAN BODY:
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF CARLA CAPPONI AND
GIOVANNA ZANGRANDI

On June 30th, 1946, *L'Unità* published a short story "La ragazza se ne va con Diavolo" by Marcello Venturi. The story opens with the image of Diavolo (a *repubblicino* sergeant), sitting on his motorcycle, smoking a cigarette, and waiting for a girl to show up. When Vera appears at a distance, Diavolo notices the attention she gets from a group of soldiers and he is stricken by her attractiveness ("gli sembrò ancora più carina," 201). The narrator's gaze passes from Diavolo to Vera who is staring pensively at a big German pistol hanging from Diavolo's belt. After his reassurance that he will not hurt her, she mounts his motorcycle. Diavolo turns back to look at her knees and they take off. When they reach a tree-lined alley, Diavolo turns off the engine and sits by Vera's side on the grass. He puts a hand on her knees. Vera asks him to take off the pistol and put it away because its sight scares her. When he does it, she tells him that she has heard of a certain Diavolo who has killed many partisans (*banditi*). Diavolo tries again to touch her knees, boasting of the three men he hanged himself only last week. Taking his hand between hers, Vera praises his strength and asks him to let her hold the pistol and show her how to shoot. While Diavolo instructs Vera how to press the trigger, she points the pistol at him and telling him that she is a partisan on a military mission, she shoots him right in the eyes. Two shots reverberate through the air and Vera calmly attaches the pistol to her own belt.

Venturi's story provides a perfect opening for the argument of my paper because it raises the question of gender within the partisan experience. It makes a woman's body the key element of the plot, the force which builds up the suspense and carries the narration towards its final resolution—Diavolo's assassination.¹ Since the success of Vera's mission depends solely on her ability to seduce him without raising any doubts as to her intentions, Vera has to play out a sexual fantasy. As an object of male desire, Vera's body fulfills social expectations and conforms to the common perception that a young, attractive woman would naturally seek and respond

to male attentions. But Vera, as the story shows, is not merely a passive body, she is a partisan who deftly orchestrates a sequence of events to carry out her assignment.

Venturi's narration reenacts the tension between two images of Vera—the woman and the partisan—through a series of gazes which switch back and forth between Diavolo and Vera. Diavolo's gaze follows the movements of her body as he sees her at a distance, joins the appreciative attention of the soldiers (a proof of his good taste in women), and rests on Vera's knees—a promise of an easy conquest. Vera's gaze, in contrast to her words (“Mi piacciono gli uomini forti come te”, 201), follows only the movements of the pistol, the main object of her interest. From the passivity of their gazes, the narration moves into action: Diavolo touches her knees, hands her the pistol, again tries to make a pass at her but at that moment, Vera, the object of his attention, becomes a subject who takes control of the situation—“guardò Diavolo diretto negli occhi e puntando la rivoltella verso di lui lo uccise con due colpi” (201).

The turning point of the story is the moment when Vera gets hold of the pistol, a symbol of phallic power and an attribute of a male soldier: “Estrasse dalla fondina la grossa pistola e tolse la sicurezza. Sembrò ancora più grossa, l'arma nel pugno piccolo e secco di Vera” (201). Vera's gesture—taking possession of a man's pistol (huge and naked without its sheath) functions on two levels; on a psychological level it evokes a Freudian fear of emasculation; on a social level it upsets the stereotype of power relations and signifies the transfer of power from a man to a woman. The incongruity of that transfer is apparent in the contrast between the size of the pistol and the smallness of Vera's dry hand. Since sweat is associated with nervousness, the dryness of Vera's hand emphasizes her self-assurance and lack of fear. She executes the fascist without a trace of emotion. The final act—attaching Diavolo's pistol to her own belt—signals Vera's transformation from a passive object into an active agent. The look of shock and disbelief on Diavolo's face at the moment of his death reflects the conflict between his perception of Vera (an attractive and submissive feminine body meant to fulfill his sexual desires) and the real Vera (in Italian Vera means “true”), a female partisan who undertakes a risky mission and brings it to completion. Diavolo sees Vera only through a lens of a social and cultural stereotype, never doubting its validity. That false perception is a fatal mistake which costs him his life.

Venturi's fictionalized account of a partisan experience reflects a split in the representation of female body into an object (a social construct) and a subject (a physical self, conscious of its own agency).² Unfortunately, it breaks off without allowing us to follow the effects of that split on Vera's

sense of identity and to pursue further inquiry into the complex reality of being a woman partisan. When was the body of a partisan gendered? Were there any circumstances which rendered sexual differences insignificant? How did women partisans themselves confront the gendered reality of the Resistance? In a sense, the autobiographical narratives of Carla Capponi and Giovanna Zangrandi are a continuation of Vera's story, thus providing us with a context to explore these questions.

I

Carla Capponi's autobiography *Con cuore di donna; L'otto settembre, via Rasella, la guerra partigiana: i ricordi di una protagonista*, was published only in the year 2000, that is, over half a century after the end of the war. Capponi was a member of a communist division of GAP (Gruppi di Azione Patriottica), paramilitary units under the command of the National Liberation Committee (CLN—Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale) during the Nazi occupation of Rome between September of 1943 until its liberation by the Allied Forces in June of 1944. Capponi's autobiography consists of two parts: the first dedicated to her childhood and adolescence, and the second to her involvement in the partisan activities. The first part focuses on the social and familiar background to explain reasons for her political beliefs and convictions, drawing a portrait of a girl whose transformation into a woman partisan we will witness in the second part.

While the first part of Carla's autobiography lingers on descriptions of sentiments and feelings, providing the reader with an insight into Carla's mind and her familial background, the second part—the partisan experience reflects the new awareness of her body and the part it will play in Carla's clandestine life. When Carla decides to become actively involved in the Resistance, she perceives herself as a dedicated patriot whose gender should not count in the fight for her country. To her mother's objection: "Ma sei matta! Ma che ci va a fare una donna? Quell'invito è rivolto agli uomini," Carla responds: "Donne e uomini saremo tutti utili" (96). And yet, as she soon discovered, the fact that she is an attractive young woman, in other words, a body full of sexual appeal, predisposes her for certain activities and limits the scope of her assignments. Her commanding officers send her on missions which require constant display of sexual attractiveness: "Secondo loro (i compagni dei GAP), dovevamo limitarci a mascherare la loro presenza, nei luoghi degli attacchi fingendo di essere le fidanzate: erano convinti che, così, avrebbero corso meno rischi" (125). Carla and other young women are to act as girl-friends or fiancées of partisans during preparatory stages of bomb attacks in public places or assassination plots against Nazi officials. A young couple in love, whispering

love-words, embracing in a public place could pass unobserved even under strict Nazi surveillance.

To project that sexual body, Carla adopts a new persona with a code-name, Elena, after Helen of Troy, a symbol of feminine attraction and an object of male desire. Her personality undergoes a dramatic change. The shy and unassuming Carla of the past is replaced by Elena, talkative and flirtatious, a talented actress. Carla's narration of that persona reflects a detachment, a distance, as if she were observing herself through a stranger's eyes: "da quando il barbiere Usiello mi aveva tinto, tagliato e arricciato i capelli, avevo un aspetto curato e piacevole, capace di risvegliare negli uomini il famoso gallismo italiano" (232). Fulfilling her commanders' orders, Carla quickly learns to use her body and her femininity to get out of compromising situations, often managing to avoid imprisonment and sometimes death. Her body becomes an ally in risky operations, a source of bravado and reassurance.

Carla recounts in detail one such deadly encounter: during a women's demonstration before military barracks where the Nazis hoarded men caught in street round-ups to be later sent to camps of forced labor in Germany, Carla was caught in the middle of a fight against Nazi and fascist soldiers with a gun in one hand, anti-fascist manifestoes in another, and no documents. She managed to pass the gun to her co-partisan, Marisa Musu, and felt her slip something into her pocket, just before three militia soldiers, kicking and beating her up brought her to a small office in the prison barracks. Left alone, she checked the piece of paper slipped into her pocket and discovered it to be an ID of a fascist group "Onore e combattimento," issued in the name of Marisa Musu. Armed with a false identity, Carla decided to play her 'attractive and innocent girl' card. When a fascist official entered the room, Carla registered his surprised reaction: "pensava di trovarsi di fronte una popolana e invece ero una ragazza vestita ancora decentemente" (202). Acting on an impulse of mutual attraction, ("era un bel ragazzo, alto, magro, la divisa tenuta in ordine," 203) Carla made up a convincing story of being mistaken for a partisan while, as a good fascist, she was only trying to calm down a crowd of furious women; to prove her point, she fished out the party ID. Her body language communicated the willingness to accept his attentions: "i nostri occhi si incontrarono e capii che gli piacevo; puntai tutto su quell'impressione, lo sentivo disponibile. Guardò l'orologio e d'improvviso mi disse: 'Se permette, le posso riconsegnare personalmente la tessera dopo il controllo, dove lei vuole.' 'Bene vediamoci a piazza Colonna, dove c'è la sede del partito'" (203). Of course, she never intended to keep her promise.

The same episode appears in Marisa Musu's autobiography *La ragazza di via Orazio*, published in 1997, that is, three years before Capponi's. Musu's text, however, tells a very different story. According to Musu, Carla was apprehended by two fascists and taken to the fascist headquarters. Musu was terrified:

Mi rendo conto che la vita di Carla non vale più un soldo, perché sarà subito perquisita e le troveranno la rivoltella, e penso rapidamente cosa posso fare. Mi ricordo che ho ancora il tesserino di 'Onore e combattimento' e lo mostro ai fascisti . . . Spingo la porta sudando freddo. Sono disarmata, se Carla è stata perquisita e le è stata trovata la rivoltella, il solo fatto che stia intervenendo in suo favore basta a incriminarmi . . . Entro e con mio grande stupore, vedo lei tranquillamente seduta che sta fumando una sigaretta e chiacchierando con i repubblicini. 'Ah!' esclama quando mi vede, 'sei venuta a spiegare a questi camerati che hanno preso un granchio? Ma ho già chiarito tutto.' Mentre parla, tiene la borsetta ben stretta sotto il braccio . . . Per fortuna, sapeva del mio tesserino, per fortuna a tutt'e due è venuto in mente di recitare la stessa parte. (70)

I have quoted Musu's version not to show that we can never trust autobiographies as a source of objective truth but rather to show how autobiographical texts construct the speaking 'I' and, in Paul Eakin's words, "what they can teach us about the ways in which individuals in a particular culture experience their sense of being an 'I'" (4). Clearly both Musu and Capponi, while acknowledging each other's wit and courage, see themselves as the exclusive protagonists of that episode, emphasizing very different sides of their identity. Maria Musu focuses on her unwavering courage and solidarity as essential parts of her identity; "the cold sweat" is the outward sign of the fear she experiences, facing the possibility of torture or death. Yet despite the fear she decides to enter the fascist headquarters to save a fellow partisan. Her gender is irrelevant since it does not affect either her reaction to Carla's predicament or her behaviour in the fascist quarters. She portrays herself as a comrade ready to risk her life for another partisan.

Capponi's version, on the other hand, underlines the gendering of her experience because it concentrates on the skill of manipulating men through the use of her body. She is clearly proud of her talent to play a seduction game in which she exploits the common assumption that an attractive, middle-class girl cannot be anything else but a sexual object. Her apparent passivity in accepting the officer's attentions is only a mask covering the other part of her identity, the partisan. It is interesting to trace

the part played by the revolver in both accounts. Carla claims to have disposed of it before being apprehended by the fascists. Her body is completely helpless, unable to defend itself in the face of adversity, thus all her power rests in her femininity. In Musu's account, Carla did not manage to get rid of the revolver and she had it in her purse throughout the whole incident. Knowing that the weapon would betray her, Carla guarded it like a treasure: "mentre parla, tiene la borsetta ben stretta sotto il braccio" (70). As in Vera's case, the weapon functions as a visual mark of power and as a sign of defying social prescriptions.

And yet, despite Capponi's obvious pride in successfully playing out the sexual role, her text reflects an ambivalent approach towards the gendered nature of her partisan tasks. On the one hand, she recognizes the necessity of carrying them out and appreciates the advantages of being a woman; on the other, she resents her very femininity because it defines her as weak and passive. The passivity of a female body implies passivity as an inherent trait of female identity, a pliant self in a pliant body. Capponi fights that perception with indignation. She credits her spirit of freedom and personal responsibility for the decision to join the Resistance: "Imparai a fare le mie scelte" (62). Capponi's comment has a particular significance with regard to women's motivations to become partisans. Both fictional and non-fictional sources emphasize the relational character of women's involvement in the partisan movement. In other words, they tend to take away the freedom of choice and attribute their decisions to emotional ties: love for their husbands, lovers, brothers, etc.³ The female 'I' thus lacks autonomy, being reduced to a reflection of the male 'I'.

Ironically, despite her ardent proclamations, Capponi did not manage to escape that classification. In her excellent historical study of women partisans, *Partigiane, tutte le donne della resistenza*, Marina Addis Saba examines the participation of women in the GAP. The chapter called "Le ragazze dei GAP" is subtitled "Un amore a Roma." The love story refers to Carla Capponi and Rosario Bentivegna, who met during the war, fought against the Nazis, fell in love, and got married after the war. What is puzzling about Saba's approach to their story is the assumption that Carla's decision to join GAP was motivated solely by her love for Rosario: "Carla Capponi è entrata a fare parte dei GAP, vuole dividere sino in fondo i rischi che corre il suo ragazzo" (123). Saba draws her information mostly from Bentivegna's autobiography *Achtung Banditen* (published in 1983) and it is his version of their relationship which will become a historical truth. Interestingly, Carla's text refrains from telling that story; there are no outpourings of the heart besides very few and very short references to their attachment. Carla's

reticence about their relationship seems then to imply a textual response and a correction of Saba's assumption.

To discard the pervasive 'sexual fantasy' image and to assert herself as an agent, Carla confronts her commanders and demands to be treated as a real "gappista," an equal partner of her male companions. When her superiors question her physical abilities to act like a soldier, Carla bursts out: "Non ti fidi di me perché sono una donna?" (137) Denied a weapon, Carla decides to prove that she has both the physical strength and the mental determination and, in an act of cold-blooded daring, steals a gun from a fascist official on a bus full of people. From that moment, she is allowed to prepare and execute armed attacks on fascist and Nazi officials. After the attack on Via Rasella, she becomes a vice-commander of a partisan group in Centocelle, in the outskirts of Rome. In his autobiography, *Achtung Banditen*, Rosario Bentivegna recalls the mythical image evoked in popular memory of Carla, the female partisan: "Ben presto nacque a Centocelle la leggenda di quella giovane donna bionda che usciva la notte a sparare ai tedeschi" (139). Carla no longer hides the revolver in her purse, she displays it proudly and openly. The external image of Carla's body undergoes a transformation, substituting a sexual object with a woman soldier.

Capponi's text also explores the boundaries of human endurance, the effects of material deprivation on the sense of identity. What happens if our physical body, "an anchor which sustains our sense of identity" is threatened with extinction (Eakin, 11)? Fighting in the countryside near Rome, Capponi has to adapt to the harsh conditions of living on the margins of humanity, the clandestine existence which requires total isolation from her family, friends, party members, even news. Like a prisoner entering a death camp, she has to leave all the attributes of her personal life behind and become a body which performs orders, a body without a past or a future. The physical ordeal of that period takes a heavy toll: cold, hunger, lack of adequate clothes, personal hygiene, and sleep are constant torments of her existence. Her body, no longer an asset, but a weight to contend with, takes over the narrative "I" when hunger threatens the core of her existence:

Dopo il secondo giorno, i crampi della fame cominciarono a tormentarmi, bevevo acqua ma mi provocava dolore allo stomaco. Verso sera, all'avvicinarsi del coprifuoco cominciai a divenire ansiosa. Alla terza sera ero spaventata, non riuscivo a bere che a piccoli sorsi, sentivo freddo, mi assopivo e mi risvegliavo d'improvviso con la sensazione di avere le vertigini. Cercai avanzzi di cibo senza trovare nulla; la pulizia perfetta di questa casa me la faceva odiare, eppure avevo sognato per mesi di un letto pulito. (264)

Capponi captures here what happens to the self if the body is on the verge of disintegration, how one's identity (memory and consciousness) depends on bodily functions. Her descriptions of the days spent in the countryside near Rome revolve around physical discomfort and suffering. Her body betrays her and demands constant attention: she gets sick, coughs blood, and has to battle high fever. Every gesture and every simple action become a painful effort. She has lost so much weight that her mother and friends do not recognize her when she returns home after the liberation: "Tutt'ossi sei, figlietta mia," —exclaims her mother (305). Her body, like the bodies of her companions, bears testimony of the partisan experience: "Tutti magrissimi, pallidi, qualcuno ancora con i segni delle torture subite, solo io avevo il volto abbronzato dal sole per i giorni passati a Palestrina, ma non stavo meglio di loro" (303). Carla recognizes her own body in the emaciated bodies of others. Gender becomes insignificant since "tutti" includes all the partisans, male and female. In the final image of the text Carla asserts her identity as a genderless partisan, erasing the split into an object and an agent and reconciling the two realities: "Stavo tornando con il fucile in spalla, la fascia tricolore al braccio" (303).

II

I giorni veri 1943-45 by Giovanna Zangrandi (a literary pseudonym of Alma Bevilacqua) is a diary written over the period of two years: from 8 September 1943 till the end of April 1945, but published only in 1963.⁴ With a degree in chemistry, Zangrandi was a science teacher in the high school in Cortina when she heard the news, first of Italy's surrender to the Allied Forces, then of the creation of the Republic of Salò and the Nazi occupation of Italy. Zangrandi, a seasoned skier and an avid hiker, offered her services to the Resistance as a courier (*staffetta*). Her duties included transporting and distributing plain clothes for Italian soldiers, deserters from the fascist army, smuggling weapons and explosives for partisan groups around Bolzano, and carrying correspondence and urgent messages between commanding centres of the CLN from Veneto to Piemonte. In her essay entitled "L'esperienza, la memoria, la scrittura delle donne," Marina Zancan observes that Zangrandi's diary, like other autobiographical texts, "alludes to the experience of the body" ("un'esperienza solitaria e feconda di presenza e di coscienza nella storia. Lo dimostrano contenuti frammentari che accennano ad esperienze del corpo" 237). My reading of Zangrandi's text reveals more than just allusions to the experience of the body; it is a text which simultaneously produces and is produced through the experience of the body.

Like Capponi, Zangrandi inhabits two bodies: the 'external' body, the image she projects for the benefit of others, changing masks and poses according to necessity, and the physical core she claims as her own: "il mio stomaco, *io*" (17). She carefully constructs the outer body through an array of disguises in order to carry out her tasks successfully. Despite her reservations about her acting skills, she plays convincingly the role of a black market smuggler, traveling on a train with heavy suitcases full of civilian clothes for deserters: "non è poi difficile, alla filodrammatica riuscivo male e mi misero fuori, ma qui non è palcoscenico di un buffo teatrino, è un treno vero e guarda un po' come è facile mentire, recitare, ingannare" (55). Her slim frame fills up with layers of nitroglicerine "nei luoghi più scarni del mio corpo; sono magra, piallata. Ci son venute alcune maggiorazioni (provvidenziale un certo regipetto vuoto che mi ha imprestato la moglie di un ferroviere)" (40). Impersonating a peasant woman ("viso da contadina sorridente" 43) who is carrying a basket of precious eggs for her ailing parents, she accepts a ride from a German soldier who takes great care not to break the eggs, in reality, explosive material.

She poses as a feminine painter who crosses forests and meadows armed with "l'album dei disegnetti dei fiori e dei panoramini" (92). The diminutives she uses in her narration bring out the irony of the real purpose of her painting expedition: preparing a detailed topographical map of the mountain zone needed by the partisan command to plan and execute explosions of trains, bridges, and roads. Her knowledge of German enables her to play a mistress of a Wehrmacht official in search of medicine for her sick lover. The German patrol warns her: "brafa moidele attenta partisan non ti tagliare capelli" (140). Ingratiating smiles plastered on her face and an attitude of forced servility constitute an external shell which conceals a will to fight and to kill: "Si diventa macchine da sorridere e uccidere" (155). This image of a machine capable of smiling and killing captures the complexity of the female partisan identity: a body which is at the same time a passive object and an active subject. Zangrandi replaces the maternal love with the love of hatred, growing and nourishing it inside her womb like her own baby: "Ci si accorge di amare quest'odio come figlio che cresce nell'ulva" (31). This sentence captures the essence of being a partisan woman. It subverts the rhetoric of a mother's narrative; nourishing a baby means protecting life while nourishing hatred means killing.

When the fascist and the German authorities put a price on her head ("50.000 lire, mi sento molto signorina da marito con dote", 210), a friendly railroad worker warns her: "Sta attenta, ti cercano . . . vedi di travestirti, cercano una dalla faccia scura, malmessa, scarpe sfondate, passo

sportivo. Sta attenta, truccati" (135). Zangrandi takes his advice and transforms her appearance into a caricature of a slut: "Così stamattina con le forbici mi sono fatta una frangetta e rossetto e pittura, una faccia da puttanella; tiro fuori un vestito pretenzioso e le scarpe con dodici centimetri di tacco" (135). Her clumsy attempt to turn her body into a sexual object brings a moment of comic relief when her fellow-partisan, Severino, ridicules her newly acquired femininity: "Severino dice che nella fontana ci sarebbe meglio la mia faccia, che mi regalerà uno specchio perché impari a pitturarmi, almeno figurare da tariffa migliore" (156). The lighthearted tone of this scene, however, leads to a painful awareness that as a woman partisan she is, in fact, often perceived as a slut, a female body who uses the war as a pretext for easy sex.⁵

In her interminable travels she encounters people who judge her. She notices "occhi che a volte frugano nel cuore, misurandotelo col loro metro, e sotto le sottane, occhi in cui senti 'con chi sarai andata a letto, tu puttana dei partigiani, dicono che siete gentaccia dal libero amore'" (142). Zangrandi suffers the injustice of these gazes because being a partisan for her means being sexless, being just a body programmed for carrying out orders and killing:

Forse credono che io e Severino ci strusciamo come un uomo e una donna e non sanno che in questo momento siamo ambedue come senza sesso, solo due corpi umani che hanno muscoli per uccidere, grilletti e dita sui grilletti e ciò ch'era un 'cuore' o un cervello di essere civile è solo ora una entità inafferrabile, esasperata, selvaggia, forse più per estrema difesa che per vendetta. (150-151)

Like Capponi, Zangrandi wants to be treated as an equal by her fellow partisans, to put aside prejudices and stereotypes concerning women and to establish a democracy of gender: "Butta fuori un altro pezzo di foccaccia nei gavettini, e parti giuste, basta con le storie che le donne non devono bere, fumare, bestemmiare come voi: democrazia in quelle tre gavette, ohè!" (189) She can hardly remember the sensation of feeling like a woman; it is a distant memory, similar to that of "inarrivabile infanzia," a memory buried under layers of masks and poses (183). Zangrandi questions her own identity when she looks perplexed at her own photograph taken for a false ID: "Quella foto sono un viso magro e triste: sono io quella lì?" (202) Her doubt of her own identity corresponds to the suspicions voiced by her fellow partisans: is she really a resistance fighter or a spy who uses her femininity to penetrate the partisan ranks and then to betray them. Anna listens incredulously to their accusations: "Ma cosa avete pen-

sato? Che ero io la spia che ha tradito?” (206) She feels crushed by their accusations, but endures calmly the interrogation which proves her innocence. A hunger pang, a bodily sensation of physical pain, evokes and at the same time sharpens the memory of mental suffering. She compares her pitiless stomach to her merciless companions: “Cucchiai di minestra fitta e fredda che vanno giù, vanno in questo affamato stomaco, spietato lui pure” (207).

The struggle not to lose herself in the confusion of outward roles and gestures echoes the bodily struggle to survive. If she can fight the enemy through disguises and pretences, the confrontation with nature requires physical strength and endurance, a body trained to fight the ferocity of the elements. She contrasts the idyllic image of the Alps as “strisciolina alta e bianca sopra le nebbie dell’orizzonte, come le vedevo da bambina, irreali e favolose” with the image of immense distance to be covered: “E invece sono vere e si deve passare di là” (222). She loves and fears nature, with a fear which she defines as “paura di me stessa, sola, senza esseri umani attorno, un ‘io’ che ritorna superbamente alla netta e immensa materia, . . . era come un terrore di farsi annebbiare, vincere, annientare dall’infinito della natura, di farsi prendere dalla morte” (77). Nature demands responsibility and respect, she resembles a tough and severe mother who will punish every little mistake, but reward every effort to appease her. Zangrandi recounts in detail how she prepares for every expedition, how much care she takes to assure that she has the right equipment that she has chosen the right path, that she constantly watches changes in weather and snow conditions. Even the smallest slip could cost her life. Every victory of her body over nature fills her with happiness and exhilaration. A New Year’s Eve spent in a mountain cave during a raging snow storm makes her appreciate yet another such victory:

Nessun pensiero alle cose solite dei capodanni, alle feste che fa la gente; solo essere felici perché anche stavolta ce l’ho fatta, a infilare la casera; a tirar fuori i piedi prima che gelino, a non restarci sfinita nella morte bianca. Ho cercato di metterci molto tempo a leccare quelle patate, pulire bucce religiosamente; sono finite. E si pensa: ‘Non dormire, o ti geli, cura il fuoco. Lo sai che a bivaccare si deve trovare un filo di pensiero. (193)

She coaches her body to adapt to the demands of her new life, what she calls “rispolverare il selvaggio ch’era in noi” (185), and proudly annotates every triumph. She learns how to control sleep ordering her body to wake up instantly at the slightest hint of danger: “Ho talmente abituato l’organismo a ‘far guardia’ che anche nelle sere sospette, quando decidiamo

dei turni, se dormo, mi accorgo dei rumori e li identifico prima di colui ch'è in fazione" (185). She is confident that her face will not betray her feelings because she trained the muscles to obey her at will: "so che la mia faccia non segna muscolo per nessun orrore *se voglio*." (221) She is grateful for having a stomach which digests anything and allows her body to function efficiently: "Questo tempo di fame ti ha fatto constatare una tua fortuna, prima non ben valutata e una più grande scoperta; la fortuna di avere uno stomaco per cui tutto passa: polenta muffita, minestra acida, carne fetente di strane bestie, magari poco fresche che gli altri buttano, pasta nera come sabbia e avanzi sbocconcellati, pastoni, pappe e brode, tutto va giù e fa chilometri" (141). Kilometers, between 80 and 200 a day, to be covered on foot, skis, or by bike provide a test that her body has to take and to pass over and over again. She manages to forget exhaustion and despair when her body catches the rhythm of nature: "ora la neve perfetta e la discesa mi prendono, un'euforia mi fa cantare come allora, un motivo di valzer che sincronizza il mio slalom indavolato tra i tronchi della Valdalega e poi giù per il canale della valle a velocità folle" (190). As in Capponi's case, the partisan experience clings unmistakingly to Zangrandi's body, betraying her partisan identity. A friend advises her to avoid people, thus reducing the risk of a possible denunciation to German authorities: "Dice che con quell'odore lì adosso, fumo di bivacco, minestra, sudore mai lavato, ecc. non dovrei andare per il paese" (196). Zangrandi's narrative completes a full circle—her physical toughness, "fisico da bracconiere" (13), determines her partisan experience and, in turn, the partisan experience produces a new awareness and appreciation of her body and its ability to adapt and to survive.

In *Deviazione* Luce D'Eramo notes that "È curioso come il corpo non ha memoria." (285) However, as the two texts I have discussed demonstrate, the autobiographical reconstruction of the past takes place through recurring bodily memories. The physical sensations of cold, hunger, exhaustion, pain, etc. serve as memory props, arresting the past and projecting it in a series of body images. To render the terror of being hunted down by a German soldier, Zangrandi condenses the recollection into a flash where "c'è solo il mio corpo vivo e impazzito di terrore" (169). That constant awareness of a physical reality, however, constitutes only a part in the partisan experience of both Capponi and Zangrandi. It is the exploration of the gendered reality, the split of their bodies into objects and agents which plays a crucial part in their narratives. The two autobiographies negotiate their way between the social constructs of women's roles and their determination to challenge and exceed accepted limits and

boundaries. The poses and masks adopted by Capponi and Zangrandi, their outward selves, repeat the hegemonic forms of behaviour, but, as Judith Butler points out, repetition does not have to be faithful, and it is in the failure “to repeat loyally” that new bodies and new models are born (124).

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NOTES

¹Venturi's story has attracted a lot of critical attention since its first edition as well as praise for its Hemingwayan qualities: a dry simplicity of narration, a rapid staccato rhythm, and a surprise ending with the echo of shots. See Giovanni Falaschi who notes that “la costruzione dei suoi racconti obbedisce a un ritmo rapidissimo che riproduce il modo in cui i più giovani sentivano la Resistenza: come un movimento fisico di forze, violento e concitato, con brevissime pause seguite subito dalla ripresa degli avvenimenti. Il racconto è costruito con una tensione verso la catastrofe; ha questo valore la ‘botta secca’, lo sparo finale,” (64). According to Rosario Contarino and Marcella Tedeschi, Venturi is a follower of Hemingway and an admirer of westerns dominated by “l'intreccio avventuroso sulla base dell'imprevedibile, condizione costante della lotta partigiana,” (201). None of the critics, however, comment on the image of a woman partisan.

²Elizabeth Grosz examines the body's object/subject status in *Volatile Bodies*, a fascinating history of the body and the self, and concludes, that “If bodies are objects or things they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency. Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable” (x-xi).

³Renata Vigano's novel, *L'Agnese va a morire*, deemed the official novel of the Italian Resistance, true to life in all its aspects, evokes a partisan in a maternal body. Agnese, a simple, uneducated peasant, married to an ailing but well educated husband acts as a substitute mother first for her husband, and after his death, for the partisans. Agnese's body (with a hint of past sexual attraction) exists to serve others; it is a body which protects, nourishes, and comforts. Agnese functions only in relation to others, in fact, even her participation in the Resistance is motivated by an act of personal vengeance for the killing first of her husband, and later of her cat, by the Nazis. This relational aspect of women's participation in the partisan ranks, the heart as a motive for their decisions, becomes a criterion for reading a vast majority of autobiographical texts. Rosario Contarino and Marcella Tedeschi clearly wrestle with the representation of a female partisan. On the one hand, they acknowledge that the war and the Resistance were historical moments of great importance for women: “Il problema della Resistenza coincide per le donne partigiane con quello della loro emancipazione, . . . indicazione di un

momento di rottura nel rapporto donna-società che si dilata alla coscienza politica postresistenziale" (194). On the other hand, their critical analysis focuses mainly on the relational character of these narratives, that is, they regard them as stories of male heroes, husbands, sons, and brothers told by women; women's own stories seem to be of secondary importance. Thus, Barbara Allason's *Memorie di un'antifascista* is called "un'opera squisitamente femminile," (177). Marina Sereni's *I giorni della nostra vita* demonstrates "la consapevolezza di essere sposa e madre oltre che militante rivoluzionaria," (176). Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano*, "è un prodotto antieroico e antiretorico . . . trepidante di amore materno, saporosamente domestico," (194). This 'heart' rhetoric of literary criticism is a devious ploy because it supplies an interpretative filter which both obscures and distorts our reading of women's texts. It shifts the focus from women's own struggle to adopt new roles and to take on new identities to a mere repetition of traditional patterns and values.

⁴A renewed interest in Zangrani's writings led to a convention organized in Bologna in 1998, ten years after her death. The papers presented at that convention were published in a book form in 2000 (*Giovanna Zangrandi: donna, scrittrice, partigiana*). *I giorni veri* was reprinted in 1998 ("Le mani," Recco-Genova).

⁵The image of woman partisan as a slut appears in a number of fictional accounts of the Resistance, among them, in such literary classics as Italo Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* or "Gli inizi del partigiano Raoul," a short story by Beppe Fenoglio. Giglia in Calvino and Iole in Fenoglio, two bodies insatiable in their appetite for sex, represent a destructive force within the partisan bands, a force capable of threatening and ruining the solidarity and harmony of male bonds.

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