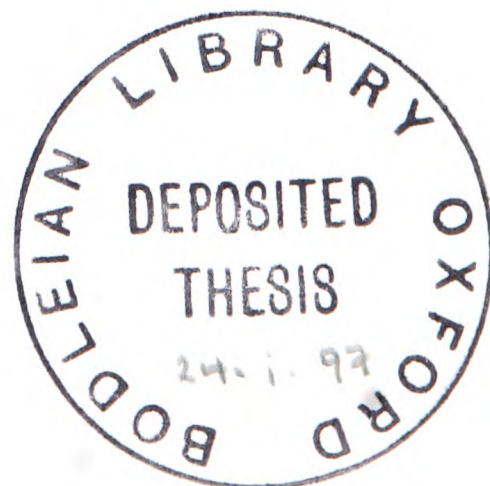


# Giovanna Zangrandi: A Life in Fiction

Penelope Morris

March, 1996

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



## **Abstract**

### **Giovanna Zangrandi: A Life in Fiction**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, March 1996**

**Penelope Morris, The Queen's College, University of Oxford**

This thesis constitutes the first detailed study of the life and works (published and unpublished) of the writer Giovanna Zangrandi (1910–1988). It is a study of the relationship between autobiography, fiction and history in her writing, in the light of recent developments in the criticism of autobiography and of feminist historiography and literary criticism. It aims to place Zangrandi's work in its historical and literary context and pays particular attention to the periods of fascism, the Resistance and neorealism. The thesis considers the nature of autobiography, and the implications of women writing about themselves, and analyses Zangrandi's use of autobiography, highlighting the inevitable intrusion of fiction into such writing. It uses that analysis, along with material including Zangrandi's unpublished diaries and testimonies of people who knew her, to write a biography of Zangrandi and to examine the way that she writes about the fascist period and the Resistance. The question of representing real life in fiction, rather than autobiography, is also discussed, with reference to Zangrandi's first novel and to neorealism. It is shown that, as well as her constant interest in the lives of women, her attitude to history and traditions of the Cadore, the mountainous region in the north of the Veneto, where she lived all her adult life and where nearly all her novels, short stories and autobiography are set, is of considerable importance. Her writing about the Cadore can be seen both as an attempt to write herself into those traditions, and as a means of expressing her commitment to improving society. Moreover, it is argued, her commitment takes the form of both autobiography and fiction as her concern to write about lived experience is balanced by a constant interest in the story-telling tradition of the Cadore and an interpretation of fiction that judges it to be an integral part of everyday life.

## Long Abstract

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This thesis constitutes the first detailed study of the life and works (published and unpublished) of the writer Giovanna Zangrandi (1910–1988). It is an analysis of the relationship between autobiography, fiction and history in her writing, in the light of recent developments in the criticism of autobiography and of feminist historiography and literary criticism. It aims to place Zangrandi's work in its historical and literary context and pays particular attention to the periods of fascism, the Resistance and neorealism.

Zangrandi's earliest publications were articles for local newspapers and magazines in Cortina d'Ampezzo in the late 1930s, but, in fact, she had started off on a rather different track. Born in 1910, in Galliera (Emilia Romagna), into a middle-class family, she was drawn to scientific studies and studied chemistry and geology at Bologna University. After a period as a university assistant, she moved north to the Dolomites to take up a post as a teacher. In 1943, her teaching and journalism were abruptly interrupted by her participation in the antifascist Resistance. During the Resistance, Zangrandi acted as *staffetta*, delivering food, arms and documents between partisan bands in the mountains and often covered immense distances on foot over arduous terrain. Wanted by the Nazis and Fascists, she spent the Winter of 1944 in hiding, bivouacked up on a mountain ridge with two other young partisan men. Following the war, she remained in the Dolomites, hating the town of Cortina d'Ampezzo, but loving the Cadore, the area to the east that forms the northernmost part of the Veneto. Her writing became her main occupation. She never went back to teaching; whenever she needed to supplement her income, she would turn to a wide variety of activities, which often involved physical work. She shied away from defining herself as a writer, shunning a label that, to her, suggested pseudo-intellectualism and the petty concerns of a literary elite;

nevertheless, writing was the one constant activity in her life. Much of her writing was autobiographical, but, in writing about her own life, she was also describing the world to which she had moved in her twenties and where she lived for some fifty years. She wrote not only about the physical environment, the mountains of the Cadore in particular, but also about the people of the area with their history, traditions and legends. Moreover, it was that world that provided inspiration for the fictional worlds of her novels and non-autobiographical short stories. In the mid-1950s, Zangrandi contracted what later turned out to be Parkinson's disease. Her condition worsened very gradually, but by the early 1970s she was no longer able to write.

Chapters One and Two consider the relationship between Zangrandi's life and her writing. Chapter One examines recent critical developments in the study of autobiography and highlights the way that, on the one hand, autobiography has been seen as increasingly useful, particularly in the area of women's history, as a source of information that is otherwise unavailable, but that, on the other hand, its status as a separate literary genre has been questioned, as has the very possibility of a stable and unproblematic relationship between writing and lived experience. Debates concerning the referentiality of autobiography are also seen to be related to the rejection of a notion of the self that maintains it is fixed and unified, and are shown to have particular relevance to women's autobiography. Philippe Lejeune's concept of an 'autobiographical pact' is used to postulate a definition of autobiography and discussions of referentiality and the unity of the self, with particular regard to women's autobiography, are used to examine the issues raised by Zangrandi's approach to writing about her own life. Zangrandi's attitude to autobiography is described: she recognized the potential for distortion in writing about the past, yet maintained it was possible to gain access to a true version of events (often through a kind of self-analysis), but emphasized that autobiography is self-indulgence unless it can serve as a general example to society. This chapter analyses Zangrandi's imposition of form on the past, and shows that it went much further than the author herself admits, and also discusses the link between narrative and autobiography, between autobiography and story-telling, as a means of

understanding the relationship between lived experience and writing.

Chapter Two applies the conclusion of these general discussions to Zangrandi's published and unpublished writing, and takes account of testimonies from friends (including the writer Mario Rigoni Stern) and local historians, in order to attempt to write a biography of the author. The chapter describes the available sources of information and gives a narrative account of her life, followed by a thematic description of the way that it appears in her writing. The sources for the early part of Zangrandi's life are very limited as she did not remain in contact with relatives or friends from that period and, indeed, this chapter shows the way that Zangrandi used her autobiography as a means of rejecting her own background and social class, and of identifying herself with the Cadore, recreating herself, as it were, in her writing. Zangrandi was very selective in the periods she chose to describe. She wrote a good deal about her childhood, but always allowed it to be understood that she was born and lived in the Cadore rather than Emilia Romagna. An only child, she gave a positive impression of her parents, but described the rest of her extended family as neurotic and selfish, attributes she links directly with their belonging to the bourgeoisie. She wrote relatively little about her adolescence, although she did refer to living under fascism (as discussed in the following chapter). The Resistance and the year 1946 are dealt with more fully and there are unpublished diaries dating from the 1950s and early 1960s. Themes that emerge throughout her autobiography, and that are discussed in the second part of this chapter, include those of sickness (or madness) and health, class distinctions, solitude and sociability, motherhood and religion. However, all of these themes are linked together in the central theme of the Cadore and her attempt to use her autobiography to write herself into the traditions of her adoptive people, and of the women of that region in particular.

The following chapters continue to discuss the themes of autobiography, fiction and history in Zangrandi's work, but they concentrate on specific historical periods as a means of understanding her writing in its historical context and of showing how a study of her writing affords significant insights into those periods. Zangrandi is known in the Veneto for her involvement in the Resistance and few are aware

that she contributed to fascist newspapers. Chapter Three looks at the nature of Zangrandi's journalism under fascism and contrasts that with the way that she wrote about the regime in her fiction and autobiography after the war, placing the discussion in the context of recent research into fascism, with particular reference to women, journalism and local history. In this chapter, as in the first two, the themes of women and of regionalism are of particular relevance. The specific question of the way that women experienced fascism is shown to be important for an understanding of Zangrandi's articles in fascist publications, two of which, were aimed specifically at women, and her subsequent representation of her own experience of the regime. Whilst fascism insisted that women should concentrate on what was perceived to be their primary function of being a mother and wife, at the same time, as recent research has shown, the emphasis on joining fascist associations and on sport meant that, for a restricted group of middle-class women, there were more opportunities under the regime than there had been before. With her love of sport and being unmarried, Zangrandi was in a position to benefit in some respects, yet, writing after the war as a *partigiana*, she was bound to give a different impression. Her concern with local issues in those earlier articles also gives an indication of the way that her adherence to fascism should be understood, for, even writing under censorship, she showed most concern with the plight of local people and, it is suggested, offered some veiled criticism of what the state had done for that region, and, it is shown, the element of propaganda in her articles needs to be analysed closely.

Chapter Four, on the other hand, does not deal with autobiography, but places Zangrandi's first novel, *I Brusaz*, in its historical and literary context. Written in the context of neorealism and of an interest amongst many writers in literary *impegno*, her novel displays a particular concern with the representation of real life in literature and thus raises a number of the same issues considered earlier in the discussion of autobiography. This chapter considers the nature of neorealism and the debates surrounding it, and analyses Zangrandi's own brand of realism. It discusses Zangrandi's insistence on the social commitment of the writer that translates itself, in her novel, into a concern with life in the Cadore. *I Brusaz* is

discussed in the light of common criticisms of neorealist works as provincial and idealistic about the lower classes, and particular attention is paid to Zangrandi's use of language and characterization and the narrative technique that forms the basis of her realism. The importance that she gives to storytelling and fable, both in the novel and elsewhere, as a means of understanding the world, is examined, and, whilst that suggests an old realism rather than a new one, her attitude towards commitment has a rather different element to it as her interpretation of *impegno* may be seen as related, above all, to a denunciation of some of the constraints that women were forced to live under and a commitment to improving their lives.

The final chapter discusses Zangrandi's autobiography of the Resistance, *I giorni veri*. Zangrandi's assertion that she was telling the truth in this account is examined in detail, in order to establish the exact nature of that 'truth' and analyse the way that it was influenced by prevailing attitudes to the Resistance, by Zangrandi's own interpretation of it, and her view of the history of the Cadore in particular, and by the fact that she was a woman writing about that period. *I giorni veri* is seen to be dominated by a desire to communicate the idea that the Resistance should be remembered as a patriotic war of liberation that can serve as an example to future generations. Moreover, assessment of the period is seen to be closely allied to Zangrandi's understanding of the history of the Cadore: in her view the Resistance in that area, like the *Risorgimento* before it, was inspired by centuries of tradition and a love of independence and democracy. This chapter also deals with issues raised by women writing about the Resistance. As more recent histories have shown, very large numbers of women participated in the Resistance and it has been seen as a period of considerable importance for the emancipation of women in Italy. The question of the way that women responded to events and wrote about them afterwards is examined, and Zangrandi's account is considered alongside other published diaries of the Resistance written by women. That comparison highlights the constraints under which women write such accounts, and discusses the relative freedom with which Zangrandi was apparently able to recount her experiences. Overall, this chapter looks at the way Zangrandi uses her writing, in this book and throughout her work, to establish a particular view of herself, in

the context of a need to correct common assumptions about the role of women in history.

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## Introduction

Giovanna Zangrandi had a life in fiction in two senses: for much of her life writing was her primary occupation, but it is also true that a great deal of her work involves recreating her own life in a written form. Her earliest publications were articles for local newspapers and magazines in Cortina d'Ampezzo in the late 1930s, but, in fact, she had started off on a rather different track. Born in 1910, in Galliera (Emilia Romagna), into a middle-class family, she was drawn to scientific studies and studied chemistry and geology at Bologna University. After a period as a university assistant, she moved north to the Dolomites to take up a post as a teacher. In 1943, her teaching and journalism were abruptly interrupted by her participation in the antifascist Resistance. Following the war, she remained in the Dolomites, hating Cortina d'Ampezzo itself, but loving the Cadore, the area to the east that forms the northernmost part of the Veneto. Her writing became her main occupation. She never went back to teaching; whenever she needed to supplement her income, she would turn to a wide variety of activities, which often involved physical work. She shied away from defining herself as a writer, shunning a label that, to her, suggested pseudo-intellectualism and the petty concerns of a literary elite; nevertheless, writing was the one constant activity in her life. Much of her writing was autobiographical, but in writing about her own life, she was also describing the world to which she had moved in her twenties and where she lived for some fifty years. She wrote not only about the physical environment, the mountains of the Cadore in particular, but also about the people of the area with their history, traditions and legends. Moreover, it was that world that provided inspiration for the fictional worlds of her novels and non-autobiographical short stories. It is the combination of these elements of autobiography, fiction and history that characterizes Zangrandi's writing and that forms the subject of this thesis.

I aim to discuss the relationship between writing autobiography and writing fiction, drawing on recent discussions of the theory of autobiography, and to examine Zangrandi's attitude to both. I will also explore her interpretation of history and the role that it plays in her work and will demonstrate the way that Zangrandi

used her writing to create a certain image both of the Cadore and of her place in it. This analysis will also highlight the importance of questions raised by studies of women's writing (whether in the form of history, fiction or autobiography) as a means of understanding Zangrandi's particular depiction of the history and culture of the Cadore, with its emphasis on the lives of women and its sensitivity to issues that concern women.

The discussion of these aspects of Zangrandi's writing will be based not only on her published work, but also on unpublished diaries, letters and notes, which have not been used by previous critics and which have led me to suggest certain new interpretations of aspects of her life and her literary interests.<sup>1</sup> As far as her published works are concerned, a detailed study will be made of all her autobiographical full-length narratives and short stories, of her journalism and of her first novel *I Brusaz*. Reference will also be made to her other two novels and her fictional short stories.

Most critical articles devoted to Zangrandi's work have concentrated on quite narrow aspects of her writing and have tended to appear upon the publication of her various books. The publication of *I Brusaz* (Milan: Mondadori, 1954), for which she was awarded the Deledda prize for fiction by new writers, attracted considerable attention from the literary world. Her later works, including her second novel *Orsola nelle stagioni* (Milan: Mondadori, 1957) and the autobiographical *Il campo rosso* (Milan: Ceschina, 1959) and *I giorni veri* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963), as well as her collections of short stories, provoked a quieter, though positive, response from critics. Although her books are now out of print, Zangrandi has continued to find a place in literary dictionaries of the twentieth century (the most recent example is the entry under her name in the *Dizionario della letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa), and, in recent times, extracts of her writing have been published in G. Falaschi's anthology, *Letteratura partigiana in Italia 1943-45* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984) (a short story based on her experience in the Resistance, 'Gli ingrassavo le scarpe' (pp. 166-175)), and in Gian Carlo Ferretti's *L'Italia raccontata: pagine scelte dal 1922 a oggi* (Rome:

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<sup>1</sup>A full list of Giovanna Zangrandi's published and unpublished works may be found in the bibliography.

Editori Riuniti, 1989) (a short story describing the aftermath of the Vajont disaster, 'Più niente' (pp. 231–238)).<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Zangrandi has continued to be well known in the area in which she lived, particularly as a result of her participation in the Resistance in that area, as well as for her subsequent success as a writer. Since her death in 1988, articles on her have appeared in local publications, and, shortly after her death, a conference was held at the *Istituto Storico Bellunese della Resistenza* to discuss her life and work. She has also remained a constant presence in anthologies and studies of the literature of the Veneto. In Guido Piovene and Alberto Frasson's anthology, *Narratori del Veneto* (Milan: Mursia, 1973), there is an extract from *I Brusaz* (pp. 213–226), and Gianni Crovato and Alberto Frasson included her short story 'I fratelli Maspert' in their anthology *I narratori veneti: 25 racconti* (Venice: Edizioni del Gazzettino, 1981), pp. 81–90. Zangrandi is discussed in Antonia Arslan's introductory essay to the study *La memoria e l'intelligenza: letteratura e filosofia nel Veneto che cambia* (Padua: Poligrafo, 1989), edited by Antonia Arslan and Franco Volpi, as one of a group of 'scrittori di montagna' (p. 37). She is also described by Silvio Guarnieri in his essay on art and literature of the Bellunese, 'Presenze e assenze' (in *Viaggio intorno a una provincia*, ed. by Belli and others (Belluno: Tipografia Piave, 1989), pp. 103–113). In 1991, Zangrandi was included in an anthology of women writers of the Veneto, *Le stanze ritrovate: antologia di scrittrici venete dal quattrocento al novecento* (Venice: Eidos), edited by Antonia Arslan, Adriana Chemello and Gilberto Pizzamiglio.

In both the earlier anthologies, edited by Frasson, with Piovene and Crovato respectively, it is stated, mistakenly, that Zangrandi was born in Belluno, in the Veneto. In *Le stanze ritrovate*, on the other hand, Antonia Arslan recognizes the fact that Zangrandi was not originally from the Veneto, but only moved there as an adult. Her inclusion in such collections testifies to the extent to which she was seen to be assimilated, in the way that she lived as well as the way she wrote. Arslan comments in *Le stanze ritrovate* that Zangrandi interpreted the world of the Cadore perfectly, even if she was not born there and despite the fact that its

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<sup>2</sup>Both of these anthologies are still in print.

people are so wary of outsiders. The link that Arslan makes between Zangrandi's life and her writing, her environment and her re-creation of herself, both as a writer and mountain-dweller, will be shown by this thesis to be an important one in its discussion of the relationship between Zangrandi's biography and her writing, between her autobiography, fiction and writing of history.

Despite the fact that Zangrandi continues to be remembered, particularly on a regional level, until now there has been no extended examination of her writing. This thesis constitutes the first in-depth study of Zangrandi's life and works and is the first to bring together the different elements of her published work and the responses of critics, alongside an analysis of her unpublished writings and testimonies of those who knew her, in order to write her biography and analyse her writing. Moreover, the evidence provided by an analysis of Zangrandi's writing, allows me to suggest a broader understanding of how women experienced both the fascist period and the Resistance, and of the processes of writing about the self that are specific to women and to those periods. A study of Zangrandi and her interpretation of a writer's commitment to society also adds a further dimension to an understanding of the aims and strategies of writers in Italy in the immediate post-war period.

Chapters One and Two consider the relationship between Zangrandi's life and her writing. Chapter One examines recent critical developments in the study of autobiography in order to postulate a definition of autobiography and to discuss the issues raised by Zangrandi's approach to writing about her own life. Particular reference is made to the question of women and autobiography and the ambivalence involved in any woman's attempt to write about herself. Chapter Two applies the conclusion of these general discussions to Zangrandi's published and unpublished writing, and takes account of testimonies from friends (including the writer Mario Rigoni Stern) and local historians, in order to attempt to write a biography of the author. The chapter describes the available sources of information and gives a narrative account of her life, followed by a thematic description of the way that it appears in her writing. It shows the way that Zangrandi used her autobiography as a means of rejecting her own family and of recreating herself, by writing herself

into the traditions of her adoptive people, and of the women of that region in particular.

The following chapters continue to discuss the themes of autobiography, fiction and history in Zangrandi's work, but they concentrate on specific historical periods as a means of understanding her writing in its historical context and of showing how a study of her writing affords significant insights into those periods. Zangrandi is known particularly for her involvement in the Resistance and few are aware that she contributed to fascist newspapers. Chapter Three looks at the nature of Zangrandi's journalism under fascism and contrasts that with the way that she wrote about the regime in her fiction and autobiography after the war, placing the discussion in the context of recent research into fascism, with particular reference to women, journalism and local history. In this chapter, as in the first two, the themes of women and of regionalism are of particular relevance. The specific question of the way that women experienced fascism is shown to be important for an understanding of Zangrandi's articles in fascist publications and her subsequent representation of her own experience of the regime. Her concern with local issues in those earlier articles also gives an indication of the way that her adherence to fascism should be understood.

Chapter Four, on the other hand, does not deal with autobiography, but places her first novel, *I Brusaz*, in its historical and literary context. Written in the context of neorealism and of an interest amongst many writers in literary *impegno*, her novel displays a particular concern with the representation of real life in literature and thus raises a number of the same issues considered earlier in the discussion of autobiography. This chapter considers the nature of neorealism and the debates surrounding it, and analyses Zangrandi's own brand of realism, with its emphasis on life in the Cadore and the importance it gives to storytelling as a means of understanding the world, and points to the way that Zangrandi's interpretation of *impegno* may be seen as related, above all, to a commitment to improving the lives of women.

The final chapter discusses Zangrandi's autobiography of the Resistance, *I giorni veri*, in the light of her interpretation of the history of the Cadore, and

also compares it with published diaries by other women who were *partigiane*. This work is seen to be dominated by a desire to communicate a certain truth about the Resistance, one that owes a great deal to an interpretation of the history of the Cadore as democratic and independent. It also deals with issues raised by women writing about the Resistance, a period of considerable importance for them in Italy, and looks at the way Zangrandi uses her writing, in this book and throughout her work, to establish a particular view of herself, in the context of a need to correct common assumptions about the role of women in history.

## Chapter One: Writing the Self

This chapter will form a discussion of theoretical issues regarding autobiography and Zangrandi's approach to writing about herself. In this way, it will serve as an introduction to the biography of Zangrandi provided by Chapter Two and will also prepare the ground for the more detailed analyses of particular aspects of her writing that appear in later chapters: from Zangrandi's involvement in, and subsequent interpretation of both fascism and the Resistance in Chapters Three and Five, to more general questions of the relationship between literature and lived experience in Chapter Four.

As far as a biography of Zangrandi is concerned, the paucity of information from other sources for some periods of her life means that her autobiographical writing is particularly important. Yet the use of autobiography for biography raises many issues and the status of a genre that purports to reflect lived experience directly has been put into question by recent critical theory.

As sources of historical information, autobiographies are generally seen as more straightforward and as a more reliable source than fiction. Whilst an autobiography apparently transcribes a life, fiction by definition invents. On the other hand, when compared to the writing of history, autobiography is seen to be less rigorous and more spontaneous. When doubts have arisen concerning autobiographies, they have tended to centre on whether or not the author is reliable, that is to say, if she or he is likely to have been telling the truth or lying.

In the last twenty years or so, however, the growing interest in autobiographical writing has thrown into doubt many assumptions concerning the nature of autobiography and has sparked off a debate concerning its value as an historical document. For some critics this has meant devaluing the contribution that autobiography can make, whilst others have attributed greater importance to it. An area in which it has received particular attention, and which is of particular interest for this thesis, is that of feminist historiography. Feminist historians have turned to women's autobiography to glean the information about women's lives that has been ignored hitherto by historical accounts which have traditionally regarded women's lives

as belonging to the ‘private’ sphere of life and therefore unimportant. However, such use of autobiography is controversial. In particular, doubt has been cast on the referential nature of autobiography and questions have arisen as to whether it can really be considered a genre in its own right. What is it, if anything, critics have asked, that distinguishes autobiography from fiction? Is there an essential difference in the way that it is written? In the light of such debates, it will be necessary to explain the definition of autobiography that will be employed in this thesis, and to explore recent developments in the criticism of autobiography, in order to establish Zangrandi’s approach to describing her own life and the way that her autobiography will be used in Chapter Two, alongside other sources, to write her biography.

Zangrandi herself makes a clear distinction between fiction and autobiography and the implications, from her point of view, of writing one or the other. In a loose-leaved diary entry entitled ‘Cortina 1 marzo 1957’, Zangrandi refers to an argument she has had with an ‘intellettuale di sinistra’ who maintains that all writing is autobiographical. For Zangrandi, such a view is incompatible with left-wing politics: ‘dici di essere di sinistra?’, she writes, as if still continuing the discussion, ‘come concilii la tua posizione sociale con questa tua esclusiva introversione?’. She does not consider her own views to be radical: ‘non sono comunista militante come te ho ancora diritto di dare un forte valore all’individuo, inserendolo incorruttibile nelle masse e capace di discutere tutti i “credi” dei dirigenti e dei teorici secondo sua intelligenza umana ed arbitrio’. Nevertheless, she continues:

io penso al suo forte individualismo inserito nella massa, la sua attività umana solidale con i proprii simili, la sua sensibilità volta ad essi ed a valutarli obiettivamente; lo scrittore *vero* deve essere anche uomo sociale, il suo *io* può aver valore, è ammissibile in lui anche qualche opera autobiografica, il suo io posto alla stessa stregua di quello di un qualunque altro suo protagonista. Ma non il suo Io, esclusivo, in ogni opera.

‘Ah piccola Alba’, she addresses the other writer, ‘come sei bambina e chiusa nella teorica degli scrittori italiani di oggi, che per loro colpa e per questo loro miserabile autobiografismo si sono perduti il mercato nazionale a tutto pro degli esteri (specie

americani) che sanno guardarsi ancora attorno'. As for her writing, she asserts 'No, che non sono stata autobiografica ne *I Brusaz*'. She admits that her later work, *Campi del fiore rosso* (as she called *Il campo rosso* for some time, before it was published), was quite definitely autobiographical, but claims she did it in that case because 'la mia vita allora aveva un'esperienza che meritava di essere raccontata, che era peccato perdere e che poteva anche avere un valore ed un'utilità umana'. In the same section of her diary, she refers to another writer, 'R.', who writes poems which are 'limpide alcune, pulite', but who, as well as being a fervent and dogmatic catholic, also maintains that 'lo scrittore è autobiografico, assolutamente lo è e nient'altro'. According to Zangrandi, 'R.' will not accept any distinction between poetry and prose, and, furthermore, 'non ammette la vita di avventura, la vita immersa nel proprio prossimo, non capisce come si possa "parlare alla gente"'. Zangrandi, on the other hand, feels she is capable of doing 'qualcosa di più, di utile a molti' and for this reason, for her writing, she would be 'capace di sacrificare qualunque mia famiglia'; an opinion that 'R.' finds risible, saying that a woman puts her family before all else. Such comments from Zangrandi may not amount to a faithful representation of the views of these other two writers, whose identities remain obscure, but leave us in no doubt as to her opinions regarding autobiography. She draws a distinction between autobiography and fiction and makes it clear that, as a writer, she considers that she is free to choose between different genres. Moreover, it is a political choice between a literature that is inward-looking and selfish, or one that reaches out to other people. In her view, a writer has a responsibility to society and should only write works that are autobiographical if they can be useful to others.

Zangrandi takes the distinction between autobiography and fiction for granted, but how may they be said to differ? How does autobiography relate to the life that it describes? Georges Gusdorf, one of the first to write about autobiography in its own right, has pointed out that however truthful a writer is aiming to be, a written account cannot of course be a simple repetition of the past.<sup>3</sup> There will always be difficulties when one tries to translate past events into a written form.

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<sup>3</sup>'Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie', in *Formen der Selbstdarstellung* (Berlin: Duncker and Humbolt, 1956).

Firstly, there is a reliance on memory, but this is never perfect; there are bound to be lapses and inaccuracies. Certain gaps have to be filled in by the author. In any case, it is impossible to write down everything one remembers, every single event that occurred; nor would this be desirable. There has to be a certain selection for an account to make sense and sustain the interest of the reader. Such a selection means that the autobiographer inevitably gives a certain emphasis to events which seem important and not to others, and this has the further effect that a particular event may be endowed with a meaning it did not have originally. Moreover, having made that selection, the writer must place the events in a particular order. Even if the order is chronological, it is not necessarily accurate, as the order may make one event seem to depend on another and create a causality that simply did not exist before. Seen in this way, writing is always a distortion and a selection. A writer must choose what is to be written and the way it is to be written, even when apparently constrained by historical facts. As Roy Pascal says in his study, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1960), ‘autobiography means therefore discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life, selection of facts, distribution of emphases, choice of expression. Everything depends on the standpoint chosen.’ (p. 10).

The choices, omissions and imposition of a structure that are an inevitable part of autobiography are rarely made explicit and are not usually acknowledged by the author. A series of events arranged chronologically is treated as a ‘natural’ form that is entirely representative of the way that events occurred in the past. Moreover, the reliability of the author’s memory is rarely called into question, and autobiographers do not usually admit that theirs is just one possible version of events. It is not always admitted either that the author is writing *now* about past events, and even if she tries to describe everything as she saw it at that time in the past, such a description will be constrained by the image that she has *at the time of writing* both of her past self and of past events. The ‘I’ of the narration masks the fact that there is a later self looking back on an earlier self; as Shari Benstock puts it in her essay ‘Authorizing the Autobiographical’ (in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by S. Benstock (London:

Routledge, 1988), pp. 10–33), in many autobiographies,

the Subject is made an Object of investigation (the first–person actually masks the third–person) and is further divided between the present moment of the narration and the past on which the narration is focused. These gaps in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the text itself are often successfully hidden from reader and writer, so that the fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of whole cloth. (p. 19)

Furthermore, the present narrating self and the past self that is the protagonist of the narration cannot be identical. The later self inevitably benefits from hindsight and greater experience which affect the way the earlier, more innocent self is assessed.

This is very similar to an issue that has arisen with the study of oral accounts or ‘personal narratives’ very often in the context of feminist historiography. Historians have pointed out the necessity of taking into consideration not only the historical context being narrated, but also that of the time of narration. Only ‘by attending to the conditions which create these narratives, the forms that guide them and the relationships that produce them are we able to understand what is communicated in a personal narrative’ (*Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 261). In this way, a personal narrative, like an autobiography, is a narration of *two* historical contexts at the same time.

Written texts also need to be placed in the context of their narration. Naturally, this is much less precise than for an oral account, and a reader can know much less for certain about the author, when basing that knowledge on a written text. Moreover, the ‘I’ of narration suggests identity with the author, the name on the cover of the book, and as readers we build up an idea of the character of the author from the narrator and the protagonist, but, of course, we cannot know to what extent this corresponds to the real person. As noted above, these ambiguities and different levels in an autobiographical narration are not recognized by most autobiographers; it only tends to be in avant–garde works by writers such

as Robbe-Grillet and Leiris that one finds lapses and uncertainties as a deliberate strategy by the author to indicate the difficulties involved in writing about oneself.

### Zangrandi and Self Analysis

Certainly, Zangrandi does not use her autobiographical writing to draw attention to such difficulties, but nor does she completely ignore them. However, the extent to which she acknowledges their existence varies from one work to another. Zangrandi makes a claim to complete truth in the preface to *I giorni veri*; therefore, one might expect her to gloss over any doubts there might be about the subjective and provisional nature of autobiography in that account. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, any suggestion of doubt regarding self knowledge or her memory in *I giorni veri* does not affect her claim to truth. Her collections of short stories, on the other hand, betray an awareness of the way that history becomes blurred and may be manipulated, in the hands of others at least. She seems to express the view that this is inevitable, perhaps even preferable. For example, in the last collection to be published, *Racconti partigiani e no*, she discusses this theme, with particular reference to the way that the Resistance is remembered, in the story about ‘I Maspert’, two brothers who were completely unreliable, because of their propensity to embellish any story they told or information they gave (pp. 43–59). She explains that the Resistance ‘è ormai una realtà che si allontana, in alcuni di noi sedimenta e schiarisce, in altri come i Maspert sfoca, gonfia e diviene leggenda’, but, aware of the way history can be used for propaganda, she adds, ‘forse è meglio così. Loro sono i puri di infiammata fede e la fede sdegna i numeri’ (p. 49).

She expresses the same idea in *Racconti partigiani*. Looking back on an episode from the Resistance with a friend who also participated, she asks if her friend ever tells her children this story. ‘Certamente’, her friend answers, ‘vanno matte per le “storie vere”; ma per loro sono ugualmente una specie di favole di tempi di una “frontiera” [...] bisogna filtrare le nostre vicende attraverso i moduli della guerra americana di secessione’. To this, Zangrandi responds, in a similar vein to the other story, ‘forse è meglio così, che tutte le guerre diventino solo leggende’ (p. 11). The idea that history can become blurred may be found elsewhere in her

writing and not just with reference to the Resistance. In the essay at the end of her collection *Leggende delle Dolomiti*, she refers to a story about the Risorgimento told locally. Although it started out as history, over the years it is changing: ‘non è ancora leggenda — si dice — ma è così pura e bella, lontana, molto lontana dal nostro secolo scanzonato ed amaro, che è ormai nella zona del mito’ (p. 218). Another example may be found in *Racconti partigiani e no*, when Zangrandi is writing about her childhood and the mountains of the Dolomites. She describes the marks left there by the First World War, but admits

ma, a dire il vero, già allora, quegli esseri non parevano della nostra misura e della nostra materia, quella loro guerra non pareva una vicenda vera o vicina a noi comunque, forse stava diventando leggenda, non lo era ancora, ma si oscurava in un suo travaglio di trapasso, sospeso nell’aria irreale ed inumana di quelle roccie. (‘Mariagrazia la capa’, p. 61)

Moreover, she does not claim to have a completely reliable memory herself. There are frequent references to the fact that she had forgotten or suppressed particular aspects of her own past. As will be seen in the next chapter, she characterizes her childhood as having been lived in her imagination and her adolescence as absorbed in everyday activities and sport, suggesting that it was only as an adult, after the war, that she began to look at the past properly. The events of the war itself also had the effect of making them live from day to day and not think about the future or the past. She comments in ‘Zilio’, a short story in the collection *Gente alla Palua*, set during the war, ‘sta per finire la guerra e forse dovremo vivere ancora come gente che ha anche un passato’ (p. 79). There are also frequent comments of this type in *I giorni veri* and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, *Il campo rosso* describes an unsuccessful attempt to block out past memories and live in the present. Nevertheless, she makes it quite clear that, even if she has suppressed the past, that does not mean she is not able to recover it. As the above quotations suggest, the stories of the Resistance may have become fable for others, but that does not apply to the way she sees them herself. She confidently asserts that she is describing the Resistance as it really was in *I giorni veri* and, although, for her too, the First World War seems more distant and unreal, she is not suggesting that

the truth of the past cannot be established.<sup>4</sup>

How then does she find a way through this distortion and mythologization of the past? A theme throughout all her autobiography is one of self-analysis, and she often suggests that a re-examination of the past, her own past in particular, allows her to understand it properly. In 'Il ponte del Gar' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 69–98), she describes the way she allows her mind to wander back to the past: 'nella cuccetta dove il corpo stanco si è come annientato, sono sveglia e quasi felice, qualcosa si sta liberando, qualcosa capace di immergersi in fondali altrimenti inarrivabili' (p. 76). She often refers to this as following a thread or 'filo' in her mind, not knowing where it will lead. It seems that she felt that this was the only means of uncovering memories that she had deliberately repressed, as a result of the war or other traumatic experiences. 'Camera 32' (*Racconti partigiani e no*, pp. 7–11) is a short story that describes the way that a period she spent in hospital created the opportunity to recover some of her past:

Non mi sento sola qui, non mi annoio, tra il letto e il muro bianco non c'è niente, dopo gli interventi non posso più leggere, ma non mi annoio, non mi preoccupo, da tempi immemorabili sono abituata a comandare i sentimenti, il pensiero, il sonno. E' una specie di autoipnotismo o di spietata selezione realizzata fin da tempi lontani, una cattiveria dura che mise inafferrabili valvole a noi stessi, al passato e ai suoi ricordi, per esempio, quando urgeva occuparsi solo del presente, intensamente. O imparammo a frugare ed esaminare un certo passato utile o utilmente analizzabile a scapito di altro remotissimo o spiacevole, che soggiacque quindi a interessate amnesie.

Ma ora che il presente è deprecabile, misero, doloroso, le amnesie anche più tenaci cadono e si aprono, scorrono immagini e fatti remotissimi, veri, solo apparentemente perduti, i loro tasselli si integrano e si inseriscono ad altri, forse non inutilmente anche per altre consapevolezze.  
(p. 7)

Of course, there is the pretence in this that she is writing as the thoughts are occurring, in hospital, whereas, in reality, these are not the spontaneous ideas of

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<sup>4</sup>The implications of writing the truth about the Resistance will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

the time, but were written much later. Perhaps it is representative of a process that she used go through in her mind, however, as there is a similar notion of self-examination present throughout her unpublished diaries too. Indeed, she says that they are written as a kind of self-analysis. In the bound diary entitled '1954: sogni — diarii', she wonders if this amounts to 'autolesionismo', but decides that she needs 'autocritica pura, spietata e scientifica, cosciente' (p. 23). Whilst, by the word 'analysis', she seems to mean a kind of general self-examination, there is a suggestion that, to some extent, she had more specific, Freudian analysis in mind. In an entry marked 'Milano 6 febbraio' (no year), she comments on what she sees as the theory behind analysis:

Vorrei dire che quando nel corpo qualcosa duole per malattia o comunque, quando nel sangue circola qualche veleno chimico tossina o febbre o fatica che sia, un sangue più attivo e drogato riesce a smuovere le dormienti cellule cerebrali delle memorie inconscie e dei desideri affondati per compressione, insoddisfatti per esigenze di vita ecc. E ci vive per rivalsa nel sogno. In questo la teoria è giusta.

Where she parts company with psychoanalysts, she says, is when they suggest that 'il sogno sia solo sesso, solo e nient'altro, no che non mi va'. Indeed, she goes on to describe 'il vecchio Freud' as 'semplicistico e a monodirezione', along with 'parecchi suoi seguaci'. What she objects to in his theories is that they do not allow for inherited characteristics: 'non me le concedete le ereditarietà e gli atavismi?'. For, she says, 'Io sento nel mio sangue barbarico febbri di avventura e smania nomade', and her dreams could be seen instead as the fulfilment of those desires, frustrated in real life. Or perhaps 'dimostrano la percentuale vivissima di estroversione che nella vita mi serve ad equilibrare le introversioni potenti (ed anche malate e paurose) che inesorabilmente mi vengono dal mio ceppo paterno e nevrotico'.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, Zangrandi acknowledges the existence of obstacles that must be overcome in order to get at the truth of the past, but never suggests that this might not be possible. History may become myth and memory may be unreliable, but by a conscious effort, she seems convinced that one could reach a true version

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<sup>5</sup>This aspect of Zangrandi's background and writing will be discussed in Chapter Two.

of events. The way that she suggests that she ‘allows her mind to wander’ in her published work, and seems to employ a similar technique in writing her diaries, encourages the reader to feel that it is possible not only for the author to analyse herself, but also for the reader to analyse her through her writing, to see beneath her dreams and comments about herself to her ‘true’ character. Thus she suggests that there is some underlying self that exists in a manner somewhat akin to that proposed by Freud.

However, it should be remembered that a written form of ‘free association’, such as one finds in her work, was never part of Freud’s clinical techniques. In any case, despite the impression it gives, in her published work, at least, there is very little that is free about this kind of narration. The literary techniques involved here obscure the extent to which she has manipulated what she writes. By her own argument, if she has suppressed certain ideas, there is no reason why she would not continue to suppress others whilst writing. Furthermore, as described above, all writers impose a certain form on what they write. One of the important considerations that dictates the particular form they choose is the perceived effect that this will have on a reader. It may seem that this would not be the case with diaries that she did not have published. In fact, it is clear that she was aware that these too would be read by someone at some point. In the bound volume ‘Capodanno 1955’ she says ‘non posso fissare qui i nomi veri della gente, non si sa mai che una volta o l’altra tu muori [sic] in croda o sulla strada, che una paralisi o un accidente ti colga e vengano a scartoffiare nei tuoi appunti’ (p. 207). Presumably for the same reason she has scribbled out names earlier in this volume (p. 41). Nevertheless, in her partial acceptance of Freud’s theories and her emphasis on inherited characteristics, she gives the reader an indication of the way she felt she had access to the past and some idea of the mental framework supporting her autobiographical writings.

As for the narrative framework that she gives her autobiographical writings, it should be noted that Zangrandi has not written the typical autobiography which follows its author’s life from birth to maturity or old age. Instead, as has been indicated above, Zangrandi has written about herself in novel-length works that

treat only a relatively short period of her life chronologically, and short stories that treat separate episodes. A picture of her whole life only emerges through a reading of all her works, as episodes reappear, are expanded on, and are linked together in different ways. The short stories are structured in a different manner from the longer works. Some of them are entirely autobiographical, whilst others use a first person narrator as a kind of narrator-witness and the details about her own life are used as a framework in which to place the story of other people. When she focuses on her own life, the stories often take the form of an anecdote from her childhood, but they are not usually written from the point of view of a writer writing 'now' about her childhood. She tends to set the story at some point in her adult life and then looks back to an earlier period from that standpoint; quite often there is some theme that links the two periods. Stories such as 'Il ponte del Gar' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 69–98) and 'Il cortile assediato' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 99–145) are set in the past, initially, but at a time when Zangrandi was already an adult. This context then acts as a framework for the 'recollection' of an earlier period. In this way, the 'I' of narration is not just split into two, as Benstock has described, but three: the narrator of the text, the older Zangrandi and the younger Zangrandi. For example, 'Il ponte del Gar' begins with a description of Zangrandi's activities earlier that day: 'è stata una giornata pesante; di scorriere e di incontri per valli e paesi, uffici, archivi, segreterie [...] e ne ritorno stanca, fiaccata, tesa' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 69), and so the reader is immediately aware that these are the activities of an adult. But this adult Zangrandi remains distinct from the 'narrating self', despite the use of the present and future tenses, as we are told that 'il corpo stanco e spezzato si sta annientando nella buona cuccetta' (not writing) and that 'il pensiero si libererà chiaro e forte, non distratto da nulla, prepotente a infilare qualche sua strada' (p.71). This introduces a recollection of childhood, as the owl that flew into her windscreen earlier that evening reminds of another owl that got stuck in the chimney of her bedroom and frightened her when she was a child (this is also an example of the kind of 'filo' that she 'allows' her mind to follow). But this latter story is told not only through the eyes of the narrator, but also from the point of view of the 'adult Zangrandi':

fu in quell'epoca che entrò nel caminetto della mia nuova camera un enorme gufo, un puzzolente e pennuto Gufo Reale come questo di stanotte. E fu come la conclusione e la crisi finale di avvenimenti pure semplici od orribili, reali certo, che ora mi è facile ricostruire e vedere, in questa notte di lucidità malata. (pp. 75-6)

In this way, Zangrandi acknowledges some 'gaps' in the 'temporal dimensions' of her works (these terms are taken from Benstock's analysis of autobiography, as referred to earlier). She recognizes that she is an adult looking back at her childhood, but the gap between her writing self and earlier adult self is hidden. As for the longer autobiographies, *I giorni veri* is written as if it were composed during the Resistance, as will be discussed in Chapter Five. It does refer back to an earlier time occasionally, but concentrates mostly on the events of the period and conceals the 'gap' between this and the time of its narration. Zangrandi uses a similar technique in *Il campo rosso*, although, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, time levels in that novel are rather more complex. It is certainly very rare that she refers to the time of writing, although one very vague example may be found in *Gente alla Palua*: 'Oggi. Sono passati altri dieci, venti anni, il boom, la congiuntura, le prime euforie spaziali...' (p. 110). Otherwise, this 'gap' is not acknowledged.

A 'filtering' of the past is also made obvious by Zangrandi's use of irony. She describes her earlier self, as a child, with some affection, but there is an ironical distance between the later narrator and the young child who is so wrapped up in romantic ideas and dreams of adventure. It is often with some amusement that she looks back at that time. Nowhere is this hindsight more clear than when Zangrandi recalls the overblown, fascist rhetoric that made up her lessons at school and is rather amused at her childish enthusiasm. She explains that she and her father often went 'dove il vallone largo preludeva la pianura vasta e appoderata, tra i campi di grano che imbiondivano' and that she, like all good fascists keen on self-sufficiency, had 'una romantica mania d'amore per i campi di grano, c'entrasse qualche dettato istruttivo o fosse nel mio sangue, radicata nel mio appetito divoratore di pane, non so; se lo dicevo a mio padre, rideva bonario' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 119). Zangrandi's attitude to fascism over the years and the

way it emerges from her writing will be examined in Chapter Three.

A particularly striking example of the way that Zangrandi has shaped her own past is provided by her diaries, when she refers to the idea of taking details from her own past and altering them. Moreover, the changes she suggests making seem to appear in her later published work. For example, as will be discussed later in this chapter, in her diary she proposes a different location for a house her aunts and uncles lived in, and it is this location that appears in her short stories. She is also very selective in the periods she chooses to write about and the particular aspects of those periods that she concentrates on. It is noticeable, for example, that she chose to say very little in her published work about her life in the 1950s and 60s and afterwards, and turns instead to the past. In this way, Zangrandi's approach to the past may, in some ways, be that of the analyst, seeking an underlying truth, but at the same time it involves creating unavoidable, or indeed deliberate, elements of fiction, whether by not acknowledging the 'gap' between the time of narration and the events narrated, or by inventing facts.

### **The Red Field: History and Imagination**

An interesting example of the kind of form that Zangrandi has imposed on the past is provided by *Il campo rosso* (1959). It is a narrative that works on a number of different levels temporally, but, nevertheless, it does not admit of a time later than that of the main narrative, 1946. Ostensibly it is the story of a few months of Zangrandi's life, as the subtitle, *Cronaca di una estate, 1946*, suggests. It describes the building of a refuge, in order to provide shelter for walkers and mountaineers, in the mountains of the Cadore, by a group of men that Zangrandi herself had got together and organized. All the characters she describes (including herself) are having to rebuild their lives after the war. It is written in the past tense, but not in the form of a diary and there is no exact sense of a time of narration. The future, beyond 1946, is treated as unknown. The action of the novel is concerned with the daily activities of Zangrandi and her builders and carpenters, the hard, physical work they undertake and the often rather fraught relationships between them. The recent past and the Second World War are only referred to obliquely;

they are a constant presence in *Il campo rosso* and remain a point of reference, even if no details are given. Relationships between those working on the refuge are difficult, it is suggested, because of unspecified events that took place 'allora'. Zangrandi finds one of the men, Faghè, particularly unpleasant, mainly because of something she knows about his past and cannot forget, but does not divulge to anyone (including the reader). 'Con Annamaria, con Giulietta sua nipote', on the other hand, she says, 'avevo ben passato assieme vicende ed avventure, negli anni di questa guerra' (p. 11). Even if, she adds, 'io non voglio pensare a queste cose [...] non sono di quelli che amano rigirarsi nell'appiccicosa torbiera dei ricordi'. Yet the subject of the war keeps returning. Annamaria's 'soffitta' is described as 'piena di ciarpami', but also as the place 'dove io e Giulietta portavamo da mangiare a Mariano, quando fu là chiuso e nascosto' (p. 12). This comment is inserted without any further explanation and no link, other than the place, to the context. It is also striking that the simple act of cutting down a tree and stripping it of its bark for the construction of the refuge conjures up a particularly macabre image in the narrator's mind:

quel tronco così denudato sembrava un corpo dalla liscia pelle dorata dal sole, un lungo gigante senza braccia, abbattuto, poggiato alla roccia e sudava un suo male di morte dentro l'umida buca, sangue di linfe e di resine; mi ricordava un uomo magro e lungo, bronzeeo, legato ad un palo, uno che avevo veduto, sfinito, non si muoveva più, nè parlava, ma sudava così perché stentava a morire. (p. 54)

Once more, no further explanation of the event alluded to is given. Such references create the impression that the narrator is describing one set of events, but is preoccupied with another, that cause too much pain to be thought or written about openly, but which cannot be suppressed entirely. The building of the refuge is seen as a distraction, for when some task requires her attention, then 'si smette di pensare, di ricordare, come a volte può succedere, le cose che non si possono più avere', and, for a while, she is able to forget Dario, a fellow partisan who died during the Resistance, and 'l'ombra di Dario che a volte trascorre ancora in folata fra il colle e la Vedretta' (p. 35). At other times, when physical exertion is insufficient to help her forget, she drinks to escape. In this way, Zangrandi

creates a subtext to *Il campo rosso*. By apparently refusing to write about what happened, yet making frequent references to it, she not only describes her mental state in 1946, but also gives a scant but significant description of relationships and events during the Resistance.

However, the subtext of *Il campo rosso* refers not just to the Second World War, but also to Zangrandi's childhood, to the history of the area she lives in and to the world of her imagination. Climbing up to the refuge with provisions one evening, she rests at a place where local people have always paused in their journey: 'sono molti secoli, credo, che la gente fa sosta in questo ripiano ultimo pratico'. 'Perché qui?', she asks, then, answering her own question, suggests, 'non so, qui è meritato, qui cambia qualcosa'. It could be objected, she says, that 'questi sono ragionamenti da donne', but, if so, they belong to women 'che da secoli fecero qui la loro "pausa", certamente', because 'furono sempre loro a portare nei nostri paesi' (p. 21). She feels that these women are somehow still present:

forse a mettersi là in una notte solitaria, ad ascoltare le voci delle Creste, dell'aria e del tempo, si potrebbero *vedere*, tutta la falange delle donne passate, processione nera e dondolante, gravata e ricurva fra intrichi di rami, dannata ad andare per schiavitù antica di terra e di fame, forse avrebbe in testa la madre di Cicio Diau, una bis-bis-avola di Annamaria. (p. 21)

Lying down in this place, she says, she can look at the stars and 'sentire salire dalla terra come un abbraccio caldo sul corpo che rivive; è tanto raro che riviva e si ricordi di essere un corpo di donna' and 'per un momento breve, sentii che allora, se avessi avuto quello che mi spettava, sarei stata come l'erba, come le altre creature, come i caprioli dai dolci occhi; sarei stata *viva*'. It is not clear if she sleeps or not, but her thoughts turn to her mother and she explains: 'ogni volta era così — è così —: guardavo una cosa nel ricordo, anche nulla e mi ritrovavo con mia madre' (p. 24). She hears her mother talking to her as if she were still alive. Zangrandi relates what she was saying that particular evening, but comments 'ma tante sere, sempre, ci si ritrova così, come in *questa vita*' (p. 25). Then she is alone, in her 'casa del sogno' and these images of her mother seem to provoke further images, this time of the child she has never had: 'avevo tra le braccia un

bambino ch'era vivo e mio, sentivo il sangue scorrere nella sua carne, ero felice e pazza perché lo sentivo respirare davvero con la sua piccola bocca molle appoggiata al mio viso' (p. 26). Then she realizes that 'quel bambino non c'era più. Intorno avevo solo una sofferenza acuta' (p. 27). It is with considerable effort that she forces herself to get up: 'capii che dovevo muovere le gambe per ritrovare *questa* vita' (p. 27).

Thus it seems that she is living, indeed only feels alive, in 'lives' other than *this* life. The very title of the book refers to the world or 'life' that partly belongs to Zangrandi's past and partly to her imagination. One evening, after a particularly unpleasant episode with Faghè, Zangrandi drinks to forget and finds herself back in her childhood and feels the desire to be 'come allora, voglio qualcosa di allora ... il gran campo di grano, che seminavamo nel terrazzo grande, falcato sul fiume. Il campo che vado sempre a cercare in sere dannate come questa' (p. 75). This field is the 'campo rosso' of the title; here the wheat 'maturava contemporaneamente ad infiniti papaveri rossi [...] tanti erano, era un meraviglioso fiammeggiante campo'. 'Posso vederlo ed averlo', she continues, 'posso camminare sull'altipiano immenso fiorito del fiore rosso, posso andare leggera per caldi purpurei viali, posso avere Dario con me. E morti non siamo, non fantasmi, vivi noi camminiamo nel campo del fiore rosso' (p. 75). She talks of herself in this episode as if, in reality, she too had died like Dario, and this reinforces a recurring idea that she is not really living in the present, or that she has other lives that are almost as real to her. It is interesting that, having referred to the generations of women who have followed the same tradition, and who could be traced to the present day, Zangrandi's thoughts then turn to her own mother, as if the very place where she has stopped provides some link between the (female) generations. She then thinks of the next generation and the child that she has not had, and her suffering is all the worse: it is as if she is aware of the generations stretching out behind her, but her lack of a child means that she cannot properly act as a link between the present and the past, and between the present and the future and is caught in a kind of limbo. She does not feel able to respond to 'this' life and feels alienated from herself and from those around her. The closest she gets to others is a recognition of the same symptoms

in them; the character Carlo is equally ill at ease. Carlo and Anna seem to have a good deal in common, and are both suffering after losing someone in the war, but they are unable to communicate fully with each other. To have a relationship with a man, Zangrandi comments ironically, ‘ci vuole un corpo con dei sensi o almeno un uomo che li svegli’, and whilst Carlo comes the closest, even he was ‘spaventosamente lontano’ (p. 87). For a few minutes, one evening, when they have both drunk too much and dance together, Zangrandi is aware of

il braccio di un uomo vivo che ti strappa e ti getta in aria, come uscire da una realtà tremenda ed entrare in un'altra, finalmente, una che urge, si rinnova e diventare piedi, gambe che vanno, essere un pezzo di suono vestito di muscoli che si agita sulla pista. (p. 128)

But when the music and dancing stop, it is as if neither have any life to return to: ‘anch’io affondavo ed affogavo in quella sera in cui sedevo con Carlo sulla banchina del pilone e non mi restava più nemmeno il corpo, perché se mi fosse restato avrei cercato di dargli quello’ (p. 189–90). Carlo gives in to this condition and commits suicide. Anna, aware of the possibility of ‘waking up’, yet unable to do so, remains half-alive and half-dead, as it were, looking to Leo, her friend’s child, who is ‘vivo, meravigliosamente vivo’ (p. 131) for the life that she lacks.

Thus in *Il campo rosso* Zangrandi links a number of different periods, creating a text and subtext that interplay to produce an account of a self that is alienated from its immediate surroundings despite the communal life that she is apparently living, and an internal life that is just as real, although anchored in different periods and in dreams and imagination. Moreover, it is an autobiography that is used to link the personal world of her imagination and the history and fables of the Cadore. She is not just living in her own, individual past, but identifies with women through the ages in these mountains. Thus this work is also about the women of the Cadore and it allows Zangrandi to show that she belongs to a local, and specifically female, tradition. Indeed, it could be said that she uses *Il campo rosso* to write herself into such a tradition.

If autobiography is manipulated to this extent and the boundaries between fiction, history and autobiography are blurred in this way, what remains of the idea

that autobiography represents the life of its author? In what sense can Zangrandi's autobiographical writings really be said to correspond to her lived experience? For that matter, how may biography, especially a biography based partly on autobiographical texts, be said to correspond to the life on which it is supposedly based? Or, quite simply, is there no such correspondence? Such questions presuppose the possibility of a referential literature and of a fixed and unified self 'behind' the autobiography, and recent poststructuralist and psychoanalytic criticism has done much to undermine both assumptions. Paul de Man, writing in 'Autobiography As De-Facement', argues that

we assume that life *produces* the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium? ('The Rhetoric of Fiction', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67–81 (p. 69))

According to such a view, the very aspiration to move beyond the text to knowledge of the self and the world is an illusion, as the text is seen as a linguistic structure that refers only to itself, and the self is not an entity that exists in itself but rather a provisional construct of language that depends on others for its existence. In this sense, autobiography is just like any other text.

However, many critics have been keen to uphold the distinction between autobiography and other literary genres, whilst trying to take account of the contribution of recent criticism. James Olney, in his book *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), comes to the conclusion not that the self is a fiction, but that it expresses itself by the metaphors it creates and projects: 'We know it by those metaphors. We do not see or touch the self, but we do see and touch its metaphors' (p. 34). However, Olney does not really provide a solution, for if we know it only by its metaphors, how can we be certain that there is a self which exists beyond those metaphors? If we can perceive no reality beyond these metaphors then surely they just come to

mean the same thing as the linguistic constructs mentioned above? These debates about the status of the self and of autobiography have particular significance for another area of studies: feminist criticism and historiography.

## Women and Autobiography

As mentioned above, women's autobiographies have been seen as particularly significant for feminist historians, literary critics, and, indeed, biographers, precisely because women's writings and the details of women's lives have tended to be dismissed as unimportant. Women's diaries and autobiographies are a very important resource and the idea that such works exist only as texts, and cannot theoretically be related back to a real life 'behind' them, is deeply unattractive to the critic who is concerned above all to show that women's lives have a value, despite their absence in histories, and have often been misjudged, stereotyped or ignored. Indeed, it has been the aim of feminist history to show that another version of history exists. This has been done by showing that conventional histories have excluded women and, whilst giving the pretence of being the whole story, have in fact only given a partial view. It has also been shown that women have had to contend, whether consciously or not, with a historically determined view of what they are and can be. This may have a number of effects on the way that women see themselves and thus on the way that they write.<sup>6</sup> When women who have flouted the accepted conventions of their time have proceeded to write about their lives, they have been described as 'writing against the grain' of what is accepted as realistic and true. Susan Stanford Friedman, discusses this issue in her paper 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice' (in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. S. Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34–62):

The self constructed in women's autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness — an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny [...] Alienation from the historically imposed image

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<sup>6</sup>In Chapter Five these issues will be discussed with particular reference to Zangrandi's published diary of the Resistance *I giorni veri* and the experiences of women in that period.

of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. (p. 41)

Friedman shows some mistrust of the idea that autobiography is simply a reflection of the author's life and talks instead of 'constructing' a self, yet, at the same time, she supports the idea that autobiography by women constitutes a separate category and gives us access to an alternative point of view; a view of lives and history that cannot be found in works by men. Flora Bassanese has also drawn attention to alternative archetypal patterns and standard literary motifs that may be found in women's writing, and that are significantly different from those found in works by men ('*Una donna: Autobiography as Exemplary Text*' in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, ed. by Ada Testaferri (Toronto: Dovehouse, 1989), pp. 131–152).

Other critics are more sceptical about what women can say about themselves in autobiography. Whilst continuing to accord autobiography a different status from other literary genres, seeing it as an expression of the self, they use Lacanian ideas about the nature of language and consciousness in order to describe that self and suggest that, in their writing too, women cannot escape marginalization. Benstock writes that 'as Jacques Lacan has noted, the "mirror stage" of psychic development that initiates the child into the social community and brings it under the law of the Symbolic (the law of language as constituted through society) serves up a false image of the child's unified "self"' ('Authorizing the Autobiographical', p. 12). In her view, the traditional autobiography seeks to maintain this false image of unity. For Georges Gusdorf, she writes, autobiography is a mirror in which the author reflects his own image, and, she adds, 'in such a mirror the "self" and the "reflection" coincide'. However, she says,

this definition of autobiography overlooks what might be the most interesting aspect of the autobiographical: the measure to which 'self' and 'self-image' might not coincide, can never coincide in language — not because certain forms of self-writing are not self-conscious enough but because they have no investment in creating a cohesive self over time. ('Authorizing the Autobiographical', p. 15)

Whilst 'those whose assignment under the Symbolic law is to *represent* authority, to represent the phallic power that drives inexorably toward unity, identity,

sameness' (p. 15) 'cling' to a definition of autobiography in which the self is 'organic', women, on the other hand, 'question such authority' and have different interests. Rather than what she sees as a typically male idea of the unified self, Benstock writes instead of a different conception of the self, of the 'fissures of female discontinuity' and the way that 'the self that would reside at the center of the text is decentred — and often is absent altogether — in women's autobiographical texts' (p. 20). Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck have echoed this view, and, to some extent counter Friedman's idea of a group consciousness amongst women (see above), maintaining that, 'the (masculine) tradition of autobiography, beginning with Augustine, had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as spokesman for the community'. On the other hand, 'no mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation — social and political as well as psychic' (*Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 1). Feminist critics have also emphasized the linguistic marginality of women and have expressed a distrust of a language that they consider to be patriarchal and therefore unable to convey women's voices. They are then left with the dilemma that women's voices need to be heard, but cannot be. It has been claimed that one solution to this would be for women to find their own language, or own form of autobiography. This can present further problems when the way that one critic describes a possible women's autobiography sounds prescriptive and inaccurate to another critic. In this way, women's autobiography has been seen as a valid source, in a compromise between an acceptance of the view that the self is a fictional construct and the idea that autobiography can also be the conduit for women's voices, whilst opinions have varied as to the extent that women's voices have been mediated by a male view of themselves and male language and literary form. What is important about the approach of many feminists to autobiography, however, is the way that it has challenged some preconceptions about autobiography and stressed the importance of cultural norms and historical context, whilst recognizing the provisional nature of all autobiography.

In her autobiography, Zangrandi does object at times to the limitations placed on her because she is a woman, and, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the effects of these limitations can also be seen in the way she writes about herself. As will be seen, it is possible to identify contradictions and silences in her work that Benstock might describe as 'fissures of female discontinuity'. Yet, in her writing, she can also be seen to do a great deal to create the sense of a unified self. Rather than occupying an entirely different, marginalized position, Zangrandi's writing is more accurately described as a negotiation between her position as a woman and the world of men, between the private and the public. In her writing she describes a life that did not correspond to any stereotypes regarding the way that women lead their lives. Yet, at the same time, she uses her writing to position herself within the prevailing traditions. Sections of her life are delimited by the traditional, and according to some feminist critics typically male, markers such as wars and nationwide political change. Her interpretation of history is very traditional in some ways, in its heroism and patriotism that equates the battles of the Resistance with those of the *Risorgimento*, as described in Chapter Five. As will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, her writing can be seen as an attempt to carve out a place for herself within that tradition, and, more specifically, within the particular traditions that she identifies as proper to the people of the Cadore. And yet, in her hands, this regional tradition is also a female tradition. For Zangrandi always writes about women, from a woman's point of view, and shows that a female perspective raises different issues and tells a different story. Moreover, as has been noted with reference to *Il campo rosso*, and as will be discussed further in later chapters, when she uses her writing to find her own place within the traditions of the *cadorini*, it is often a specifically female tradition that is implied. Zangrandi's approach to autobiography does not seem to fit in with any archetypal descriptions of writing by women or men. As for her attitude to herself, Zangrandi has a strong sense of her own identity, but does admit that there are unconscious influences at play, and that her identity has evolved over time. Nevertheless, as shown above, she takes it for granted that autobiography is a separate genre and that she is able, in her writing, to give a faithful representation of the past.

## The Narrative Self

Paul John Eakin, writing about autobiography by men and women, attempts to negotiate a middle path between stating that the self does not exist and treating autobiography as referential. In his work *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), he does maintain that ‘autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, and that the self at the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure’ (p. 3). However, a few pages later, he suggests that

instead of debating the old either/or proposition — whether the self is a transcendental category preceding language in the order of being, or else a construct of language brought into being by it — it is preferable to conceptualize the relation between the self and language as a mutually constituting interdependency, for study of early human development reveals an intimate and necessary linkage between the acquisition of language and the emergence of self-awareness. (p. 8)

In a later work, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Eakin develops this idea further. The self may be a fiction, but, he asserts, it is a necessary fiction. In support of this idea, he refers to the work of the psychologist Oliver Sacks: ‘What his case studies teach us’, Eakin explains, ‘is that possession of some operative concept of identity is absolutely essential for our survival as functioning human beings’ and that, therefore, he sees ‘the self-invention that takes place in the autobiographical act as obeying an existential imperative’ (p. 189). He also regards the use of a narrative form as significant. Rather than agreeing with those feminist critics and psychoanalytic critics who have called for new forms of autobiography, in order to get closer to our experience of living, Eakin tends instead towards the view that narration itself is a mode of consciousness and that the self is narratively structured. Although, he says, he does not mean this in any prescriptive way, it is simply that

as far as autobiography is concerned, it would be a mistake to argue that narrative form is either entirely ‘natural’ or entirely arbitrary.

Narrative in autobiography is always a retrospective imposition on remembered experience, but the choice of narrative is justified by its roots in that experience (p. 197)

Thus, Eakin puts forward the view that it is a human tendency to make sense of experience through chronological accounts and story-telling. In fact, as will be discussed later, Zangrandi herself attached considerable importance to story-telling, as a means of understanding oneself and one's cultural history, and had a great interest in the way that story and history intermingle. This has already been seen in the way that Zangrandi describes the process of history becoming stories that people tell each other. In *Anni con Attila* (1966), she refers to a period in her own past that is 'ormai remoto', and, for this reason it has become the stuff of stories and is "da raccontare" (p. 99) and *Il campo rosso* also suggests a merging of history and fable. As will be shown, in all her autobiographical work there are elements of fiction, just as she always gives her fictional works a defined historical context. (In Chapter Four this will be discussed with reference to realism in her fictional work *I Brusaz*.) According to Eakin's view, we are obliged to invent a self, in life as in autobiography, just as we have no alternative to using language to describe that self. The experimental autobiography that deliberately includes lapses, repetitions and contradictions, and 'feminist autobiography' with less emphasis on closure, may bear a closer resemblance to the randomness of everyday life (or perhaps to the way that women experience life), but it is hard to see that such approaches involve any less of an imposition of form. The use of chronological narrative, with all its faults, on the other hand, does seem to bear some relation to the way that the human mind makes sense of experience and communicates it to others through memory and story-telling.

### **Writing Zangrandi's Biography**

It should be pointed out that autobiography is no more limited than any other attempt to describe the past. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the other sources of information for Zangrandi's biography cannot be used uncritically either and they are subject to just the same difficulties: they are all subject to an

imposition of form and involve the construction of a self. The personal documents that Zangrandi left provide some very useful details, and, as documents, may seem to present fewer problems, but they inevitably give a partial picture, dictated by what Zangrandi herself decided to keep and by what happened to be passed on rather than lost.<sup>7</sup> The information that may be found in the introductions to her published works and in the blurbs is also subject to a certain bias. The content of these descriptions of Zangrandi's life must have been partially dependent on the image of herself that she wished to project, but, above all, they would have been dictated by the publisher and formulated in such a way as to be of interest to a prospective reader. (Of course, the publisher also has an influence on what appears in the final printed version of a text, so, for that reason too, no autobiography is simply the 'voice' of its author).

Testimonies from people who knew Zangrandi raise some different issues. Despite strenuous efforts it has not been possible to find people who knew her before the Second World War and her involvement in the Resistance. This means that for the first thirty years or so of her life, there are no alternative accounts to set alongside Zangrandi's version of events. Moreover, testimonies, like autobiography and oral accounts, are by their very nature subjective. For many people, she is still identified with the period of the Resistance, and attitudes towards her are inevitably coloured by more general attitudes to the Resistance.<sup>8</sup> Her activities during that period are quite widely known, whilst her early and late years had remained obscure. In the latter years of her life she had no relatives with whom she was in contact. She had a cousin, Antonio Bevilacqua, but did not get on with him and, according to her friend Arturo Fornasier, resented the fact that he was summoned to her when she was very ill, during the last years of her life.<sup>9</sup> Very few

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<sup>7</sup>These documents include correspondence with magazines, newspapers and publishers, scientific studies including her *tesi di laurea* and other university work, certificates of the sale of land (sold by Zangrandi), gun licence, income tax forms and insurance documents, birth certificate along with her diaries and typescripts of her fiction and autobiography. They are all in the possession of her friend, Arturo Fornasier, Pieve di Cadore.

<sup>8</sup>The fact that this biographer carried out much of her research at the Istituto Storico della Resistenza Bellunese, and made some contacts through the Institute, would also have given a certain bias, even taking account of the fact that the Institute is now concerned with all aspects of local history.

<sup>9</sup>A letter sent by me to Antonio Bevilacqua was not answered.

other people seem to have got to know her intimately. Fornasier has commented that she was a solitary figure who did not allow many people to get close to her. He also points out that she did have a close friend in a woman called Gigliola Rosà, but that this friend died a couple of years after Zangrandi. Thus testimonies from friends and acquaintances are necessarily restricted; they often refer to quite a brief period of her life and, like any account of any person, they reflect the attitudes both of the individual concerned and those which prevail in the wider community. Once more, an important aspect of the way that Zangrandi has been described is the whole question of attitudes towards women. Just as women are influenced by cultural norms in the way that they write about themselves, so such received ideas affect the way that women are described. The fact that Zangrandi led such an unusual life for a woman is bound to be interpreted in rather different ways, according to one's opinions and preconceptions about what women are and do. The accounts of Zangrandi provided by these other sources are also subject to the same issues of the imposition of form, the limitations of language and the workings of memory, even if they have not been composed in the same way as a literary work. Thus Zangrandi's autobiographical writings may be set alongside other sources and compared with them, but the usual hierarchical approach that sets historical documents above autobiography as sources of historical fact needs to be qualified.

### **The Autobiographical Pact**

There also remains the formal problem of differentiating between fiction and autobiography. Readers and critics (and, indeed, bookshops) continue to treat novels and autobiographies as two different genres, but is this mere convention? Philippe Lejeune has suggested that the difference lies in a kind of pact that is established between the author and the reader. A work is autobiographical when the author claims that the work is true and suggests that there is identity between the narrator and protagonist of the work and the name on the cover. The reader will then read the work as corresponding to historical fact, unless it seems clear that the author is using the first person and this claim to truth merely as a device

for greater realism. There are grey areas of course, where it is not at all clear if the work is to be read as truth or fiction, but this surely corresponds to the way we actually *do* read autobiography. Thus Lejeune proposes a reader-centred approach; it is the reader who will respond differently to a work that he or she believes to be autobiographical. Naturally, such an approach allows for different interpretations as readers react and understand differently. As Lejeune explains, according to his view, autobiography may be defined as ‘un mode de lecture autant qu’un type d’écriture, c’est un *effet contractuel* historiquement variable’ (*Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Le Sellier, 1975), p. 45).

It is Lejeune’s definition of autobiography that I intend to use in the next chapter, and throughout this thesis, in order to differentiate between fiction and autobiography in Zangrandi’s writing. It should be noted that this definition involves the inclusion of works that others would exclude. For example, critics in the past have described autobiography as a whole life-story, from birth to death, and none of Zangrandi’s works fall into this category. As has been noted, all her works have different emphases and different time-spans. Her work would not fit in with definitions that insist that autobiography concentrates purely on the writer’s own life. The focal point of Zangrandi’s work changes; at times she is very inward-looking and her writing amounts to an examination of her own psychology, whilst at other times she is far more concerned with the historical events that she witnessed and she writes about them from the point of view of a witness, rather than judging their importance only in terms of the effect they had on her own life. Indeed, sometimes she claims that she is no longer really aware of her ‘self’. She is not concerned simply with the story of her own life: her interests also lie with the life of the community in which she lived, most particularly with the women in that community. However, all these works referred to in this section establish some kind of pact with the reader. As stated earlier, *I giorni veri* is the only work where there is an unequivocal claim to truth, but the other works taken into consideration here form a pact by making the narrator/protagonist a woman of the same age as Zangrandi and whose biographical details agree with those in the blurb, where it exists. In stories in *Anni con Attila* and *Gente alla Palua*, although she is given

no first name, we learn that the surname of the narrator/protagonist is Zangrandi, whilst in the other works, she is called Anna (Giovanna Zangrandi's *nom de guerre*, and obviously related to the name Giovanna). A comparative approach to all her published works reinforces this 'pact' as they complement each other and together form an uncontradictory account of her life. It is interesting to note that the other works do not contradict what she writes in *I giorni veri*, the work she claims is completely true. Obvious contradictions and ambiguities only arise when these published works are compared with other accounts.

Chapter Two will look at the versions of her life that Zangrandi gives in her published autobiographies as well as her unpublished writing. It will consider the particular context in which she was writing and her apparent motivations. Her accounts will be placed alongside other sources whose context and point of view will be examined in the same way. This does not aim to be the definitive account; indeed, by its nature it must remain ambiguous. As will be seen, there are a number of contradictions that remain and, even if more evidence were to emerge, there would be no means of arriving at *the* true and complete story of Zangrandi's life. The aim here will be to examine the way that Zangrandi writes about the past, to establish the shape that she gave to her life in her writing, the self that she constructs, and to use other sources to throw this into relief. In this way, it is possible to gain a number of insights into her writing and give an overview of her life as it exists through the sources that remain and are available at this particular time.

In constructing the first chronological account of her life, Chapter Two will split the 'double' (or 'triple') narrative of her autobiography, and discuss first her childhood and then her adult years. In the first half of the chapter, it tells a 'story' about Zangrandi's life, just as she has told stories about it. The difference here is that it is based on a number of points of view and its form is dictated by the biographer, rather than the autobiographer, although the divisions into separate periods that she imposed on her life in her writing are largely taken up in this account. However, it will not lose sight of the fact that an account of her childhood must at the same time be an account of the adult protagonist through

whom these memories are filtered, and of the 'narrating self'. An important part of Zangrandi's life from the 1950s onwards was devoted to looking back to the past and writing about it. The death of her mother, for example, is significant not only for the period in which it happened, but also for the latter period when it was 'relived', as it were, and finds its way into her writing so often. In some ways, Zangrandi's writing is her life; not only was writing a major activity in her life, and an important element in forming her self image, but also, given the reasons explained above, for many aspects, it is the only access we have to that life. For this reason, the second half of Chapter Two looks at Zangrandi's life thematically, to give a more accurate picture of the 'life' that Zangrandi created for herself in her writing. It must not be forgotten that the context and approach of the biographer is equally important, and a biography written by a feminist literary critic of the 1990s inevitably takes on its own shape, just as Zangrandi moulded her own autobiography.

## Chapter Two: Biography of Giovanna Zangrandi

### A Chronological Reconstruction

#### Childhood

Whilst Zangrandi's life in the early 1950s and her activities during the war became well known, her early years remained rather more mysterious. Gian Carlo Ferretti's anthology *L'Italia raccontata: pagine scelte dal 1922 a oggi* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987), which contains Zangrandi's short story 'Più niente', states that she was born in 1910 in Salce, a *frazione* of Belluno (in the Veneto), as does the most recent reference to her life in the *Dizionario della letteratura italiana del Novecento* edited by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1992). On the other hand, the blurb on *I Brusaz* (1955), like that on the much later work *Il diario di Chiara* (1972), mentions no birthplace, but describes Zangrandi as 'cadorina di adozione'. According to the card sent out when she died, she was indeed born in 1910 (13 June), and it is certainly true that, for many years, she was a familiar figure in the villages of the Cadore (the mountainous area of the Veneto, north of Belluno). In the immediate pre-war years she worked in Cortina d'Ampezzo, and she spent most of the rest of her life in Borca di Cadore, a village between Cortina and Pieve di Cadore. However, as her birth certificate shows, she was not born in this area, but rather in Galliera, in Emilia Romagna. Moreover, as school and university documents show, she spent her adolescence and early adulthood in Bologna, and, as will be discussed later, she did not move to the Veneto until rather later (most probably 1937).<sup>10</sup> In her diary 'Capodanno 1955', she describes her attachment to the Cadore and its mountains, saying 'credo che siano secoli (e non anni solamente) che è il mio mondo', even if she was not born there, 'cosa conta se dicono che non ci nacqui, il mio sangue era quello, inevitabilmente e fatalmente, balle, esserci nati o no' (p. 59).

Her birth certificate and other documents (such as medical certificates and insurance documents) also show that her real name was not Giovanna Zangrandi,

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<sup>10</sup>These documents may be found in the *Archivio Storico* of the University of Bologna.

but Alma Bevilacqua (on some documents it is shown erroneously as Alda Bevilacqua). In her published writing and even in her diaries, she refers to herself almost exclusively as Giovanna Zangrandi or Anna (her *nom de guerre* of the Resistance, which continued to be used by friends who had got to know her in that period), but there is one reference in her diaries to the fact that it was not her name. Arturo Fornasier and Lino De Luca do not recognize it as a local name, but Zangrandi was clearly of the opinion that it was. Writing in her diary one evening about Attila (the Hun, not her dog of the same name) and the ‘Tartari del Comelico’, she says that, at that moments, she really feels she belongs to an ancient race of barbarians, the ancestors of the people now living in the Cadore, with her ‘viso come i tartari’ and adds ‘stasera mi sento davvero Giovanna Zangrandi, nome comelicano’ (‘Capodanno 1955’, p. 175). In this way, she seems to have chosen this name specifically for what she perceived as its local connections.

As has been noted, there is very little information available regarding Zangrandi’s childhood beyond what she has written herself. Friends and acquaintances who are still alive date from later periods of her life. Fornasier and De Luca, for example, both met her during the Resistance.<sup>11</sup> They recall that she was originally from Emilia Romagna and that she moved to the Cadore as an adult, with her mother, some time after the death of her father, but they know very little of her life before her arrival in the Veneto. Amongst the documents she left behind (all now in the possession of Arturo Fornasier), there is nothing that refers to the years between her birth and university. In her published writing, however, she often writes about her childhood, especially in the collections *Anni con Attila* and *Gente alla Palua*, where a number of the stories are based on childhood anecdotes. In fact, the title *Gente alla Palua* refers to relatives of hers who were tenants of a large farmhouse and its land. Her childhood and adolescent years are divided into distinct periods: her early years living with both parents in a house in the countryside and paying regular visits to relatives; a period spent living beside Lake Garda; the time spent at a secondary school in an unnamed town. It should be remembered that her childhood is not described anywhere in chronological order

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<sup>11</sup>I interviewed Arturo Fornasier and Lino De Luca together on 16 February 1992.

(unlike the periods covered by *I giorni veri* and *Il campo rosso*), but different, sometimes overlapping aspects of it are referred to in different stories. The reader is left to piece together scraps of information from various stories.

Zangrandi describes herself as a lively and energetic child who loves being outside and riding a bicycle or climbing trees. She describes herself as rather ugly and tomboyish, but is rather proud of her own strength and of being a little wild. At the same time, she has a very well developed imagination and her mind is full of romantic adventures. She has an affectionate relationship with both her parents, who are described, however, as rather unhappy, if stoical in their sadness. They are suffering partly a result of being socialist at a time when fascism was taking hold in Italy. The story 'Il cortile assediato' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 99–145) gives a vivid illustration of the dangers of the time and of the courage that her parents, her mother in particular, had to show. Nevertheless, a more pressing cause for sadness is her father's illness. A country vet, when able to work, his ailment is never specified, but there are frequent references to its debilitating effect. Indeed, he rarely appears in her writing without the fact that he was ill also being mentioned. His physical decline is a source of considerable emotional pain for his daughter. In 'Mio fratello Nuvolo' (*Gente alda Palua*, pp. 7–23), she writes of the time when her father has offered to give her a foal (which she later names Nuvolo):<sup>12</sup>

nell'entusiasmo mi abbrancai alle sue gambe, poi gli tenni solo le ginocchia: un tempo quando lui era sempre per la condotta a sella, le gambe le aveva come i tronchi dei giovani frassini, ora mi pareva di appoggiarmi alle gambe di mia madre e mi dava un oscuro senso di malessere sentirle così allentate in mio padre, un uomo, uno come Fanfulla o gli altri delle figure che ammiravo ('Mio fratello Nuvolo' pp. 8–9).

In 'Il cortile assediato', Zangrandi describes a period when she tried to escape the sadness of her own family and would spend as much time as possible with her parents' tenants and their baby:

se qualcuno mi avesse detto: 'sei affamata d'amore tra la gente' mi sarei messa a ridere e avrei berciato ch'erano baggianate, si sarebbe

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<sup>12</sup>In Zangrandi's diary 'Capodanno 1955', she refers to a pony named Cirro that she had as a child (p. 55).

forse incrinata la felicità spettacolosa che mi davano la Bianca in collo o gli occhi amici di Clelia, la presenza e lo scambio di amore con gente sana, non ammalata come era mio padre (p.118)

Even when her father is feeling rather better and she is able to go out with him on his rounds as a vet in their horse-drawn carriage, her natural enthusiasm must be curbed for she has to remember that he is an invalid: ‘a me sarebbe piaciuto sferzar di redini la cavalla, andar forte, “come il vento”, ma mio padre non voleva, diceva che i sussulti gli facevano tornare i dolori’ (*Anni con Attila*, p. 119).

The illness of her father, and the fact that she was an only child, meant that she was often left to amuse herself. This lack of companionship seems to have weighed heavily on her. She does describe some friends, such as Pieritt in ‘Il ponte del Gar’ (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 69–98), and her gang of friends as a small child in ‘Camera 32’ (*Racconti partigiani e no*, p. 7–11), but other relationships that she describes with children her age are rather more fraught. In ‘Il cortile assediato’, a girl at her school insults her father for being a socialist and she responds by attacking her physically. Commenting upon this fight, she says, ‘alla selvaggia e incredibile baruffa con la Mariotta attribuiamo una notevole importanza, un valore quasi eroico. Mia madre aveva severamente deplorato quella cosa, io invece me l’ero chiusa dentro quasi ammirandomi’ (*Anni con Attila*, p. 114). Far more often she relies on her imagination to compensate and creates her world with made-up friends, as she describes in ‘Mio fratello Nuvolo’:

Era un muro a mezzogiorno, c’era contro un grande rosaio e, per aver dei bambini con cui giocare, ci avevo disegnato dei pupi e ogni tanto mi accucciavo lì e gli parlavo, gli raccontavo delle storie o mi sfogavo e dicevo insolenze. (*Gente alla Palua*, p. 7)

Her childhood imaginary world draws its inspiration from the countryside around her and from books and local mythology. In ‘Il cortile assediato’ (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 99–145), she describes the land around her family house, her imagined kingdom:

Più che cortile era uno spiazzo vasto, un ibrido tra giardino e aia, irregolare; era via di accesso agli orti, ai pollai a un vasto campo terrazzato, alto sul fiume. Era stato il mio regno di infanzia, con vaghe radici in un

periodo eroico in cui vi passarono e sostarono cavalli, carriaggi, soldati ‘veri’ nell’eco di lontani rombi, offensive che facevano tremare terra e aria (p. 99)

Another description finds her up a tree and letting her imagination roam:

Quando mi toglievano tale adorato attrezzo [her bicycle], mi inerpicavo sull’altissimo frassino con l’aiuto di una corda che poi ritiravo: in una biforcazione a sella avevo il mio nido fra la frasca tenera, mi sentivo sicura lassù come in un fortilizio, non avevo paura, dentro al frassino. Da quest’albero proteso sui campi e sul fiume potevo continuare a viaggiare nel sogno, la mia bicicletta andava sempre più veloce e leggera, alata (*Anni con Attila*, p. 90)

Her imagination is not always a refuge from the outside world. In ‘Il ponte del Gar’ (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 69–98), Zangrandi recounts an episode from when she was about eight years old. Until that time, she explains, she had experienced various emotions such as ‘la gioia, la stizza, anche il dolore quando morivano pulcini e coniglietti, quando mio padre era ammalato, conoscevo la noia, se pioveva a lungo, ma non conoscevo veramente la paura’. However, she goes on, ‘da qualche tempo questa specie di fiducia nel mondo che mi contornava, mi aveva abbandonato’ and she puts this down to stories she has been told, suggesting it was the fault of ‘la servetta insipida e superstiziosa, qualche suo racconto balordo, gli occhi tondi e pavidì, gli strillini isterici di certe compagne di scuola e le fantasticherie “magiche” della vecchia Enrica dalla quale andavo a prendere il latte’ (*Anni con Attila*, p. 73). Although this is a passing phase, it seems a significant one to Zangrandi as she tells this story later in life. It is in the telling of episodes such as these that we are particularly aware of the later ‘self’ describing the earlier ‘self’, as described earlier, and the filtering of events through a narrator/protagonist ‘adult Zangrandi’.

A further aspect of her descriptions of this early period of her childhood is particularly revealing, especially when her published writing is compared with her unpublished diaries and other accounts of her life. As has been seen from the sections of her published stories that are quoted above, Zangrandi does give some indications about the area in which she lived as a child, and we gather that it was

rural and hilly. In the short story ‘Gardesana’ (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 229–257), she describes herself and her family as ‘provenienti dal prealpino vallone boschito di noci e di faggi, al limitare di nordiche foreste d’abeti’ (p. 234) and in the same collection, in the story ‘Il cortile assediato’ (pp. 99–145), she suggests that from there they could see ‘le creste nevose delle Alpi Grandi’ (p. 100). Likewise, in the story ‘Il 47° cromosoma’ (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 25–59), she refers to their ‘casa tra le colline’ (p. 47). Given such information, and the context of collections of short stories that include many references to the Dolomites and the *cadorini*, the reader is likely to place her home somewhere in the alpine foothills of the Veneto. There is certainly nothing in her published writing, either in the text or the blurb, that would contradict this assumption. This sits rather oddly with the accounts of Arturo Fornasier and the historian Ferruccio Vendramini, who maintain that she was from Galliera in Emilia Romagna, as, indeed her own documents confirm, a village in the flat plain of the Po valley, and that she only moved to the Cadore as an adult.<sup>13</sup> Given this piece of information, one is inclined to read her stories differently and give greater significance to a story in which the Cadore seems to be mentioned as a holiday destination rather than her family’s place of residence. At the beginning of ‘Estate alla Vissana’ (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 85–100), Zangrandi’s mother decides that she and her daughter will go somewhere different from usual for the Summer and Zangrandi reflects that this must have been partly ‘per strapparmi a una mia ghenga cadorina di rocciatori e alpinisti’ and partly ‘per economizzare soldi’ (p. 85). Given the information regarding Zangrandi’s background referred to above, the idea that she and her family went to the Cadore on holiday inevitably stands out as a truer version of events than that suggested by stories which allow it to be understood that she and her family lived in the Cadore all year round. There remains considerable ambiguity as to where she spent her childhood. Nevertheless, there are a number of passages in her unpublished diaries that are particularly relevant. Even in these diaries, Zangrandi does not mention specific places of her childhood, although she talks a great deal about the places she was living in when

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<sup>13</sup>I had informal discussions with Ferruccio Vendramini, director of the Istituto Storico Bel-lunese della Resistenza, on a number of occasions, during the periods July-August 1990 and November-June 1992–3.

writing the diaries: Cortina d'Ampezzo and Borca di Cadore. What she does mention is the villa where her relatives used to live. In 'Capodanno 1955', there is an interesting reference to what went on in this house and the way that she intends to interpret it:

'La casa degli zii' può essere una trama stupenda e potente, ciclo e romanzo fiume [...] me la devo rosicchiare e darci sotto, la sbatterò fuori a qualunque prezzo, ed il prezzo più greve per me donna ed essere umano, figlia dei miei e della mia famiglia sarà proprio dover camminare nuda nelle pagine e nudi i miei come nelle ossessioni dei sogni, solo denudandoci l'animo possiamo creare personaggi che sono attorno a noi e devo imparare ancora di più ad essere senza pietà verso me stessa se voglio arrivare, [sic] a far bene questo colosso. (p. 22)

This 'denuding' process that she sees as so essential does not mean that she will no longer have any input herself. A few pages later, she refers once more to this projected work based on her family, but here her planned intervention as a writer is made much more explicit:

Nonno Luigi vorrei farlo fuggire da Verona, poco prima del 1848.

Quale potrebbe essere la gretta città degli zii? Padova?

La casa di ricostruiti nonni nel vallone del Piave, la condotta là sul vallone e perchè non far venire dal vallone nonno Luigi? O forse nonno Luigi andò a lavorare là, fornaio a Veona [sic] sono facili baggianate queste da combinarsi. (p. 25)

Her 'nonno Luigi' does not appear in any of her published writing, unlike the 'casa degli zii' which is described in detail in *Gente alla Palua* and *Anni con Attila*, as well as being referred to in *I giorni veri*. Naturally, the notes that she makes in her diary here may well have been referring to some fictional work that she had in mind. Nevertheless, it is interesting that in her published writings, her father's 'condotta' is indeed described as an area very like the 'vallone del Piave', and she also refers on a few occasions to the town where her uncles lived and just gives it the name 'P.'. In an entry marked 'Marzo 17' ('Capodanno 1955', pp. 52–57), she begins by saying that she is attempting to immerse herself in the writing of her second novel *Orsola nelle stagioni*, but, instead:

ritorna tutta la storia e lampi di e per 'Casa degli Zii': *di*, in quanto mi rivelano cose che avevo dimenticate nel modo vissuto del sogno o di un baleno vivo di ricordo che credevi perduto, *per* in quanto che a volte sono stracci nuovi ed inusitati, lampi e figure che sono là, per quella trama e non per altre, ma che mai esistettero nella realtà. (p. 52)

Later in the same entry, she thinks about what really happened at the home of her aunts and uncles and asks:

Cose da recuperare? Sì, certo, la pianta delle camere e le camere segrete della grande fattoria, ma ora la vedo in collina e le querce sono sulla collina, i lecci e vi vedo anche cipressi ed il fiume non è giallo torbido tra aride golene insabbiate, nè contenuto dagli ossessionanti argini delle pianure, ma è azzurro e serpeggiante tra cilestrine Prealpi, tra rive verdi e terrazze come il Piave e la fattoria fu, [sic] è volata così grande su quelle colline, a riva del gran fiume forse, non scarna e gialla, infuocata da rossi tramonti, ma dolce ed ornata come una villa veneta, così, come tante ville venete cadute nei rustici la vedo e bestie e bestie, il cortile pieno, ombra di grandi lecci e querce e cavalli. (p. 55)

This 'alternative' version of the 'grande fattoria' seems to have been the one that Zangrandi preferred when it came to publishing stories on her childhood. Although she changes the geographical setting, the description of the relatives who lived there remains consistent, both in her published and unpublished writing. *Gente alla Palua* seems to be the closest that Zangrandi got to writing a book inspired by 'la casa degli zii'. Not all the short stories in this collection are based on this period of her childhood and this group of relatives, but 'Palua' is the name of the farm where they lived and the four stories that make up the 'parte prima' of the collection have some reference to this period. The story 'Il 47° cromosoma' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 25–59) gives the most detail about her relatives. This story, like others mentioned above, takes the form of reminiscences on the part of an adult Zangrandi, sparked off by the surprise visit of her father's brother, Peter Zangrandi, who used to live at the Palua before going off to America. The Palua was 'la reggia di una tenuta di una quindicina di poderi dei Conti Roale,' and, as she explains, the 'fattori e reggitori da anni o da secoli erano gente della famiglia di mio padre' (p. 28). Her father and uncle came from a large family:

Il prolifico nonno, conforme ai dettami del parroco, da una sfinita moglie, in breve arco di anni, aveva avuto ben dodici figli, alcune coppie di gemelli, la prima coppia erano zio Gianni e mio padre, poi venivano due femmine, zia Onorina e zia Zelinda, un'altra coppia di gemelli, innominabili con maniaco tabù, erano ricoverati a vita in manicomio: schizofrenia irreparabile. Poi c'erano quattro scapoli erano assieme in città con una avviata azienda. Il penultimo figlio era questo americano Peter e l'ultimo zio Angelo, viziato questi, come nato addirittura dopo la morte del padre. (p. 29)

It is interesting to compare this information with the list of names and dates that appear on the family tomb in the cemetery in Galliera, Emilia Romagna. The grandparents are listed first: Giuseppe Bevilacqua (4 May 1824 – 21 March 1890) and Elisa Merli (11 March 1845 – 14 March 1914). The children are then listed in the order of their deaths. Here it is more convenient to consider them in the order in which they were born: Angiolina (1 February 1874 – 13 August 1944); Antonio (1 February 1874 – 7 October 1918); Gaetano (21 June 1875 – 12 September 1923) (Giovanna Zangrandi's father); Alberto (4 December 1876 – 9 December 1918); Maria (2 September 1878 – 20 October 1931); Giovanni (27 December 1879 – 4 March 1957); Luisa (15 April 1883 – 15 November 1933); Agostino (15 April 1883 – 10 August 1902); Ferdinando (14 August 1889 – 29 March 1936). The wife of Antonio, Elisabetta Vicini (11 August 1882 – 17 March 1967), also appears, as does Zangrandi's mother, Maria Tardini (11 June 1877 – 30 October 1937). The first obvious difference between Zangrandi's version and the evidence provided by the tomb (beyond the fact that she has, of course, changed the names) is that nine children are listed rather than twelve. There were indeed two sets of twins, but not in the order suggested in *Gente alla Palua*. Instead, the first-born Angiolina and Antonio were twins as were the penultimate Luisa and Agostino. Zangrandi's father, Gaetano, was not a twin. It can also be seen that the last son was not born after his father's death, nevertheless, he was only born some seven months before it. Thus there are a number of similarities, such as the fact that the family was large, there are two sets of twins and her father was the second son, but, at the same time, it is clear that Zangrandi used considerable artistic licence in describing her family. Nevertheless, it does seem clear that 'Gianni' was based on

her uncle Antonio, and 'Angelo' corresponds to Ferdinando. It seems reasonable to assume that the sisters 'Onorina' and 'Zelinda' are Angiolina and Maria, with the third sister, Luisa, belonging to the set of twins who are 'innominabili con maniaco tabù' (perhaps it is relevant here that Luisa's twin, Agostino, died at the age of only nineteen). On the other hand, as 'Zelinda' is described as a widow, she might be based on a sister who does not appear in the list of names on the tomb because she was buried with her husband. 'Peter' would have to be either Giovanni or Alberto. However, neither really fit because the story 'Il 47° cromosoma' describes 'Peter' returning from America after the war to visit, whereas Alberto died in 1919 and Giovanni must be the uncle mentioned in *I giorni veri* (see later) who was living in Padua during the war. 'Peter' could just as easily be entirely fictional, or based on both brothers, of course. It is certainly true that Zangrandi never refers elsewhere to a relative who had gone to America, and that 'Peter' can be seen as a very convenient fictional device for initiating memories of the past in 'Il 47° cromosoma'. Thus, once more, Zangrandi's writing can be seen to be a mixture of truth and fiction; she takes elements from her real life, in order to recreate them in her fiction. What is perhaps most telling is the way she chooses to describe her family.

In 'Il 47° cromosoma', Zangrandi gives further information about her family. Of her father's siblings, she says, the two sisters (one unmarried and one a widow, but both childless), and her uncle Gianni lived at the Palua. She and her parents would visit and she in particular would be made very welcome: 'gli zii della Palua mi volevano molto bene' (p. 30). Although the house and its land did not belong to them, it is made very clear that her relatives were sufficiently well-off to lead a comfortable life (and rather more comfortable than her own parents). Not that they were necessarily happy. The reader is told that her aunt Onorina as a girl was 'assai bella, gaia e vivace', but that following some operation, 'che si nominava senza specificare', became 'zia Norina, di sicuro zitellaggio, grassa, pelosa, con infiniti rametti strambi, cerimoniali e manie che appesantivano — e amareggiavano — l'esistenza di lei e degli altri' (p. 29).

The fact that the family never referred to the two schizophrenics nor to Onori-

na's operation is interpreted as typical of their bourgeois attitudes. In the same way, it emerges that Peter has had a relationship with the Contessa and the family reacts by keeping it as quiet as possible, and certainly never mentioning it in front of the young Anna. It is the aunts who come in for most criticism in this respect, and they are censured even more strongly for their subservience to the 'Conti':

Il *Signor* Conte, la *Signora* Contessa, il Contino: le zie nominandoli, sibilavano le *esse* per fare più fino, parlando di loro usavano lingua e non dialetto, cercavano parole difficili e facevano naturalmente ameni strafalcioni, c'era in loro una eco di medievali sottomissioni valvassine. (p. 31-2)

Her parents object to their attitude, she says, but at the Palua they make no comment. Once they get home, however, her father comments, 'Quelle due è inutile riprenderle, hanno mentalità feudale fino in fondo, per loro non c'è stata nemmeno la rivoluzione francese' (p. 32). Although her parents have to admit that even the much more sympathetic Gianni 'si mette sull'attenti davanti al conte' (p. 32). The repressive attitudes of Zangrandi's relatives are linked explicitly to the mental illness that manifested itself in their family. For not only were there the two schizophrenics and Onorina with her 'manie' and fear of microbes, but her uncle Angelo also seemed to be affected. He is described as 'bellino, elegantissimo, profumato, folleggiante e odioso'. It is apparently after an argument between him and his brother Peter, that the latter ends up being falsely accused and put in prison and then ordered out of the country by the rest of the family. After this time, Zangrandi recounts, Angelo suffered from a 'forma di mania persecutoria sempre più grave' (p. 42). Zangrandi might have been exaggerating in her descriptions of her relatives, but she does suggest, in her diary 'Capodanno 1955', that the suicide of her father had something to do with this family illness: 'fu un malato infine, tarato veramente fisiologicamente dalla parte delle ereditarietà congenite di pazzia' (p. 105). As will be discussed later, Zangrandi's interest in inherited characteristics takes a particularly important place in her writing.

As has been seen earlier, Zangrandi refers to this period in her diaries, and she mentions this aspect of her father's family there too; her relatives are described as 'gretti, malati e pazzi' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 23). Here too she links this with their

bourgeois attitudes, mentioning the way that her mother was ‘scostata e nauseata dal servilismo delle cognate’ and ‘si vedeva umiliato e distrutto nei suoi effetti in questi papalini residui di feudalismo da valvassini’ (p. 55). Indeed, she even describes her father’s death as ‘il suo crollare borghese’(p. 23). She also mentions her fear that their afflictions may be hereditary: ‘sono figlia di una razza stanca, di morti giovani, di tarati, di artritici e cardiaci ed a volte sono stanca, penso a quanta gioia si prova quando vi si può addormentare per sempre’ (p. 42).

In ‘Il 47° cromosoma’ she describes the way that this world of the Palua fell apart, when her uncle Gianni died and her aunts moved to the town. Zangrandi and her mother were to move to this same town when her father died, but before that, she describes a period she spent living on the shores of Lake Garda, a move prompted by her father’s illness. It is not clear to what extent she and her parents continued to visit the farm during this period, although, in ‘Il 47° cromosoma’ she does suggest that her uncle Angelo’s interference was at least partly responsible for her father’s death.

The period spent by Lake Garda does not feature much in Zangrandi’s writing, but there is one short story devoted to it in the collection *Anni con Attila: ‘La Gardesana’* (pp. 229–257). Once more, the story is framed within a later event: many years later, as an adult, Zangrandi is driving alongside Lake Garda when her car breaks down. She is obliged to stay for a while (as she recounts, using the present tense) and so the scene is set for a reunion with someone she knew as a child and for the recollection of what happened then. This was the place she writes, ‘dove fui per anni di una adolescenza involuta e tardiva’ (p. 230). ‘Non fu un tempo troppo lieto’, she continues, ‘con mio padre che moriva giorno a giorno e mia madre impegnata in una sua lotta sconosciuta perché ciò non fosse’ (p. 230). And yet, she still has some good memories of her father from this time: ‘il suo vero diletto e la sua bravura, certamente anche passatempo, specie nei lunghi giorni in cui non poteva uscire, era ripassarmi, commentarmi l’italiano’ and ‘se c’era il sole uscivamo assieme [...] ci mettevamo a leggere, a ripassare sulla riva del lago’ (p. 231). Zangrandi mentions her father’s death elsewhere, in her diaries, as referred to above, and in other short stories, but it is never more than a brief

mention. Here she gives a little more detail:

Poi mio padre morì, lo volle lui, stanco di vivere male e ce ne andammo di là, io e mia madre, noi due sole. (Non si parlava della *cosa* successa, lei credeva di avermi ingannato e io invece sapevo. Tacevo, cosa conta chiedere? Forse chiedendo lo facevo tornar vivo?). (p. 232)

There is also a further reference here to the way that she claims to have blocked certain memories out of her mind and then unearthed them later (and then recalled them later still, when writing the short story):

Quegli anni della mia adolescenza gardesana rimasero come sepolti. O forse ero stata io stessa a volerli seppellire; nel mio silenzio covavo come un rancore sottile, amaro che lui mi avesse lasciata, non volevo pensare lui e quegli anni, anche per altre cose. (p. 232)

This reference to 'altre cose' introduces what is in fact the main theme of this short story. During her time by Lake Garda she used to play with the nieces of their landlady. One of them, Delfine, came to be particularly important to her. She describes her as she saw her at the time, almost as if she were a film star:

era tanto bella come mai vidi bambina. Le scioglievamo i capelli, lei si rigirava e rimirava nei vetri, il viso fine preludeva la donna, restava immobile, angelico e duro; gli occhi azzurrissimi, grandi e lenti non si sapeva che cosa guardassero (p. 238)

In fact, she describes Delfine as her 'primo amore', but this is a love that is 'strano, chiuso gelosamente e taciuto', especially after she has asked her mother what happens if a woman falls in love with another woman. Her mother's response is completely uncompromising: 'assolutamente no, è una cosa contro natura, non deve assolutamente avvenire' (p. 242). In this way, she explains, 'per settimane, mesi, mi portai appresso l'amore, l'ammirazione incondizionata e morbosa per Delfine' but was extremely careful not to let it show. Although she emphasizes 'la mia infatuazione non aveva nulla di carnale', and suggests that the fact that she kept quiet about it was, perhaps, precisely the 'tranello che mi aveva inespertamente fatto scivolare per quel sentiero, aveva ingigantito una infantile simpatia fino a

una pericolosa sofferenza' (p. 243). Then one day, Delfine and her sisters are playing in the courtyard, along with the little boy belonging to the maid, while Anna watches, unseen from the terrace above. Something happens that completely changes the way she sees Delfine, 'un sentimento segreto che poi finì con un trauma pure segreto: la scenetta del brolo' (p. 243):

Fu Michela che decise di svestirlo, ma non come un bambolotto, si sentiva dal terrazzo la sua risatina eccitata [...] poi gli furono attorno a scoprirne il sesso diverso. Delfine per ultimo si curvò con uno scatto e dal terrazzo ben vedevo, ero sconcertata e la mia mancanza di morbosità mi rendeva più sconcertata ancora. Guardavo ora nel brolo, gli inutili paradigmi arrotolati per terra. Le mani bianche di Delfine.

Poi il ridacchiare delle altre veniva coperto dal pianto del piccolino tormentato. Ma Delfine non lo mollava, armeggiava laggiù, a lungo, al pianto acuto del bimbo reagì infine dandogli un tremendo ceffone, lo rovesciò nelle ortiche e fuggì.

Le altre ora accorrevano a coccolarlo e rivestirlo, timorose d'essere scoperte e punite, si sentiva Delfine gridare alto, non strillo di bimba, ma uno strappato, adulto grido di pazza dentro l'eco dello stanzone del torchio. (p. 244)

After such an experience, an apparently unbearable mixture of adult sexuality and cruelty, Anna's infatuation 's'era sbriciolata così, come un cristallo di parabrezza' (p. 245). When so many years later, Zangrandi finds herself near Lake Garda and, by chance, meets Delfine for the first time since that period, she describes it as a continuation, as it were, of this process of disabusing herself of past illusions. She discovers not only that Delfine was a fascist during the last years of the war and that she was still under the impression that they were 'uomini, stupendi uomini, superuomini al di là del bene e del male' (p. 251), but also that she is now completely on her own and caught up in her own private world of regrets and alcohol. This is a stark example of the way that Zangrandi interpreted people and events differently at different stages in her life. As she comments:

In questa mia vacanza gardesana, non voluta, ma grata e ricca di ricordi vivi e insperati, cose, persone, l'avvenimento più singolare è stato il ritrovamento di Delfine, di quella vera, attuale e di quella di *allora*, idealizzata, amata e distrutta in un mio infantile amore. (p. 239)

It is significant that Zangrandi chose to recount this particular episode and emphasize the aspect of self-discovery by returning to the past, as it were. As will be discussed later, these published writings are also important for the light they throw on the biography of Zangrandi as an adult author. For all these descriptions of her early years also give us valuable information about her interests and priorities at the time of writing these stories: what seemed important to her, the way that she chooses to present certain episodes, the interpretation she puts on events.

### Adolescence and Early Adulthood

There are rather more references to the period just after her father's death (in September 1923, according to the family tomb), when she and her mother moved to the town where her uncles lived. In an autobiographical sketch, on a few sheets of paper amongst her other documents and presumably written for some publisher, Zangrandi comments on this period, and particularly her attitude to her school. She describes her education, with some venom, as something that was forced on her, stifling her natural inclinations:

Avevo fatto degli studi regolari, liceo classico, laurea in chimica, odiando (dopo la quarta ginnasio circa) selvaggiamente la scuola, tutta la sua gente di banchi e di cattedra [...] mi avevano trasferit[a] in una scuola di una città che mi soffocava, tra ragazzi evoluti e corrotti, professori incapaci, aule sordide, vecchie celle senz'aria, banchi che spezzavano la mia schiena di bambina troppo grossa e cresciuta, non si vedeva il cielo altro che dal finestrino dei gabinetti. Avevo professori severissimi in latino, insufficienti in matematica che avrei amato, all'antica, ci oberavano, accoppavano, solo quello d'italiano in liceo ricordo con piacere, un umanista buono, aperto, coltissimo e vivo.

These opinions are echoed frequently in her short stories, longer works and diaries. In 'Il 47° cromosoma' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 85–100), it is made clear that her uncle Angelo 'ci volle tirare in quella città' (p. 43) and that she is suffocated not only by the town and school, but also by her relatives who insist on telling her how to live her life. She compares her adolescence with her early childhood:

l'adolescenza che potrebbe, dovrebbe essere serena se non gioiosa, truffata così e truccata, con una incrostazione precoce di amarezza da

adulta, spiaccicata sopra una non terminata infanzia. L'infanzia era stata un tempo non felice del tutto forse, ma limpido e aperto, il tempo di quando ero un cucciolo nel vallone verde, ampio, di là mi avevano snidata violentemente per chiudermi qui, per impormi le loro fisime, conformismi, schifezze e misteri. (p. 55)

Despite this, there do seem to have been some happy times during this period. For example, from what she says in 'Estate alla Vissana' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 85–100), as mentioned above, this was also the time when she would spend her summer holidays with her mother in the Cadore, doing what she loved most, climbing and walking in the mountains (p. 85–6). Her description of herself at this age is very similar to the way she is described as a young child. She is still a spirited tomboy, playing tricks on fellow pupils at school in 'Il primo della classe e altri' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 188–228) and climbing trees in 'Estate Vissana'. She recognizes later, when writing about it, that this was probably 'un tentativo di rifiuto ad adolescenza e giovinezza, a situazioni ignote che il mio pessimismo congenito definiva spiacevoli' or 'un tentativo di prolungare l'infanzia, il suo mondo sicuro, non impegnativo' (*Gente alla Palua*, p. 89). She continues to see herself as ugly, and in 'Il primo della classe e altri' she imagines the way that the mother of a boy in her class must see her: 'una ragazza piuttosto brutta', but 'robusta e sana' (p. 199). When she is seventeen, her uncle Angelo is put away in a mental hospital, very secretly of course, she says, and he dies soon after. In a story set during the Resistance ('Zilio', *Gente alla Palua*, pp. 71–81), she looks back at this period and admits 'Mi confesso...quando Angelo morì ebbi come un senso di liberazione' (p. 80). She and her mother are now free to move to an apartment that they like and they find 'una specie di soffitta non cara, gelida e stramba, ma simpatica' (p. 59), where at last they can see the sky. In 'La sahariana' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 146–187) she still claims to hate the school but does add: 'veramente non furono anni cattivi, cinque o sei, quelli in cui avemmo quel quartierino di periferia [...] Devo ammetterlo e dovrei ricordarmeli di più' (p. 148). Later in the same collection, in the story 'Il primo della classe e altri' (pp. 188–228), she gives a brief sketch of her school:

era un ginnasio-liceo di una città non grande (preferisco tacerne il nome), due sezioni ogni classe, come spesso era allogato in un ex-

convento, con aule rimediate e lunghi corridoi. Niente di speciale: i soliti ragazzi e ragazze (p. 189–190)

Whereas before Zangrandi has been vague or ambiguous in her published work about the precise geographical position of places she describes, here she explicitly points out that she wants to withhold such information. This can be interpreted in a number of ways; it seems to confirm the reader's feeling that she is describing something that really happened. Why worry about placing the story precisely if it is all fiction? It must have some reference to real people, or else how could it offend, or be a problem to her? On the other hand, it could equally be a rhetorical device: authors often suggest that the truth is being concealed to create an effect of greater realism. In fact, although Zangrandi herself does not mention it, an examination of the report card and certificate of her *Diploma di Maturità Classica* shows that the town she was forced to live in was Bologna, and the school she went to was the Liceo-Ginnasio Galvani (via Castiglione, Bologna) (copies of both documents are held at the historical archives of Bologna University). Her certificate is dated 12 July 1929.<sup>14</sup>

Following school, Zangrandi went on to read chemistry at university. Once more, Zangrandi does not state the name of her university town openly in her published work, but, she does describe moving to the new apartment with her mother when she was seventeen and then staying there for five or six years (albeit in different short stories in different collections) thus suggests that the 'gretta città' (see above) where she went to school and where her relatives lived (and which, in her diaries, she suggests naming Padova) was also Bologna. That is confirmed by documents in Fornasier's keeping and those held in the historical archives of Bologna University. Zangrandi's address whilst at university was Via Nosadella, 55. She gained her degree in chemistry on 23 October 1933 with a mark of 108/110. Her *tesi di laurea* was entitled 'Sullo spettro Raman di aldeidi e chetoni pirrolici' (Istituto di Chimica Generale, Università di Bologna, Anno Accademico 1932–33), and may now be found amongst her personal documents in Pieve di

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<sup>14</sup>Her results are even, with a mark of 7 for most subjects (listed as Lettere italiane; Filosofia ed economia politica; Matematica e fisica; Scienze naturali, chimica e geografia; Storia dell'arte), a 6 for Latin and Greek literature and 8 for History.

Cadore. The following academic year (1933–34), Zangrandi completed a diploma in pharmacy. According to university records, she stayed on as an ‘assistente volontaria’ at the Istituto di Geologia under Professor Michele Gortani from the academic year 1934–35 to 1936–37 (this is also mentioned in the blurb on *Racconti partigiani e no*). Amongst Fornasier’s collection of documents, there are a number of undated studies, as well as her *tesi di laurea*, such as ‘Ricerche fisiche e chimiche sul suolo’, ‘Chimica e mineralogia’, ‘Chimica analitica’, ‘Elementi di terre rare’, ‘La geologia di Liguria’ and descriptions of organic chemistry practicals. There is also a further volume entitled: ‘Tesi di Laurea: Sopra alcuni aggressivi chimici solforati’ (Istituto di Chimica Generale di Angiolino De Domenicis, Università di Bologna, Anno Accademico 1933–34), which, given the date, must be a *tesina* written for her diploma in pharmacy. A project on physical geography dates from the period during which she acted as a university assistant, 1934–35. Such evidence points to a considerable interest in academic work on Zangrandi’s part. According to the autobiographical sketch mentioned earlier, however, she was not happy with the subject she studied at university, and was still thwarted by the expectations of her family:

L’università una squallida successione di formule e di logaritmi, gas di cloro e solfidrici invece di aria e foreste e campi come avrei amato. Volevo studiare agraria ed avere una “farm” qui o nell’America dove c’erano conoscenti...Mia madre ed i parenti terrorizzati mi volevano farmacista.

As De Grazia comments in *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), under the fascist regime which did so much to try and limit women’s education, pharmacy was considered an acceptable subject for women to study, and, in fact, it was the third most popular subject for female students after literature and teacher training. Not that such studies were necessarily intended to lead on to a career; two thirds of women studying pharmacy married and became housewives upon the completion of their degree (see pp. 156–8). Neither pharmacy nor research were vocations that Zangrandi envisaged for herself, in any case.

In ‘La sahariana’ (*Anni con Attila*), she describes going to university, then suddenly announces ‘intanto mia madre morì’ (p. 152). Although Zangrandi herself

never gives an exact date for her mother's death, it does appear (as mentioned above) on the list of names on the Bevilacqua family tomb: 30 October 1937. Zangrandi adds shortly after, in the same story: 'Certo è un colpo duro per tutti perdere la madre. Andai dove capitò lavoro' (p. 152). In *Gente alla Palua*, she mentions her mother's death and her departure: 'Poi mia madre morì, all'improvviso. Io me ne andai da quella città estranea e odiosa' ('La selce', p. 65). With the references to her mother's death, one is aware once more of the later Zangrandi writing this story, for the following reflections must be more of an indication of the regrets that she felt about her mother's death later in life; as she says, at this time she was doing everything she could not to think about it:

Cercavo accanitamente di lavorare, di correre, stancarmi, riempire le giornate, ore e minuti, senza soste, per non aver tempo di pensare e di soffrire, per non farmi afferrare dalla nostalgia di lei, di non aver parlato di più con lei, di una infinità di cose, nostre e tante altre. Mi covava e cresceva nel fondo il rammarico senza rimedio di non aver voluto prima accettare, di aver perfino irriso con malgarbo le sue ribellioni, di non aver saputo attingere a quel mondo che era in lei, esperto di dignitose libertà e di lotte anche eroiche, oscuro a noi del tempo di allora, anzi: infamato e pestato. Intuivo, ora ch'era morta, come in lei ci fosse stata una forza a me ignota, in lei che aveva veduto, sentito parlare, discusso. Con chi? (*Anni con Attila*, p. 152-3)

The death of Zangrandi's mother is mentioned often, especially in her diaries and seems to be something she thought about a great deal even much later in life. Her regrets at not having talked to and understood her mother are very much linked to the way that she judges her earlier self in her later writing and, in particular, to the way that she deals with the question of fascism. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

She claims that to some extent this effort to forget about the death of her mother was successful: 'Certe volte si doveva concludere che la vita non era poi tanto male. Basta fare le giornate piene, anche di fatica fisica, sport, scorribande e crollare nel sonno subito: soffrire è da scemi, a piangere non si fanno risuscitare i morti' (p. 153-54).

As she continues in 'La sahariana', she then happened to be offered 'un contratto di lavoro in una cittadina di villeggiatura (p. 154). It is at this point that one begins to have accounts of her life from other sources. The 'cittadina' was Cortina d'Ampezzo and there her work was as a school teacher in a private school, the Istituto Antonelli.<sup>15</sup> Lino De Luca, later to be a friend of Zangrandi's, was a pupil at the state school in Cortina from 1934 to 1936, and says he knew of Zangrandi because the two schools joined forces in order to teach subjects such as physical education. As the Istituto Antonelli was quite new and relatively small, De Luca has explained, working there would have involved teaching a range of ages and subjects. According to Bologna University's records, Zangrandi stayed there working with Professor Gortani up to and including the academic year 1936–37. Zangrandi's own diaries suggest that she moved to Cortina during the year 1936–37, as, writing in an entry for the beginning of January 1955, she says that she has been there for 18 years. However, she could easily have been exaggerating by six months, given that it was written in the context of complaining that she had been living there far too long.

Whilst Zangrandi felt that teaching was not the job for her either, she did have considerable enthusiasm for the sporting competitions she participated in and the skiing teams of schoolgirls that she organized at the time. Such activities were very much the order of the day under Fascism, and local newspapers report the successes of these teams and the fact that Zangrandi (then Bevilacqua, of course) had been made sports officer of the local *fasci femminili* ('Pagina del fascio', *Cortina*, 1 March 1939).

Zangrandi's first published writings date from the late 30s and early 40s, when she was producing articles for the weekly paper of the *Federazione dei Fasci di combattimento di Belluno, Dolomiti*, and for the magazines *Cadore* and *Cortina*. The fact that she wrote for a fascist newspaper and fascist magazines prior to 1943 would probably come as a surprise to many people in this area now, as she is known particularly for her participation in the armed Resistance to Fascism (1943–1945).

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<sup>15</sup>The school claims that it no longer has records of teachers from the 1930s and the Provveditorato agli Studi in Belluno was unable to provide information about Zangrandi's teaching career because the Istituto Antonelli is a private school.

Her involvement in fascist institutions at this time is not in question, but, as will be suggested in Chapter Three, it requires careful analysis. In her published diary of the Resistance, *I giorni veri*, Zangrandi herself recognizes the contradiction between her fascism (although she makes no mention of this journalism) and her activities as a partisan, and she describes a kind of political awakening that she underwent, in 1943, in her conversion to the antifascist cause. The question of whether her journalism under the fascist regime shows any sign of resistance to that regime will also be discussed in the next chapter, though it should be noted here that Lino De Luca has suggested that the very fact that Zangrandi was an outsider in Cortina would have influenced her relationship with fascist officialdom. Cortina d'Ampezzo had only become part of Italy following the First World War and many local inhabitants still felt far more affinity with Germany and Austria than with the rest of Italy. For this reason, fascism and its alliance with Nazi Germany received strong support from these people, and there were many who welcomed the German invaders when fascism fell in 1943. Relations between this section of society and those Italians who had moved into this area (or been moved in, in an attempt by Mussolini to make it more Italian) were much poorer. It was amongst this second group that there were the first antifascist stirrings after 1943. De Luca contends that a certain hostility to fascism had developed amongst them before 1943 too, and that, although it did not strictly amount to an opposition to fascism, it was, at least, a 'modo di pensare diverso'. As Zangrandi was not native to the area, she would, De Luca maintains, instinctively have had more in common with other outsiders, and with their point of view. In her later writing, Zangrandi certainly expresses her contempt for certain sections of the population of Cortina and claims to have never felt part of the community there. In 'La sahariana', she mentions her move to Cortina, as referred to above, and at this point describes it as 'molto bella paesisticamente', but 'dal punto di vista umano era un mondo di snob innestato su un sottofondo di autoctoni prevalentemente ignoranti, presuntuosi, chiusi in conformismi filistei'. She adds that 'la parte più sana era il mondo sportivo', although, even there, some were 'maniaci e tifosi [...] (un modo come un altro di essere snob)' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 154). There is no knowing whether or not this was the opinion that Zangrandi had of Cortina at the

time, or one imposed on her earlier self when writing later. It should also be borne in mind that De Luca was not in Cortina after 1936 and may well be projecting an image of Zangrandi formed as a result of her Resistance activities onto an earlier period.

The historian Vendramini supports Zangrandi's own contention that she was never a particularly fervent fascist, and that the articles that she wrote at the time are significantly different from what was written by those who were committed to the regime. His point that Zangrandi's articles are exceptions, however, depends greatly on one's reading of them. It cannot be ignored that they formed part of a stridently fascist newspaper, just as the fact that they so often extol the typically fascist virtues of youth, self-sacrifice and devotion to one's people must be considered significant. And yet, such ideas are also quite common in Zangrandi's later work, where they do not necessarily have any fascist overtones and where the fascist regime, when it appears, is portrayed as either evil or ridiculous. This thesis will examine these themes in greater detail in Chapter Three, and assess the extent to which they are constants in Zangrandi's writing, exploring the way in which the political context redefines them. Zangrandi's ideas seem to have changed rather less than she suggests.

## **The Resistance**

Zangrandi continued to teach and to write for these fascist publications during the Second World War and up to 1942. In *Racconti partigiani e no*, Zangrandi suggests that she was also involved in 'contrabbando' and 'bracconaggio' during the 'periodo iniziale della guerra' (p. 37), although this is never described in any detail anywhere. Her enthusiasm for the Resistance from September 1943 can be in no doubt. The early days of the German occupation saw her helping to hide allied and deserting Italian soldiers before aiding their escape (as described in *I giorni veri*). Enrico Pioggerella describes the beginnings of the antifascist Resistance in Cortina, supporting the idea that there was already an antifascist awareness amongst some:

Alla caduta del regime, ci furono incontri ed intese tra persone che erano già pervenute alla formazione di una coscienza democratica e ad una scelta ideologica che comportava l'adesione al programma di lotta del PCI [...] Tali incontri ed intese dettero origine ad un primo gruppo di comunisti, costituito da me, Luigi Da Deppo ed altri compagni di cui non ricordo i nomi, ai quali ben presto si aggiunsero Carlo Orler, Alda Bevilacqua e Simonetti. (*Gli inizi della Resistenza bellunese* ed. by Istituto Storico Bellunese della Resistenza (Belluno: Amministrazione Comunale di Belluno, 1985), pp. 168–9)

This group linked up with others and, in particular, with two men responsible for organizing the Resistance in this area, Mario Prevedello and Sandro Garbin. Giovanna Zangrandi's role in the operations of this group, and the nature of its political orientation are made quite clear:

Cominciammo a ricevere la stampa clandestina che veniva riprodotta a macchina, dalla Bevilacqua, in molte copie che noi facevamo circolare. Noi stessi intraprendemmo la redazione di un giornale — battuto a macchina, sempre dalla Bevilacqua e del quale potemmo diffondere soltanto il primo numero — per far conoscere la politica di liberazione attuata dal PCI, sia in pace che in guerra, nonché gli ideali e gli obiettivi concreti della lotta partigiana, già iniziata nel Cadore. (p.169)

Zangrandi's house was also used for partisan meetings. As Pioggerella points out, after the German invasion, all the teachers in the state schools were replaced by German speakers from the Alto Adige and it was only the Istituto Antonelli that remained open, with Italian teachers, for the children of Italian 'immigrants' from other provinces. In *I giorni veri*, Zangrandi describes the way that, at the beginning, she continued to teach at the Antonelli school in Cortina, and at its other school in Pieve di Cadore. This proved to be very useful for her Resistance activities, because although Cortina was part of 'Alpenvorland', the area that Nazis considered to be a reclaimed part of their own country, Pieve was across the 'border', in what the Germans designated as occupied Italy. Her journeys between the two allowed her to carry messages while remaining unsuspected of any clandestine activities. However, as she describes in *I giorni veri*, it soon became unsafe for her to remain in Cortina, as she was known and wanted by the Germans.

For a partisan, it was a particularly dangerous place to be, given the sympathy towards the Germans felt by a large section of the population. She had to escape along with the other members of the group, who took to the mountains.

Once partisan bands had formed in the hills, Zangrandi worked as a *staffetta*, carrying messages, food and arms between different partisan groups. The danger involved in this and the distances that had to be covered would have made this arduous under any circumstances, but high up in the Dolomites conditions were particularly tough. The details are described in *I giorni veri* and, as Mirella Aloisio and Giuliana Beltrami suggest in their book *Volontarie della libertà*, ‘bisogna leggere il suo libro per rendersi conto di quale fosse la durezza della lotta in montagna non solo contro il nemico, ma anche contro gli elementi’ (*Volontarie della libertà 8 settembre 1943–23 aprile 1945*, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1981) p.173). That Zangrandi survived such an ordeal and was able to make such a contribution to the Resistance is a testament to her skill as a mountaineer and her knowledge of the environment in which she had to work. She herself emphasizes how important her previous experience of mountains, as well as her involvement in contraband and poaching had been. She also stresses the importance of the solidarity of local resistance fighters. Chapter Five of this thesis will discuss *I giorni veri*, which was published in 1963, many years after the Resistance, and will consider this work particularly from the point of view of women participating and writing about the Resistance.

## The Post-War Writer

Zangrandi returned to her home in Cortina at the end of the war. For a few months immediately after the war, she was editor of *Val Boite*, the weekly newspaper of the *Comitati di Liberazione* of Cortina and the Val Boite. It reported local news and was designed to be a forum for debating the issues facing Italy, and Cortina and its surrounding area in particular, in the post-war period. In her editorials, Zangrandi took the opportunity to express views that were clearly aimed to be controversial and provoke strong reactions. The fact that this newspaper did not last beyond the beginning of September 1945 is not surprising when one reads her

attacks, both on the collaborators of the last war and on those who, as far as she was concerned, were not contributing to the reconstruction of Italy. In one article directed particularly at the women of the area, she rebukes them for their lack of seriousness (and, indeed, lack of morals):

Non ci si può accusare di non conoscere la vita e le sue esigenze di ripresa, di allegria viva, di risata. Sul nostro stesso giornale, numeri addietro, parliamo noi per primi della necessità di 'saper ridere'.

Ma un conto è quel tanto di sana allegria che basta, un altro conto è l'impazzimento totale e sfrenato di certe personcine senza cervello. Quello è solo offesa indegna a chi tutto diede. (*Val Boite*, Cortina, 21 July 1945)

Zangrandi continued to be a member of the communist party after the war. Her newspaper was clearly inspired by her political ideals, even if it was not openly affiliated to the PCI. Amongst her papers there is a letter from *L'Unità*, dated 12 September 1945. In this letter, the editors of *L'Unità* show an interest in her local paper, which she must have mentioned in a letter to them. They are also keen to have reports on the local situation in Cortina d'Ampezzo in this immediate post-war period (as mentioned earlier, there had been a good deal of support for the fascists in Cortina, which led to a difficult situation after the war):

Se pur la cosa è assai delicata e in mano alle autorità, come tu affermi, noi ti diciamo che è necessario tu ci invii al più presto dette corrispondenze, anche perché — per esempio — alcuni giornali di Milano di altri partiti hanno già cominciato a parlare della cosa, naturalmente dal loro punto di vista.

Devi quindi accordarti con la Federazione del P.C. di Belluno e inviare una serie di corrispondenze che noi potremo anche far apparire come servizi speciali eseguiti da qualche nostro inviato e questo, tu lo comprenderai, per ovvie ragioni che ti riguardano.

Ma oltre alla situazione politica nell'Ampezzano e nel Cadore vi sono certamente problemi locali della montagna, della agricoltura, del turismo; e anche delle comunicazioni, della vita democratica, ecc. su cui puoi inviarci corrispondenze molto interessanti.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>The letter is signed 'Paolo Succi, Il responsabile'. Succi suggests that Zangrandi's contributions should be anonymous or attributed to some correspondent because of the hostility that

Shortly after this, in 1946, Zangrandi organized, and participated in, the building of a mountain refuge, designed to act as a kind of rustic hotel for walkers and climbers during the Summer, which Zangrandi ran herself (there are many such refuges throughout the Dolomites). The Rifugio Antelao was built in the mountains just above Borca di Cadore, and this is recounted in her work *Il campo rosso: cronaca di una estate 1946* (Milan: Ceschina, 1959). In this work, Zangrandi describes the way that she had got together a rather motley group of labourers, men looking for some kind of employment now that the war was over, and somehow raised sufficient money to build the refuge and pay their wages. It is also the story of the way that she and the men working for her attempted to adjust to a new life after the destruction and upheaval of the war. She went on to run the refuge for walkers and mountaineers during the Summer tourist season. This involved cooking and cleaning, but, as Mario Rigoni Stern has commented, she was an experienced mountaineer and would also act as a guide to climbers and walkers.<sup>17</sup> Another friend who knew her from the days of the Resistance, Luigi dall'Armo, has also testified to her knowledge of the mountains and has described her as 'più montanara dei montanari'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, she herself describes acting as a mountain guide (although she makes no reference to her particular refuge) in the story 'Lo scrittore e la "pasionaria" Mariangela' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 101–14):

Per me veramente non era affatto strano o esaltante [...] anche se alquanto singolare poteva apparire a gente cittadina il mio modo di vivere. Affittata proficuamente ai villeggianti la mia casa di fondovalle (mia unica risorsa, che dovevo poi tirchiare e far bastare una intera annata) partivo con un enorme sacco, attrezzi, viveri, la mia salute, la mia forza giovane oltre gli anni, che la mia faccia scura imbrogliava: 'Anna Sherpa' mi chiamavano. (p. 117)

Unfortunately, according to Fornasier, she was unable to make sufficient money from the refuge and so, after a few years, she sold it to the Club Alpino Italiano

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she faced in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The *Archivio L'Unità* at the *Istituto Gramsci* Rome did not respond to a request for information (made 30 November 1995) regarding Zangrandi's correspondence with *L'Unità*.

<sup>17</sup>This and other comments from Rigoni Stern are based on an interview I had with him at his house in Asiago, 6 March 1993.

<sup>18</sup>Luigi dall'Armo spoke about Zangrandi during a visit to the *Istituto Storico Bellunese della Resistenza*, July 1990.

di Venezia, and returned to Cortina. Lino de Luca maintains that she had a house built in Cortina at this point and lived by renting out rooms, mostly to the Polizia Stradale. However, in *I giorni veri*, she refers to renting out rooms in Cortina before the Resistance and it is not clear if she owned this house previously. She herself describes giving up the refuge:

dopo molte fatiche e amarezze nella gestione di quel rifugio, dopo alcune stagioni, piantai tutto e andai altrove, continuai a scrivere, era malattia fonda, storie vere o no, corte e lunghe: avevo cominciato lassù in rifugio nei solitari autunni e certo gli argomenti non mancavano. (p. 107)

The first book that Zangrandi had published was *Leggende delle Dolomiti* (Milan: Eroica) in 1950. As she says in her essay at the end of the collection, these are stories that she gathered herself, ‘in anni lontani, lasciati ormai dietro una barriera di sangue’ (p. 197), as she travelled around and talked to the people of the Dolomites. This is another example of her interest in story-telling and the place that it has in the lives of real people. It is a constant theme in Zangrandi’s writing, from the articles she published under fascism to her last collection of short stories. Her next work, *I Brusaz*, won the Deledda literary prize in 1954, and was published by Mondadori in December of the same year, and Zangrandi suddenly found herself interviewed by all the main critics and photographed by *Epoca*. Everyone was keen to find an autobiographical element in this novel and tended to relate her lifestyle and the events of her life to her characters and plot. (This was partly inevitable in the context of debates on neorealism and given that this novel spoke about a backward and struggling section of Italian society. The relation that this novel bears to neorealism will be discussed in Chapter Four.) Despite her literary success, she continued to act as landlady to her tenants.

Roberto De Monticelli, writing in *Epoca* (13 February 1955), described her in the following way:

è una donna piccola, dalle spalle robuste, un volto bizzarro, irregolare, deciso, col naso arcuato, gli occhi allegri, le pupille che, se ammiccano, diventano strette e verticali nell’iride come le scanalature nei chicchi di caffè; sulla fronte i capelli neri, corti, selvatici, spettinati; ha un passo veloce, ilare, da ragazzo e da cucciolo; affitta le camere della sua casa

a Cortina, batte i lenzuoli, le coperte e i tappeti sul terrazzo di legno, alle sette del mattino, nella luce fredda dei monti; si rovina le mani nell'acqua del bucato e scrive. (pp. 64-5)

Zangrandi's own words, quoted by De Monticelli, give a similar impression of someone with a job to do, a tough one at that, who also happens to write:

Certo quando vengo a Milano e qualcuno mi invita, qua, là, e ci sono scrittori, giornalisti, signore, mi trovo un po' imbarazzata per queste mie mani. Lo so, non sono mani di una scrittrice. [...] Be', che vuoi? Sono le mani di un'affittacamere, di un'affittacamere di montagna. Perché questo io faccio; e poi anche scrivo. (p. 64)

Not only was this a time when others began to write about her life, Zangrandi's unpublished diaries also date from the mid-1950s, shortly after the award of the Deledda prize. In her diaries, she describes the way that she continued to live in Cortina d'Ampezzo and rent out rooms, even after the success of her novel. She often expresses her intense dislike for the town, however. As mentioned earlier, she realises that 1955 is the 'diciottesimo anno in cui lavoro in questa Cortina: mi dà un senso di nausea tutte le volte che mi vien nominata. Devo propormi irrimediabilmente di non oltrepassare i venti, diventerebbe masochismo' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 2). As has been seen earlier, she does not consider that she ever belonged there. In 'Anni con Attila' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 7-68), writing about this post-war period, she does not even want to mention the name of the place, because she knows it has connotations of 'velleità mondana'. But for her it was just 'un posto buono da ingaggio', where she spent years working very hard, feeling herself to be, 'forestiera, sradicata, solitaria, con la speranza da emigrante di far gruzzolo e andarmene', and, for this reason, she says, 'si impara a incassare umiliazioni, a coprire dolore e sensibilità sotto una maschera di bronzo, di sorriso, pur di arrivare a quella meta' (p. 8). She did spend some time away from Cortina, and went quite often to Milan, as she had been advised that this was necessary in order to further her literary career. A number of entries in her bound diary 'Capodanno 1955' are written in Milan, although rather than specify the name of the city she often refers ironically to her 'Diario dalla giungla dei lupi', which she changed to

‘diario dalla giungla...ma di che bestie?’ for her entry ‘Fine gennaio 1955 (p. 17), and in February 1955 this becomes her ‘Diario nella giungla delle puttane’ (p. 43). These titles reflect her ambivalence towards life in this city. In ‘Anni con Attila’, she claims to enjoy Milan, and to prefer cities to small towns:

Mi piace la metropoli (tanto detesto le città piccole, pretensiose e sonnolente), mi piace la febbre spietata che si attacca e ti sveglia, la durezza brutale del minuto e altro. Mi piacciono anche le sue nebbie, il suo freddo per le strade e i buoni termo nelle case, il suo mondo intricato dove occorre farsi lupi veri, pur senza parere. Anche le periferie dove devi abitare, se hai poco denaro per i posti entro cerchia dei Navigli dove stanno i ‘bene’. (*Anni con Attila*, p. 45)

Similarly, in her diary she comments that, as soon as she escapes into some ‘bettolino’, ‘mi sento a casa mia [...] con questa gente un po’ sbracata, ma sotto tanto più profonda umana e viva di “quelli là”’ (‘Milano 6 aprile’, in ‘Capodanno 1955’, p. 58). By ‘quelli là’, she is referring to the literary world of Milan. In the same entry she talks of ‘dei salotti, delle maldicenze, delle acidità represses e delle coltellate alla schiena’. In another entry she is particularly scathing about her visit to Mondadori, now that she has won the Deledda prize:

Anna, oggi, adesso devi presentarti al Presidente Alberto Mondadori, quanto hai aspettato? Quante volte ti rimandarono dalle sue sacre porte: “non ha un nome, nome nuovo, capirà che la nostra casa non accetta principianti” e adesso riverisci ti considerano ormai come un orsetto consumato (‘Fine gennaio 1955’, p. 18)<sup>19</sup>

In this way, she hints at the efforts she had to make before her work was accepted, although there is no reference to this elsewhere. In her diaries, she refers to the fact that she is writing *Orsola nelle stagioni* during this period. In an entry in the volume ‘Capodanno 1955’, marked ‘Cortina 9 maggio 1955’, she comments that she is returning to Cortina ‘a finire (o cominciare) la storia di Orsola Osarchio’ (p. 89). On the same page, she refers to another interest she has at the time, saying that she has been to Rome, ‘una scappatina [...] buona per dare una ripassatina “politica” sul mio paese’. In this way, although she does not mention this elsewhere, it seems

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<sup>19</sup>The *Fondazione Mondadori* were unable to supply information regarding Zangrandi.

that she had continued the work for the PCI that was suggested to her some ten years previously.

She seems to have gone through a lean period in the mid-fifties, and, apparently, all did not go smoothly after the award she received. In a section of diary entitled 'Cortina 10 giugno' (no year, but presumably 1956), she writes that 'ancora trovo gente che mi viene incontro a far felicitazioni per il libro fortunato, per il concorso Deledda di due anni fa', but laments that she has barely enough money to eat. By this stage, she has completed two more novels; as she says, she has '*Campi del fiore rosso* in casa editrice da un anno e quattro mesi, ed *Orsola nelle stagioni* fatto e consegnato da mesi', and has heard nothing. 'Nulla, il silenzio, ma perchè', she asks with some vehemence, 'mi hanno tirata fuori dalla mia vita felice ed ignorata per "lanciarmi" per dirmi "lavora qui che è meglio *devi* (dissero) lavorare come scrittrice"'. And, she goes on to say, whilst they have not had the courage to tell her that her work is worthless, it has been impossible for her to find work at any publisher's or magazine. Instead, she has toured Milan for five days, returning home at night to get drunk on her own. 'Non sono una scoraggiata cronica', she says, 'ma una temporanea ribelle e bere fino a domani mi fa sempre arrivare al famoso "altro giorno"'. Writing this entry, and no doubt after no small amount of alcohol, she thinks little of her publishers:

La casa editrice con i suoi meandri da ministero, le sue mene, il proprietario debole e incapace, giochi di milioni. Questa è la situazione letteraria italiana e mi hanno presa e fatta cittadina della repubblica delle lettere, quanto desidererei cambiarla con una licenza di prostituta pubblica almeno per guadagnarci in dignità.

However, by the end of this section, when she describes escaping up into the mountains, she has regained the resolution and independence that are a more usual feature of these diaries, and, of course, the two novels she refers to were published subsequently (*Il campo rosso* after *Orsola nelle stagioni*, even though it had evidently been written earlier, and by Ceschina rather than Mondadori).

When not in Milan, she continued to live in Cortina d'Ampezzo. Much as she disliked the place, she was always relieved to get back to the mountains. They

were the reason for her move to this area in the first place, and continued to be extremely important to her throughout her life. They are a constant backdrop to all her writing. During this period, excursions into the mountains allowed her to escape the society that she hated so much in Cortina and also provided her with relief after frustrating trips to Milan. After one such trip, she tells herself, 'dopo questa settimana milanese [...] hai bisogno di solitudine, di neve, solitudine, silenzio' ('Fine gennaio, 1955', ('Capodanno 1955'), p. 19). As she says in this entry, time in the mountains seems to restore her spiritually, but also fulfils a need for physical activity, 'avresti anche desiderio e bisogno di strade percorse a piedi, laceri, di paracarri da far passare, fame di strade ho'.

What she really longed to do was to be able to afford the move a few miles east to the Cadore, where she spent most of her time as a *partigiana*. She viewed this as a move away from the supporters of fascism who despised true Italians, in order to live amongst the *cadorini*, the people with whom she identified. She asserts, in the same section of diary as above, 'avrò la mia microscopica e *solitaria* casa oltre Dogana sul verde prato che sogno' (p. 4). Unlike the intrusive *ampezzani*, she felt that the *cadorini* were genuine and, above all, *her* people. They emerge from her writings, both published and unpublished, as people who have no pretensions, talk little, yet have a generous sense of humour and great strength of character. In her diary of 8 December 1955, she refers to the piece of land that she is desperately hoping to buy, so that, she says, 'allora rivivrei fuori da questa conca dannata impregnata di odio' (p. 229) and would live again 'tra la mia povera gente com'erano oggi, domenicali, ma non offensivi, freddi, chiusi in sé, ma sereni, non ostili se non tagli loro la via' (p. 230). That longing to move is mentioned again and again in her diaries.

It was during these years that Zangrandi met Mario Rigoni Stern. Both living in the Dolomites and writing about the people there and their way of life, they had a good deal in common and became friends. Rigoni Stern has also indicated that Zangrandi would sometimes send manuscripts to him, to get his opinion, before sending them on to her publisher. Speaking in an interview in 1993, he made it clear that he still holds her, and her writing, in high regard.

Thus, it is possible to find friends that date from this period, but, by this stage, Zangrandi no longer had any family that she was in touch with. In her diary of 1955 she mentions that she has one uncle left, but in an entry for 4 April 1957, she says that he had died a month earlier, and, although she had been invited to the funeral she says ‘non ci sono andata, promettendo di andarci qui ed invece sono andata a zozzo a far l’autista agli amici infortunati’.

Eventually, Zangrandi got together enough money to make the move from Cortina to the Cadore. There is no reference to exactly when this was. An entry entitled ‘Cortina 23 dicembre’ describes the feelings of depression she has, saying that ‘l’indigenza e l’incertezza del domani pesano a 47 anni’, and, she explains, ‘quello che dà il maggior fattore alla mia tristezza è che sono stanca di vivere in questa valle di odio [...] voglio andarmene da questa conca dannata e maledetta, voglio avere la mia casetta a Villanova, tra la mia gente. Devo trovarlo questo dannato danaro’.<sup>20</sup> Thus she was still in Cortina in 1957. However, a diary entry of April 1958 is entitled ‘Borca — diarii dell’altopiano’ and begins with the words ‘Sul colle dietro la mia casa di Villanova...’. By 1966 she had published a collection of short stories which includes a description of this move. In ‘Anni con Attila’, she describes having her new house built in Borca di Cadore. According to this story, instead of staying in Cortina, she and two carpenters constructed a ‘baracca’ next to the building site for her to live in, in the meanwhile, along with her new dog, Attila.

Once she had moved to Borca, Zangrandi’s main activity was writing. She lived partly from the proceeds of her books, although, according to both Rigoni Stern and Fornasier, these earned her very little, and from money she earned by selling short stories to newspapers. She kept many, clipped from papers, with her other documents. They almost all date from the years 1969–70, although one is as early as 1966 and four date from 1984. According to Fornasier, she had also inherited some land near Galliera, in Emilia Romagna, which she gradually sold off to her cousin, Antonio Bevilacqua, who lived in that area (the documents from these sales may also be found amongst her personal papers). That money allowed

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<sup>20</sup>Villanova is some 2 kilometres from Borca di Cadore.

her to build her house in Borca and provided a little more money to live off. She is rather vague as to what she spent her time doing when not writing. In 'Anni con Attila', she talks about 'vagabondaggi montani e silvicoli' that she went on with her new puppy, at the time when she was living in the 'baracca', or preparing wood for the winter (*Anni con Attila*, p. 18). In the same story, she talks about a day that was 'denso, pieno, chilometri, paesi, valli, valichi, colloqui', all for 'una certa faccenda' which she does not bother to describe. In the same collection, in the story 'Il ponte del Gar', there is a similar vague reference to her activities: 'una giornata pesante; di scorrerie e di incontri per valli e paesi, uffici, archivi, segreterie a cercare dati per una certa inchiesta' (p. 69). Likewise, there is little reference to what was happening in the world around her during those years. An important exception is the story that she wrote about the Vajont disaster of October 1963, in the first story of the collection *Racconti partigiani*, 'Più niente'. This is also the story that appears in the anthology, *L'Italia raccontata* (ed. by Gian Carlo Ferretti (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987), pp. 231–38). For Zangrandi, that disaster was also a personal tragedy, as she knew a number of people who lived in Longarone, the village that was almost entirely destroyed. As she says, 'correvamo per sapere, chi aveva parenti, quasi tutti noi della provincia ci si aveva amici, conoscenze e legami di affari ch'erano anche legami umani' (*L'Italia raccontata*, p. 231). At the end of the story, she talks to a local inhabitant who wants his young son to see what has happened, 'è troppo piccolo per provarne choc, abbastanza grandino per ricordarsi, come io e lei che vedemmo Caporetto a sei anni'. But, she reflects, this is even worse than the pain of war: 'la sconfinata tristezza che ti prende quando vedi, senti discorsi derivati da parole d'ordine, in malafede, allora il dolore che era atroce, ma pulito e senza marcio diviene carico di amarezza, si gonfia di ribellione. Allora si soffre di più' (p. 238). In this way, Zangrandi shows that she was still very much concerned with the people around her and the injustices they suffered. All who knew her comment that she was a well-known figure in the area and that she had many friends. On the other hand, they also mention that she had a tendency to keep to herself. She never married and lived alone, but for her dog. De Luca recalls that she was invited to sit on the village council, but never wanted to. He also points out that she was a card-carrying communist all her life, yet there is

no evidence that she got involved in the activities of the local party. A similar insularity is sometimes expressed in her diaries (although it should be remembered that most of her diaries date from the time when she was still living in Cortina).

Zangrandi had not been living in Borca di Cadore long when her illness began. It turned out to be Parkinson's Disease, although it is never given any name in her published writing. She describes its onset in 'Anni con Attila' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 7–68). The story is set at a time when the symptoms that she suffered from already went back a number of years. She explains that something happened, but it was not 'immediato, veloce, violento come è stato solitamente nella mia vita', but instead, 'qualcosa di lento, quasi inavvertito e falsamente giudicato prima, un male inafferrabile e fondo in cui lo spirito non entra affatto' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 57). At first it was 'certe incespicate nelle gite, dapprima ascritte al terreno accidentato o alle scarpe', or 'l'oggetto che diabolicamente sfugge dalla mano e si spezza a terra', accompanied by 'una fiacchezza insana e stanca' which went on 'per mesi, anni, per stanche primavere inaspettate fuori dal nevaio disfatto, per viali della metropoli o zebrati di cui arrivi alla fine senza fiato, per estati calde, boccheggianti, angosciose' and continues, bringing her up to the time when the story is set, in 'questo annebbiato autunno che ti affloscia' (p. 57). According to this same story, she attempted to carry on with her life as normal, particularly during those periods when she felt rather better. She did not perceive this illness as a purely physical ailment; she comments on having endured weeks, months of 'pazzia' and adds, 'senza mentire so che devo dare questo nome a ciò che mi sta succedendo' (p. 63). She finds it difficult to describe exactly, for the symptoms are not always the same. At times, she says, 'è l'incapacità di fare un certo movimento che si addiziona al male e fa traboccare il vaso', and the frustration makes her cry out. This seems to be the most frightening aspect, for she has heard such cries before from 'un fratello di mio padre e una sorella di lui, le loro crisi atroci dietro la porta prima che li portassero via' (p. 63), and suspects that her own illness is linked to that of her relatives and her own father. The story ends with some optimism, however, as she undergoes an operation that apparently worked and she is able to return to her home and her dog: 'guardo la mia mano ritornata abile

passare sul muso del mio cane. Posso camminare, cammino normalmente' (p. 67). In a later story in this collection, 'Davide e i gatti' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 230–258), she refers to this illness as 'una lenta morte da vivi fin che insperatamente era venuta una quasi guarigione' (p. 272).

She refers to an operation in other short stories. In *Racconti partigiani e no* (1981), she recounts being in hospital for 'un intervento cerebrale, indubbiamente delicato' (p. 7), but this story, 'Camera 32', is really about the dreams and recollections she had at this time, and tells us nothing of the operation or its outcome. Fornasier and De Luca also spoke of an operation on her brain, saying that she went to a private clinic in Milan. Her diaries date largely from the period before the disease began. There are some later entries bound together under the title 'Diarii — note (note dell'ospedale di Pd)'; some of which have the date October 1962, but there is little reference to the fact that she is in hospital. In one of these entries she does write about the importance that mountaineering had for her and she realizes 'che vivo ora, ammalata, e sopravvivo come allora, su lievi alee da giorno a giorno, anche se schifata di vivere e sotterraneamente tentata di finirla, sopravvivo tenacemente da un giorno all'altro e piccoli appigli salvano' ('PD. 6 ott.'). However, references to the illness itself are rather rare, considering the amount she writes about herself and the fact that she suffered for more than thirty years. Nevertheless, amongst her papers, there is a more formal description of the development of her illness and of the treatment that she underwent. It covers a single side of paper and there is no indication as to who wrote it (the typeface is different from that of Zangrandi's diaries). The title is simply: 'BEVILACQUA ALMA, ANNI 65' and it describes the initial stages of her disease in the following manner:

Inizio morbo di Parkinson lentissimo circa nel 1961, braccio e soprattutto gamba destra. I Stereotassi nel 1964, per diatermocoagulazione, a Milano, chirurgo Columella, riesce molto bene. Resta una piccola acinesia a sinistra, poi si vuole strafare e una seconda stereotassi peggiora la situazione. Tuttavia con molta buona volontà e inizio della cura con *Dopamina* passano anni di vita quasi normale. Posologia prescritte: *Pagitane* mgr. 5 — *Larodopa* gr. 3 in tre volte al dì (tollerati bene dallo stomaco — intestino e sonno regolari)

It seems clear that the illness progressed slowly and that for some periods she was apparently completely free of it. In 1973, however, it showed signs of worsening again:

Verso la fine del 1973 iniziano disturbi vari, forte acinesia etc. si ricovera pochi giorni a Natale alla clinica delle Betulle di Appiano Gentile calcolando di passare alla cura *Madopar*, forti disturbi anche in concomitanza di un notevole esaurimento nervoso (capogiri, nausea, insonnia etc.). Interrompe la cura del *Madopar* dopo pochi giorni (anche per ragioni finanziarie) e ritorna al *Larodopa* (e *Pagitane* da mgr. 2,5)

Acinesia e spasticità, difficoltà o addirittura impossibilità di qualunque lavoro, specie verso sera.

Si ricovera in Agosto 1974 circa 10 giorni nel reparto Neurologico di Belluno (direttore prof. Ravenna), dove viene iniziata terapia con *Sinemet* (gr. 4 o 4,5 al dì e piccole dosi di *Pagitane* leggero da mgr. 1 a mgr. 2 al dì).

Scarso beneficio, malessere, inappetenza, stitichezza fortissima e indomabile, spasticità spesso tale da dover ricorrere a miorilassanti, insonnia, difficoltà a camminare e facilità a cadere; non ha tremiti ma difficoltà di movimento soprattutto nelle mani verso sera.

This description of Zangrandi's illness then records a visit to the Istituto Neurologico, Castelfranco Veneto, where 'lentamente viene abituata al Larodopa', which results in an 'ottima ripresa' which lasted until July 1979.

In Zangrandi's published work, there is some reference to the later stages of her illness. By the time of her collection, *Gente alla Palua*, published in 1974, Zangrandi seems resigned to the fact that she is ill and nothing can be done. Unlike her other collections, this one makes very occasional references to the time of writing and even to the future, in comments on her state of health. In 'Torre Sonia' (pp. 115-130), she describes a mountain ridge that she used to climb, but now cannot because 'qualcosa s'è spezzato nella macchina che fu selvaggia e padrona di grandi regni di pietra; mai più da viva ci potrò arrivare' (pp. 128-9). In the following story in the collection, 'Il ragazzo cane' (pp. 131-140), she says she is 'matusa' and adds that she and her dog are 'malandati ambedue', (p. 131). Both

are now just left to dream of the mountain excursions that they used to go on. In the same story, she describes having to talk to someone she finds very tiresome and considers saying, 'l'ultimo intervento neurochirurgico mi ha leso la zona del linguaggio, posso parlare e ascoltare molto poco', but then reflects, 'ma era una frase confidenziale e non mi piaceva dirla' (p. 134). Amongst her diaries there is the draft of a letter, typed very badly, dated 1 July 1978, four years after the publication of *Gente alla Palua*, in which Zangrandi is replying to a letter concerning suggestions for the financing of a collection of short stories of hers (from the indications she gives, this appears to be the collection *Racconti partigiani e no*).<sup>21</sup> She apologizes for the delay in replying, but explains:

ecco il guaio irreparabile: io sono molto ammalata e lo vede dal come scrivo. Il guaio è il morbo di Parkinson, da molti anni; e quando ero rassegnata a tirare i piedi senza farne tragedia ecco che operazioni e medicinali del DOPA unitamente alle sollecitazioni di amici mi hanno spinta a fare quella raccolta e scelta di racconti di cui vi ho inviato copia.

If by this stage, she was finding it very difficult even to write a letter, she was, according to De Luca, still managing to look after herself and continued to do so until around 1984. In the later years of her illness, Zangrandi was not at all well off. As Vendramini has explained, she continued to make some money from her writing in later years, by 'recycling' many stories, and sending them off to different newspapers, as she was no longer able to write new ones. Her last two collections of stories, *Racconti partigiani* and *Racconti partigiani e no* were published at the instigation of the Research Institute for the Resistance in Belluno (she talks about the way friends have encouraged her to do this in the letter referred to above), in order to provide her with some income. The first collection was published as a limited edition with drawings by the artist Augusto Murer, and the second is a rather more substantial volume, containing some of the same stories, and others from those she had had published in newspapers. In the last years of her life Zangrandi apparently told Fornasier that she felt that, during her illness, she had

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<sup>21</sup>It is not clear who the original letter was from as Zangrandi makes no reference to her name and begins her own letter 'Gentile Signora'.

been abandoned by the *cadorini* who had meant so much to her, and for this reason asked to be buried in her family plot in Galliera in Emilia Romagna. She died on 21 January 1988 and was buried two days later.

### A Life in Fiction

These, then, are the events of Zangrandi's life, as they can be gleaned from her accounts and those of other people. But, as mentioned earlier, a chronological biography of this sort, relying to such a large extent on her own writings, inevitably involves splitting the 'double narrative' of her versions of her own life. Given the fact that the context of narration always influences what is narrated, it is important to look at her life and especially her writings about her life from another point of view, and to examine her life not as a chronological series of events, but as a picture given much of its form in the relatively short number of years that she was writing about it; a synchronic rather than diachronic account. Nearly all her writing (except for the newspaper articles that she wrote under fascism which will be considered in more detail in the next chapter) dates from quite a short period — from the late 1950s, through to the early 1970s. As has been seen, *Racconti partigiani* and *Racconti partigiani e no* were published somewhat later, but, considering the incapacitating nature of her disease, they must have been composed earlier. A clear pattern of what material and what periods Zangrandi chose to write about may be discerned from this survey of her life.

Firstly, with regard to her childhood, she is very selective, giving only information about the Palua and a little about her parents and their home. As has been seen, she has apparently altered some of her own past with respect to this period. She gives emphasis to the period when she was around 8–10 years old. As for her adolescence, it is interesting to note that the episode she picks out for a short story is the one with Delfine. Otherwise, most of what she writes is concerned with the repression she felt from her relatives. From this time, and for most of the period of her early adulthood, the information that Zangrandi chooses to give about herself is quite scant. This all changes with the Resistance, which receives more attention than any other period. As has been suggested, it is interpreted as a turning point

in her life. It is seen as a rejection of her immediate, fascist past, and a return to her childhood and the politics of her parents. *Il campo rosso*, despite being based on her activities of the year following the war, is, in many ways, a continuation of this description of the Resistance and her early years. She does give some detail of the later periods of her life, but they emerge as somehow less significant, and most often act as a kind of lens through which earlier years are examined.

One area that receives surprisingly little attention is that of literature and the kind of reading that Zangrandi enjoyed. We do hear about her childhood and adolescence, when, we are told, she enjoyed adventure stories above all. In 'Estate alla Vissana' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 85–114), she notes that, at the age of fourteen, she was not yet interested in legends: 'casomai le mie favole erano Salgari, Conrad, London e qualche altro autore di western o di avventure in Alaska' (pp. 86–7). Likewise, in the description of an earlier period in 'Il cortile assediato' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 99–145), she describes climbing a tree with a book: 'stavo scoprendo Salgari, mi annidavo sulla biforcazione alta come sull'albero di una nave corsara a sognar guerre, battaglie, avventure, arrembaggi e violenze. E quando il libro finiva, talora ne continuavo io la vicenda, a mio modo' (p. 124). Salgari's adventure stories were, of course, immensely popular with children in the early years of this century. As Ann Lawson Lucas has pointed out, however, Salgari is a rather ambiguous figure, as he was adopted and promoted by the fascists, yet, in many ways, did not fit fascist rhetoric. She describes an 'inconclusive campaign' and a 'long drawn-out scandal' that 'proved sadly damaging to the novelist's reputation, which was tainted as a result with an ideology which he had not, in truth, prophesied' ('Fascism and Literature: "Il caso Salgari"', *Italian Studies* (1990), 32–47 (p. 47)). Whilst he has clearly been associated with fascism by some, however, Zangrandi does not make that link, even where she draws attention to the rhetoric of her fascist education.<sup>22</sup> The fact that she enjoyed adventure stories does not come as a great surprise, when one considers the way that she went on to live her life and the importance she gives in her writing to that most adventurous of times, the Resistance. Indeed, in describing herself, she gives

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<sup>22</sup>The relationship between Zangrandi and fascism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

the impression that she was at her happiest when most active. She also always recognized the value of a good story (see Chapter Four), and thus she indicates, in 'Il cortile assediato', that that interest, along with a vivid imagination, went back to her teenage years.

The differences between the reading habits of her own generation and that of her parents is suggested in a short story in the collection *Anni con Attila*. As an adolescent living near Lake Garda, she tells us, she would go out with her father who would get her to read with him. On one occasion, he makes her learn D'Annunzio's 'Pioggia nel pineto', saying, "Parole, parole, bellissime, perfette...Ma il mio poeta è Leopardi. Si sa, D'Annunzio è di moda e poi sta qui vicino, al Vittoriale, fa il matto, esibizioni...Beh da grande, capirai da sola cosa è meglio" ('Gardesana', *Anni con Attila*, p. 231). If Salgari is seen as her childhood favourite and D'Annunzio the fashionable writer of that period, Carducci, on the other hand, is associated particularly with her parents. Her father has a copy of poems by Carducci by his bedside in 'Il cortile assediato', whilst there is mention of her mother reciting the poem 'O stelle dagli occhi piccolini' to her as a kind of lullaby in 'La sahariana' (*Anni con Attila*). That association is picked up again in *I giorni veri*, when Anna is given a book, Carducci's *Giambi ed Epodi*, by an old friend of her mother's, and the importance of that work to her parents' generation is indicated in the words of the friend: "c'è dentro tanta della nostra giovinezza, come era, con tutti i suoi difetti, sì, ma anche certe idee: giustizia e libertà sognavamo" (p. 39). There is a further reference, when Anna chooses the *nom de guerre* 'Saturnia Tellus' for one of the women she works with in the Resistance, and that choice is described by another character as 'una delle solite romantiche carducciane di Anna' (p. 61). Thus Carducci represents the democratic ideals of the *Risorgimento* to which she returned as a result of her experience of the Resistance. It should also be remembered that there is a further link between Zangrandi and Carducci in the form of his poem 'Cadore', in which he describes the mountains and rivers of the region and also mentions its *Risorgimento* hero, Piero Calvi. The love and admiration that Zangrandi often expresses in her writing for the Cadore and the *cadorini* echoes the sentiments to be found in Carducci's poem. Her novel for children, *Il diario di*

*Chiara*, is also based on Calvi and the *Risorgimento*.

As for Zangrandi's reading as an adult, we are given a few indications in her unpublished diaries and personal documents. In a review of *Piccola cronaca* by Nina la Orzes (a typescript three pages long, dated July 1973, with no indication of its final destination), Zangrandi mentions the importance of the Resistance for her political education, and the way that 'compagni operai ci aprirono gli occhi e fecero di molti di noi i ragazzi della Resistenza ci insegnarono Gramsci e Gobetti, Marx e Lenin e altri, meglio dei prof che al liceo li avevano vilmente taciuti' (p. 1). As mentioned earlier, however, Zangrandi is often scathing about other writers and the literary world. In her diary 'Capodanno 1955', for example, she says in an entry for February 1955:

Pensa ad una cosa vera e reale, Anna: nei 40 o 45 milioni solo della tua gente italiana (per non dire il resto che ha percentuali simili), della gente in cui hai una esperienza di vita, di valli, di strade, il mondo letterario e giornalistico, intellettualoide, rappresenta una percentuale ben piccola, anche se gracchia forte; tolto qualcuno buono, è la parte più impotente e marcia della nazione, non valgono più di pederasti. (p. 45)

She also gives us an idea of writers she does appreciate, however, in a later entry of 16 May, when, prompted by reading a piece by Falqui in *La Fiera Letteraria* in which he proposes a survey of bedtime reading, she ponders over what might be found on her bedside table:

Se venisse qui da me salterebbe o sguazzerebbe, tutto sta nella sera che capita, magari trova Dante, ce lo troverebbe più spesso di un altro, con gli scarabocchi liceali di commento del buon Lovarini [...] Ma, bravo signor Falqui, fatevi forza, ci trovereste anche Pinocchio [...] E Pinocchio e Cuore li ho messi vicino ai testi di Freud (p. 91)

She continues, saying that 'ieri sera [...] ho attaccato i diarii di Kafta [sic], no, non diventeranno libri da capezzale, come non lo divenne il diario di Pavese (ma lo è talora quello di Dostoiewski)'. Indeed, she adds,

ho appena cominciato questo signor Kafta [sic] e credo che nonostante il suo gran nome mi farà sempre tanta rabbia da spiccicargli la testa in

effigie. Sono arrivata stamane a pag 30 e vi sento subito una spaventosa nevrosi piena di egoismo e di miseria, una introversione pesante, penosa, vacua, *negativa* [...] non è e non può essere in questo nevrotico un negativo universale e come tale atto a rilevare valori positivi, ma solo il suo personale negativo di introverso. Miseria morale e disordine, egoismo spaventoso e conformismo borghese come morsa, asocialità assoluta, dalle prime trenta pagine: vedremo se mi sbaglio. (pp. 91–2)<sup>23</sup>

She does not develop this exploration of her reading interests any further here, indeed, she returns to her former theme, commenting ‘del resto, quanto noiosa e scoccante è la gente della Repubblica delle lettere’ (‘Capodanno 1955’, p. 93). Nevertheless, the authors she mentions do give some indication of her tastes, or rather (given the context in which these observations occur), they give an indication of the way that she would like her reading to be seen by others. Her tastes are broad, she suggests (that is to say, she is not one of the narrow, introverted intellectuals she despised), for she can still appreciate the value of children’s stories, such as *Pinocchio* and *Cuore*, yet also enjoys great works of literature (Dante), and is interested in non-fictional studies of humankind too (Freud). As discussed in Chapter One, her judgement of Freud was not, in fact, entirely positive. Dante is not mentioned elsewhere, and one wonders if his place at her bedside can be explained simply by the fact that he was automatically required reading for a serious writer in Italy. As for her attitude to Kafka, that exemplifies a point of view often found in her writing. In characterizing Kafka as introverted, neurotic, selfish and conformist, she is not only describing him as everything a writer should not be in her view (see Chapter One), but is also indicating that his essential pessimism and superficiality are typical of the class he belongs to and writes about: the bourgeoisie (Zangrandi’s attitude to social class will be analysed later in this chapter). Zangrandi’s view of Kafka further underlines her rejection of the middle-class and of a literature that does not, in her opinion, look beyond that class.

There are few other references to literature or writers in her diaries. In the entry for 20 May in ‘Capodanno 1955’, she mentions picking up a particular book (‘un

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<sup>23</sup>In a similar vein, Zangrandi also makes a brief reference to Pavese in the section of diary ‘Borca fine luglio’, saying that ‘la mia solitudine non è certo pavesiana’, but is ‘quieta’, ‘sufficiente per sopravvivere’ and ‘quasi felice’ (p. 1). The theme of solitude will be discussed later in this chapter.

libro dell'epoca del fascismo', but which otherwise remains unnamed) because it contains a biography of Schopenhauer and she is interested in finding out something about him (p. 102). She also comes back to Kafka a few days later (30 May), and describes reading his writing 'non per gusto, per studio e curiosità', adding that 'per gusto leggo piuttosto Croce o un trattato di antropologia o di zoologia' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 103). Beyond these instances, Zangrandi does not seem to have been interested in discussing her reading habits. Thus, when discussing her childhood interests, she suggests a particular interest in adventure stories (which she shared, no doubt, with many other children) and indicates the influence of both fascism and her parents on her literary education, pointing to a generational difference that will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Describing her interests as an adult, she suggests that she had broad tastes, yet, at the same time, had very definite ideas about what kind of literature had any worth.

Whilst references to literature and reading remain relatively rare in Zangrandi's writing, certain other recurrent themes emerge, such as those of sickness and health, the Cadore and its mountains and relationships with other people. Naturally, these emphases and this imposition of form are just as much part of her biography, whether they are seen as representative of the years in which she was writing, or as the features of her life as it exists now, for the reader. Later chapters will examine particular works and particular periods in more detail; the following survey provides a general discussion of the themes that emerge.

One of the clearest themes to emerge is that of sickness. As seen above, she connected the idea of her own illness with the mental illness that ran through her family. Fornasier has also testified to the fact that she feared that she too might commit suicide like her father. In *Il campo rosso* she comments 'era logico che vi pensassi, io, figlia di un uomo che in quel modo era morto, crollando', even if on this occasion she adds, 'vi avevo pensato dunque, ma sempre con un NO davanti, così come ad un problema che ci si ponga per esercitazione e non servirà davvero' (p. 72). She seemed convinced that she was somehow tainted in the same way as her relatives were and such ideas occur frequently in her diaries and published work. In the story 'Zilio' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 71–81), she meets a farm-labourer

who had worked at the Palua, many years previously. Discussing those days, he comments, 'erano tutti ammalati di mattia i tuoi parenti, e tu?' She answers, 'forse, ma sotto controllo' (p. 74). In the bound volume of her diaries, that begins 'Capodanno 1955', she remarks, 'sono di una razza stanca, di morti giovani, di tarati, di artritici e cardiaci' (p. 42). It is interesting to note that this was written at a time when her illness had barely begun.

Elsewhere, her 'madness' seems to take on different forms. In *Gente alla Palua* in particular, she mentions a certain propensity to violence in her character. This is not necessarily seen as negative, indeed she often links it to a more general pride in her own physique. She stresses that she is not what is normally considered attractive, in fact she often describes herself as 'brutta' or as having a 'faccia da mongola', but she is very proud of her physical strength and endurance. Nevertheless, she recognizes this as something abnormal, especially when she is also aware of being capable of hurting others to defend herself. In 'La selce' (*Gente alla Palua*, pp. 61–70), a story set during the Resistance, Zangrandi and another partisan, Severino, are discussing killing a spy. Zangrandi shows such enthusiasm for it that Severino asks 'Chi ti ha insegnato a odiare?'. She answers rather obliquely, 'Tanto tempo fa, ma chiuso dentro, non per amori mancati, ero ragazzina'. It has been seen above that she chose to devote part of another short story to an incident from her childhood when she got involved in a fight and was rather proud of it. Put together with these other references to her violence in this collection, she is encouraging the reader to see a cause and effect in the child then the adult, whilst the opposite, the imposition of certain characteristics on the child by the later writer, is just as likely. But, in 'La selce', she goes on to suggest another possibility for her violent inclinations: 'forse ho nel sangue un coso, un 47° cromosoma, deboluccio; è attivo e forte nei criminali senza controllo, dicono' (p. 69).<sup>24</sup> In this way she links the idea of madness and heredity to the violence that she feels inside her, and encourages the reader to draw the same conclusions. However, Zangrandi did not see this violence and madness only in her own character, but as prevalent in the world around her too. This is most explicit in *Gente alla Palua*. This collection

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<sup>24</sup>It has been established that violent characters often show some abnormality in their chromosomes.

of short stories is divided into two parts and the second part is given the following brief preface:

Il 47° cromosoma sembra scomparso dal sangue di molti di noi; accadde quando riprendemmo a ridere e sorridere senza sforzo (perché riso e sorriso sono gli anticorpi della violenza, della malattia di uccidere). O è annidato in fondo al nostro sangue in un suo celato 'stadio terziario' più pericoloso e micidiale ancora?

The sickness that Zangrandi saw around her took many forms. The above quotation could seem to be the jaundiced view of someone who has lived through a terrible war. As described in Chapter One, *Il campo rosso* certainly bears witness to the psychological trauma which the war had caused. She also writes of the divisions caused by the war that still existed in Italian society long after it ended. Talking to the fascist collaborator Delfine, many years after the war, Zangrandi comments: 'parlava e quel tempo restava in lei come in me, sangue e delitti come cicatrici fonde e mal chiuse' (*Anni con Attila*, p. 254). Such a point of view could also seem to be the result of her long illness, as she projected her own suffering onto others. Yet such ideas predate her ill health. It has been seen above that, when writing about her relatives in her diary of 1955, Zangrandi also linked their mental illness with their social class. Such sickness was seen by her to be typically bourgeois. In this way, Zangrandi's move away from her bourgeois background and away from Cortina d'Ampezzo is interpreted as a move to a morally healthier environment. She does not consider violence to be absent in the Cadore, but, she says, in her diary entitled '1954: Sogni — diarii', 'stimo l'uomo dagli istinti forti e primordiali che sa punire o vendicarsi, anche sfidando la legge, assai più lo stimo del borghese vile che sfoga i suoi istinti assassini uccidendo con la parola, soprattutto uccidendo "dietro la schiena"' (p. 5).

The distinction that Zangrandi made between people of one class and another can also be seen as evidence of a particular political commitment, in the choices she made regarding the way that she lived and the subjects she chose to write about. As has been seen above, she was a member of the PCI, but in her diaries she scarcely mentions party politics. It is obvious that she sympathized with the ideals of the left and that this influenced the way that she wrote about the past, particularly in

her concern for the poor and the neglected and in her attitude to the Resistance. She herself talks about the importance of writing committed literature, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. However, she shows considerable impatience with the intellectual approach to politics. This may be seen in *I giorni veri* where she is far more interested in action than theory. In a diary entry entitled 'Cortina 10 giugno' (no year), she also says of two 'compagni comunisti' that she had seen the previous day, 'loro hanno fede in qualcosa io non ne ho'. Mario Rigoni Stern emphasizes that her attachment to the people of the Cadore should not be condemned as a kind of intellectual idealization of simple country people, but does suggest some political motivation. He notes in the introduction to *Racconti partigiani e no*,

non è diventata populista per una certa compassione di classe, come non si è fatta escursionista per qualche spinta sportiva dopolavoristica, ma si è maturata popolana come ci insegna Gramsci (*diventare* popolo e non *andare* verso il popolo), e montanara perchè le crode vertiginose, i boschi profondi e il volgere delle stagioni con le loro bufere e i loro tepori le sono entrati nel sangue. (*Racconti partigiani e no*, p. 5)

Zangrandi's love of the Cadore is another theme that runs throughout her writing. It is evident not only in her diaries, but also in all her published work. All her novels and short stories are set in this area and she also wrote a tourist guide (*Borca di Cadore: cenno storico e turistico*); a well researched work of some 130 pages that discusses the history of the area as well as its folklore, and gives information regarding its flora, fauna, architecture and so on. Not long before her death she also passed on a historical work that she had written, *Risorgimento e Resistenza*, also referring to the Cadore, to the Research Institute for the Resistance in Belluno.<sup>25</sup> In Rigoni Stern's opinion, Zangrandi went to live in this area and stayed there because of 'la genuinità della gente, ossia la sincerità della gente che viveva di quella fatica, però riusciva ad essere se stessa'. According to him, she felt that 'non era gente che si era venduta...venduta al consumismo, venduta nell'ideologia, era gente che era rimasta fedele alla loro terra e alla loro maniera di vivere'.

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<sup>25</sup>A detailed discussion of this work may be found in Chapter Five.

At times she suggests that her love for the Dolomites was really a love for all of Italy, and part of a broader patriotism that she felt. In her diary 'Capodanno 1955', she describes, as so often, a trip into the mountains of the Dolomites and comments:

ecco che io sono figlia di una generazione che ha tentato disperatamente di distruggere ideali, religioni, confini e popoli e ritrovo le pietre miliari dei confini e sangue di fiori rossi ed ossa, qui e sento, contro queste rocce, che sono irrimediabilmente italiana; è la vita e la storia tormentata della mia gente, della gente umile italiana che sento veramente, la mia, capisco ora cosa sono i confini = linee [sic] ideali e sacre sui margini dei quali ci si dovrebbe amare e sorridere. (p. 163)

Later in the same volume, she reflects, 'è forse un ottocentismo a cui gli esistenzialisti sorriderebbero questo accorgersi di amare a fondo il proprio paese come una madre' (p. 217); and this is despite the fact that she sees her country as 'povero', 'mentitore', 'utilitarista' and 'pieno di ladri'. Moreover, she says, 'ha governi abominevoli, è cattolico conformista, gente piena di chiacchiere e di indisciplinazione', but, 'è mio e gli voglio bene' (p. 218). This infatuation does not extend to the south of Italy. A comment, 'non ho regioni, io', is followed by a swift, 'credo che non tollererei il Vesuvio e i meridionali, non riesco a disgiungere un paesaggio alla gente che ci vive e la gente del sud mi è insopportabile' (p. 217).

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, her interpretation of the lives and characters of the *cadorini* rests on a patriotic interpretation of the history of that area that gives particular emphasis to the period of the Risorgimento. Her fictional work for children, *Il diario di Chiara*, is, she says on the back cover, 'un racconto fondamentalmente storico' that tells 'la storia — gloriosa, anche se sfortunata — della rivolta del Cadore', set in 1848. Clearly, she felt that the history of the Cadore needed to be written, and, moreover, that the history of women in particular in that area needed to be written. It is true that her works contain a number of male heroes (Calvi in *Il diario di Chiara*, and Severino and Garbin in *Il campo rosso* and *I giorni veri*), and that her emphasis on the Resistance and *Risorgimento* could be seen by some feminist critics as a typically male interpretation of history, yet she always gives greatest importance to female characters and always writes from the

point of view of a woman. In this context, her autobiographical writing is not only a personal testimony to some periods of the history of the *cadorini* and a tribute to their traditions, but may also be seen as a means for her, as an outsider, to write herself into those traditions. In Chapter One, we have seen how Zangrandi identifies with the customs of the women of the Cadore in *Il campo rosso*; the idea that she belongs in this area is stressed throughout her writing. For example, in the same work she talks about ‘i nostri paesani’ (p. 15) and ‘noi dei monti’ (p. 57) and comments that ‘la nostra è gente che detesta i perché [...] sono secoli che siamo così’ (p. 31). In all her other autobiographical works, there is a similar use of the first person plural, and it is interesting that the narrator in *I Brusaz*, a work that is not autobiographical, speaks in an analogous fashion about the *cadorini*.

A consideration of the way that Zangrandi related to the *cadorini* on a personal level raises another important theme that runs throughout Zangrandi’s writing: solitude. Her attitude to her own character in this respect is summed up neatly in ‘Anni con Attila’, when she talks about her life being an ‘eterna altalena tra solitudine e socievolezza’ (p. 38). It has been shown above that this is described as a significant feature of both her childhood and her adult life. Also in ‘Anni con Attila’, she talks about the ‘mondo degli altri’ (p. 44); she could have some contact with this world, but never really belong to it. She gives the impression that her relationships with other people were very important to her but that real friendships were only possible with a certain type of person. It was in the Cadore that she could find such people. Although she frequently mentions the idea that, by their nature, the *cadorini* speak very little, she emphasizes that it was amongst them that it was possible to communicate. Rigoni Stern affirms that she had many friends in the area, speaking fondly of the way that she would be forever visiting and bumping into people, and then suffering from too much caffeine from having drunk coffee with each one of them. The lack of communication between members of her bourgeois family or between her and the people of Cortina is interpreted by Zangrandi as another kind of illness. But Rigoni Stern is confident that Zangrandi found herself a place in a different society:

si è inserita completamente con quella gente di Cadore [...] poi è ve-

nuta la Resistenza e allora lei si è trovata addirittura insieme, con i partigiani, con i montanari, ha diviso tutto [...] non era una che aveva studiato e che era al di fuori di quella vita, anzi, aveva abbandonato l'università, e l'assistentato che faceva [...] e la sua professione di chimica [...] Lei è diventata montanara e ha fatto la scelta di vivere in montagna e di scrivere storie della gente. (Interview, 6 March 1993)

Fornasier and De Luca also considered that she was very much part of the community. However, Alessandro Sacco, of the Biblioteca Civica of Comelico, has expressed the opposite view, claiming instead that Zangrandi was never really considered a true *cadorina*, and remained an outsider as far as the people there were concerned.<sup>26</sup> As has been seen, Zangrandi herself certainly considered that these were her people and that she belonged with them. Nevertheless, she also put a high value on having time to herself and often reflects on this in her diaries. As mentioned earlier, she makes a distinction between her solitude and a solitude that is 'pavesiana'. 'Unlike Pavese's solitude, she suggests, hers was 'quieta, sufficiente per sopravvivere, autosufficiente direi fino a farmi quasi felice quando è assoluta,' ('Diarii — note (note dell'ospedale di Pd)', 'Borca fine luglio'). The implication here is that Pavese was another of the typically introverted, bourgeois intellectuals whom Zangrandi so disdained. Similarly, elsewhere she asks 'perché amo tanto la solitudine?', and answers herself by affirming, 'questa non è solitudine, ma scelta' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 81). Yet she recognizes that there is a negative side to solitude too, and that it has made her suffer. Moreover, it has not always been a matter of choice. The fact that she is a woman living an unusual life is shown to have isolated her. Sometimes she suggests that she was resigned to this; in *Il campo rosso* she explains that the men working for her rarely speak, but when they do, 'allora rispondevo, ma sapevo che non stava a me donna, anche se padrona, cominciare per prima' (p. 31). At other times, however, as will be demonstrated in later chapters, she shows much more indignation at the limitations put on her because of her sex. Occasionally, she is decidedly vitriolic. She claims in her diary, that she never had any good relationships with men:

Io ero sana, come acciaio, famiglia non mi hai dato, Dio, nè figli; gli

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<sup>26</sup>Testimony made December 1992, Istituto Storico Bellunese della Resistenza.

uomini che facesti avvicinare non mi dissero parole buone od oneste o d'amore, gli uomini che mi avvicinarono dissero 'vieni, un'ora, mezz'ora', dissero senza anticipi e senza riguardi anche se mai mi comportai da puttana; dicevano 'ho un preservativo se vuoi che niente ti succede, non far storie, sei brutta, ma forte, servi solo per questo, non far storie sentimentalisti'.

Questo mi hai fatto, Dio, nella mia vita non breve. L'ho incassato, piansi e lo sai, fino all'orlo del suicidio, poi ho imparato a ridere in faccia a tutto il mondo ed a bestemmiare, che è il più bestiale modo di ridere in faccia al Dio che ti massacra. (p. 133)

By no means all her relationships with men are seen in such a negative light. She seems to have loved the man she calls Severino in *I giorni veri*, who is killed by the Nazis shortly before the end of the book, but, although the relationship is described in a very positive way, she does not suggest that it ever went beyond friendship. In *Il campo rosso*, she apparently refers to the same relationship, also in a very positive way, although this time she gives him the name Dario. In the same work, she describes another relationship, with Carlo, that might have been, but that, in the end, was impossible. In any case, she sometimes views this lack of relationship as inevitable, and preferable, asking: 'cosa sarebbe la mia vita se dovesse sopportare il peso di un uomo, del "compagno della vita" vicino?' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 166). She concludes in another entry, referring to the man she describes in *Il campo rosso*, 'non era il tuo destino, perché il tuo era un altro, gran errore sarebbe stato legarsi anche minimamente a quest'uomo, a qualunque uomo vivo o reale nella tua vita, Giovanna Zangrandi' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 30). It is interesting that she addresses herself with her pseudonym here, despite the fact that she continued to use her original name throughout her life. Is she addressing just one part of herself, the writer? Or the woman who exists by virtue of these self-reflexive writings?

In general, the relationships with men and women described in her published work are more positive and optimistic than those found in her diaries. This could be because she used her diaries as a kind of release, and turned to them when people let her down. Obviously, they are the result of much more spontaneous reactions than her published work. Even in her published work, there are no references to

intimate relationships. It is interesting to note the main event she describes of her teenage years is that with Delfine, when she fell in love with another woman. This comes over as a very open, honest account of her feelings at the time. References to lesbianism in her diaries, on the other hand, point to a much more complex situation than anything suggested by her published work. In 'Capodanno 1955', she is looking back at her childhood once more, and seeing what she might learn. She sees the

porte socchiuse nella mia infanzia, la contessina e la signorina Amelia come lontane e forse avvicinati, in una ricerca vile ed interessata da parte mia ora, come a leggere la seconda parte di una storia, e credo che sarebbe una squallida storia di lesbiche. (p. 64)

(The words 'di lesbiche' are handwritten whilst the rest is typed.)

A few pages later, she is considering the different kinds of 'donne solitarie' that there are and turns once more to lesbians (of a particular type):

Inconsapevoli lesbiche e le loro esplosioni ed odii tra loro, gelosie selvagge e lotte: bello. Ti ricordi la contessina e la signorina Amelia e quell'altra che non ricordo come si chiamasse e l'orrore che ispirarono a te quindicenne per le donne e le cose di donne e le intimità fisiche di donne; credo che sia a quel periodo che devo ascrivere il senso di schifo fisico che mi fa anche solo la mano di una donna sulla spalla, la mia freddezza ed il mio distacco per tutta la vita. (p. 69)

There is no reference to these kind of feelings elsewhere. It is also rather revealing that she goes on in this section of diary to contrast these lesbians, with, amongst others, 'una sensuale e sana "puttana della brigata" come conobbi, ed erano eroiche e magnifiche' (p. 70). It is also interesting in this respect that her despised uncle Angelo's mental ill-health, on the other hand, and his repressed bourgeois attitudes are linked to a certain effeminacy (he is 'bellino, elegantissimo, profumato' (*Gente alla Palua*, p. 32)) and implied homosexuality. This is food for what could be endless speculation regarding Zangrandi's own sexuality. Her writing suggests considerable ambiguity on her part.

A particular aspect of her solitude that made her suffer keenly was the fact that she never had children. As seen in Chapter One, this pain is evoked movingly in

*Il campo rosso*, though with none of the bitterness sometimes found in her unpublished writing. In her diaries, she describes turning to her writing as compensation for this lack of a child: 'quando il fallimento di una vita di donna segnava assoluto vuoto nella creazione di creature, ho messo al mondo quasi senza accorgermene Sabina' (p. 237). When she has problems with writing *Orsola nelle stagioni*, she comments in her diary: 'sono lontana dalla storia di Orsola, ma i fili non li perdo, voglio le storie e le vite di questa gente per vite dei figli e degli amanti che non ebbi, in cambio, Signore, le voglio, io ladra di vite' (p. 171).<sup>27</sup>

In this way, her writing is her child, and perhaps also a means of communication with others. She is able to communicate with her readers, but also, through her writing she is able to recall people who really lived and her relationship with them can continue in some sense. This is particularly true of her relationship with her mother, which is also a constant theme in her works. In a way, this relationship continued to exist and to influence Zangrandi for years after her mother's death:

Oh mamma, mamma, come sei donna e viva!

Lascia che un giorno ti scriva più grande di Sabina, pura e splendente, gigantesca come un personaggio di quel esagerato e grottesco Vittore Hugo che amavi leggere (ma io ti terrò umana, io radicata alla terra, io che per sconfinare o per leggere grandiosità al massimo arrivo a Dante, radicato alla terra) come sei grande e umana, piccolina fisicamente e raccolta, come vederti da un bivacco in cui ci si faceva caffè alzarti nello sfondo di valico Cibiana, come una statua di ideale, come si vede a volte la Libertà e la Dignità umana, pensandole in un nevaio senza barriere. ('Capodanno 1955', p. 23)

At times she is aware that the mother she thinks of now is not the one that really existed: 'Oh mamma, mamma, anche se non fosti così splendida ed angelica ed avevi le tue asprezze e vecchi residui conformisti, come ti vedo grande e splendida nei sogni dolenti di ore malate' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 239). The presence of her mother is felt throughout her writing; she is sometimes recalled with regret, but at other times, most notably in *Il campo rosso*, she seems to continue to

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<sup>27</sup>This phrase, 'ladra di vite', occurs often in Zangrandi's writing, both published and unpublished. It refers to the way that she used the lives of others in her writing. There is also the suggestion that she is stealing what she did not have herself.

exist and provide comfort. Zangrandi also traces her political ideals back to her mother (particularly in *I giorni veri*, see Chapter Five), bringing up the question of heredity once more and the idea that her fascism was a kind of parenthesis in her life.

Another source of comfort for Zangrandi were the mountains that surrounded her. The solitude she could find in the mountains and valleys of the Dolomites and mountaineering and skiing were her 'cure' for the offence she so often felt at the hands of other people. The sheer physical effort and concentration involved in such activities (like the strenuous, physical work she enjoyed) allowed her to empty her mind of other thoughts and escape from the frustrations of every day life. But she also saw a spiritual quality in the mountains themselves, that is very much linked to her view of religion.

In *I giorni veri*, she claims not to believe in God at all, while elsewhere He is seen as benevolent yet distant; 'lo sconosciuto, lontano Iddio' is 'così lontano, puro, bellissimo, come aria, solo aria immensa, pura, eterna è il Dio che mi ha comandata e mi attende. Ed è umano, umile, sa vedere anche le cose terrene' ('Capodanno 1955', p. 20). Often, as Antonia Arslan has commented, in her paper at the conference held on Zangrandi shortly after her death ('La figura e l'opera di Giovanna Zangrandi', Belluno, 11 March 1988), it is a rather ironical attitude that she expresses towards Him. In her diary 'Capodanno 1955', she comments that 'ci deve essere un Dio che mi ha aiutato', otherwise she would never have survived 18 years in Cortina. In this same entry she goes on to refer to Him as 'il Capo' (p. 5). She certainly had no love for the Catholic Church, which appears at best irrelevant and at worst superstitious and harmful: 'cattolica non so essere, un senso di orrore e di ripugnanza selvaggia mi distacca dal cattolicesimo, dalla liturgia, dalla loro iconoclastia, dai loro dogmi, un senso che a volte è schifo fisico, nausea'. Although, she reflects, perhaps it is not hatred that she feels, for 'chi odia combatte, allora sarei un'anticattolica militante e non lo sono e non lo sarò' (p. 21). Instead, she continues, it is towards the 'parte dirigente, la ligia e la fanatica' (a good half of Catholics, she says), that she feels 'disprezzo', not towards 'la massa tiepida ed onesta che riveste di un ufficiale e timido cattolicesimo la sua fede pulita nella

bellissima dottrina Cristiana'. The religious feeling she does have is often linked with the mountains. In the same volume she describes walking in the mountains:

ed ecco che vien l'ora del giorno, quella che dovrei chiamare "l'ora di Dio" tanto ti agguanta forte la certezza di Dio. In me, anticattolica, feroce, dubitosa cristiana, è tanto più spaventosa ed allarmante. E vi soggiaccio, come ad un'ora-attimo pura e splendida, splendente come roccia e cielo. (p. 161)

Writing seven years later, in a section of diary entitled 'PD 6 ott.', she comments that discussions with strict catholics drive her to total atheism. She has no more liking for protestants, and, having just read a book on India, she is equally dismissive of the religions there. She prefers, she says,

un prato e un grande larice, guardarlo nel suo gioco pulito di tronco, di frasca, aghi e rami controcielo, sapere il suo eterno morire e rinascere dal seme, amarlo come non saprei dire come: forse come il proprio padre se fu onesto e buono, come nostro figlio se promette bene, un albero, bellezza e armonia e qualcosa di più, vita. (p. 2)

And then, she says:

sento qualcosa di immane e oscuro a me, oltre quel larice singolo, oltre il mio corpo singolo, malata carne, oltre la terra direi, certo oltre il mio tempo umano, e se questo inafferrabile stupendo nel quale mi sento immersa, io granello, se questo è Dio non ho difficoltà di chiamarlo con tal nome, anche di invocarlo e parlargli nelle ore allucinanti del dolore. (pp. 2-3)

Thus Zangrandi rejects religious institutions and claims to hate dogma. Nevertheless, she is uncompromising both with herself and with others, and insists on a kind of 'moral code'. This has a lot to do with her politics, more than with her religion: the value that she put on a simple, peasant life, as opposed to bourgeois living, and the importance she gave to physical work of a very practical nature, has been seen above. Essentially, she favours the customs and characteristics that identified in the people who lived around her in the Cadore. In many ways, the theme of the Cadore is central to her writing. For Zangrandi, choosing to live

in this area and write about it was a political choice, a rejection of intellectuals and the literary world and of her comfortable, middle-class background in order to live a life that she felt was healthier and more honest. As seen above, it is also described in her writing as a spiritual choice, based on an affinity with the Cadore that was so strongly felt that she insists that she belonged to the area. Yet she must always have been aware that she was not one of the *cadorini* by birth; there is an obvious strain in her work as she asserts rather too often that they are *her* people. So it is ironic that it was in fact via the literary world that she was able to find a place amongst the people she so admired. By writing about herself and this environment, Zangrandi seems to have created a childhood for herself there, and made the mountains and traditions of the Cadore her own. Her choice of material and emphasis on certain themes give not only a temporal framework to her writing about her life, but also an interpretative one, as she describes the values and the traditions within which she places her own life. Thus her choice of the Cadore was also a poetic one, that influenced the very form of her writing. As has been seen, Zangrandi insists at times on the truth of her accounts, but also seems quite happy that fiction should find its way into her autobiography. This seems partly a result of what she saw as the demands of story-telling, and partly an attempt to write her own life into a particular tradition. In any case, Zangrandi does not seem too concerned by the idea that history moves into the realm of myth; for her this does not undermine the possibility of telling the truth, but enhances the role played by myths and legends.

## Chapter Three: Reflections of Fascism

As described in the last chapter, Giovanna Zangrandi's involvement with the Resistance to fascism began shortly after the fall of the fascist regime in 1943. Before this date she does not seem to have been a member of any antifascist group, although, as discussed in Chapter Two, the very fact that she was an outsider in Cortina may have meant that she mixed with people who shared a certain hostility towards the fascist regime. Prior to the period of the armed Resistance, her activities point to a participation in fascist institutions, rather than any attempt to undermine them. During her student days at Bologna University, she had joined the Gioventù Universitaria Fascista.<sup>28</sup> In an article in her post-war newspaper *Val Boite* she also comments 'mi iscrissi al P.N.F. nel 1934' ('Storia di una sahariana', 11 August 1945, p. 3). When she moved to Cortina, she became a member of the local Fasci Femminili and was made female sports officer in 1939.<sup>29</sup> She also contributed to local newspapers, which, given fascist policies regarding the media, meant writing for a press whose purpose was to provide propaganda for the regime.

The aim of this chapter is to examine how Zangrandi's involvement in fascism should be interpreted, and discuss what light that may throw on her work and the position of women such as Zangrandi under the fascist regime. An analysis of her own interpretation, in her references to fascism and to her own fascist past in post-war writings, will be followed by an assessment of her work as a journalist working for regional publications during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In this way, a comparison may be drawn between the way Zangrandi chose to present the regime, and her involvement in it, in her writings after the war, and her relationship with fascism as it emerges from articles written in the context of fascist culture and the fascist press in the Cadore. The discussion will take account of recent studies and will pay particular attention to issues that have been raised concerning the relationship between women and the fascist regime.

The myths that have grown up around fascism since 1945, added to those

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<sup>28</sup>This is mentioned in the short story 'La sahariana' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 146–187).

<sup>29</sup>This is reported in *Cortina*, 1 March 1939, on the 'Pagina del fascio'.

created by the regime itself, have made it a subject that is particularly susceptible to generalizations and tendentious accounts. For example, as Mario Isnenghi has commented in *Intellettuali militanti e intellettuali funzionari: appunti sulla cultura fascista* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), discussions about the extent to which Italians collaborated with the regime have frequently come up against broad stereotypes. It is his view that, in the years since the war, the middle classes have tended to suggest that no one really believed in fascism:

hanno lasciato che si imponesse il disegno di un'Italia fascista quasi una chiesa vuota, senza religione e senza fedeli, dove gruppi di falsi sacerdoti trescano sull'altare e tutti gli altri prendono esempio, soffocando nell'affettazione di cinismo il disinganno e la vergogna. (p. 20)

This, he says, is just as much of a stereotype as the idea of the Italy that is 'tutta convinta e compatta propagandata dal regime di allora' (p. 20). After the war, few wanted to be identified with the failed regime and, as a result, Isnenghi maintains, 'il paesaggio storico che via via si è andato definendo è quello di un fascismo senza fascisti, dove una patente di antifascismo, criptoantifascismo o, male che vada, afascismo non la si nega a nessuno' (p. 21). The problem is also that such labels do very little to clarify just what fascism was, and how it was experienced by the Italian people. Moreover, interpretations of fascism are very often influenced by political concerns of the day. That is not to say that it is desirable or even possible to take a neutral stance towards an analysis of a regime that existed by virtue of the denial of basic human rights and a reliance on propaganda. Nevertheless, this chapter will aim to go beyond the stereotypes and allow some of the true complexities of fascism to emerge.

A number of areas of research into fascism are of direct relevance to this chapter. These include work on the question of women and fascism, journalism under the regime and studies on the way that people experienced fascism in Italy's different regions. The role of women under fascism has been of growing interest to historians. Initial studies in this area highlighted the essential misogyny of fascist policies and the way that the regime, particularly in the context of its demographic policy, aimed to limit the female role in society to that of mother and wife. Piero Meldini,

in his study *Sposa e madre esemplare: ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1975), talks of the importance of Mussolini's Ascension Day speech (26 May 1927) in this respect. There is little direct reference to women, he notes, yet the speech was clearly based on a 'concezione della donna come [...] "essenzialmente madre", votata a un destino incombente di gravidanze accelerate per sostenere la missione imperiale dell'Italia, oltre che per difendere la reputazione di "virilità" degli italiani' (p. 19).

It has been noted that, despite the obvious restrictions that fascism put on women's lives, there was apparently a considerable consensus in favour of the regime amongst the female population. This idea is supported by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, in *La donna 'nera': 'consenso' femminile e fascismo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), who points out that 'l'andata al potere fu appoggiata, ferocemente, dalla piccola borghesia femminile, dalle maestrine, e da tutto lo squadrone della morte delle vedove e delle madri orbe' (p. 16). As for why there should have been such support for fascism from women, Macciocchi suggests that the key to this is the appeals made to women, particularly by Mussolini: 'condannandole a furia di parole tragiche e talora tragicomiche a questo perenne castigo del sacrificio [...] e ottenendo da loro questa resa volontaria da far assorbire con gioia "masochistica", Mussolini riuscì a "incantare", "mistificare" e "possedere" milioni di donne' (p. 33–34). Whilst Macciocchi's conclusion still does not really explain *why* women should have found such a role attractive, it does begin to look at the problem from the point of view of women.

It is this area, a history of fascism as it was experienced by women, rather than fascist policies regarding women, that has received the most attention in recent years. The collection of essays, *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1988), edited by Marina Addis Saba, includes a bibliographical survey of recent research on women and fascism, in which the editor suggests that by taking a closer look at the realities of their everyday life under fascism, it is possible to identify alongside, or even within, this consensus, 'alcuni poli di dissenso e di una più o meno consapevole resistenza delle donne alla dittatura' (p. 9). Luisa Passerini has done some work

in this area regarding the working class in Turin in *Fascism in Popular Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, translated by R. Lumley and J. Bloomfield), and some of the essays in the above collection look at the middle and upper classes from this point of view. These works also show that the role assigned to women by the fascist dictatorship was not simply a reinforcement of traditional ideas, but far more ambiguous. The fact that, as Addis Saba discusses, the regime not only wanted to ‘conservare alla donna la sua naturale missione’, but also wanted her to fulfil it ‘con consapevole responsabilità nazionale e sociale’ (p. 34), had far-reaching effects. There has also been recognition of the growing influence that the commercialisation of Italy had on the lives of women in Italy during the 1920s and 1930s, and of the new role models offered by the worlds of fashion and the cinema in particular. As will be discussed later, in connection with Zangrandi’s articles written for fascist newspapers, this more nuanced approach is beginning to provide a much fuller picture of the relationship between women and fascism. It is noticeable, however, that most of the work done so far tends to exclude the period of the war before the fall of the regime in 1943. Miriam Mafai’s description of daily life for women during the whole of the Second World War, *Pane nero* (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), is very revealing, though it does not aim to be a systematic or critical study. Beyond this, there is only the collection of essays edited by Anna Bravo, *Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali*, (Rome: Laterza, 1991). She herself comments on the dearth of other work in this area, compared to the following years: ‘paragonata alla resistenza, grande racconto di purificazione che rovescia la sconfitta in vittoria, la guerra è ora un brusio infido, ora una babele fragorosa, comunque un terreno poco seducente’, and this has led to ‘una quasi sordità di fronte alla sfida storiografica proposta dalla guerra totale’ (p. VIII). Victoria De Grazia seems typical of this tendency when, in *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922–45* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), she accords little space to the war period and almost dismisses it as a time when the ambiguities regarding women that were evident earlier in the *ventennio*, cease to exist.

As regards the history of the region during this period, Ferruccio Vendramini,

in his essay 'Indicazioni di fonti e di possibili ricerche sul periodo fascista', in the volume *Storia contemporanea del Bellunese*, edited by the *Istituto Storico Bellunese per la Resistenza* (Feltre: Libreria Pilotto, 1985), explains that there had been very little published on this period regarding the province of Belluno, at least until 1970. He identifies the fact that there were no obvious social tensions in this area under the regime, which might subsequently have interested historians, as one of the reasons for this lack. This was not because there were no problems in this area; rather that the perennial problem of poverty and lack of development found an answer in emigration, just as it had before the fascist regime:

l'economia bellunese, priva di grossi centri operai, si caratterizzava soprattutto per le attività agricole, zootecniche e forestali. La mancata soluzione del 'problema montagna' anche sotto il regime [...] non provocò momenti di scontro lacerante, bensì un esodo continuo, che si manifesta nelle statistiche attraverso gli scarti sensibili tra residenti e presenti. (p. 119)

In this way:

il controllo politico e sociale su quanti restavano in provincia risultava così più semplice: l'emigrazione, politicamente controllata, sanava, almeno in parte, il problema della disoccupazione, e permetteva di mantenere forme di sussistenza per chi continuava a coltivare la terra, divisa, specie nelle zone altimetriche più elevate, in piccoli appezzamenti di proprietà a conduzione familiare. (p. 119)

Another area where there remains a great deal of work to be done is that of the press under fascism. In the past, there has been a tendency to regard it as unworthy of study; as Isnenghi comments: 'valutata in partenza come caricatura degenerata della prassi comunicativa propria di altre società, la stampa dell'epoca fascista resta assente dalle ricostruzioni storiche' (*Intellettuali militanti e intellettuali funzionari*, p. 16). He continues: 'sulla stampa del regime pesa il drastico giudizio nato dalla contropposta leggenda di una presunta libertà di stampa in età prefascista e postfascista' (p. 50). Certainly, it is true that manipulation of the press was institutionalized under fascism, but this does not mean that newspapers and magazines are not a useful source of information. There was not the

uniformity in magazines and newspapers that one might expect, given the government censorship at the time. In fact, there was considerable variation in language and subject matter between the various publications produced in Italy during the *ventennio*. Research carried out so far has tended to concentrate on daily papers and learned or literary reviews. Addis Saba's collection does include a study of the *Almanacco della donna italiana* (a national magazine produced from 1920 to 1943), but, on the whole, popular and weekly publications have not received much attention so far.

Thus Zangrandi's articles in the fascist press are of particular interest, not only for the light that they throw on her writing as a whole, but also for the insights they provide for the study of women and fascism (especially as she belonged to the middle class identified as providing so much support for fascism), and for research on the press and local history of this period. An important aspect of Zangrandi's relationship to fascism is, of course, the way she interpreted it herself, once the regime had fallen. An analysis of Zangrandi's work as a fascist journalist can be put into context better by first examining her later writing and the way that she presents fascism in the post-war period. Thus, the picture of her interests and relationship with fascism as they emerge from her writing under the censorship of the regime may be compared to the way she decided to present them afterwards, when there was no longer formal government censorship, but when influences and constraints on her writing as a journalist and author may have come from elsewhere. This is also a means of illustrating some of the problems involved when talking about fascism, and of working towards an overall analysis of the relationship between Zangrandi and fascism.

### **A retrospective view**

Zangrandi's post-war writing includes a number of references to fascism; in her newspaper articles, autobiography and fiction. As these each raise rather different issues, they will be discussed separately. It is difficult to imagine that an ex-partisan would write favourably about the fascist regime, particularly shortly after the Resistance, and, indeed, Zangrandi is highly critical. As for her own participa-

tion in the institutions of fascism, she does not try to hide it, although, as will be discussed later, the way that she writes about it seems to involve some compromise and contradiction. Most of her criticism is generic, although a recurring complaint is the way that fascism harmed women in particular, by underestimating their abilities and restricting what they were able to do with their lives.

Just after the end of the war, Zangrandi edited a newspaper called *Val Boite*, on behalf of two local CLNs (Val Boite and Cortina), and it is here that she is most vociferous in her criticism of fascism. ‘Siamo stanchi’, she writes, ‘di demagoghi, di burocrati, di palloni gonfiati’ (*Val Boite* 30 June 1945, p. 2). She is bitter about what fascism did to her and her generation:

tutta la nostra giovinezza fu sporcata dal fascismo, impantanata dalla sua propaganda di fandonie e di false testimonianze propagate in malafede. E lo fecero dire ed anche scrivere in articoli alla nostra buona fede di ragazzi stupidi e illusi. (*Val Boite*, 21 July 1945, p. 1)

In the editorials of the newspaper, Zangrandi points to the possibility of a new beginning for Italians, now the war is over and the fascist regime defeated, but, she warns, an honest review of the past is required in order to create a better future. In this respect, the views she expresses here are entirely consonant with the need felt by most Italians to make a new start. When this new honesty also included denouncing collaborators, however, it was inevitable that the paper would be seen as more controversial (although she never mentions individuals by name), particularly in an area where the issue was so sensitive. Zangrandi reserves her severest criticism for those who remained faithful to fascism after September 1943 and who collaborated with the Nazis, deriding ‘certi elementi delusi nelle loro inconfessabili aspirazioni tedescofile ed anti-italiane’ amongst the people of Cortina d’Ampezzo in particular. It is hardly surprising that her denunciation provoked a strong reaction amongst readers. As she puts it herself,

successo e succedette quello che era prevedibile: i lettori di tutti i generi, a nord e a sud, che comunque godettero dei 20 anni di quel famoso dominio, usati alla menzogna, ai pudichi silenzi, al sistematico occultamento di ogni fatto vergognoso, strillano, protestano e anche minacciano [sic]. (*Val Boite*, 28 July 1945, p. 2)

It is even less surprising that she was forced by her readership to account for the anomaly between her fierce criticism of fascist collaborators and her own participation in fascist organisations. Given her own insistence on honesty, and the fact that she was well known in the area, she could hardly ignore that demand. In August 1945, she wrote that she was prepared to tell the story of her 'sahariana' (the jacket Italians were required to wear at fascist ceremonies) and her 'fede fascista', because it was 'la storia di tanti giovani'. She explains that she regrets joining the fascist party bitterly, mainly because of the effect it had on her mother, the widow of a former socialist. She, like other young people in Italy at the time, was deceived by fascism, particularly during the 'anni dell'impero' when she and other students were taken on visits 'per l'agro pontino e i nidi di infanzia più belli e meglio organizzati'. For a while, she says, she believed in it and wore her 'sahariana', 'assieme ai gradi di capocenturia che mi avevano affibbiati' and also organised 'certe ben note squadrette sportive'. The disillusion came later. They had been taught that sport was good for physical and moral wellbeing, but, she says, in 1940 she realised that it was also promoted by the regime 'per aver buona carne da cannone'. That realisation was a very painful experience:

tutti i giovani di anni e di spirito che hanno vissuto questa odissea fanno l'amarezza della demolizione che abbiamo avuta dentro in quel tempo. Dentro di noi era come in quelle case in cui è caduta una bomba e restano in piedi solo i muri e le finestre vuote contro il cielo. (*Val Boite*, 11 August 1945, p. 3)

In this article she does not mention her work for fascist newspapers, although the previous week, in an article in which she criticises the 'maestrine' and 'studentini' who, during the fascist regime, would write just to see their name in print or to earn a few lire, she admits 'nella mia irresponsabilità giovanile ho fatto altrettanto' ('Leggere e scrivere', *Val Boite*, 4 August 1945, p. 3).

It appears from these articles, written in the period immediately following the war, that Zangrandi's attitude to fascist regime was overwhelmingly negative. Her own adherence, before the period of the Resistance, and that of others of her generation, is interpreted as a typical error of youth and a result of the deception wrought by the fascist regime. The responsibility for their actions is thus shifted

to a great extent on to the regime. This is reinforced by the language Zangrandi uses. The use of diminutives such as 'squadrette', 'studentini' and 'maestrine' plays down the importance of their actions, and the tendency to refer to a 'generation' and 'tutti i giovani' draws the attention away from discussions of individual responsibility. Moreover, as one would expect in a CLN publication, great emphasis is put on the eighteen months of the Armed Resistance, rather than the previous twenty years, and support of the Republic of Salò is censured most strongly. In this way, her criticism of the fascist state and of fascists as a group separate from herself in some sense, sits rather uncomfortably with the acknowledgement of her own involvement. Such tensions are a vivid illustration of the situation many Italians found themselves in at the end of the war. As these articles were written at a time when feelings were running very high and when Zangrandi would inevitably find herself on the defensive, writing as a *partigiana*, and yet known to have been a fascist, it is interesting to compare them with later references to fascism in her works written under very different circumstances.

Whilst Zangrandi felt compelled to write about the fascist period in *Val Boite*, and, indeed, was required to do so by her readers, she was under no such constraints later, when it came to writing fiction. However, it is interesting to note that the two novels, *I Brusaz* (Milan: Mondadori, 1954) and *Orsola nelle stagioni* (Milan: Mondadori, 1957), both overlap to some extent with the period of the *ventennio*. Despite this, they contain very few direct references to the fascist regime. The overall impression in these works is that, for most of the time, fascism has no direct influence on the characters' lives. The only time the workings of the fascist state intrudes in *I Brusaz* is towards the end of the novel (in the early days of fascist government), when the likeable simpleton, Franz, is presumed by a local fascist official to be a subversive and is consequently sent to *confino*. The latter character only makes a very brief appearance, and his purpose in the novel seems to be to act purely as a means of discrediting fascism by showing the stupidity of its supporters. *Orsola nelle stagioni* overlaps to a much greater extent with the fascist period, but there is only a brief reference to fascism, and again it is suggested that the regime was of little relevance to this remote village. It indicated obliquely

that the fascists have taken control, but life continues in the same way, and the *capovilla* continues to make money as before, by selling wood illegally, only now it is with the collusion of the *podestà* rather than that of the *sindaco*. Thus, it is interesting to note that, having chosen to set both novels at least partially during the *ventennio*, and having shown an interest in showing the beliefs and tenor of life in their mountain communities, Zangrandi then gives the impression that fascism did not necessarily impinge on the lives of her characters and was not of great relevance to their communities.

In her account of the Resistance, *I giorni veri*, the accent is rather different. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, most of the time Zangrandi tends to conflate fascist with nazi and the interest always lies with the partisans; the ‘nazifascisti’ are rarely seen as more than an anonymous force that is inherently evil. It is true that local people who have volunteered as *gendarmi* in the *Sud-Tiroler Ordnungsdienst* are treated quite sympathetically:

son gente che parla veneto-ladino come noi, che ha fatto servizio militare nei nostri alpini o circa, i nazi li hanno catturati nel S.O.D. per ragioni di minestra, per paura di servizio al fronte, per opportunità. Hanno approfittato soprattutto dell’agnosticismo politico assoluto di questa gente, facendo leva sul loro senso di ‘ordine e disciplina’, talora, a farli entrare nel S.O.D., sono state anche le simpatie ceccobeppeiste dei vecchi genitori e nonni, il tradizionalismo e il ricordo di quel felice paterno regime. (pp. 67–8)

Zangrandi expresses considerable pain in *I giorni veri* at the idea that Italians are having to fight these fellow countrymen. As for the very few who really believe in nazism (she does not suggest anyone believes in fascism), they are described as ‘gente che si pasce veramente di naia, divise, fucili, pattugliamenti e bei passi marziali, di cattiveria nei controlli al confine’ (p. 68). That is to say, by definition they are not normal people and Zangrandi does not attempt an explanation of their psychology.

As *I giorni veri* is an autobiographical account, it is also important, like the articles in *Val Boite*, for understanding the way that Zangrandi wishes to present her own role in the regime. Once more, there is an attempt to explain her motivations

for being a fascist, but she does not identify at all with those who remain fascist after 1943. Although *I giorni veri* is centred mainly on the period when she was involved in antifascist activities, there is a description at the beginning of the book of her ‘conversion’ to the antifascist cause. Here, thoughts of her involvement with fascism are very much linked with memories of her mother’s disapproval of such activities and, indeed, of the younger generation in general. Looking back, she describes it again as a symptom of youth, the typical thoughtlessness of a young person more interested in sport than in politics. Her involvement in fascism is presented as almost belonging to another life.<sup>30</sup>

These ideas are explored in more depth in a short story, ‘La sahariana’. Published in 1966 in the collection *Anni con Attila*, it is a reworking of the story that appeared in *Val Boite*, referred to above. This story deals with the subject of living under fascism in much more detail. Although it was published some twenty years after she edited *Val Boite*, in many ways her interpretation of her fascist past is very similar. Here too, she describes her young self as irresponsible by nature, being ‘infantile oltre misura’, and ‘senza problemi e senza coscienza sociale’, but that there was nothing unusual in this, for she was just like ‘tanta gioventù muscolosa di allora’ (p. 147). The older generation are seen as rather different. Her mother, an autodidact who had not been allowed to continue at school by a father who was ‘liberale al caffè, retrogrado in famiglia’ (p. 147), is described as quietly knowledgeable and we are told that ‘il suo giudizio era essenziale e giusto, soprattutto suo, non fasullo’ (p. 148), in contrast, one presumes, with the fascist posturing of the time. But her daughter cannot see this at the time and cannot understand her mother’s complaints about young people. Until, that is, her mother dies and she begins to feel tremendous remorse at not having been able to talk properly with her and ‘di non aver saputo attingere a quel mondo che era in lei, esperto di dignitose libertà e di lotte anche eroiche, oscuro a noi del tempo di allora, anzi: infamato e pestato’ (p. 153). In this way, the regret at losing her mother is also the regret she feels at not having understood fascism sooner. Nevertheless, it is a sentiment that must be attributed to a rather older Zangrandi, for, as she recounts,

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<sup>30</sup>A full discussion of *I giorni veri* may be found in Chapter Five.

her actions even after the death of her mother are typical of the indifference she has attributed to the younger generation. In the same way that, at university, she had tossed a coin in order to decide whether or not to join the GUF, later, she says, when teaching at a school in Cortina, she finds herself taking part in a march in front of Mussolini, as the organiser of the skiing team, but with no real enthusiasm; the uniform she wears for the parade includes a *sahariana* that she has cobbled together out of old scraps of material (including, ironically, an old dress of her mother's). Once more, however, the inertia and ignorance of young people are not seen as the only reasons for the success of fascism. In *Val Boite* she attested to the deception wrought by fascism; here she points to other methods it used to achieve a consensus. In describing the march, she points to the overwhelming sensation produced by the rhythm of the marching feet of so many people:

dopo qualche centinaio di metri non pensavo più per nulla a cose mie, di un tempo di ora; tutto ciò che non fosse passo era remotissimo [...] era veramente un senso di euforia il non esistere più come un individuo piccolino e fragile, il divenire massa così enorme, a cui il regolare passo di marcia dava un senso di implacabilità. (p. 170)

Only later that same day is she horrified by the effect the march had had on her and by the fact that she had felt unable to look directly at Mussolini as she passed. At this point it gradually begins to dawn on her that Italy is heading straight for war and that the Italians have allowed this to happen. Although, she writes, she did not realise it at the time, this 'consapevolezza angosciosa di una realtà da rinnegare [...] era già l'embrione di una individualità che disperatamente cercava fili, filacci, parole', and, moreover, 'logicamente molte erano proprio parole di mia madre' (p. 175–6). There is also a symbolic 'conversion' to the antifascist cause (which parallels that in *I giorni veri*) when Zangrandi uses her *sahariana* in order to make a jacket for a partisan in the winter of 1944.

So the suggestion in both *I giorni veri* and the story 'La sahariana' is that she had no real commitment to fascism and that, had she listened to her socialist parents, and her mother in particular, she would have realised what she was doing was wrong. Moreover, in describing the considerable power of persuasion that the

fascist state had over the Italian people, she points to another possible explanation for her behaviour.

In another short story in the same collection, 'Il cortile assediato' (*Anni con Attila*, pp. 99–146), Zangrandi describes a period earlier in her life, when she is a child living with her parents. Just as is the case for 'La sahariana', this short story establishes an autobiographical pact in Lejeune's sense (see Chapter One), but does not have the explicit assurances that preface her Resistance diary. Naturally, both remain important sources for this discussion, as they provide examples of the way that Zangrandi wished to represent the fascist regime, and the way it was experienced by someone of her generation, in her post-war writing.

The story describes the difficulties experienced by a child growing up with socialist parents and yet also influenced by the fascist rhetoric she learns at school. A sense of family loyalty makes her want to defend her father against mocking schoolmates. Yet she is unable to understand what socialism is. She listens to the discussions that her father has with his friends, but when she asks her mother to explain what they are talking about, she is told "dicono delle cose importanti, molto, ma che non serviranno più a niente, capirai poi quando sarai grande" (p. 103). In the meantime, she also listens to her teacher at school whose 'modo virile e bello di parlare' makes her want to remember 'quelle frasi da libro stampato che lei diceva' (p. 105). She repeats them to her father when she gets home, but is completely mystified when he just laughs at her, describing what she has said as "fandonie che non servono a niente" (p. 105), and echoing her mother's comment that she will understand when she is older. In this way, there is some attempt to show the attraction that fascism could have for young children, and to give another indication of the responsibility that should have been borne by the older generation. They could have done considerably more, it is implied, to explain to their offspring why fascism was so wrong. The fact that Zangrandi's parents are censured to some extent in this story, does not mean that socialists are blamed for not putting up sufficient resistance to fascism, however. For this story also shows the threat of violence Italians were living under, and the heavy-handed techniques that were used by fascist squads. Despite being a socialist, her father is left in

peace because, as the local vet, he is a respected figure and is very useful to the community. He is also in rather poor health and, convinced that socialism has been defeated, is very careful about where he expresses his political ideas. It is made clear, however, that others, particularly those who were less circumspect, were treated very differently. At the end of the story, it is only the intervention of Zangrandi's mother that saves the young labourer, Berto, also a known socialist, from being attacked by a gang of fascists.

Thus in Zangrandi's post-war references to fascism, she clearly felt the need to attempt some explanation of her and other Italians' adherence to the fascist state. In doing so, she apportions some blame to the younger generations for lack of responsibility, but tends to refer to the generation as a whole, rather than as individuals. In describing her own behaviour, she always points out that she was acting in just the same way as those around her. Moreover, the language she uses tends to suggest that their actions were of little real importance. One also wonders how far youth is credible as an excuse when Zangrandi is writing about a period when she was in her late 20s and early 30s. It must also be remembered that she was continuing to support the fascist state in the early 1940s, when disaffection with the regime was widespread. She also points to the older generation who had lived through pre-fascist times and experienced the advent of fascism. The feeling of betrayal of the younger generation by their parents who, it is suggested, could also have done considerably more in order to teach their children what fascism was, has been noted by a number of historians. In stressing this, however, Zangrandi perhaps underplays the importance of having grown up with parents who were antifascist. She also suggests that it was not as if she ever had any real enthusiasm for fascism. More than anything, however, her interpretation rests on the idea of a huge deception engineered by the fascist hierarchy, using their powers of persuasion and threat of violence. It is interesting to note that the violence of the fascist regime does not have a very high profile in her writing, perhaps because it was not something she had experienced herself, or perhaps it was an aspect of the regime that she did not care to think about, given her own involvement. Zangrandi is clear in her condemnation of fascism, but, in talking about herself and fascism in

the post-war period, she is also on the defensive. She seems to want to admit her involvement, but, at the same time, to dismiss it as unimportant. In this way, fascism constitutes a significant, if somewhat ambiguous, aspect of her work.

### The Fascist Journalist

It is to be expected that a rather different picture should emerge from Zangrandi's writing during fascism, when her attitude to the regime was presumably rather different, but also when all her journalism was subject to the censorship applied during the *ventennio*. That Zangrandi had been actively involved in the institutions of the fascist state is not in doubt, but it cannot be assumed that the fact that she wrote for fascist publications is necessarily evidence in itself of a much greater commitment than she was prepared to acknowledge after the war. As shown above, she herself dismisses any such writing as thoughtless and, although reprehensible, not very significant. Whilst this may well be underestimating the real importance that she attached to it at the time, one should also bear in mind the view advanced by Ferruccio Vendramini in his article 'Guerra e donne nel giornale bellunese *Dolomiti*' (*Protagonisti*, 39 (1990), 3–20): the fact that women wrote for fascist newspapers does not necessarily indicate enthusiasm for the aims of the regime. Instead, as he says, 'per una donna colta, specie se giovane, che sa scrivere, quella del giornale diventa una strada obbligata per una promozione personale' (p. 4). He also supports Zangrandi's contention that she was not very committed to the regime, when he maintains that her articles were rather different from the rest of this newspaper:

tra tante ripetute esortazioni e tra tante parole ridondanti di *Dolomiti* vanno evidenziate alcune eccezioni, e sono gli articoli di Alda Bevilacqua (Giovanna Zangrandi) che, pur descrivendo situazioni di guerra, poggiano su trame più realistiche e sulle difficoltà della vita montana. (p. 12)

In this way, it cannot be denied that she was collaborating with the fascist regime, but neither the very fact that she was writing for a fascist paper, nor the substance of her articles themselves, necessarily suggest strong support for fascism. However,

before discussing the implications of such a point of view, particularly regarding the question of a possible resistance to fascism from within the institutions of fascism itself, it is necessary to take a closer look at the articles that Zangrandi wrote for fascist publications.

Zangrandi contributed to three different publications, the newspaper mentioned above, *Dolomiti*, and two magazines, *Cortina* and *Cadore*. *Dolomiti* was the weekly official paper of the *Federazione dei Fasci di combattimento di Belluno*, from 28 October 1941 to 25 July 1943. Its main purpose was to provide reports on local fascist organisations and promote the various campaigns and policies of the regime. It did this in a language that was highly rhetorical and often very abstract and which showed a much greater concern with propaganda than any factual reporting. Overall, it may be described very well by what Ilvo Diamanti sets forth as the typical features of a fascist newspaper in ‘Storia e simbologia di un quotidiano di regime’ in *Giornali del Veneto fascista* (ed. by G. Boldrin and others (Padua: CLEUP, 1976), pp. 151–219): the content is ‘ridotto all’essenziale’ with an ‘indiscussa preminenza accordata all’esaltazione del fascismo o delle sue opere’. The ‘cronaca locale’ is ‘ridotta a bollettino delle sezioni periferiche del PNF, punteggiata, talvolta, da noterelle didascaliche o da “esempi di virtù italica e fascista”’ (p. 151).

*Cortina* and *Cadore* are rather different as they are both magazines with a large number of photographs and a much lighter tone. *Cortina* was produced by the tourist office in Cortina and aimed very much at providing visitors to the area (women in particular) with the kind of articles that they would like to read on holiday. As a result there are articles on subjects such as local amenities, fashion, films, sporting events and prominent visitors to Cortina. *Cadore*, on the other hand, was published by the ‘Magnifica comunità cadorina’ (the local town council) in Pieve di Cadore, and has a much more local orientation. In its mixture of articles, short stories, local reports, features and photographs, it is similar to *Cortina*, but does not share the tourist magazine’s interest in fashion and cinema. Indeed, people and places beyond this area of the Dolomites are barely mentioned unless there is some direct link with the local population. Thus *Cadore* was much less

concerned with the social elites and latest colours for ski outfits, and rather more serious in tone. Nevertheless, it lacked the highminded seriousness of *Dolomiti*, and was still a magazine that aimed to entertain rather than educate. Neither are free from fascist propaganda, however, and this is not surprising as Andrea Pais, who took over as editor of *Dolomiti* in October 1942, also edited these two magazines. Unlike *Dolomiti*, in the latter two publications overt propaganda is restricted to Pais's editorials.

None of these publications had particularly wide circulation figures and their distribution was limited to the province of Belluno. However, the area they covered is not a true gauge of their importance, as they were read by a significantly wider section of the population than their distribution suggests. For it must not be forgotten that, although geographically remote, the Cadore figured large in Italian society, as Cortina was one of the most popular Summer and Winter resorts amongst Italy's social elites. Indeed, in Miriam Mafai's work on the daily life of women under fascism, *Pane nero*, for example, Cortina is mentioned very frequently, and clearly had considerable snob value. As *Cortina* often pointed out, it was a resort favoured by royalty as well as the fascist *gerarchi*. The issue dated 15 August 1939 proudly bears a photograph of Ciano reading *Cortina*, and the resort was frequently visited by Edda Ciano, his wife and Mussolini's daughter, who had a refuge named after her in the nearby mountains. Once Italy entered the Second World War, Cortina also became a hospital town for Italian officers. Publications produced in this area (particularly those aimed at tourists), therefore, had to take account of this important section of their readership. As Ferruccio Vendramini points out:

la rivista *Cortina*, riccamente illustrata e impreziosita da firme celebri di intellettuali dell'epoca, è una fonte importante non solo per la storia locale, ma per capire meglio abitudini e mentalità delle élites che allora erano alla ribalta dell'Italia che 'contava'. ('Indicazioni di fonti', note 33, p. 133)

A closer examination of the articles written by Zangrandi shows that, in all three publications, they are based essentially on the natural world and the lives of ordinary people in this area. The former vary from scientific descriptions of the

flora, fauna and geology of this mountain region, to discussions of the latest ski slopes and the exploitation of these natural resources in order to provide further facilities for tourists and economic opportunities for the indigenous population. In describing local people, Zangrandi talks about their work in the agriculture and industry of the area and their customs, including the houses they live in, and the stories they tell, and the language they speak. There are a number of short stories, also based on local people, as well as reports of sporting events and reviews of exhibitions.

At first glance, such subjects seem as innocent and apolitical as they could be, even if they are written in publications produced under the fascist regime. Vendramini seems to support the idea that these articles are neutral as regards fascist propaganda and policies; he points out that Zangrandi writes about the difficulties of mountain life, but ‘con letture prepolitiche in cui non si va oltre la sofferta accettazione dell’esistente’ (‘Guerra e donne...’, p. 12). His contention that her articles are different from others surrounding them appears correct. *Dolomiti*, as mentioned above, is full of the rhetoric one normally associates with fascism; Zangrandi’s articles stand out in marked contrast against articles such as the one written by Renato Artesi entitled ‘Crede’:

Crediamo. La generazione, quella del Ventennio della Marcia, crede: e perciò credono i figli. Crede senza discutere, senza sottilizzare. Crede nel Duce, come vent’anni, come venticinque anni fa, credettero i nostri padri. Crede è Mistica, che oggi dice ciò che essa è veramente: credere al domani, al nostro domani più fulgido, nel tormento quotidiano di volontà e di lotta. (*Dolomiti*, 6 December 1942)

However, the context in which these articles were published cannot be ignored. What is printed on the surrounding pages inevitably influences the way that individual newspaper articles are read, and, in fascist publications, it was clearly designed to do so. For example, in *Dolomiti* on 27 August 1942, an article by Zangrandi called ‘Bambini in montagna’ is printed around a quotation from Mussolini which says ‘Voi siete l’ancora della vita, voi siete le speranze della Patria’. In this way, a piece of writing that seems to have no political content is given overtones of fascist nationalism and its cult of youth.

The difference between Zangrandi's articles and those surrounding them is less obvious in the magazines. However, her articles do have a distinct character. She is unique amongst the female journalists writing for *Cortina* and *Cadore*; firstly because, as mentioned above, she does not write articles about fashion or the cinema, and secondly because her short stories are not the romantic love stories typical of women's magazines and so many novels written for women in the period. Everything she writes, even when fictional, is closely tied to the world of the local readers. Given this emphasis, her writing inevitably has more in common with the other articles in *Cadore* than those in *Cortina*. As in *Dolomiti*, her language is not, in general, the inflated rhetoric which does creep into other articles and which forms the substance of Pais's writing.

### **Journalism as Propaganda?**

However, this apparent lack of concern for politics and pursuance of private or local interests cannot immediately be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm or disregard of fascism and its aims. That would be to misunderstand the nature of a regime which aimed to be totalitarian, and which used the media as one of its principal means to that end. In this context, discussions of everyday life, at home and at work, of local customs and local history, were anything but apolitical. Although they are undoubtedly less rhetorical and less obviously singing the praises of the fascist state than other contributions to these publications, Zangrandi's articles can, nevertheless, be seen to be supporting fascist policies. Subjects such as rural life and pride in local culture were at the very centre of fascist policies, as were leisure and sporting activities. It is necessary to re-examine her journalism in the light of those policies if one is to assess their true relevance in the context of the fascist regime.

The campaign for ruralization was partly a response to the fact that more and more peasants were moving to towns in search of work. In the poor economic climate of the late 1920s in Italy, this merely boosted unemployment and added to social problems in cities and towns. Such a townward migration was also seen as detrimental to the fascist drive to improve agricultural production in order to

be independent of foreign imports. Furthermore, rural life was also perceived as important for their demographic policy, with its aim of drastically increasing the Italian population, as birthrates were much higher in the countryside. As a result, a great deal of propaganda was devoted to promoting rural life, vaunting the qualities of people who lived in the countryside, and, as De Grazia puts it, in *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ‘reinforcing the “timeless”, the “traditional”, and the “harmonious” in rural social arrangements’ (p. 99). They also instituted the organisation of ‘*massaie rurali*’ and encouraged the revival of folk traditions. That was partly, as Maria Antonietta Macciocchi suggests, for propaganda reasons; rural women ‘dovevano offrire l’immagine di una gaia Italia campagnola, del mito femminile rurale, e per le manifestazioni fasciste le contadine venivano fatte abbigliare con fastosi costumi paesani, sorta di grande mascherata, per soddisfare Mussolini nella sua aspirazione al ritorno alla capra bucolica’ (*La donna ‘nera’*, p. 90). It also had a more practical side, as it aimed to mobilize rural women and encourage their participation in the regime (particularly as prolific mothers). The fascists also recognised the potential of a return to old traditional crafts that might contribute to the drive for self-sufficiency. Moreover, the praise reserved for rural populations was often extended in fascist rhetoric to suggest that these qualities of bravery and tenacity were the typical features of the Italian nation as a whole. In this way it was also part of the emphasis on *italianità* and the idea of the superiority of the Italian nation.

It is very easy to find examples of this promotion of rural life and its traditions in Zangrandi’s articles. The very fact that she chooses to write about local people of the Cadore takes on a different connotation in the context of the policies of the regime, and, despite first appearances, cannot be judged as apolitical. There is no doubt that she paints a very positive picture of life in the mountains, for all its harshness. When compared to that in towns, it is invariably seen as healthier, both physically and morally. For example, in *Cortina*, in a short story entitled ‘Evasione’, Zangrandi describes the trip into the mountains made by a bank clerk, who, as he leaves the city behind, feels a sense of release from a ‘mentalità affo-

gata fin dall'infanzia tra le mura di una città semiprovinciale' (*Cortina*, 15 July 1939). He meets a local young woman and realises afterwards that 'la voce della montanara solitaria gli ha fatto conoscere un mondo nuovo, superbamente bello, vasto, illuminato, tanto diverso dal suo'.

More often, however, she does not make any comparison but just concentrates on the particular environment of the Cadore and its people. She counters the idea that Cortina and the surrounding area should be seen purely as tourist resorts. As she says in *Cortina*, she is interested in giving 'una segnalazione di questa nostra Cortina, vorremmo quasi dire "retroturistica", di questa Cortina ampezzana, lavoratrice, silenziosamente attiva, italianamente attiva' ('Possibilità di allevamento della pecora caracul nella Valle d'Ampezzo', *Cortina*, 1 February 1940). It is interesting to note the way that she includes the word 'italianamente', in an attempt to broaden the scope of her interests to include all of Italy as well as this particular region and make the typically fascist appeal to the patriotism of the reader. There are a number of articles that describe the work of local people. In pieces like 'Artigiani bellunesi' (*Dolomiti*, 10 January 1943) she describes the work of local craftsmen and stresses the fact that they are an established part of life in this area: 'sono eredi di una tradizione che ancora nel medioevo era radicata nelle nostre valle'. Moreover, it is a tradition that has survived thanks to the inherent qualities of the workers here, who have 'le doti precipue di montanari, di calmi ed intelligenti lavoratori, esatti e geniali'. Such characteristics are partly a result of growing up in such an environment, because, she writes, 'tutte le peggiori miserie del carattere umano si formano sempre in relazione alle debolezze fisica e morale dell'individuo stesso', but are never found 'nel sano e equilibrato organismo di chi fin dall'infanzia è abituato alla vita di montagna, alla sua semplicità serena, alle sue difficoltà, alle sue battaglie' (*Dolomiti*, 27 August 1942). This article echoes ideas she had previously expressed in *Cortina*, when she referred to 'bambini cortinesi dai bei nervi calmi temprati da secoli di vita serena e aria di monte', who have in them 'l'abbozzo dei nostri alpini dal sacco affardellato, delle valligiane potenti use alla gerla ed ai "mantui" del fieno' ('Bambini cortinesi', June 1939).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>This issue of *Cortina* only had a month and no day.

In *Cadore*, too, she expresses a similar idea, that the *cadorino* benefits from a ‘tenacia intelligente ed acuta che forse viene loro dalla terra montana in cui, per vivere, bisogna “voler” vivere’ (‘Ingegnosità cadorina: Norberto Cian e il ricupero delle navi affondate’, *Cadore*, May – June 1942). The people of this area are not provincial and inward looking, however. Quite the opposite. If the ‘agricoltore cadorino’ is not ‘avaro di fatica per benessere suo’, neither is he ‘per quello della Nazione’ (‘Cadore agricolo in linea’, *Cadore*, July – August 1941).<sup>32</sup> For, in this area there is a ‘vecchia tradizione di glorioso patriottismo’ (‘Ingegnosità cadorina’, *Cadore*, May – June 1942).

Such people are also typical of the heroes of the fascist rhetoric that put such emphasis on self-sufficiency, or *autarchia* as it was called, and Zangrandi does make a number of explicit references to this policy. In January 1940, referring to a particular ‘iniziativa zootecnica’, for example, she says:

oggi più che mai, in un difficile ed agitato momento storico, ci piace segnalare questo sereno atteggiamento di lavoro della nostra cittadina, questa profonda comprensione di un vasto problema autarchico al quale si apprestano le nostre provincie alpine, laboriose e tenaci’ (‘Cinquanta volpi argentate a Pontechiesa’, *Cortina*, 1 January 1940)

Such references to autarchy also appear when she is describing old domestic skills, such as weaving, which had been forgotten about, but which now, with the austerity of the war, are coming back into use. In this vein, there is an article about the ‘corleto’, a ‘filatoio familiare e autarchico per eccellenza’ (*Cortina*, 15 August–1 September 1939). This device is mentioned again in a very suggestive, nostalgic piece about the return to old traditions: ‘odore di ceppi resinosi bruciati nella stufa, odore di lana e di legno antico che sfrega, di casa e di forno, di cose buone e umili, siete ritornati’ (‘Sono tornati i tempi in cui Berta filava’, *Dolomiti*, 25 July 1943). Zangrandi also writes about the importance of local legends, and while she does not approve of ‘vecchi sentimentalismi poetici’, they should not forget, she maintains, the ‘fantasia’ and ‘tradizione viva’ that ‘il riflesso della storia ha suscitato nell’animo popolare’ (‘Leggende delle nostre montagne’, *Dolomiti*, 2 July

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<sup>32</sup>The use of the capital letter here, suggesting she is not talking about any nation, but *the* nation, is also a typically fascist rhetorical device.

1943). However, this article is more than just a reminder of tradition, as it is used also to draw the attention of readers to the 'true' nature of fables not just in this region, but the whole of Italy: 'la leggenda italica guerresca rinasce, la tradizione antibarbarica è quella che più profonde radici ha nella nostra terra'. At this point Zangrandi's complicity with the regime obviously goes much further than a rather generic support for the aims of ruralism and autarchy, and amounts to an attempt to provide cultural evidence to back up one of the fundamental ideas of fascist rhetoric: that Italy was essentially a warlike nation, that could only fulfil its true destiny through the defeat of other nations and the creation of an empire.

Zangrandi's treatment of the figure of the *alpino* is somewhat similar. For here too, she starts with an examination of local characteristics, but, through the figure of the soldier, they take on a wider significance, linking the qualities of a rural population with those required by the Italian army, and those typical of the *alpini*, so praised by the regime for their contribution during the First World War. This also widens the scope of the discussion from local subjects to questions of race. Vendramini comments on this link between the Bellunese and the nation in fascist thinking; as he says, the *alpino* was a 'figura che si voleva connaturata alla montagna, su cui tanto insistette il fascismo, figura fortemente complementare, d'altronde, con ideologia del ruralismo' ('Indicazioni di fonti', p. 128). In an unusually rhetorical article in *Cadore*, the *cadorino* is described by Zangrandi as 'tenace e vigile all'opera', and from his 'razza' there have also been the 'meravigliosi soldati i quali hanno lasciato segno del loro eroismo, della loro capacità di sacrificio' ('Cadore agricolo in linea', *Cadore*, July – August 1941). In *Dolomiti*, the article 'Alpini, gente nostra' talks of the 'soldati della montagna' who are 'umili' and 'eroici' and have the 'natura aspra' of the mountains themselves, belonging as they do to the 'indomita razza Piave' (25 October 1942).

It is also interesting to note the way that Zangrandi writes about the local dialect. She chooses to do so by referring to a collection of thirteenth-century religious 'liriche' from the Cadore, edited in 1892 by Carducci. 'Il dialetto cadorino vi è già chiaro e netto', she explains, 'quasi identico all'attuale (dove è puro ancora), bel dialetto latino nostro, uno dei più puri dialetti italici dell'epoca'. 'Solo

dal punto di vista linguistico', she adds, 'queste liriche sono un documento interessantissimo sulla più pura romanità del Cadore in tutti i tempi'. Having given a number of examples, she concludes 'è evidente ora, dall'abbondanza dei versi riportati, quanto genuino sia rimasto e latinamente bello il dialetto del Cadore, quale vive ancora nella bocca dei Cadorini non degeneri, nè viziati dalla civiltà' ('Antiche laudi religiose cadorine', *Cadore*, July – August 1942). The influence of ancient Rome on fascist thought and indeed on the language fascists used is well known, and it is interesting to see here how Zangrandi uses words such as 'latino' and 'romano' as unequivocally positive terms of reference, and also introduces distinct moral overtones, in describing this dialect as pure and uncorrupted (because still similar to Latin).

As suggested earlier, even discussions of sport cannot be regarded as apolitical, because of the special place accorded to it in fascist culture. There have been a number of explanations for the fascist predilection for sporting activities; undoubtedly there was concern for the health of the nation, although it was more related to ambitions of being a fertile, imperial nation than to any concern for individual well-being, and sport was seen as a means to this end. Success in sport on an international level was also a means of promoting fascism and any victories were vaunted loudly by the regime. Sporting activities were considered a vital part of the education and the discipline of children and large numbers of them took part through the various youth organisations. The 'higher purpose' of sport was never lost from view, however. As Lando Ferretti writes, in *Il libro dello sport* published by the Libreria del Littorio in 1928 (Milan-Rome), 'se per fine immediato l'educazione sportiva si prefigge la sanità fisica e morale dei singoli, essa ha, dunque, come naturale meta suprema, l'onore, la potenza e la grandezza della Patria' (pp. 227–8). He continues, 'l'Italia, sollevata ai trionfi olimpionici dall'educazione sportiva, vorrà dire l'Italia preparata a marciare, a travolgere, a vincere, a riprendere l'iniziativa che non era più sua dopo il Rinascimento' (p. 229). Sport was also a popular part of the leisure activities organised for adults by the fascist regime. In this way, it had a role in securing the popularity of fascism at home too. In the light of these concerns, therefore, the reporting of sport also takes on

a certain importance. As Rosella Isidori Frasca comments in ‘L’Educazione fisica e sportiva e la “preparazione materna”’ (in *La corporazione della donna*, ed. by Marina Addis Saba, pp. 273–304),

col diffondere l’educazione fisica e lo sport il regime si poneva finalità politiche apparentemente poco vistose, ma sostanziali, a tempi brevi per una infiltrazione del fascismo pacifica e senza contrasti, ed a tempi lunghi per la garanzia di durata del fascismo stesso. (p. 273)

Indeed, it is easy to find an instance of where Zangrandi gives a sporting event a wider significance, and a particularly fascist interpretation. Reporting the success of the girls’ ski team in Bardonecchia in 1940, she describes it in a very lighthearted fashion, but, the reader is reminded at the end, if they won it was because ‘avevano pure nei loro cuori di fanciulle la forza tenace della loro terra, lo spirito di sacrificio e di vittoria di una razza di campioni e di soldati’ (‘Sciatrici cortinesi a Bardonecchia’, *Cortina*, 15 February 1940). Thus sport is identified with the exploitation of a natural ability that depends on one’s race, and a warlike sense of sacrifice and service to the nation on the part of the competitors. In other words, once more the emphasis is put on the superiority of the Italian race and the ultimate subordination of Italians to the expansionist desires of the fascist regime. Victoria De Grazia refers to the emphasis given to sport and to this link between sport and militarism, pointing to the particular significance that she considers skiing to have had under the fascist regime:

It was in fact skiing that earned Mussolini’s much of its ill-deserved reputation for having democratised elite sports. Apart from being fashionable and upper class, skiing had considerable mystique deriving from its association with the daring and prowess of Italy’s crack alpine troops during the Great War. Military motives were in fact cited to justify the attention devoted by the OND to organizing mass ski rallies. (*The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 176)

In this way, Zangrandi’s articles undoubtedly show elements of fascist propaganda, particularly related to the fascist interests concerning rural populations and leisure activities. Moreover, in a manner typical of the regime and its propaganda, at

times she seems to use the discussion of these areas in order to promote more general ideas about Italians as a warlike race destined to be conquerors. It is possible to find examples of typical fascist vocabulary too. Words and phrases, taken from quotations from her articles already referred to, like 'razza', 'spirito di sacrificio', 'autarchia', 'romano', 'latino', 'italico', 'antibarbarico', 'Nazione' (with the initial capitalized) have all been identified by Giovanni Lazzari as amongst the most common used by fascists in his work *Le parole del fascismo* (Rome: Argileto, 1975). It is possible to find further examples of such words in Zangrandi's articles, such as 'stirpe', 'forza', 'romanità' and 'eroismo'.

### **A Resistance to Fascism?**

If it is true that Zangrandi's articles are certainly not apolitical, one must not exaggerate the propaganda content of them either. For it is all too easy to interpret the above as evidence of unwavering adherence to a totalitarian state that is able to dictate exactly what is written in its newspapers and magazines at all levels. It is necessary to remember that the above comments note the presence of fascist elements in Zangrandi's journalism, but cannot be said to apply to all her writing at the time. The vocabulary that Lazzari describes as typically fascist rhetoric does not appear consistently throughout Zangrandi's articles; there are some in which it does not appear at all and, in those where it does, as quoted above, it appears as established formulae, frequently slotted in at the end, in order, it seems, to give the article a dutiful fascist twist. Thus, an article about emigration from the province of Belluno and the bravery that this required, is turned, in its conclusion, into a comment on the Empire: 'sono essi che in un domani che a noi Italiani è dovuto [...] in un glorioso domani potranno degnamente fecondare un Impero' ('Migratori', *Dolomiti*, 15 November 1942, p. 3).

Moreover, the reality of fascism and the way that people lived under the regime is far more complex. As Isnenghi points out in *Intellettuali militanti e intellettuali funzionari*, the mixed origins of fascism show through clearly and, even if the regime wished to be totalitarian, there were many areas where the designs and rhetoric of the regime are contradictory or ambiguous. An example he quotes is

the adoption by the fascist state of vocabulary previously associated with socialism, such as ‘rivoluzione’, ‘borghesia’, ‘popolo’ and ‘proletario’ (a result, no doubt, of the socialist backgrounds of many fascists). Isnenghi describes this as the ‘zona ideologicamente più esposta, l’area di opposte influenze semantiche, che anche all’interno del regime non sempre — anzi! — trovano significato univoco’ (p. 41–42). Similarly, the emphasis on patriotism and the references to the heroism of the local soldiers and population, during the Risorgimento and the First World War in particular, may be seen as a typical feature of fascist rhetoric, but, like many aspects of fascism, they were also present before the regime and afterwards. Indeed, it is Ferruccio Vendramini’s view that

si deve sottolineare che il ritrovarsi di forze, anche diverse, attorno ad una lettura patriottica della guerra, pure se abbastanza generica da consentire a persone di orientamento eterogeneo di ritrovarsi insieme, favorì il radicamento del fascismo in zone periferiche come il Bellunese. (‘Valorizzazione della “Grande Guerra” e rafforzamento del fascismo bellunese’, *Protagonisti*, 45 (1991), 21–32, (p. 25))

Furthermore, if what Zangrandi wrote at this time can be said to fit in with fascist policies and ideas, it must also be noted that this is limited to those areas such as ruralism and autarchy that have already been mentioned. A striking omission is the lack of reference to Mussolini, despite the fact that he was central to fascist rhetoric and that in *Dolomiti*, as Vendramini says, ‘il mito di Mussolini [...] era ingigantito sovente’ (‘Guerra e donne’, p. 7). There is no hint in Zangrandi’s writing, unlike other articles in *Dolomiti*, of antisemitism or of a denigration of other countries. In fact, she is rarely ‘anti’ anything. The only group that inspires any negative treatment, apart from one isolated anti-socialist comment in *Dolomiti*, is the bourgeoisie. This is consistent with the line that *Dolomiti* takes (Pais himself makes a number of anti-bourgeois comments), and was certainly representative of a current within fascism, but can seem rather bizarre in *Cortina* particularly where the criticism seems aimed at the very readership of the magazine.

On closer examination, the other policies that she appears to be promoting present similar ambiguities. Angelo Ventura has suggested that the policy of ruralisation was really nothing new to this community, for, he says, we recognize, in

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motivi agitati dall'ideologia ruralistica e dalla campagna demografica del regime fascista, con l'esaltazione della sanità fisica e morale della vita dei campi e della razza italica, insidiata dall'urbanesimo e dalla corrotta e decadente civiltà borghese, [...] alcuni dei temi più ricorrenti nella predicazione pastorale del clero e nella polemica anticapitalistica e antindustrialista di tanti esponenti del cattolicesimo "sociale". ('La società rurale veneta dal fascismo alla Resistenza' in *Società rurale e Resistenza nelle Venezie*, ed. by Istituto Veneto per la Storia della Resistenza (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 11–70 (pp. 52–53))

Indeed, he adds 'attraverso la parola di molti curati e il coro unanime della stampa parrocchiale, l'immagine del regime fascista è quella del restauratore dei valori morali e religiosi più profondi, in cui crede da secoli il mondo contadino'. Zangrandi was not originally from the Cadore, of course, but, as noted in Chapter Two, her interest in being considered part of that mountain community is evident in all her writing and may well have started from this early stage. In that case, her writing about rural Cadore could be interpreted as part of an adoption of local values rather than any attempt to impose ideas that are peculiarly fascist. For De Grazia there was, in any case, an ambivalence at the heart of the fascist policy of ruralisation, based, as it was, on two main aims, agricultural modernisation and the conservation of the rural community, that were essentially contradictory. Referring to the ceremonies and traditions encouraged by fascism in the countryside, she comments

the overwhelming local and regional nature of these manifestations reinforcing, at least in appearance, the solidarity and self-consciousness of specific communities, in some respects conflicted with the essentially national orientation of the fascist regime. Encouragement of popular identification with the state, the nation, or race was — no matter how ancient the resurrected ceremony — hardly to be found in a "revival of traditions" based on regional or local distinctiveness. (*The Culture of Consent*, p. 214)

These contradictions obviously have repercussions for any apparent support for that policy in the media and particular implications for Zangrandi's journalism

when one considers her considerable bias towards local interests. As has been indicated, she does link those positive qualities of the *cadorini* with those of Italians in general, but there remains a contradiction in such a stress on the qualities of the local population in a regime so concerned to present Italy as a cohesive nation. For example, Zangrandi frequently uses the word 'razza', which is commonly found in writing of the fascist period, but, instead of meaning the Italian race, she is almost invariably talking about a much smaller area, and the race of people that she considers to be indigenous to the Cadore. Thus there is a tension between the local and the national in her writing, just as there is in fascist policy, and her interests almost always lie with the former.

It was inevitable in any case that there would be a contradiction between the rhetoric of fascist images of the countryside and the reality of the situation, especially in this area, where there was such poverty and it was impossible for many families to even earn a subsistence living from the land. If Zangrandi was to write articles that local people could recognize as having some link with their own lives, then she had to go beyond the propaganda, and contradict some of the idealism of the fascist view of rural communities (particularly in an area that was so poor and underdeveloped). This may be found in perhaps the most important aspect of Zangrandi's interest in local people: her concern for local issues. Although the abstract idea of the character of the *cadorino* is undoubtedly stressed, the more practical, socio-economic questions such as government investment in the area, the correct exploitation of the natural resources, and industrial and agricultural development are also treated. Moreover, they are not quoted merely, as was usual in the fascist controlled media, to give an example of the regime's successes, but approached in a critical fashion. This goes against the grain of fascist reporting, which depended to such a great extent on propaganda: 'dovendosi necessariamente "dire poco" era bene che questo sembrasse "importante" e che l'enfatica eloquenza colmasse il vuoto effettivo dal punto di vista contenutistico' (Ilvo Diamanti, 'Storia e simbologia di un quotidiano di regime', *Giornali del Veneto fascista*, p. 197). Whilst there is no open criticism of the regime in Zangrandi's articles, and it is hard to imagine how there could be, there are tentative suggestions that not

enough has been done, or that the present course of action is not necessarily the right one for the area. For example, in an article entitled 'Industrie nostre' in *Dolomiti* (31 January 1943), Zangrandi notes that 'nella provincia di Belluno la valorizzazione industriale, ancora relativamente scarsa, ha incontrato difficoltà notevoli fino dal suo inizio'; there has been some success in the development of the spectacles industry, for example, but the lack of communications remains a serious problem. 'Noi abbiamo fiducia', she continues, 'in un domani in cui le nostre vie di comunicazione siano ulteriormente migliorate, in cui la possibilità di trovar capitali sia larga e lungimirante. Vogliamo avere fiducia in questo nostro domani italico e bellunese anche'.

This contrasts with the unwavering confidence in fascism expressed by the editor Andrea Pais in all three publications under consideration here. A typical example is the editorial in *Cortina*, a few years earlier, in which he refers to a grant that has been given to Cortina for the construction of sporting facilities. The *Duce* had announced that this money would be made available and this promise 'era seguita, come sempre, dal rapido compimento dei fatti' (Spring, 1940, p. 6). Obviously, by the time of Zangrandi's article in 1943, the unpopularity of the fascist regime had increased. However, her more critical approach is evident earlier too. In *Cadore*, in 1941, Zangrandi talks about the successes in the various agricultural enterprises of the region, but also about 'errori' that have been committed ('Cadore agricolo in linea', *Cadore*, July–August, 1941). These are not mistakes made by local people, but by administrators who have failed to understand the true nature of local problems. 'Molti opuscoli ed articoli sono stati sparsi', she notes, but 'la viva voce, in un ceto che lavora molto ed ha poco tempo da leggere, può fare ancora di più'. Moreover, 'si deve tener presente che gli agricoltori e le massaie cadorine non hanno bisogno di insegnamenti nel campo delle colture e dell'allevamento zootecnico ed ovino praticati da secoli' (p. 12), whereas such advice could well have been of practical use regarding other agricultural techniques, newly introduced to the area.

It is interesting to note that in a fascist publication, designed, like all the press at the time, to be a means of propaganda, to transmit a message from the state

to the people, Zangrandi seems to be using her article as a way of representing the local people and passing a message on to those in power. The very idea of promoting ruralism, or any other policy aimed at peasants or workers, in a newspaper was contradictory in any case. For the people such articles aimed to influence, were very unlikely to be those reading the paper, either because they were unable to read (illiteracy rates in Italy were still very high at this time), or because they would not have had the money to buy a newspaper. The implicit acknowledgement that most of the local people cannot read (when she suggests that they do not have the time), is consistent with the idea that the real readership of such magazines and articles are the middle classes and fascist officials themselves.

It could be said that writing about such issues in this subtle fashion barely constitutes any resistance to the fascist regime, considering the glaring difference between the rhetoric and the reality in the Cadore at the time. But there were also limits, of course, on what she was able to write, and it is very difficult to judge what she would have written if given a free rein. Such concern for the poorer strata of society may have been part of Zangrandi's antibourgeois sentiment, or evidence of the influence of her socialist parents (although, as suggested earlier, she denies any such influence at this stage in her life). It is significant, and an indication of her true interests, that Zangrandi continued to write about local people and their lives, after the war, but without these references to national characteristics and the imperial destiny of Italy. This integral part of her writing also takes on very different connotations in the context of neorealism (see Chapter Four).

## **Women and Fascism**

Another very important consideration for understanding the nature of the articles that Zangrandi wrote during fascism, and indeed for her attitude to fascism as she expressed it later, is the position of women under fascism. This is an important issue, both from the point of view of Zangrandi as a female journalist collaborating with the regime, and of the way that women are represented in the articles that Zangrandi writes in this period. As noted earlier, as part of their demographic policy the fascist regime promoted a very limited idea of the role of women in society,

seeing them as essentially producers of children and a support for their husbands. In other words, they were required to fulfil a very traditional role, the one also promoted by the Catholic Church. It has also been noted how Zangrandi voices her resentment at this limited view of women in her post-war writing. However, one of the main innovations of fascism, when it came to the treatment of women, was the way in which they promoted this traditional role, and the particular emphasis they put on motherhood as a means of serving the nation. Discussing her contention that the fascist state tried to 'nationalize' women, Victoria De Grazia puts forward the view that the attempt to mobilize women, the modernization of social services and the belligerent militarism of the 1930s all had the 'unintended effect of undercutting conservative notions of female roles and family styles', and that, 'in the process, fascist institutions ordained new kinds of social involvement and recast older notions of maternity and fatherhood, femaleness and masculinity' (*How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 2). Addis Saba agrees that whilst the dictatorship undoubtedly increased the subjection of women, 'tuttavia ha chiamato la donna alla vita sociale e al "consenso" e per la prima volta ha elaborato per lei un progetto politico' (*La corporazione della donna*, pp. 5-6). In this process, 'la maternità, nel complesso, acquista una dimensione più ampia: destino e dovere da sempre, diviene ora anche responsabilità e professione di interesse nazionale' (p. 13). 'The perfect fascist woman', says De Grazia, 'was a remarkable new hybrid: she served her family's every need, yet was also zealously responsive to the state's interest' (*How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 81). In this way, women were supposed to aspire to the model of the 'angelo del focolare', but were also inevitably taken out of the home by their participation in fascist women's organisations, and were encouraged to participate in sport so that they would be healthy mothers. The image of this new, fascist woman was maternal, but also active and self-confident. The regime's encouragement of leisure activities, through its *dopolavoro* programme, also had a significant impact on the lives of women. Although modern leisure pastimes, as well as female employment, were blamed by a number of fascist leaders for the decline in the birthrate, nevertheless, under the fascist regime, women were able to take part in many more activities outside the home than had been possible for the previous generation. De Grazia stresses the importance of the way

that 'the postwar generations enjoyed pleasures entirely different from those of their mothers as mass culture brought them into contact with more commercialized and seemingly freer sexual and social customs' (*How Fascism Ruled Women*, p. 117). Such differences naturally created tensions between the different generations, and the misunderstandings that Zangrandi describes between her and her mother were typical of many women at the time. Addis Saba quotes a study by Ostenc to describe what were supposed to be the new and characteristic features of the new fascist woman: 'rigoroso controllo di sé, stoicismo e morale eroica, educazione attiva e vita collettiva; obbedienza con contenuto dinamico che respinge ogni atteggiamento rinunciatario e passivo e che perciò cura anche gli esercizi fisici e sportivi per abituare la volontà' (*La corporazione della donna*, pp. 19–20).

This new model was particularly relevant to a certain group of women, mostly young and middle class, who according to Addis Saba

sia attraverso una certa cultura nazionalistico-classicistica, avevano vagamente recepito l'ondata emancipazionista e modernizzante che veniva dall'Europa e speravano, attraverso i posti di rappresentanza che si offrivano loro nelle mille organizzazioni femminili del regime, una realizzazione di sé e un posto negli eventi. (*La corporazione della donna*, pp. 9–10)

For, in schools, libraries, government commissions and so on

fu assorbito ed ebbe formazione fascista tutto un personale femminile, quello che poi appariva nelle piazze e nelle manifestazioni: una minoranza, certo, di donne, ché la massa delle anziane, delle casalinghe, delle lavoratrici operaie erurali, soprattutto nel meridione, non erano coinvolte, ma una minoranza persuasiva che poteva servire da modello e da stimolo alle altre, soprattutto alle giovani. (pp. 10–11)

Thus, for some women of a certain class, fascism offered considerably more than just a life as a mother and wife, and it was no doubt because of this that, at the beginning, it attracted significant numbers of feminists. This does not mean that women did not suffer from the insistence that their main role in life was motherhood, but that the fascist image of womanhood unintentionally allowed some women greater freedom and, for the first time, gave them a very public role.

Anna Bravo cautions that this freedom depended to a great extent on age, and that the 'ragazza mobile e sportiva' was 'destinata a trasformarsi nella moglie e madre esemplare del regime' (*Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali*, p. 105). However, if one considers the position of Zangrandi, it becomes clear that she was in a position to suffer least from the restrictions of fascism, and benefit most from the new opportunities offered to women. As a teacher, she was able to earn her own living and be independent, even if she was not very keen on the job itself. She was also encouraged by the fascist state to spend her time doing what she enjoyed most, climbing mountains and skiing. In many respects, she was the perfect 'new fascist woman', sporting and fit, and committed, as her articles seem to show, to her own people at a local and national level. Moreover, the main thrust of the fascist rhetoric directed at women, that they should be strong and fit in order to be good mothers and supply the state with more soldiers, did not apply to her as she was not married. From a fascist view, she was, of course, failing to fulfil her main purpose in life, but the life she led did not contradict the fascist image of womanhood, even if it did not match the whole picture.

Further role models were offered to women by the worlds of fashion and cinema. In these areas too, the response of the fascist regime was ambiguous. There was a great deal of criticism directed at women's magazines, which, in the view of a section of the fascist hierarchy, were frivolous and distracted women from their true responsibilities. At the same time, Italian fashion was paraded as a significant contribution to their policy of autarchy. There was also the fact that many well-known fascist women were regarded as amongst the most fashionable in the country. It was precisely this group, and followers of this group, that magazines like *Cortina* appealed to, with its pages of women in the latest ski outfits or swimming costumes, depending on the season. As Natalia Aspesi points out, such magazines 'esaltando la moda italiana, rispecchiano una realtà di donne nobili, ricche, dedite ad una intensa vita mondana', and were certainly not intended for the 'massaia rurale', the 'vedova di guerra', the 'salarziata agricola' nor the scorned 'signorine d'ufficio' (*Il lusso e l'autarchia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1982), p. 15). Addis Saba, commenting on Aspesi's book, makes the following observation:

la Aspesi legge un'altra versione ancora della multiforme 'donna nuova' del fascismo e nota le contraddizioni tra le figurine di donne slanciate ed eleganti delle riviste di moda e le polemiche contro la donna crisi, la maschietta, le affermazioni dei gerarchi che sentenziano che l'eleganza è nettamente sfavorevole alla fecondità. (*La corporazione delle donne*, p. 17)

It is interesting that *Cortina* is full of pictures of women in trousers, promoting an image that contradicted official fascist policy. As Miriam Mafai describes, in the early 1940s there was a campaign for modesty directed at women, at the instigation of both the fascist state and the Catholic Church, which was essentially 'una battaglia contro i pantaloni' (*Pane nero*, p. 111). The restrictions were not applied evenly: 'mentre le autorità di pubblica sicurezza nelle località di villeggiatura eleganti chiudono un occhio sulle signore che trasgrediscono al divieto, in altri casi si rivelano occhiute e severe' (p. 112). However, there is a certain unease in *Cortina* regarding the change in habits of women. This is betrayed by the captions accompanying the many photographs of women in trousers and by a question that recurs regularly in this magazine: how it can be that women are so interested in skiing? Answers range from the frivolous — suggestions that it is the perfect way of meeting potential husbands, or the only way women are able to wear trousers without being laughed at — to the fulsome in descriptions of the 'forza politica' and 'forza spirituale' that skiing instils in young women (*Cortina*, 1 March 1942, p. 22). Thus sometimes the attitude expressed is critical of women taking part in such activities, at others it seems that they are indispensable to a correct education.

Although, as suggested above, the new possibilities for women that arose due to the encouragement of associations and sporting activities must have appealed to Zangrandi, she was not necessarily attracted by the fashionable image that skiing in particular had. Indeed, Zangrandi's articles seem to represent the more conservative fascist view of how women should behave when she criticizes the excessive frivolity of some.<sup>33</sup> When the Ministry for Home Affairs sends around a circular in the summer of 1941, warning people that, even in holiday resorts, they

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<sup>33</sup>It is interesting to compare her comments here with the similar attitude she expresses towards frivolous behaviour in *Val Boite*, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

should avoid 'un tenore di vita ed una linea di condotta che non siano improntati a un contegno di assoluta serietà, indispensabili nell'ora presente', Zangrandi's article 'Estate Cortinese', printed around the message from the ministry, maintains with some relish that Cortina 'conscia dell'ora grave che volge, ha ripulito le sue strade dalla vecchia mondanità che la rese celebre per il mondo, dal lusso sfarzoso ed eccentrico della sua mondanità internazionale'. In this way, she maintains, they have made way for that other Cortina: 'agli strascichi di costosi vestiti da sera si sono sostituiti costumini di cotone; alle pallide donne fatali che ignoravano questo nostro bel sole delle Alpi, una schiera di belle ragazze abbronzate ed uno sciame di biciclette' (*Cortina*, 31 July 1941, p. 6). This moralistic attitude to women once more recalls the divide between the healthy, 'honest' countryside and the sickly, superficial world of towns and cities. It also has a lot to do with the anti-bourgeois sentiment expressed by some fascists, and mentioned earlier, which often labelled the bourgeois way of life as unhealthy.

In an article in *Dolomiti*, entitled 'Donne nostrane' (13 December 1942), Zangrandi also disapproves of feminism. She praises the women of the Dolomites who live in 'umili case in umili valli' and who 'non hanno mai fatto chiasso intorno a se stesse, non hanno seccata l'umanità con le loro persone, con storie di femminismo e di modernità' (p. 4). Here, however, feminism is equated with ideology and theorizing; with talking, not doing. The one time she mentions socialism in *Dolomiti*, it is rejected for a similar reason. It certainly does not mean that she feels no solidarity with other women and is not interested in promoting their cause. Quite the opposite. In 'Donne nostrane', she makes the point that these 'donne di montagna' tend to be ignored, because they do not make a fuss and are involved in 'lavoro di piccoli campi che quasi non vedi, orti come fazzoletti, mucchi di legno'. 'Eppure', she says with a phrase that might belong just as well to today's feminist historians, 'anch'esse hanno una storia'. As Zangrandi recounts, these are women who have had to cope with emigration and war. She describes them in a typically fascist manner as 'le custodi sante di un focolare', although, of course, in this area where the men were so often away, to call women the guardians of the home was not mere rhetoric.

The fascist emphasis on activity and health is also evident here, but taken one step further by Zangrandi. Indeed, it is the aspect that she stresses most. The women of this area are able to ‘mettere al mondo degli eroi degni della penna nera’, but this reference to motherhood is unusual in Zangrandi’s articles. Although she talks frequently about children, women are rarely seen as mothers. Instead, they are nearly always involved (in descriptions of local life and in short stories) in some physical activity, usually manual work of some kind. Moreover, frequently it is a type of activity not usually associated with women, or an image of them that challenges expectations in some way. We are reminded that these are women who are ‘forti e salde, le mani di acciaio come quelle dell’uomo’ (‘Donne Nostrane’). In the short story mentioned earlier, about the town-dweller Marco who goes into the mountains, the human being seen in the distance ‘con un gran sacco da montagna e un casco scuro in testa’, approaching ‘pian piano col passo regolare dei veri montanari’, turns out not to be the male ‘montanaro’ he expects, but ‘una ragazza in calzoni, dal volto abbronzato e dal piglio sicuro’ (‘Evasione’, *Cortina*, 15 July 1939). In Zangrandi’s writings there is no hint of the concern, voiced by a number of fascists (in articles on sport in *Dolomiti* as well as elsewhere), that women’s physical activity should not be too strenuous. Instead, she portrays women as capable of very tough work, and all the healthier because of it. For example, the character Eire in a short story in *Cadore* (‘Fulmini di Popera’, January-February 1943) is typical. She is ‘forte e bella, usa alla gerla della legna, ai grandi carichi di fieno, usa a viver coraggiosamente, senza parole e senza lamenti la dura vita della montagna’ (p. 25). Such women have no time for the delicate sensibilities of those not used to country life. Nowhere is this more evident than in the gently provocative and amusing article in *Dolomiti*, ‘Un carro di “grassa”’ (13 June 1943). A short story, told in the first person, it is the simple tale of one woman going to fetch a cart of manure from a friend. She takes great pleasure in her own ability to load up the cart without falling into the ‘lago di broda’ at her feet, and even delights in the smell of fresh manure that is ‘un odore acido speciale, potente, che adesso appesta tutto il villaggio alto’. Thus, Zangrandi always emphasizes the real lives of women, and, although, as elsewhere, her articles do show some support for fascist policies regarding women, once more she is selective, and always impatient

with abstract ideas that do not take account of everyday life.

In conclusion, it is clear that the tendency to label someone as fascist or not, is totally insufficient. A much more subtle picture of Zangrandi's life under fascism and of the way that she felt about it afterwards, emerges from her fascist journalism and subsequent writings, and from the differences between the two. Her post-war references to fascism are not only an indication of what she did at the time and the pressures that the regime put on her, but also give hints at the way that attitudes to fascism after its fall (not least her own) shaped the way she was able to write about it. Obviously she was more involved in fascism, and more enthusiastic about it, than she admitted later, as is clear from the way that she understates her role. Moreover, it could well be that, given the ambiguities described above, she actually experienced this period of her life in a positive way, and that this was not simply a matter of ignorance or youth. The way that she interprets her collusion with the regime is as a kind of aberration, a broken line between her own behaviour and her parents', and in particular her mother's, antifascism; a line that she is only able to rejoin by virtue of her participation in the Resistance. A closer look at the position of women such as Zangrandi under fascism, however, leads to the conclusion that she was less limited and repressed by fascism than she could possibly have admitted in the post-war period, when writing about a regime that did so much harm in Italy and after the bitterness of a civil war. As for her journalism, as she was writing for a press that was regarded as a legitimate tool of propaganda by the regime, one would expect little room for individuality. Furthermore, during the last three years of her contributions, Italy was also at war, and under these conditions even nations not aspiring to totalitarianism use censorship. It is not surprising to discover therefore, that, in broad terms, her articles supported the regime. As has been shown, however, Zangrandi's articles were not simply crass rhetoric. She can be seen to be promoting some of the general themes of fascism, yet these were sufficiently ambiguous as to allow her some freedom. She had choices available to her as a journalist at this time, as shown by the differences between her and other writers, and she was selective in her subjects and the manner in which she treated them. In this way, even though she must have been limited in what she could

write, and she must be judged to have supported the fascist regime, nevertheless, her journalism does amount to an individual approach, characterized as much by areas that she chose not to write about, as much as by those subjects she does treat. Moreover, her comments in some articles seem to constitute a certain resistance to fascist ideas. Such articles are witness not only to a lack of homogeneity in the fascist press, but also to the ambiguity and variety within fascism as a whole. Moreover, even though she may well have judged the fascist period as one alien to her later, her writing shows considerable continuity, and supports the theses of those arguing against a Crocean interpretation of fascism. As will be shown in the next chapter, the theme of continuity is also of particular significance for debates about the new realism of post-war writers.

## Chapter Four: *I Brusaz* and Neorealism

Giovanna Zangrandi's first novel, *I Brusaz*, was awarded the Deledda prize for novels by new authors in 1954, prior to its appearance later the same year as part of the Mondadori *Medusa degli Italiani* series. It was published, therefore, at a time when Italian politics and the Italian literary world were dominated by the preoccupations of the Cold War. The literary concerns of the immediate postwar period, such as the role of literature in society, the responsibility of the writer and the form that literature should take in a new, democratic Italy, were still being debated, but attitudes had become more and more polarized, with critics often arguing along party lines from entrenched positions. The term neorealism, once employed to denote a new attitude to the world and its representation in literature and film, was now frequently used as a pejorative term by critics. In order to consider the relationship between *I Brusaz* and neorealism, it is necessary to look in more detail at its literary context.

Lucia Re, writing in her work *Calvino and the Age of Neorealism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), describes the change in the literary and political climate during the period 1945–1954 and refers to two phases of neorealism. The first phase, from 1945 to 1948, was, she maintains, characterized by the spontaneous enthusiasm for storytelling that Calvino refers to in his retrospective introduction of 1964 to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Turin: Einaudi), and the generally held conviction that literature could be a means of improving society and creating a better Italy. Salvatore Battaglia describes this phase as 'il vero e proprio realismo' ('Neorealismo' in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana* (Turin: UTET, 1973), pp. 675–680 (p. 675)). According to Re, that period was a time of openness, flexibility and debate. Indeed, the form that neorealism took in the immediate postwar period had been largely a spontaneous reaction to historical events; disagreements amongst critics at the time remained within the context of the same, broadly left-wing, shared objectives. As many have stressed since, even at this stage it was not a unified literary movement. Calvino, for example, prefers to call it an 'insieme di voci' rather than a school (Introduction to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p. 9), and

Peter Bondanella comments that, in film too, 'the phenomenon was clearly unlike other avant-garde movements in the sense that it never adhered to a governing manifesto or ever felt that one was even necessary' (*Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1988), p. 34). Chicco Vitzizzai talks, moreover, of 'un vasto movimento ideale e culturale, in cui confluirono esperienze, atteggiamenti, personalità diverse, accomunate però da analoghe esigenze morali e politico-culturali' (*Il neorealismo: antifascismo e popolo nella letteratura dagli anni Trenta agli anni Cinquanta* (Turin: Paravia, 1977), p. 3).

The second phase, during which *I Brusaz* was published, was, Re maintains, entirely the opposite. In the late 1940s, as conservative forces in Italian politics took control, the PCI, taking its lead from Moscow, became ever more rigid in its cultural policy. The atmosphere in Italy changed considerably. Much of the optimism about a possible new society had died as the old ruling class moved back into power, and the Cold War set in. *L'Unità* showed increasing interest in Soviet writers and the prescriptive policies of Stalin and Zdanov. Extracts from Gramsci's *Quaderni dal carcere* first appeared after the war in *Rinascita* and *Società*, and his ideas about the relationship between intellectuals and the *popolo*, and the creation of a literature that would be 'nazional-popolare', formed the basis of Communist cultural policy, but, as Chicco Vitzizzai points out, the Communists tended towards 'un'utilizzazione pratico-ideologica del pensiero di Gramsci spesso fortemente riduttiva' (*Il neorealismo*, p. 215). The ideas of Lukács, too, tended to be used in a very narrow, simplistic fashion by the PCI. As Re indicates, 'neorealists' efforts to disclose the meaningfulness of history in socialist or Marxist terms all too often lapse into the very sort of didactic socialist realism criticized by Lukács, or into mere party propaganda' (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, p. 22). Re considers that Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949) is a typical example of this political didacticism. Other writers had been members of the Communist party, often following their involvement in the Resistance, and had fully supported its aims, seeing their writing as part of their political activism, yet they felt that they could not allow such interference in their art (the argument between Vittorini and Togliatti over the independence of the

intellectual is well known, for example).

As the political situation changed, and PCI cultural policy became more rigid, neorealism was increasingly identified with Soviet socialist realism and thus increasingly censured by critics who were politically opposed to the aims of the Communist party. Chicco Vitzizai comments that Enrico Falqui and Emilio Cecchi both shared the same tendency to ‘liquidare il neorealismo semplicemente come un fatto di “cattiva letteratura”’ (*Il neorealismo*, p. 71). Other critics, who would not have shared such an opinion of neorealism in the years immediately following the Second World War, considered nevertheless that, by the end of the 1940s, the characteristic features of neorealism were no longer indicative of an attempt to create a new kind of literature with a new relationship with the rest of society. Instead, they had become established as a formula for realist literature. Critics such as Ferretti and Asor Rosa maintained that neorealism did not continue beyond the end of the 1940s. Manacorda, too, in his *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940–1975)* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1967), judges that neorealism was ‘in via d’esaurimento’ by 1950 (p. 44). In Falaschi’s opinion, on the other hand, the ‘problema del realismo’ remained ‘attuale’ into the first half of the 1950s (*Realtà e retorica: la letteratura del neorealismo* (Messina: G. D’Anna, 1977), p. 69). There is general agreement that neorealism did not go beyond 1956 and the invasion of Hungary, by which time the literary avant-garde had, in any case, moved on to other debates. It was during the late 1950s and early 1960s that neorealism, by this time clearly a spent force, received its harshest criticism from all sides, including the leftwing critics.

In more recent years, there has been a more considered assessment of neorealism’s successes and failures, but it continues to provoke debate. Arguments have been fuelled by the fact that neorealism’s supporters and detractors came from opposing sides of a political divide, but also by a tendency to try and impose a rigid idea of what neorealism meant when, as mentioned above, from the very beginning it could not be described as a unified movement. Quoting Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Bondanella gives what he describes as ‘one very typical list’ of neorealism’s characteristics: ‘realistic treatment, popular setting, social content, historical actuality

and political commitment' (p. 32). However, he suggests, referring once more to film, but with a judgement that could apply just as well to the literature of the time: 'the vexing problem posed by any comprehensive definition of neorealism derives ultimately from its almost universal association with the traditions of realism in both literature and film' (p. 32). The artists, on the other hand, he continues, 'sound an entirely different note' and, with the exception of Zavattini, rarely, if ever, 'equate their artistic intentions with traditional realism'. In literature too, Bondanella states, the best known examples of 'neorealistic' literature do not necessarily display those characteristics presumed to be typical of neorealism. He contends that Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia*, Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Calvino's *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* and Pavese's *La luna e i falò*,

all deal with social reality in a symbolic or mythical fashion, and all employ unreliable and subjective narrators, thereby embracing a clearly antinaturalistic narrative stance quite contrary to the canons of literary realism established by the masters of the nineteenth century. [...] Italian novelists and directors were not concerned only with social realism in their works. On the contrary, they were seeking a new literary and cinematographic language which would enable them to deal poetically with the pressing problems of their times. (pp. 33–34)

Bondanella does consider that there was a 'common aspiration to view Italy without preconceptions' amongst film directors now labelled as neorealist, and a desire to create a new cinematic language that was 'honest' and 'ethical', but that was 'no less poetic'. He describes the 'crisis' in neorealism, as referred to above, as based more on 'ideological disagreements between various critics' (p. 35) than any abrupt change on the part of the filmmakers.

Thus this chapter does not aim to judge whether *I Brusaz* belonged to a defined literary movement, but rather to position it in a much more fluid context of debate and disagreement, in which particular concerns, such as the questions of language, realism and the tradition of realism, referred to above by Bondanella, and particular approaches to literature, gained prominence amongst both writers and critics.

When *I Brusaz* was judged for the Deledda prize in 1954, the judges showed

a concern for the role of literature in society and an interest in finding a work that they considered to be realistic.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, they were all too aware of the criticisms of neorealism. Ravegnani, their spokesman, explained that the commission had examined some 216 novels and that about half of these belonged to the genre of 'letteratura vissuta' which he considered to be a 'segno confortevole per l'ingresso della letteratura nella vita e per la stessa funzione della narrativa' ('La relazione della commissione giudicatrice del premio', *Unione Sarda*, 31st August 1954). However, it was felt that some of the works were spoiled by a 'diffuso senso di verismo dispogliato da ogni magia: la realtà concepita ed espressa come notazioni di cronaca, che frena lo snodarsi della narrazione'. Others were censured for using the past as a pretext to avoid reality. There were a large number of more traditional novels, he says, many set in the south of Italy, that were a faithful reflection of a specific reality, yet when they tried to move beyond the specific to the more general, they fell into 'schemi di provincialismo'. *I Brusaz*, in the view of the judges, showed none of these shortcomings, and was judged to be realistic without being provincial or dull. Their conclusion suggests that they felt that Zangrandi had included some of the more positive features of neorealism, but had avoided the pitfalls. This chapter will assess that judgement of *I Brusaz*, and will discuss the relationship of Zangrandi's novel to neorealism and the criticism that has been made of it.

### Zangrandi and the Writer in Society

Zangrandi's own opinions about Italian society in the immediate postwar period, and the role of writers in it, are set out very clearly in the newspaper she edited while living in Cortina just after the war, *Val Boite*. This publication, referred to above in Chapters Two and Three, ran for some eight months from June 1945 and includes short stories about the Resistance, pieces on current affairs and editorials written by Zangrandi. The reader is never in any doubt as to the purpose behind the paper. It aims to publicize the events of the Resistance and show how great

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<sup>34</sup>The judges were Francesco Camali, Nino Ciusa Romagna, Carmelo Cottone, Marino Moretti and Giuseppe Ravegnani.

the sacrifice has been, to indicate what needs to be done now, and to encourage a feeling of solidarity amongst Italians. The Cadore may be a remote area but, Zangrandi says, the people there must not forget that they are Italians. In an editorial in the first issue of the paper, these views are stated emphatically:

Il presente giornale non ha scopi politici. È italiano. Nelle sue modeste proporzioni perché le condizioni attuali non permettono altrimenti, ha principalmente lo scopo di supplire alla mancanza di altri giornali, collegando gli italiani di una zona alpina, lontana e sganciata, con il resto della penisola [...] Ma soprattutto l'ora della ricostruzione incombe sul nostro disgraziato paese. Problemi gravissimi si affacciano alla ribalta italiana e del mondo tutto. Ci è sembrato talora che le altre barriere dolomitiche della conca di Cortina e paesi limitrofi chiudessero la zona in una beata dimenticanza di mondo perduto. Ciò non deve assolutamente essere. Oltre ai problemi locali esistono anche quelli nazionali. Quello che è avvenuto nel nostro paese, fino agli estremi confini adriatici e tirreni, e quello che potrà avvenire, deve interessare ugualmente fino agli estremi confini alpini. Questa è la voce degli ITALIANI di Cortina e della Val Boite (*Val Boite*, 23rd June 1945, p.1)

The idea of reaching out to all Italians was typical amongst writers who had participated in the Resistance, and who, even if not consciously adhering to PCI policy, considered that they had not only been fighting for liberation, but also for a fairer, more unified society. As Falaschi has noted, Italians had had the chance to become better acquainted with their fellow countrymen and it is his view that, 'l'esperienza di guerra, molto di più quella partigiana, aveva determinato un avvicinamento tra classi diversi, avvicinamento fisico e insieme politico' (*Realtà e retorica*, p. 48). They had seen more of their own country too, and this gave the lie to fascist propaganda that had glossed over the backwardness and poverty of much of Italy. There was a feeling that Italians should take on the responsibility of scrutinizing the past in order to see fascism in its true light, and to find the means of creating something different. This was a time, as Battaglia describes it, of 'revisione e riscatto dei valori morali e civili che la politica fascista e la sua avventura internazionale avevano adulterato o pretermesso. Si trattava di redimere e rieducare la "cattiva coscienza" della storia e restaurare la "causa della società"' ('Neorealismo', p. 675). As has been seen in Chapter Three, in *Val Boite* (1946),

Zangrandi speaks out directly against fascists and collaborators, insisting that they must be brought to justice. She also calls to account those who are contributing nothing to the reconstruction of Italy, often reserving her harshest criticism for the women of this area.

Giuliano Manacorda has written of the way that,

mutata la situazione della società italiana, un rinnovamento nel campo delle lettere e della cultura apparve non solo come un inevitabile aspetto di quel mutamento in quanto espressione della partecipazione di strati sociali finora rimasti ai margini, ma come un inderogabile impegno proprio perchè quel mutamento potesse venire incrementato e condotto a termine e potesse acquistare piena coscienza (*Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea 1940-75*, p. 4)

Just what form literature's response should take was the subject of much debate in the cultural journals of the years following 1945. There was widespread criticism of much pre-war literature, which was accused of being removed from real life, turned in on itself and passive in face of the challenge posed by fascism, whilst in *Il Politecnico*, Vittorini called instead for the development of a new culture which would include the masses, with intellectuals who were actively involved in society, and writers who produced committed literature. The mixing of Italians from different classes and regions, along with the political importance attributed to workers and peasants by the PCI, meant that one of the most significant concerns of postwar neorealist literature (and culture in general, most notably cinema) was to produce works that would be popular in all senses of the word; reflecting the lives and concerns of the lower classes, but also of interest to them.

In *Val Boite*, in an editorial entitled 'Leggere e scrivere' (4 August 1945), Zangrandi expresses her views on pre-war literature and the kind of writing that was needed now that the war was over. Looking back to the fascist period, she is not concerned, at first, with the major authors whose works were brought out by famous publishers, but instead with the 'letteratura in minore di riviste e rivistine' which had had a huge readership, especially amongst women, and was full of 'donne fatali, giovani bellissimi "con la cravatta intonata"... luci del "casino", il vortice della danza, l'ombra del suo viso, il cuore spezzato' and 'dialoghi sciapi

come la minestra di dadi (1942–45) e lunghe sbrodolature di parole'. Not that she necessarily blamed the readers; they just read what was available. All that it amounted to was, '1) quello che scrivevano i demagoghi politici dei quotidiani ecc. 2) la letteratura amena dove sfarfallavano studentini e maestrine desiderosi di vedere il loro nome in calce. Oppure qualche mercantucolo della penna che aveva bisogno di qualche lira', as she did herself, 'e come me centinaia di altri — non altrettanto giovani — irresponsabili, contribuivano al diletto del popolo'. It should not be surprising, she maintains, if, as a result, 'certa gioventù è molle, borghese, lontana dalla vita e non sa resistere ai suoi urti brutali'. It is interesting to observe that she feels that the people of the mountains of the Cadore have probably been less affected, however: 'c'è la lotta dura con la terra, la montagna, l'ambiente, il carattere più rude del paesano che subisce meno le influenze e per fortuna non ha nemmeno certi gusti e certe letture'.<sup>35</sup>

Now, as literature is beginning to be printed again, would it not be possible, she asks, for there to be newspapers and books that are 'solidi e belli, divertenti, possibilmente ben scritti e da gente di coscienza'? Certainly they can be amusing too, and enjoyable to read, but, above all, she calls for a literature that is:

qualcosa che ci parli della vita vera, umana, dentro la cornice serena e semplice di paesi e di cieli, di terra calda e buona, o anche in quella più tormentosa di città e di opifici. Di esseri reali, vivi, ridenti o sanguinanti come ce ne sono tanti che camminano per le vie del mondo. La vita ha tutto: il riso, il pianto, il comico, il tragico fino alla pazzia. E solo dalla vita reale nasce l'osservazione utile, giusta, che crea una esperienza ed, attraverso la lettura, la può creare negli altri. Solo mettendoci a contatto con la vita e mettendovi gli altri si creano dei caratteri che l'urto con la realtà dura non abbatta, che sappiano essere sereni e forti.  
(p. 3)

As for well-known writers (she does not name any specifically), to Zangrandi they are just 'artistoni' who 'non scrivevano per il popolo — fortunatamente — ma per un vecchio mondo trito, feudale e parassita'. Instead of these, she wants 'scrittori sani, sobrii, umani che scrivano per TUTTA la gente italiana', and who

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<sup>35</sup>It is interesting that this recalls some of the attitudes that Zangrandi expressed in her fascist journalism, particularly the idea that country people are healthier, both physically and morally.

will produce writing that has a purpose. It must not be propaganda, but ‘opera utile di rieducazione morale in questa massa di sbandati e di disorientati che ci ha ridotti la guerra’. She ends this article with the caution ‘e si ricordino che oggi chi fa della letteratura “in maggiore” od “in minore” (o piccolissima) è responsabile della vita del nostro popolo’.

So, Zangrandi’s concerns immediately following the war are quite clear and are typical of left-wing intellectuals of this period: Italians have a responsibility towards each other that crosses regional and class boundaries and they must recognize a break with the past in order to rebuild Italian society. Literature has no small part to play in this view of things; she is convinced of the harmful effects of ‘bad’ literature, and of the positive role in educating people and uniting society that can be played by the right kind of writing.

*I Brusaz* was published some nine years after *Val Boite* ceased publication and Giovanna Zangrandi’s enthusiasm for the role that literature might play in society could easily have waned, as it had for many other writers. However, there is evidence that, in later years, she continued to feel that a writer had a duty to society. As has been seen in Chapter One, in a loose-leaved diary entry entitled ‘Cortina 1 marzo 1957’, Zangrandi discusses the idea of the role of the writer in society and autobiography. She makes it very clear that at this time she still considered that the writer had an important role in society and a responsibility towards other people. For this reason she disapproves of any writing that is introverted and of a definition of writing that insists all literature is necessarily autobiographical.

Thus Zangrandi’s views as expressed in *Val Boite* and her diaries place her firmly in the neorealist camp to the extent that they reflect the concern for social issues in Italy (and the responsibility of the intellectual) that Bondanella has identified as the main unifying feature of neorealism. But can her first novel be described as neorealist? By examining the content, style and language of Zangrandi’s novel, it will be possible to assess the relation that *I Brusaz* bears to the literary debates of its time.

## *Popolo and Provincialism*

As mentioned earlier, in an effort to get close to the people, many writers immediately after the war took the *popolo* as the subject for their literature.<sup>36</sup> Their aim was to show the reality of their lives, a reality which some intellectuals had only experienced for the first time in the Resistance. Many works concentrated on the events of the Resistance, or aimed to ‘discover’ the lives of workers and peasants who had been exploited or ignored by fascism. Great emphasis was placed on telling the truth and on getting as close as possible to real life. This led to the publication of a large number of autobiographies (particularly diaries of the Resistance), as authors chose to write about instances they knew to be true. Other authors chose subjects they felt were typical of real life. In both cases, literary works were very firmly anchored both geographically and chronologically in an effort to get closer to the lives they were describing. However, as Pavese had maintained in his essay ‘Middle West e Piemonte’ (*Saggi letterari* (Turin: Einaudi, 1951), pp. 35–44), it was considered important that these specific examples should be seen as representative of a much broader reality (it will be recalled that Ravegnani identified this as one of the concerns of the judging panel of the Deledda prize).

Zangrandi chose to set *I Brusaz* amongst the highest mountains of the Dolomites, near the border with Austria. This novel tells the story of Sabina, a girl from the Austrian side of the border, who is made pregnant by Donato, a seasonal worker at her father’s farm. She is beaten by her father, thrown out of her house and, having married Donato, she follows him to his village in Italy. He soon leaves her in order to go and make his fortune in America and she is left to live in abject poverty with her mother-in-law, Tesa, and her child. In the course of the novel, the reader learns a lot about the hardships suffered by the peasants in this area, as Zangrandi reveals aspects of what Calvino called ‘l’Italia inedita’, writing about an area that rarely finds its way into literature.<sup>37</sup> Their daily life is shown to be

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<sup>36</sup>Chiccho Vitzizzai cites authors such as Cassola, Fenoglio, Carlo Levi, Pasolini, Pavese and Pratolini in this respect.

<sup>37</sup>Rigoni Stern is probably the closest author to Zangrandi in this respect, with novels such as *La storia di Tönle* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978) and *L’Anno della Vittoria* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), which are set in the Dolomites earlier this century, but written a good while after Zangrandi’s novel.

extremely harsh; a constant, stoical battle against the elements and starvation.

The novel is not set during the Second World War, nor immediately after it, unlike the majority of neorealist novels, instead it starts in the years before the previous world war. Nevertheless, it does show the typical neorealist concern with a precise historical setting, with dates and references to the First World War and the armies that pass through the village in which Sabina lives, and, towards the end of the novel, to the institutions of fascism. Whilst, as mentioned above, many neorealist works were autobiographical, Zangrandi denies any autobiographical element in *I Brusaz* (as has been discussed in Chapter One); however, it is clearly an attempt to write about a real situation and real Italians, even if the characters are fictional. This was confirmed by Zangrandi in an interview in *Epoca*, 'La storia di Sabina nella gerla della contrabbandiera' (M. De Monticelli, 13 February 1955, pp. 64–67) shortly after *I Brusaz* was published. She talks of the village of Pescul, on which she based her descriptions of Iugol, and the morning when she looked at it from a mountain pass and saw 'donne vestite di nero che riportavano la terra nelle gerle ai campi in pendio di dove l'acqua l'aveva rubata' (p. 65). It was at this point that she decided that Sabina would be one of these women, and this particular scene appears in *I Brusaz* (p. 114).

Zangrandi also refers to the question of the relation of *I Brusaz* to real events in a short essay entitled '*I Brusaz* sulla panchetta di Gripiade'. This may be found amongst her diaries and letters and may have been written for a newspaper or magazine. It certainly differs from her diaries as it seems to have been composed quite carefully, with an introductory passage followed by an anecdote from her own life. On the first page, she says that she has often been asked if *I Brusaz* is a true story and explains why, according to her, the book was so successful. 'Rispondere sarebbe gentile', she says, 'ma non è tanto facile'. She confirms that 'intreccio, vicende, figure, non le ho ricavate affatto da un singolo caso'. For, in any case, she adds, 'detesto di copiare luoghi o persone definite e deliberatamente in romanzi o novelle, soprattutto mi ripugna conservarne nomi ed identità complete'. If she does this at all, she continues, 'lo faccio per me sola in note di diarii od appunti, alla sera di una giornata di lavoro e di comuni rapporti umani'. In this way, she

emphasizes that, although her novel is not based directly on one group of people or series of events, her material is taken from ordinary, everyday life. Moreover, it is the ordinary, everyday life of the people who live around her, for, she states:

si osservi che la vita dei piccoli centri e delle valli dà forme di sondaggi — non visti, mentre si vive, si traffica, si ride o si letica — molto più capillari ed interessanti della città, soprattutto del compassato e stereotipato ambiente conformista

She may take one of these folders of notes as a starting point for her fiction, but then, she says, 'mi piace di andarmene su di un piano di realtà che possa costruire io'. Therefore, 'è assolutamente inutile ed assurdo cercare le tracce ed i focolari veri di Sabina o di Pino de *I Brusaz*'. As for why her novel was such a success, Zangrandi points to the level of realism that she has achieved by telling a story of three women of Gripiade, who lived some four kilometres before her own house, a place that she would pass as she returned home, 'l'ultima tappa nella valle nera di abete, solo abeti e fienili scuri'. The women live there with the son of one of them. When Zangrandi helps them by bringing the son home from hospital, she is invited to stay and eat with them. It is at this point that one of the women goes to the hayloft and brings out a copy of *I Brusaz* for her to sign, asking her, 'come ha fatto poi a scrivere questa storia, così, senza viverla lei, come se l'avesse vissuta? Si sente che l'ha vissuta, sennò non si riusciva a leggerla tre volte'. Zangrandi finds herself unable to answer, distracted by the way that this woman reminds her of her own protagonist, Sabina, just as her son reminds her of Sabina's son, even though she knows that 'il figlio di Sabina esiste solo nella carta che scrivevo, che stamparono'. Eventually, all she can say is:

è che...è che quando ho scritto quel libro rubavo vite vere, qua e là, di donne come lei, di tante che hanno allevato dei figli, pressapoco.

Impastavo ed inventavo.

E dopo, è strano: vivendo conosco gente simile a quella inventata.

They do not question her further and she is grateful for this:

Quello che amo e stimo in loro è soprattutto questo pudore, questo gentile trattenersi dal frugare in me, è soprattutto che non mi considerano 'la scrittrice, ecc, ecc' ma solo una che per evitare la fame conduce il camioncino del latte e forse scriverà altre storie 'che si riesce a leggere due o tre volte'. Se fosse vero.

It would perhaps be uncharitable to suggest that Zangrandi invented this particular story too, but, whether she did or not, it demonstrates the solidarity and admiration that she felt towards the people of the Cadore and the desire that her novel should be seen as relating closely their real lives. It is *their* opinion of her writing that Zangrandi claims to value most.

In this way, it could be said that she was aiming at a truly popular literature. However, the emphasis in many novels of this period on a particular region, and a particular social class and its way of life, has been criticized a great deal and there has been considerable discontent with what has been described by many as the 'contenutismo' of neorealism. That critics of an opposing political persuasion condemned the leftwing preoccupation with the *popolo* is hardly surprising. But from a literary point of view too, it has also been felt that the stress on a certain content meant that other literary concerns were neglected, and that the result was a literature that was too documentary or narrow in its perspective. Barberi Squarotti is especially damning in his assessment of neorealism as a literature that, despite its efforts to be universal, is, in fact, 'provinciale'. He claims that, in neorealistic works, 'la rifrazione nella provincia italiana del realismo borghese dell'Ottocento diviene, da concreto rispecchiamento di una realtà oggettiva, il rifugio estremo di un'incapacità di partecipazione culturale col resto del mondo, il segno di una continuazione del fascismo come chiusura e limitazione locale' (*Poesia e narrativa del secondo Novecento* (Milan: Mursia, 1978), p. 160). In other words, neorealists did not achieve their aim, but precisely the opposite. Zangrandi certainly objected to the idea of writing literature that was 'provinciale', as has been seen earlier in *Val Boite* with her emphasis on writing for all Italians. That idea is confirmed in an undated and untitled diary entry where she bemoans the tendency for Italians to give greater importance to the region they come from than to their country:

una delle cose più cretine e penose che io incontro nei discorsi, scritti,

ecc del mondo letterario-giornalistico italiano, nella critica e nell'‘abitus’ è questo loro miserabile dichiararsi con orgoglio ‘io sono emiliano, io sono napoletano, sono toscano o veneto’

nel loro chiedere ad uno scrittore ‘lei di dov’è, di che paese scrive? come se questa fosse la cosa più importante, la chiave di tutto, *la chiave* per capire costui

Given Zangrandi’s attachment to the Cadore, discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, and the fact that all her writing is set there, such an outburst against ‘provincialismo’ may seem rather ironic. One is led to wonder if it is partly provoked by a reluctance on her part to say where she really came from. And, yet, of course, as she would no doubt have countered herself, such an attachment to one area did not mean that she was necessarily inward-looking and parochial in the way that she criticizes in others. Indeed, as will be seen later in discussions about her use of language and legends, there is general agreement amongst the critics that Zangrandi did achieve a kind of universal quality in *I Brusaz*. Certainly, all Italians would have recognized that the problems created by poverty and emigration, shown in such sharp relief in *I Brusaz*, had a significance that went far beyond the mountains of the Dolomites.

It was not simply the fact that writers concentrated on one area of society, there were bound to be other problems too, when intellectuals turned to the *popolo*. One in particular is described by Chicco Vitzizzai as ‘populismo sentimentale’ (*Il neorealismo*, p. 34). When authors chose to write about the masses, workers and peasants, the relationship between the writer and his or her subject was often an uneasy one. The Resistance may have brought different classes closer to each other, but it did not mean that an intellectual was immediately able to write convincingly about the *popolo*. Petronio doubted that it was possible for a bourgeois writer even to begin to identify with workers or peasants:

Quale, fra i letterati italiani, sapeva (e sa) veramente che cosa pensa e sente, della vita e della morte, del suo lavoro e dell’amore, della famiglia e della natura, un operaio e un contadino? Chi (anche tra questi recentissimi contestatori, operaisti, marx-leninisti, maoisti, e che so io)

non può che tirare a indovinare, aiutarsi a forza di intelligenza di ispirazione, di 'cuore', tutte cose nobili e belle, ma che non sostituiscono una consuetudine lunga di vita e di pensiero, la partecipazione naturale e organica al vivere di una classe. Per una letteratura quale la nostra, riflesso di una società quale è stata ed è quella italiana, il mondo contadino e il mondo operaio sono, veramente, un pianeta diverso e lontano, e rappresentarli è altrettanto difficile, per non dire impossibile, che scrivere per essi (as quoted by Falaschi, *Realtà e retorica*, p. 185)

There was a tendency to idealize and romanticize the working class. Re writes that many Italian neorealists 'were unable to come to terms with their own distance — as bourgeois intellectuals — from the masses and often compensated (adhering to Soviet dogma in the process) by granting the working class a kind of mythical status, as the sole possessor of an authenticity and solidarity missing in every other segment of society' (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, p. 62). In describing their poverty and suffering, it was all too easy to let this become an idealized picture which exalted those qualities seen as inherent to this particular class: an endless capacity for hard work and great dignity in adversity. They were the positive side of Humanity in a manichean representation. As Re continues, such a view inevitably rested on a rather imprecise sociological idea of who the *popolo* were and a simplification of historical and political issues. Asor Rosa, in his controversial work, *Scrittori e popolo* (Rome: Samonà e Savelli, 1965), also maintained that representations of the masses could never be successful, because they were always mediated by the ideology and interests of the bourgeoisie.<sup>38</sup> He agrees that the distance between the classes remained after the Resistance, and he makes a similar point that

il populismo della letteratura resistenziale appare mosso, più che da una frequentazione diretta degli strati popolari interessati al processo di rinnovamento, da un forte impulso moralistico ed ideologico: l'intellettuale va verso il popolo ma il più delle volte, prima ancora di raggiungerlo concretamente e seriamente lo trasforma in mito e in immagine rovesciata di sé (p. 134)

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<sup>38</sup>A new edition of *Scrittori e popolo* appeared in 1988 (Turin: Einaudi). All page numbers are taken from this later edition.

In this way, the world of the peasant (as Chicco Vitzizzai comments, neorealists were, in general, far less interested in industrial workers (*Il neorealismo*, p. 34)), with its superstitions and myths, becomes an object of interest to bourgeois writers who then portray it in terms of their own preoccupations.

Falaschi, as ever, comes to the defence of neorealism. He admits that for the older generation, who had been through the experience of fascism as adults, there was a problem in identifying with a different social class. However, he maintains that the gap between intellectuals and the working classes was less of a problem for the younger generation who had fought alongside them and ‘anche a guerra finita continuarono a sentirsi *dentro* le classi che premevano per un rinnovamento politico-sociale...Nessun dubbio, in loro, per chi si dovesse scrivere, e di che, ma semmai *come*’ (*Realtà e retorica*, p. 37). But, of course, the question of *how* is the fundamental one that, as indicated in earlier chapters, inevitably shapes the object of a narration. It also reveals the fact that writing about the *popolo* was much more problematical than was supposed. The idea that this difficulty was solved, because of the identification neorealist writers felt with their partisan comrades, is very similar to the assumption that, because the political will is there and the times one is living in are so dramatic and imposing, it must be possible to represent real life directly in literature. As discussed in Chapter One, the representation of lived events in autobiography is always problematical and always results in distortions. The representation of reality in fiction is an equally vexed problem, and, particularly in this period when it seemed so imperative that writers should achieve a picture of real life in what they wrote, it inevitably provoked the kind of polemics that this chapter refers to.

So how did Zangrandi approach this problem? It has been seen in previous chapters that her attitude to the *cadorini* did involve a certain idealism and she undoubtedly credits the peasants of the mountains with qualities missing in other groups in society. Nevertheless, she cannot be said to be simplistic or schematic in the way she describes them, whether in *I Brusaz* or elsewhere. She did come from a different region and a different class, but, unlike the vast majority of writers, Zangrandi had not just experienced life amongst peasants and workers during the

Resistance, but continued to live amongst them after the war. Moreover, she was not living as the typical artist, on the edge of society, observing it from a different perspective. As has been seen in Chapter Two, when she was interviewed by De Monticelli for *Epoca*, she was proud of the fact that hers were not the hands of a writer, but were ‘ruvide, con le ragadi che abbiamo tutti noi che si lavora nel freddo’, and that she worked as a landlady, who, incidentally, was also a writer (‘La storia di Sabina nella gerla della contrabbandiera’, by Roberto De Monticelli, *Epoca*, 13 February 1955, pp. 64–67). De Monticelli comments that Zangrandi lives herself in the world she describes in *I Brusaz* and adds that, ‘Lei, Giovanna, non scrive di cose che non ha visto, delle cose che non sa’ (p. 67). It is also interesting that, as has been noted in an earlier chapter, the writer Rigoni Stern, who had very humble origins and came from an area close to where Zangrandi lived, also considered that she was accepted by the people of the Cadore and understood them very well. In other words, she was much closer to the ‘partecipazione naturale e organica al vivere di una classe’ that Petronio talks about (see above) and less open to generalizations and misunderstandings when writing about the *popolo*.

Furthermore, as has been seen in the chapter on Zangrandi’s relation to fascism, her interest in the *contadini* of the Cadore did not spring from nowhere in the post-war period, but dates back to the time she was writing under the regime. As that chapter suggests, although, given the historical context, such an interest could be considered mere fascist rhetoric, it is an area of considerable ambiguity and needs treating with some care and there is evidence to suggest that Zangrandi’s concern with the *popolo* went beyond the demands of the regime. It is interesting that the fact that she expresses a similar concern in the post-war period allies her with the left-wing, antifascist neorealists. She may have used rather different language in fascist publications, but her interest in the poor, rural communities around her seems consistent. Moreover, the concern for realism could not be ignored entirely during the fascist period either. As has been shown in Chapters Two and Three, she makes it clear that she considers the working classes to be more attractive on the whole than the bourgeoisie, and she credits them with a certain moral superiority too (a view also suggested by her comments in *Val Boite* quoted above).

However, in this novel, the bourgeoisie scarcely appears and a comparison between the classes is beyond the horizons of this story of remote peasant people. Sabina's stoicism and dignity might suggest a certain idealization of poor peasants, but, in fact, characters are shown to cope with deprivation in different ways. Generally, poverty emerges as divisive and destructive and characters in this book do not have special qualities that allow them to cope with it, but simply manage as best they can. For example, solidarity between members of this community is a luxury that few can afford. Sabina is treated with considerable diffidence when she arrives in the village, and it is only the Zecchin couple, who are slightly better off than some others, and Pina, who has worked in America, who show her kindness. Her mother-in-law, Tesa, is also far from welcoming at first. When Sabina arrives, we read that Tesa

si alzò e si volse, si piantò di fronte a questa donna di Hoden che il suo figlio ha portata qui, con la fede di nozze, un bel guaio; certo, nelle 'fedi' egli spese quasi tutto il guadagno dell'ingaggio estivo; c'è da sperare che sia stato furbo, che abbia preso di quelle solo indorate di fuori. (p. 55)

However, as the story develops, it becomes clear that Tesa is not ungenerous, but that all her thoughts are conditioned by the kind of life she has had to lead. The fact that Zangrandi understood the people she was writing about well does not mean that her brand of realism was automatically more authentic, but it was less likely to be a complete misrepresentation.

## Colour

It has been a common criticism of neorealist works that they tended to be uniformly grim in an effort to achieve what was perceived to be a greater degree of realism. Zangrandi was not tempted apparently by such an approach and, once more, the fact that she knew the Cadore and its people well seems to have been influential in her writing. The harsh side of life is certainly present in *I Brusaz* — at such altitudes, the reader is reminded, little grows, there is a great deal of illness and the only real hope is to leave, if at all possible, and emigrate to America — and is

described vividly by Zangrandi. For example, the way that Sabina sees the people of Iugol at first is striking: ‘questa gente scura, ignota, dalle lunghe mani adunche e magre, che lavora, mugugna, conta centesimi, calcola, tace, fuma, scatta un attimo nel riso salace, irridente, tace ancora, come oppressa da grigia e pesante nuvola, tutto si ingrigia, muore lo sprazzo di riso e di canto, si spegne’ (p. 84). The natural world, too, is often seen as hostile and threatening. For example, as Sabina walks with Donato from Hoden to Iugol, around her she sees ‘enormi bancate tufacee, nere’ that ‘affioravano dalle praterie aride come tundre di sconosciuti continenti [...] e vi erano come buche, dove pareva che malefici giganti avessero frugata la terra’ (pp. 50–51). Such descriptions might seem typically neorealist in their emphasis on the ugly and forbidding. Some of the gruesome details that we are given add to this impression, such as when Tesa’s foot becomes infected, and she is described as the ‘vecchia dal corpo che scola materia nella nera cucina’ (p. 110). However, as stated earlier, whilst such descriptions are very common, *I Brusaz* is not a work that is uniform in that sense. There are a number of episodes where the tone is light and humorous. For example, when Donato and his friend Momo are crossing the mountains looking for work at the beginning of the book, the narrator seemingly ascribes to the local wisdom: Momo is wrapped up in clothes and sweating freely as they climb because “‘molta roba indosso tiene il caldo ed il freddo’”, dicono i vecchi’. But this is followed by ‘ma sono degli scocciatori nient’affatto saggi, i vecchi’ (p. 9). Further examples of humour are provided by characters such as Sabina’s uncle who was a ‘caposcarico celibe che ne aveva combinate parecchie’ (p. 15), or the Zecchin couple: Anna, the ‘vecchia [...] con il visetto fresco e scuro’ and her husband, ‘il mio vecchio scimmiotto’ (p. 103).

The contrasts present in *I Brusaz* are particularly striking on the level of visual descriptions and colour. As the above descriptions of Iugol, the natural world and Tesa’s foot illustrate, there is a predominance of the colours grey and black, whether it applies to the clothes that are worn, the natural world, or to the mood or atmosphere. The darkness of Iugol, in particular, is emphasized; it is described as a ‘paese cacciato in un fondo di sacco’ (p. 52), where the light scarcely seems to reach because of the mountains overshadowing it, and where the houses, like

the clothes of the people, are all black. Such a picture contrasts strongly with Hoden, at the beginning of the book, which is light and sunny, and the mountains surrounding it are 'chiari massicci rocciosi guerniti di torri eleganti' and are 'lontane barriere' that 'lasciano entrare il sole nella conca di Hoden a riscaldarne i ricchi campi' (p. 10). In this way, attention is drawn to the drastic change in Sabina's circumstances as she moves from the relatively comfortable, if stifling, atmosphere of Hoden to the forbidding severity of life in Iugol. Indeed, it is possible to identify a sense of progression that runs through *I Brusaz* with regard to the use of colour and visual contrasts. Sabina starts the novel in the colourful, traditional clothes of Hoden, but they are judged to be entirely unsuitable for the meagre life she must lead in Iugol and she is obliged to change to carry manure to the fields, or cover up the colour of her clothes in church, to avoid drawing attention to herself. Thus the change in colour of Sabina's dress charts the progress of her fortunes. In a similar way, it is significant that when the soldier Muzziero moves in and Sabina's life improves considerably, one of the main differences is that the inside of her house, previously smoke-stained and black ('un antro da streghe' as Muzziero describes it (p. 137)), is painted white for her. Indeed, as the novel as a whole progresses, after the initial brightness of Hoden, that becomes just a memory for Sabina, the predominant change in colour is from the black and grey of Iugol to lighter colours; ones which still suggest the harshness of life, such as the white of the all-enveloping snow at the end of the book, or the references to grass that is yellowing and 'bruciata dall'autunno' (p. 167), but, which, nevertheless mark an attenuation in the level of suffering endured by Sabina and her children.

Within the general progression from dark colours to light, there are also other occasional splashes of colour and brightness. As well as the sunshine of Hoden at the beginning of the book, remembered nostalgically by the protagonist when living in her black kitchen in Hoden, there are further examples of vivid colours that contrast strongly with the 'background' black, grey and then white. Firstly, there are times, when Sabina is still living with Tesa, when the natural world seems to light up, even in Iugol: 'si vede in fondo a quella valle una gran montagna superba che ha un enorme ghiacciaio, il sole vi batte ancora e ne accende una lama

di fuoco' (p 52). It should be noted that such a description does not necessarily modify the impression given of the physical conditions in Iugol: the light of the sun and the 'lama di fuoco' momentarily suggest greater physical heat, but such impressions are negated by the fact that it is a glacier that is being described. In this way, our attention is drawn more to the visual contrast, and to the use of red as a sign of danger and as a means of reinforcing the threat posed by the natural world, and, perhaps, by other supernatural forces. In other cases, colour *is* an indication of greater warmth and comfort, as well as greater happiness. During the happy period when Muzziero is staying with Sabina, the colour of the natural world is found in flowers: 'è giugno ed è scoppiata violenta la primavera-estate delle montagne, calda, i giorni più caldi dell'anno, rigogliosa da ogni centimetro di terra, i prati ed piccoli erti campi sembrano cascate verdi fiorite sulla valle' (p. 149). At the same time, Muzziero, 'l'uomo entrato magnifico e prepotente in lei e nelle loro vite', is 'come una nuvola calda e rossa che a sera cala sui campi' (p. 151). Likewise, the house of the Zecchin is not black, but rather 'un tinello rivestito di legno' which is 'caldo, caldissimo' because of the 'fornellone panciuto e bianco' (p. 103). In the last section of the novel, too, when Sabina is living with Tommaso, there is the description of the 'focacce di zucca' that are 'riuscite perfette, leggere e dorate' and of the 'rosso vinello del fiasco [che] scalda come un sole, un piccolo sole nella cucina sepolta' (p. 185), which forms a contrast both with the emptiness of her life before and with the cold white of the snowdrifts outside.

In this way, *I Brusaz* is certainly not an example of the much-criticized monotony identified as typical of neorealism. Instead, it works by a series of contrasts; black contrasted with white, or black and shades of grey contrasted with other, richer, colours. It should also be noted that Zangrandi's use of colour is always very conventional. Black signifies a harsh life, poverty, and suffering, whilst white is either the opposite of black or marks the absence of other colours and suggests a certain bleakness (as with the description of the snow, mentioned above). Red appears as a sign of danger or indication of warmth and many colours together suggest gaiety or happiness. Thus the use of colour in *I Brusaz* is hardly innovative in its

connotations, indeed, like other aspects of the novel, as will be discussed later, it seems quite deliberately conventional. Nevertheless, it does create a strong visual effect and provides an eloquent commentary on the vicissitudes of Sabina's life, as well as contributing considerably to a variation in tone in *I Brusaz*.

## Language and Characterization

If authors were not only to write about people who had been ignored, but also to make literature relevant to people's lives and show a way forward for society, then communication was paramount. Thus, content was important, but so too was the chosen means of expression. As mentioned earlier, Peter Bondanella refers to an attempt during this period to create a new poetic language to deal with the problems of the time. However, this is one of the areas in which it is most clear that neorealism never constituted a fixed programme to which writers adhered. Most critics point to an attempt in neorealist works to avoid styles that could be judged obscure or over-literary. Battaglia indicates that such writers eschewed the overtly poetic or lyrical which was considered to be, he says, an 'estremo residuo romantico, perché affette dalla tabe del disimpegno, dell'evasione, dell'arcadia, del compiacimento narcisista decadentista, della mera retorica' ('Neorealismo', p. 679). Instead, they tried to get as close as possible to the ordinary language of real people and this typically involved the use of colloquial language and dialect borrowings, as well as a great deal of direct speech, which also minimized overt authorial intervention. However, Battaglia paints such a picture in order to criticize it. As far as he is concerned, they rejected lyricism and poetry 'con la conseguenza di abbassare l'arte alla cronaca agnostica e amorfa e mortificare la resa stilistica in una scrittura meccanica, neutra, abbecedaria' ('Neorealismo', p. 679). Manacorda also criticizes the language of neorealists and allies the choice of dialect words and colloquial expressions with 'il vezzo della concitazione e della parolaccia, la retorica dello scriver male, la popolarità della lingua falsa perché stereotipata, mal orecchiata, siglata proprio da quel difetto di studio che imponeva quel linguaggio come copertura' (*Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1975)*, p. 30). Such judgements tend to be reserved for what are considered the worst

cases; however, it is remarkable just how little agreement there is about which authors fall into this category. Both Vittorini and Pavese, on the other hand, were criticized for producing writing that was too poetical. Linked to the use of language was another feature seen as typical of neorealist novels: characterization that was simple and involved no great psychological exploration; the emphasis was on visual descriptions and characters that were defined by their actions.

It is interesting to examine the way that Zangrandi treats language and characterization in *I Brusaz*. Characters tend to be seen from the outside and are described in quite simple terms. There is no great psychological depth to them; the reader does learn of Sabina's thoughts, and more rarely those of other characters, but they tend to be in the form of immediate reactions to specific situations rather than contemplative musings. Vicari, making the connection between language and characterization, comments on the way that Sabina speaks in his review of Zangrandi's novel, 'La storia dei Brusaz' (*Incom*, 5 December 1955, p. 61):

proprio la scarsa eloquenza verbale del personaggio, il suo rifiutarsi all'analisi moralistica del proprio destino, alla ribellione, danno pieni contorni a questa figura di donna [...] Sabina è tenera e forte, e la calda, virile pietà che il suo destino ispira scaturisce dai gesti e non dalle parole

The language that Zangrandi uses in *I Brusaz* provoked mixed reactions in her critics. However, to explore this fully, it is necessary to look first at the narrator, the 'speaker' of this language. For an important element in the success of *I Brusaz* must have been the way that it achieves its own particular realistic effect and this depends, to a great extent, on the role of the narrator. Although the narrator is an 'implied narrator', in Wayne Booth's terms, and does not exist explicitly as a character in the book, a distinct point of view emerges and there are a number of indications that suggest that this is a story being told by someone who belongs in some sense to the community being described, and is presenting the narrative from, to use Rimmon Kenan's words, 'an unpersonified position internal to the story' (*Narrative Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 77). The perspective of this narrator varies. There *are* occasions when the narrator is what Rimmon Kenan calls an 'external focalizer' where 'the focalizer is located at a point far above the

object(s) of his perception', and this position yields 'either a panoramic view or "simultaneous" focalization of things "happening" in different places' (*Narrative Fiction*, p. 77). This is true of the description of the natural surroundings and of Donato and Momo at the beginning of the book. There is a description of a 'valico delle Alpi, che divide delle valli di qua e di là', with its small springs that 'sboccano da disciolti nevai, si incanalano e vanno, cantano e rombano, diventano torrente e fiume' as they flow through other valleys, between hills, through 'pianure' and into various seas. Donato and Momo are described as if from a distance, as 'due figure nere' with 'cose lunghe in ispalla che balenano in cima' (p. 1) (suggesting that they are too distant for these objects to be seen clearly), and then the narration 'closes in' on these two characters.

An ironic comment referring to the future, when, after describing the fortifications that are being built high up in the Alps, the narrator remarks 'sarebbe bella che volessero venire a far guerra fin su queste crode' (p. 31), is also an indication of an 'external focalizer', as are the times when the narrator is able to see into the minds of the characters. However, much of *I Brusaz*, apart from the examples given above, and the passages of direct speech, is narrated via an 'internal focalizer', with a much more limited perspective, either from an unpersonified position, or from the point of view of a character. The shift between these different focalizers is achieved by extensive use of free indirect discourse. Rimmon Kenan describes this as 'the typical form of first-person interior monologue' (*Narrative Fiction*, p. 110), but in *I Brusaz*, it is used much more widely, frequently in conjunction with an impersonal expression, such as the construction using *si*. Very often it is possible to tell to whom the thoughts and opinions expressed should be attributed by means of their content, or the context. However, it is not always so obvious. There are many instances where it is left as ambiguous. Sometimes this is resolved a few lines on, as is the case in the following example, where the mountains are being described, apparently by the narrator: 'la parete enorme era rossa, prima, ora è cenere viola, si dice noialtri: "è il rir de i muortes"'. This seems to be the narrator speaking as one of the community. It continues, impersonally, 'da tempi lontani si dice, "rir de i muortes" quest'ora, sui monti senza voce, si affonda in un'ondata di nebbia, che

sale, senza voce; la nebbia, può darsi, son loro'. However, when the chapter then ends with the words 'si entra nella cucina di Costa' (p. 111), the reader must revise her first impressions and now suppose that these were the thoughts of Sabina, and that it was Sabina who was narrating. More often, the ambiguity is not resolved and it is significant that the confusion is nearly always between the narrator and Sabina. It is also interesting that there are only two very short episodes in the book when Sabina is not present in the narrative. This ambiguity leads, at times, to a close identification of the narrator with Sabina in particular.<sup>39</sup> The narrator continues to exist as a separate 'voice' despite this; sometimes as an omniscient narrator, at other times apparently not omniscient but, instead, apparently as a witness to events that have just occurred. For example, in Tommaso's kitchen, we are told that 'il topolino che evidentemente risponde al nome di Matteo, lo guarda, per nulla impaurito' (p. 167); the word 'evidentemente' gives the impression that the narrator is watching a scene and trying to work out what is happening, rather than knowing everything automatically. In this way, the perspective of the narrator is often brought close to that of the community being described, and it is suggested that the narrator is a member of that community.

There are further aspects of *I Brusaz* that contribute to that effect. There is a tendency throughout the novel to alternate between past and present tenses. It is interesting to look at the beginning of the novel in this respect. To start with, Zangrandi describes the mountains near Hoden in the present tense: 'È un valico, un valico delle Alpi, che divide delle valli di qua e di là' (p. 7). When Momo and Donato are introduced, the present tense continues to be used: 'vi sono due uomini che salgono dalle valli più a sud verso il valico alto' (p. 7). The present tense makes the narrative more vivid for the reader, but also brings the narrator closer to the setting and the action described. Hoden seems to be a place that the narrator knows, and has known for some time: 'Hoden stessa, nel centro dell'abitato, è come una città, con i portici, ed i negozi, i caffè e gli empori, gli alberghi che ormai si chiamano *hotels*' (p. 8). However, a few lines later, the tense switches to the past,

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<sup>39</sup>It is tempting to question Zangrandi's assertion that her novel is not at all autobiographical at this point, given this identification between narrator and protagonist and the fact that Sabina is also an outsider in the world of the Cadore, accepted by some but not by others.

and the narrative seems to recede in time, as the narrator looks back to an earlier period: 'e quei due camminavano con le falce fienaiie piegate sulla asta' (p. 8). Two pages later and the tense has switched back to the present once more, as the narrator describes the scene in more detail, 'Hoden, nel mezzo, sta come regina tra la corte dei suoi servi', and places Momo and Donato within that description: 'e questi due quassù guardano ai campi là in fondo' (p. 10). In this way, the use of different tenses adds to the effect of the shifts between different focalizers, making the time of the narrative, and of the act of narration, deliberately ambiguous, so that the novel seems both an account of the narrator's own times, and a story from the past, related by a narrator who exists on a similar time level to that of the reader.

There is a further means by which Zangrandi brings her narrator closer to the community described in *I Brusaz*: any metaphors and similes are drawn from the natural surroundings or the supernatural of the local myths and legends; for example, Sabina and Tesa 'sembravano due corvi che sbeccottassero la terra' (p. 69) and the 'mucchietti di falciate' seemed to be 'guerrieri caduti a schiere come raccontava la storaa della nonna, tutti i predoni sconfitti nella favolosa battaglia del popolo Duràn' (p. 25). Thus, the narrator's horizons appear to be those of the peasants of the Cadore. It is not assumed that the reader is also one of that community, yet the narrator does address the reader directly, asking questions as if expecting a response. Moreover, the language often tends to be colloquial and suggests familiarity between narrator and reader. An example would be the comment about Sabina's sister made by the narrator, 'Elga è una ragazza molto per bene e timorata di Dio, non ti pare?' (p. 30). Such questions create the illusion, at times, that the story is being told out loud to people who are listening, and, thus, in a certain way, Zangrandi may be seen to ally her story with a tradition of oral narration and to reinforce the idea of storytelling within a community.

The use of dialect is also important in this respect. The following regional or dialect words may be found in *I Brusaz* (in the order in which they appear first):

'erker' (p. 13, p. 130)

'smarn' (p. 14)

‘maso’ (p. 14)  
 ‘soga’ (p. 42)  
 ‘sbecottassero’ (p. 69)  
 ‘pacioccosa’ (p. 53, p. 134)  
 ‘larìn’ (p. 54, p. 73, p. 80, p. 88, p. 144, p. 146)  
 ‘rìsina’ (p. 58)  
 ‘grassa’ (p. 59)  
 ‘sapiin’ (p. 59, p. 65)  
 ‘brugnolosa’ (p. 70)  
 ‘tersuò’ (p. 72)  
 ‘malga’ (p. 84)  
 ‘butti’ (p. 90)  
 ‘liosà’ (p. 93, p. 126)  
 ‘stua’ (p. 94, p. 108, p. 213, p. 219)  
 ‘soraforinèl’ (p. 104, p. 106, p. 107)  
 ‘mare’ (p. 65, p. 126)  
 ‘smergolare’ (p. 146)  
 ‘pantegane’ (p. 171)  
 ‘ciaspe’ (p. 181, p. 214)  
 ‘crosti’ (p. 208)

As regards the meaning of these words, some belong to the local dialect and may be found in V. T. Tamburin’s *Dizionario del dialetto di Cortina d’Ampezzo* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1973), but not the *Dizionario etimologico veneto italiano* ed. by D. Durante and G. F. Turato (Padua: La Galiverna, 1993). They, and their definitions as they appear in Tamburin’s dictionary, are as follows:<sup>40</sup> ‘liosà’ (liòza): slitta; ‘stua’: soggiorno foderato in legno; ‘soraforinèl’: incastellatura in legno sopra

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<sup>40</sup>Where the spelling is different in Tamburin’s dictionary, or where he gives a different part of speech, his version is given in parenthesis, following Zangrandi’s. The same applies to definitions taken from Durante and Turato’s dictionary.

il forno da pane nelle 'stue' di un tempo, utilizzato come letto; 'ciaspa': racchetta per camminare sulla neve.

Other words belong to the broader category of the dialect the Veneto. They, and their definitions as they appear in Durante and Turato's dictionary of the Veneto dialect, are as follows: 'soga': corda, stria di cuoio; 'larin': focolare; 'butti' (buto): gemma; 'mare': madre (found in other dialects too, of course); 'pantegana': topo delle fogne, topo acquaiolo, grosso topo; 'grassa': ingrasso, concime animale; 'sbecottassero' (sbecotare): beccare con insistenza, piluccare, bezzicare; 'pacioccosa' (pàcia): mota, fango.

Some words appear in neither dictionary, but, nevertheless, are specific to the region in which the novel is set. The word 'erker' is clearly German (see the reference below to German words in Sabina's dialect), means 'bay' or 'bay window' and in *I Brusaz* refers to the alcove in a building in which the statue of a saint is placed. 'Maso' is not specifically from the Veneto, but belongs to alpine regions and means 'nelle zone alpine orientali, l'insieme costituito da podere, casa colonica e attrezzatura agricola' (as defined in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. by S. Battaglia (Turin: UTET, 1967-)). 'Malga' ('pascolo alpino estivo') belongs to a similar category. The meaning of 'rìsina' is also apparently that of 'risina' (in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*) and proper to a mountainous area that produces timber: 'canalone fatto di tronchi d'albero per far scendere legname a valle' (from the German 'rieseln'). 'Sapìn' is also clearly a form of 'sapino', a regional word for the 'abete rosso'. 'Smergolare' is given in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* as a dialect form meaning 'cantare in modo monotono'; 'smergo' is also a duck-like bird found predominantly in the Veneto. 'Smarn' is clearly the same as the 'shmorn' (a kind of thick pancake), found in the Trentino (*Il meglio della cucina trentina*, ed. by Giuliana Paoli (Trento: Panorama, 1989), whilst 'brugnolosa' (used to describe potatoes in *Brusaz*) must be related to 'bugna', meaning rough or uneven in the dialect of the nearby Predazzo.<sup>41</sup> Other words are introduced in inverted commas in *I Brusaz*, thus suggesting that they are either dialect or borrowings; they are clearly not standard Italian, but nor

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<sup>41</sup>I am grateful to Guido Bonsaver, University of Royal Holloway, for his comments with regard to the dialect words in *I Brusaz*.

do they appear in the dialect dictionaries mentioned above. Nevertheless, their meaning tends to be clear from the context: 'tersuò' is a greeting and 'crosti' are snow ploughs.

The issue of dialect is an important aspect of the plot itself. We learn that Sabina speaks her own dialect, of Hoden, and also some Italian. When she moves to Iugol, one of the features that makes her stand out from the people around her is her inability to speak the dialect of Iugol. It is clear that the dialects are not mutually incomprehensible, for she and her mother-in-law are able to communicate. Nevertheless, they are recognisably different. For a while, she speaks a strange mixture which gives the local people plenty of opportunity for ridicule:

Parlava metà dialetto di Hoden e metà di Iugol, un dialetto a modo suo, diceva la Tesa. Ma le altre ridevano a tutte le parole diverse ch'essa diceva: sarebbe stato bello fare infuriare la sposa di Hoden.

Invero Sabina avrebbe loro pestato il capo volentieri, quando in principio esse sghignazzavano per dieci minuti, perché lei pronunciava 'ega', invece di 'aga'. Ma non è sempre la stessa acqua, Dio buono?

Oppure dicevano, maligne: 'tornate a dire: come, come? "el sorei" avete detto, ah! "el sorojo" diciamo, ah!'. E non è sempre lo stesso sole?

E altre cose del genere.

Eppure ce la metteva tutta a non dire le parole tedesche che abbondavano nel misto dialetto di Hoden; ormai aveva intuito come era la faccenda e cercava di parlare solo con le parole che sembravano di tutte le valli o quelle che aveva imparato qui. (p. 80–81)

The above passage also illustrates the way that the narrator (identified closely with Sabina in this case) apparently 'translates' for the reader from dialect into Italian. In another example, the narrator describes a conversation between Sabina and Tesa, where Sabina is apologizing: 'Scusate, madre, chiamatemi domattina, sarò come nuova'. These words are followed by the comment "'madre" ha detto, come dicono loro in dialetto: "mare"' (p. 65). In this way, the narrator informs the reader of the words of Sabina; they are not represented directly in the language of

the novel. Similarly, when dialect words appear in the text directly, as mentioned earlier, they often do so inside inverted commas. For example, the words 'larìn', 'rìsina', 'liosà' all appear that way. When words are repeated they sometimes keep the inverted commas, and sometimes lose them. The word 'larìn', for example, appears twice in inverted commas, the third time has none, but is part of a sentence in direct speech, and the fourth time has none, without being in direct speech, as if it is acknowledged that the word would be foreign to the reader at first, but that, by a later stage, she or he could be expected to have learned it. Thus it is made explicit that the language that the narrator uses is not meant to represent the local dialect in some way, but rather quotes from it (and thus Zangrandi's approach to language differs from, for example, the techniques used by Verga or Silone). That is most obvious when the words are introduced in inverted commas, but even when dialect words are introduced without commas, they stand out as words that, on the whole, denote aspects of life that are specific to that region of the Alps, and that could not easily be expressed in Italian. In this way, such words do not seem redundant or gratuitous. For example, when the word 'erker' is used, without inverted commas, its meaning is clear enough from the context: 'quella casa con l'erker dipinta e ci si vede una Santa assai bella' (p. 13). The fact that it is a German-sounding word also serves to remind the reader of the location of Hoden, and the consequent influence of German on the local dialect (that is also true of 'smarn' which appears on the next page, p. 14). In a similar way the 'soraforinèl' and 'larìn' are typical features of houses in the Cadore and do not have any exact equivalent in Italian. Thus the use of dialect anchors the text in a particular region, but without the pretence that the story is being recounted in that dialect (there is, of course, more than one dialect referred to, in any case).

The narrator thus occupies a kind of middle position between the reader and the world of *I Brusaz*. It seems that the narrator is part of the community, and speaks and understands its dialects, yet also has a wider knowledge of the world, in terms both of language and narratorial omniscience. The narrator apparently knows the specialized vocabulary to describe those aspects that are typical of the area, its way of life, its houses and so on (indeed, as shown above, the greater number of dialect

words used in the novel belong to this category), but narrates the novel in Italian, albeit a colloquial register of Italian. A further indication that the narrator belongs in the area, yet is more educated than the characters of the novel may be found in the descriptions of plants and trees. Certainly, a knowledge of what grows locally can be interpreted as a sign that the narrator is native to the area, but the tendency to use specialized botanical vocabulary that occurs throughout the novel implies a scientific education of some sort. There are many examples, including the following: ‘composite’, ‘pelargoni’, and ‘trollii’ (p. 25), ‘colchici’ and ‘aconito’ (p. 48). Such issues are also significant, of course, in the light of Zangrandi’s insistence that she belonged in the Cadore. Thus the language of *I Brusaz*, and dialect in particular, are not only used to suggest identification between the protagonist and narrator, but, for readers who are aware of Zangrandi’s life, also point to a link between the narrator and the author. Dialect is important in suggesting a very precise geographical location for *I Brusaz*: it is clear from the language alone that the novel is set in the Veneto, in the mountains and near the border with Austria. The dialect words that Zangrandi chose to include in *I Brusaz* also give a sense of social class as they are associated with peasant life in the mountains and refer to in particular to the houses people live in and the work they do. Dialect defines the boundaries in the text, between those who belong and those who do not; thus it is an important aspect of the characterization and the plot of *I Brusaz*, and, in a similar way, it also ‘places’ the narrator and reinforces the role of the narrator within the novel.

Direct speech is common in *I Brusaz*, but, in any case, even where there is free indirect discourse, the use of dialect and of a colloquial register adds to the impression of the novel being ‘spoken’, as it were, given the deliberate confusion between the spoken words, the thoughts of the characters and the narration. It is ironic, however, that in a novel that has this ‘spoken’ quality, speech itself is regarded with some diffidence. Sabina decides that, to get on with her new mother-in-law and neighbours, she should speak as little as possible; she barely talks to anyone outside the family, and her conversations with Tesa are usually very brief. Moreover, it will be remembered that a lack of verbosity is cited frequently by

Zangrandi as one of the virtues of the people of the Cadore. Thus it is significant when characters do speak at any length in *I Brusaz*. When Muzziero is verbose, however, his words are shown to be worthless, just the product of an over-active imagination and of no practical use. Nevertheless, speech is also seen in a more positive light on occasion; the Zecchin's conversations with Sabina stand out as rare examples of generosity and solidarity, and one of the ways that Sabina is seen to greatly improve Tommaso's life is to provide him with someone to talk to. Thus, speech plays a role in the plot of *I Brusaz*, to emphasize the issue of communication (or lack of it) between characters. However, as suggested above, even when exchanges between characters expressed in direct speech are brief, the novel retains its 'spoken' quality through the use of free indirect discourse. It is important to remember, nevertheless, that the colloquial register used in most of the novel is not the only register to be found. Muzziero's is not the only example of abstract language. As noted earlier, a rather more poetic, grandiose even, register is also to be found in *I Brusaz*. It is found particularly in Zangrandi's descriptions of the mountains, which are often also linked to references to the supernatural or the world of fables. For example, the mountain above Iugol is described in the following way: 'la sua roccia a parete compatta si ergeva, lavata di piova o battuta di vento, come un trono massiccio di un ignoto e terribile Iddio' and contrasted with the 'ben modellate e frastagliate Crode di Hoden; quelle si potevano credere i fantastici regni delle favole di nonna Nena Langer, ma questa invece era tremenda come le parole dell'Apocalisse che a volte sentì dai predicatori del quaresimale' (p. 79). This variation in register has enchanted some critics and perplexed others. Falqui links the variation in register to the changing perspective of the narrator (described earlier) and has commented that that this is a novel that,

essendo tutto recitato e commentato in una sorta di prima persona rapsodica che ora si accosta e ora si allontana, si solleva e si abbassa, s'impiccolisce e s'ingrandisce, si familiarizza e si solennizza, ha gli oscillamenti e gli sbandamenti d'una cronaca popolare che si trasforma in leggenda

Falqui does not seem able to decide, however, whether he considers this to be a good or a bad thing. He is very critical of her 'cattivo gusto delle amplifi-

cazioni rettoriche', yet he rather begrudgingly admits: 'fatto sta che, nonostante la mescolanza di schietto e di artificioso, in chi legge si crea l'illusione di ascoltare un racconto stando a veglia, vicino alla "stua", mentre fuori imperversa la bufera' ('Giovanna Zangrandi: *I Brusaz*' in *Novecento letterario italiano* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1957), pp. 906–910). Falqui's criticism of Zangrandi's 'cattivo gusto delle amplificazioni rettoriche' must, at least in part, be attributable to her use of rhetorical questions. Such questions seem quite acceptable when it is clear who is doing the asking, as it were. For example, at the time when Sabina is working alongside Tesa and the others in the woods, we read the following words: 'E quando verrà luce in tanto grigiore? Il bambino verrà? E poi?' (p. 84). As is often the case, they are not in direct speech nor openly attributed to one character. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that they are the thoughts of Sabina. The effect is rather more uncertain when such questions are not easily attributable as they may seem redundant and over-rhetorical, particularly on first reading.

Vicari expresses a rather different view from that of Falqui: 'le ingenuità di linguaggio...fanno pensare ad una abilissima astuzia formale, usata con maestria per dare maggiore evidenza ad un linguaggio che sembra scolpito nel legno, singolarissimo, ad un espressionismo tessuto di cose', (*Incom*, 5 February 1955). In other words, for him, this mixture of registers *increases* the realistic effect of this novel. Other critics comment on a kind of 'solidity' in her language, (as has been noted, her language is anchored firmly in a particular area and amongst a particular group of people) which is found alongside a more mystical, poetic quality. Vigorelli maintains that

Il segreto del suo racconto, infatti, è questa inavvertita ma incalzante giustificazione che la vita porta sui fatti, così da rendere usuale quel che è abnorme; e di questa legge morale se ne è fatta una norma estetica, al punto che persino le discordanze del suo stile sembrano risultare quasi necessarie, tanto accompagnano e rendono evidente quel trapasso dalla vita com'è nelle sue deflagrazioni, negli urti, nelle brutture e quale è invece nel suo ritmo profondo, nelle sue salutari verità. Onde quella scrittura decomposta e pur così amalgamata, secca e gonfia, concitata e bruscamente tramortita: il suo è un disordine di natura, di cuore; perciò conta il grafico delle sue oscillazioni, e non una è gratuita, nessuna è di testa (*La Fiera Letteraria*, 9 January 1955, p. 2).

One might argue with the notion that Zangrandi necessarily gets closer to the truth of things with this technique, but it seems to be an accurate assessment of what she was aiming at with her use of language and of the way that *I Brusaz* affects the reader. She was certainly not writing in this mode because she could not do otherwise. Her style is recognizably that of her other works, particularly in the way that it is colloquial, almost 'spoken', but elsewhere the rather rhetorical descriptions (which are reserved almost uniquely for descriptions of the natural world) are much rarer. In any case, it can be argued that, given the identification of the narrator and protagonist, the reader does not tend to understand these descriptions as expressions of the author's point of view, but rather as the way that the narrator sees the world around her/him. Perhaps this explains why Falqui finds them acceptable, rather despite himself. In this way, they contribute to a knowledge of the narrator's view of the world, the view of someone who belongs to a world which is in turns awe-inspiring and frightening. The conventional nature of such descriptions seems to allude to the naive symbolism of her characters and to the established expressions of a story-telling tradition. It is in this way that the mountains become the thrones of gods and 'mucchietti di falciati' are 'guerrieri caduti' (p. 25). In other words, in a similar fashion to the use of colour in *I Brusaz*, abstract and poetic terms are conventional (even if, at times, the convention may be a fictional 'traditional story'). The overall effect is that this novel is narrated by someone who belongs to the world being described, who understands it and judges its people, not from a superior standpoint, but almost from within. Thus, Zangrandi avoids depicting the peasants' world as either beneath her or as some kind of utopia, full of 'noble savages'.

### **A Tradition of Storytelling**

The link with folktales and oral narration that Zangrandi makes does not necessarily set her apart from neorealistic writing as this feature has been noted in other neorealistic works too. Lucia Re points out the way that the simple characterization of neorealist novels is similar to that of folktales and the way that 'like the characters of folktales, fairytales, and the classical epic, neorealist characters

“exist on the surface”” (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, p. 52). Falaschi also notes that neorealism borrows the identification of author and reader from that tradition in some texts which give the impression of being the transcription of an oral tale. ‘La finzione del pubblico che ascolta come fosse vicino’, he explains, ‘vuol convincere che l’autore è come uno del pubblico’ (*Realtà e retorica*, p. 77). In this way Falaschi seems to be referring to a technique aimed at achieving a greater realistic effect, at bringing the reader closer if not to the action narrated, at least to the act of narration. *I Brusaz* does not quite fall into this category as it does not use the pretence that the reader is part of a listening audience as an overt technique, but rather there is the suggestion, on occasions, that this is the case. Moreover, the aim, I would suggest, is not only to produce an effect of realism in the reader, but also to locate *I Brusaz* within the story-telling tradition of the *popolo*, and Zangrandi’s use of language, as described above, is a crucial element in this. As a member of the community, she would have us believe, she is telling stories in the way that they always have.

It was a common criticism of neorealism that local folktales and legends were used simply for colour, either as a source of anthropological interest, or to provide some kind of mystical interpretation of reality. Legends appear in *I Brusaz* too, not so much as stories that are related to the reader, but as a living part of the lives of the peasants. Characters and stories from the past, mythical or real, are invoked as means of understanding the present. The old man Amadeo Zecchin, who reads all the time, distinguishes between ‘favole’ or ‘storie inventate’ and ‘la Storia vera’ (p. 107), but for the other characters this distinction has no meaning. The stories they refer to have been passed down from generation to generation; for example, Sabina talks of the ‘fantastici regni delle favole di nonna Nena Langer’ (p. 79). When Sabina is cutting hay, she does not see ‘i mucchietti delle falciate’, but rather, ‘i guerrieri caduti a schiere come raccontava la storia della nonna, tutti i predoni sconfitti nella favolosa battaglia del popolo Duràn’. As for where the story came from:

Nonna Nena aveva appreso queste storie dai vecchi, era bello sentirla raccontare di magie e di cavalieri e soprattutto di gran battaglie (che forse furono baruffe vere) dove quelli di Hoden erano sempre bravi ed

eroi contro gente come i Duràn che venivano a loro dai valichi del sud, dalle valli verso il mare. (p. 26)

Other references are left unexplained. Sabina is thinking of her child that is not yet born: 'la testolina la vede, come sarà, ricciuta e ridente, questo Maggio che verrà, come Chico di Daria quando affiora da un campo maturo' (p. 71).

Mixed up in these stories are religious references and a belief in the supernatural that is not unquestioning, but certainly open to the idea that the legends they have learnt as children may, in fact, be true. Sabina is genuinely frightened of spirits as she crosses a mountain pass in the dark, 'forse che le fiabe possono essere vere?' (p. 129), she wonders. It is important to note that these references to mythical warriors, and wandering lost souls are never treated ironically by the narrator. They are an integral part of the characters' and the narrator's cultural identity; partly simply as their favourite means of entertainment, but also as a frame of reference, a means of understanding their lives. The fact that these stories are probably fictional does not seem to be particularly relevant.

It is significant that there is such an emphasis given to storytelling and that *I Brusaz*, with its reference to oral narration, locates itself to some extent within that tradition. This may be seen to encourage a particular interpretation of realism in this book; that it relates to real life in the same way as folktales and legends do. It is a relationship full of uncertainties, resting as it does on a mixture of fact and fiction, of historical truths and symbolic truths, and one which, from a theoretical point of view, is no less problematical than any other attempt to represent reality in literature. But, there does seem to be an attempt, on the part of Zangrandi, to locate this work within a tradition of story-telling, and the way that people have traditionally made sense of their lives.<sup>42</sup> It is also a tradition that puts at least as much stress on the entertainment value of a story as on what it may mean. In Chapter Three it was noted that, already, under fascism, Zangrandi was writing about the significance of local legends as an important mix of history and popular imagination, relevant to everyday life. It is also important to remember in this respect that the first book that Zangrandi published, in 1950, was not

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<sup>42</sup>See Chapter One in this respect and Eakin's comments on narrative.

her Resistance memories, or even a description of the harsh life of the Cadorini (although she was clearly interested in such subjects, as *Val Boite* shows), but rather a collection of legends: *Leggende delle Dolomiti* (Milan: Eroica, 1950). In the essay by Zangrandi at the end of this collection, 'Vita delle leggende' (*Leggende delle Dolomiti*, pp. 197–219), she stresses the fact that she was able to collect these stories by means of a close association with the people who traditionally told them. Living amongst them, she says,

trovai tutta la loro vita di oggi, quieta e rovente, reale od illusa, miscuglio di moderno e di antichissimo, nelle cucine, nelle 'stue' pulite, dove i secoli hanno spesso lasciato segno, e le nuove radio, oggi, agganciano al mondo anche i più spersi Ladini. La loro vita mi era attorno, con la sua eterna vicenda di amori, di dolori, di nascite, di sbornie, di risse, di canzoni, di morti, di eroismi (p. 198)

Thus, these were the *living* stories of real people. Moreover, she says, she wrote them down as they were told to her, with as little authorial intervention as possible. In this way, the results are very different from those that would be produced by writers and academics:

Di solito lo scrittore, il ricercatore di leggende o di antiche tracce di civiltà sepolte, archeologo o poeta che sia, è anche un erudito od uno storico. Spesso, troppo spesso, egli ricerca negli archivi, nelle pergamene, con base scientifica. E *dopo* cerca forse le voci del popolo; talora lo sa fare, ma talora invece attinge alle presunte fonti con uno scostante stile da intervista. Ed il montanaro, in tali casi, è restio a parlare e mette fuori quel che crede, talora può esser anche un bel tipo che al 'sior villeggiante o turista' racconta una fandonia di cui è conscio e poi gli ride alle spalle (p. 199)

Thus, alpine legends 'furono interpretate, raccolte o ricostruite, con bagaglio di coltura o sotto i dettami di questa' (p. 200). She says of herself, on the other hand, 'non avevo zavorre, mi lasciavo guidare più dall'istinto quasi, direi, da arcaiche ereditarietà sconosciute' (p. 200). The idea that Zangrandi had inherited certain characteristics that brought her closer to the people of the Cadore has been seen earlier (see Chapter Two). Certainly, she felt that by following her instinct and knowledge of these people she was able to remain more faithful to the stories they

told. It is interesting to note the way that this contrasts with Calvino's method of collecting fables. As he comments in the introduction to his collection, he used only written sources and quite deliberately put his own mark on the way that they are recounted, trusting his literary judgement, feeling that he could not write them any other way. 'Non sono andato di persona a farmi raccontare le storie dalle vecchiette', he explains, 'e poi, insomma, non è il mio mestiere, è un lavoro che bisogna saper entrare in confidenza col prossimo, e io già partirei con la prevenzione che la gente ha altro per il capo che raccontar favole a me' (*Fiabe italiane* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), p. XIX). Zangrandi would have felt, no doubt, that such an approach was possible for her and that she could cope instinctively with the kind of problems that Calvino refers to.

She also asserts the value of legends in giving information about the history and present character of the people who pass them down: 'è indubbio che le leggende riflettono la storia e la interpretano con la fantasia del popolo che visse quella storia ed ora la racconta e se la tramanda' (p. 200). Calvino also felt that fables could tell us something about the history of the peasants who handed them down. In his essay 'La tradizione popolare nelle fiabe' (*Sulla fiaba* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), pp. 109–128), he writes:

un'indagine di questo tipo ci può dunque mostrare come la fiaba, produzione narrativa arcaica del mondo agricolo, rappresenti l'integrazione dell'uomo al ciclo di riproduzione d'una ricchezza soprattutto vegetale e animale, vivendo questo processo in tutta la sua precarietà, in tutti i suoi sforzi di dirigerlo dalla penuria all'abbondanza, e testimoniando, attraverso la gamma delle varianti, lo stratificarsi delle trasformazioni culturali, sempre dal punto di vista contadino e paesano (p. 122)

Therefore, when Zangrandi makes references to this tradition in *I Brusaz*, the legends are not there merely for colour, nor realism in the sense that the *cadorini* she knew told stories, and therefore her characters do too. Rather, she is pointing to a much more intimate link between those stories and the very way that the people telling them understand themselves in terms of their own past, and understand their past in terms of the stories they tell where history and imagination are inextricably linked.

## New Realism or Old?

In its reference to a storytelling tradition, then, *I Brusaz* is very conventional and calls on an 'old realism' rather than a new one. To put this assertion in context, however, it should be remembered that, as Bondanella has pointed out (see earlier), in some ways, neorealism in fact contained very little that was new. Whilst not necessarily agreeing with this judgement, Chicco Vitzizai notes that this was an argument that came up in the debate about the value of neorealism: 'la critica impegnata nella battaglia del neorealismo rivolgeva la sua polemica contro una destra culturale novecentista, che si faceva forte di una valutazione esclusivamente estetico-letteraria del neorealismo, negandone la novità non solo culturale, ma anche politica e sociale', adding that Falqui considered it to be 'un movimento scarsamente originale, esemplato sulla narrativa americana, ma con l'aggiunta di un'insopportabile sciattezza formale' (*Il neorealismo*, p. 70). Generally, however, neorealism was considered far more often to be most heavily indebted to nineteenth-century realism. This was recognized by writers and critics at the time. Natalino Sapegno, one of the most enthusiastic advocates of neorealism, told Carlo Bo in 1950 that writers should look back to the 'momenti più grandi della tradizione ottocentesca, da Manzoni a Verga, quando la letteratura anche da noi seppe, nei limiti di una società storicamente definita, adempiere a una sua funzione storica popolare' (*Inchiesta sul neorealismo* (Turin: ERI, 1951), p. 17). Calvino, in his 1964 introduction to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, also talks of 'una linea, ossia una specie di triangolo: *I Malavoglia*, *Conversazione in Sicilia*, *Paesi tuoi*, da cui partire' (p. 10), recognizing the importance attributed to Verga, alongside Vittorini and Pavese. Certainly, on the face of it, it would seem that many features of neorealism can be traced back to nineteenth century realism and Verga in particular. While some saw this as a positive feature, others considered it a sign that neorealism was merely a return to a literary mode that had failed before and whose weaknesses had already been demonstrated by modernism. As Battaglia suggests, there was an ambiguous attitude towards Naturalism and *verismo*, according to which 'si pretendeva ignorare o comunque si riteneva d'aver superato e travolto...nel momento stesso che se ne ripristinavano i moduli, gli obblighi, le

maniere', which he goes on to list as, 'l'impersonalità dell'artista, il valore documentario della testimonianza letteraria, il protagonismo prevalente se non proprio esclusivo dei fatti, il ritratto fotografico della società e degli ambienti, la preferenza per i ceti popolari proletari, il carattere d'inchiesta, di verifica, di denuncia' ('Neorealismo', p. 678–679). Falaschi presents a rather different view. He considers that the very term 'neorealism' encourages the erroneous impression of an automatic link between the literature of those two periods: 'il rapporto fra il realismo ottocentesco e il neorealismo c'è, ma quasi esclusivamente come fatto stilistico, e solo per i *Malavoglia*; e questo non è certo sufficiente per stabilire quella continuità tra due letterature che il termine invece esprime' (*Realtà e retorica*, p. 26).

It must be said that there is one very basic difference between Verga and the neorealists, which is summed up by Lucia Re: 'while the new realists adopt (with varying degrees of consistency and success) 'verista' stylistic strategies for the effacement of the author's presence, they do not for the most part subscribe to Verga's position of artistic neutrality' (*Calvino and the Age of Neorealism*, p. 142). Verga's neutrality applied to his politics as much as to his position in the text. Unlike him, the neorealists were interested in committed literature with a progressive political purpose, and this constitutes a fundamental divergence in literary practice. Whether or not this *impegno* made the literature sufficiently different for it to be called 'new realism' is questionable, however. Although there was clearly the will to produce a literature that was politically committed, in practice, there were huge problems to overcome if they were to ensure that the required *impegno* and insistence on a certain content did not end up as a stultifying formula for literature.

Chicco Vitzizzai's analysis of neorealism is important in this respect. As she points out, neorealism in fact remained very conservative. In her view, postwar neorealists abandoned the attempts made by Vittorini and Pavese to find a radically new form of literature and a new relationship between intellectuals and the working class, and instead they took up again 'la vecchia battaglia democratica ottocentesca contro la miseria, l'oppressione sociale, l'ingiustizia, la fame' (*Il neorealismo*, p. 34), believing that it was sufficient for literature to show this in order

to change society. Instead of examining the causes of Italy's ills, neorealism just showed the effects, and what prevailed was 'il recupero di un'ideologia e di un costume, sostanzialmente prefascisti, in cui lo sforzo anche generoso di elaborare un modello di rapporto organico tra cultura e politica, tra intellettuali e classe operaia [...] non riusciva di fatto a rompere con la pregiudiziale crociana di una cultura — la Cultura — come somma di valori perenni e immutabili' (*Il neorealismo*, p. 34). According to this view, there was no real attempt to deal with historical reality. Nor, she maintains, was there any true analysis of the role of the intellectual, who remained a privileged source of truth.

Zangrandi's novel can certainly be said to *show* poverty rather than point to any radical solution beyond the capacities of Sabina herself. Despite the choice of content, there is no suggestion that the *popolo* are any kind of force for the future, or that socialism is the answer to Italy's problems. Moreover, it is interesting to note that despite Zangrandi's calls for a new literature immediately after the war, and her rejection of what she and others wrote under fascism, there is a remarkable continuity in her interests. As has been shown, the poor and dispossessed of the Cadore were the subject of many of her fascist articles and she continued to write about them later, albeit in a radically different political climate. Thus, although there are some important similarities in content and style between *I Brusaz* and neorealist novels, there are also important differences in her overt reference to a much older tradition and the apparent lack of *impegno*. To give such a priority to telling the story of Sabina for its own sake is hardly typical of neorealism, and it is clearly not a novel that can be described as committed literature, at least not in the sense required by the PCI at this time.

### A Feminist *Impegno*?

In fact, as Zangrandi has noted, *I Brusaz* was refused by a couple of publishers because 'non era lavoro impegnato'.<sup>43</sup> However, she rejects such an idea as absurd, saying

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<sup>43</sup>These words may be found in a piece of about 250 words that Zangrandi wrote about the Deledda prize, perhaps for publication. It is not written like her diaries in that it is carefully composed and signed with her name. It has no title.

lavoro non politicamente impegnato, il mio? A parte il fatto che la letteratura troppo 'impegnata' è propaganda e non letteratura, la trama del romanzo era una spietata denuncia contro le nostre balorde leggi, contro l'inscindibilità di *certi* matrimoni, sul nome dei figli bastardi, ecc.; i signori lettori di casa editrice non se ne erano accorti? (dated 1 March 1957, Cortina)

Whilst such an interpretation of *impegno* was hardly the way other writers saw it at the time, it is true that the most obvious statement that this novel makes is about the way that women are treated in this society. The very name of the book is clearly ironical. Brusaz is the only name that Sabina can give to her children, despite the fact that she was only with her husband for a few weeks, during which he gave her nothing, before abandoning her. She reassures herself with the thought that her children are not like her husband and will not leave her: 'No, no. I suoi figli non sono come Donato, no, non la lasceranno, non sono come Donato', but, it is added, with the understatement implied by the use of parenthesis, '(E ne portano tutti il nome)' (p. 189). For according to the law, she still 'belongs' to Donato, even though she now has two bastard children and is living with another man, just as she 'belonged' to her father before her marriage. Donato chooses to neglect his possession, whilst her father felt free to beat her whenever he wanted. Donato neglects his mother too, and Sabina's future at the end of the book is seen to depend entirely on how her sons decide to treat her.

The second man that Sabina becomes involved with, an army officer who stays in her house during the First World War, Muzziero, is a more positive figure, in that he does give Sabina some practical help and some emotional comfort. In the end, however, he is shown to be selfish and only really concerned with his wife who does not understand him and his daydreams. As a fellow officer remarks to him 'sei un dio pagano cascato sulla terra, me lo hai detto, sei Giove o sei Dionisio, a seconda che sei sbronzo di donne o di vino, lo so' (p. 140). In the end he is more interested in the fanciful image of Sabina that he has created for himself: 'sei Gea, la Terra, la più bella ed immortale femmina che il mondo abbia avuto' (p. 152). Sabina finds his attention enchanting, it is inevitable that he will leave when he is moved on by the army to fight in the war. Despite the fact that he is the father

of her second child, Guido, Sabina shows no surprise that she never hears from him again. It would be wrong to suggest that all relationships between men and women are presented in a negative light, however. Towards the end of the book, Tommaso, the third man with whom Sabina becomes involved, treats her and her children very well and the marriage between the old couple Anna and Amadeo Zecchin is also described in a very positive way. So Zangrandi is not saying that good relationships are not possible, but that they depend on the behaviour of men, and that women were (and perhaps she felt that this was still true in Italy in the 1950s) entirely at their mercy.

As for Sabina's adulterous relationships and bastard children, the novel is very clear on how they should be judged. Her initial relationship with Donato, when he creeps up to her room at night in her parents' house is not censured at all, but seen as the normal enjoyment of a physical relationship and the natural consequence of her love for him. Her subsequent relationships are judged in the same way. Sabina herself, aware of the attitude of others towards her actions, does not regret what she has done. As she says to Amadeo Zecchin 'nemmeno pentita sono, vedete, e non chiedo perdono. Ecco chi sono io. Certo lapidarmi potete' (p. 162). Instead the Zecchin couple treat her kindly.

The fact that the novel ends with Sabina once more in a precarious situation, with a very uncertain future, is also significant. The critic Guido Lopez, writing in an article entitled 'Sabina e i suoi figli: articolo allegato al notiziario Mondadori di gennaio 1955', to be found amongst Zangrandi's papers, seems to have missed the point entirely when he says the book ends too suddenly and that he would have liked a description of the lives of Sabina's sons. For the focus of the narration throughout the novel is always Sabina and the way her life has been dictated by the actions of her father, husband and lovers. It would be inconsistent for the novel to shift away from these concerns at the end and show Sabina to have found some security at last, or to turn away from her to describe her sons instead. Such an ending would be saying something entirely different about the situation of women.

The church comes in for a great deal of criticism in this regard too. The religion of Sabina's father and sister, and, indeed, of the whole of Hoden, their village, is

shown as the sterile repetition of words. Sabina would like to sing, as her uncle did, when, every day, her father and Elga repeat ‘il rosario intero e le altre preghiere per i defunti e per i peccatori’. After all, is it possible ‘che si offenda Iddio anche per canzoni innocenti? Ma pare che sia così’ (p. 23). Later, when Sabina returns to Hoden in need of food, it is an excuse for prejudice and a sense of moral superiority and Elga blames her sister’s sins for the death of their father: ‘la vergogna di te lo ha fatto morire’ (p. 130).

It is interesting to note that none of this is mentioned by the critics in reviews of *I Brusaz*. They prefer to emphasize Sabina’s saintly, heroic characteristics, and because motherhood is so important to her, and such a comfort, this is interpreted as the most significant aspect of her character. This is despite the fact that they are describing a novel that criticizes a society that defines women as such by their ability to have children: when Sabina’s sister has been ill and is no longer able to have children, it is commented ironically, ‘Elga non avrebbe più avuto figli, non era più per nulla una donna’ (p. 41). Descriptions of Sabina take on distinctly religious overtones. Giancarlo Vigorelli expressed the view that ‘da anni, non solo nella nostra letteratura, non capitava di imbattersi in un personaggio così potente, tragico e sacro come la povera Sabina’ (*La Fiera Letteraria*, 9th January 1955, p. 2). Ravegnani, writing in *Epoca*, agrees with Vigorelli and describes her as a ‘peccatrice senza peccato’ (23rd January 1955).<sup>44</sup> Ravegnani chooses not to explain this apparent contradiction any further and it is certain that the only critic who comes anywhere near to discussing the issue of her illicit sexual relationship as it is explicitly shown in the novel is Adele Maria Jemolo, writing in *Noi Donne*:

la vecchia Tesa, dai modi bruschi e dalla lingua tagliente, è veramente una figura tratteggiata da mano maestra. Da lei Sabina apprenderà che “solo i figli contano”, e Sabina sarà madre con amore e dedizione. Ma non si spegnerà in lei la coscienza del suo diritto ad una vita diversa. Perciò Sabina non sentirà come colpa l’amore che la legherà ad un altro uomo (*Noi Donne*, 31 July 1955)

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<sup>44</sup>This article appeared later as ‘Nota su Giovanna Zangrandi’ in Ravegnani’s collection of his own essays *Uomini visti: figure e libri del Novecento 1914–1954* (Milan: Mondadori, 1955), pp. 323–327).

The other critics chose to ignore the aspects of this novel that challenged the traditional view of women, and that criticized the Catholic Church, and they described Sabina instead as a kind of selfless, madonna figure. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the very nature of realism and the decisions that have to be made regarding what is real and what kind of writing is realistic. Whilst critics have concentrated on the specific problems of neorealism, especially in terms of what were deemed to be aesthetic faults or political inconsistencies, this has rarely led on to a discussion of the ambiguities at the heart of any attempt to produce realistic literature. Chicco Vitzizai does maintain that Vittorini and Pavese in particular did try to move beyond the traditional conventions of Naturalism, which they considered did not reveal the true nature of reality. As she goes on to point out, quoting Vittorini from his preface to *Il garofano rosso*:

l'insistenza sul valore "poetico" del linguaggio, capace di attingere il "senso di una realtà maggiore" riporta direttamente al concetto simbolista della poesia come rivelazione di una realtà più alta — l'assoluta verità delle cose — non raggiungibile attraverso la comune esperienza né attraverso la conoscenza scientifica, un concetto cioè che, nella misura in cui privilegia un approccio al reale di tipo istintivo-intuitivo-lirico, si configura come tendenziale negazione del piano storico concreto (*Il neorealismo*, pp. 56–57)

This explains why, as well as being criticized for being over-documentary, neorealism has also been accused of the opposite, of being too lyrical. Chicco Vitzizai's words suggest that a more direct, historical approach to reality in literature is possible, but this also relies on an assumption. For literature is necessarily mediated by language which is always conventional, and the literary language inevitably has its own tradition that it is impossible to ignore. Moreover, it is possible to maintain that any work of literature is realistic. As Jakobson has argued ('On Realism in Art', in *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 1987), pp. 19–27), the aim of realist art is to achieve the highest possible degree of verisimilitude in the reproduction of reality. What is called realistic is what seems to mirror experience of the real. However, in literature, what the author and reader consider to be realistic will always play

a large part. With the realism of the Nineteenth century, a canonical definition of realism was established, and critics have measured other literature against this. But, as Jakobson continues, verisimilitude in art is entirely based on a conventional code of representation. Only if we are familiar with the code's conventions can we read the text or see the painting as realistic, just as we are unable to understand an utterance unless we know the language in which it is uttered. As we are so used to these codes, they are no longer immediately apparent.

Neorealism, Lucia Re contends, rarely strays beyond what is conventionally accepted as realistic. An interesting aspect is her contention that, despite the fact that specific ideological and political orientations vary widely:

neorealist narrative tends in general to employ a basic framework of values taken entirely from the traditional conventions of Italian patriarchal culture [...] The recourse to traditional patriarchal roles, the deployment of value-charged oppositions concerning sexuality and family, the homeland, and human 'nature' itself reflects neorealists' attempts to make their representation of the world appear as non-ideological and 'common-sensical' as possible (p. 113)

Thus, even when neorealists are trying to say something new, there are inevitably limits placed on the extent of any possible novelty by their very attempt to create a work that is recognized as realistic. Such limits have consequences for an author who wants to say something about the condition of women that challenges accepted ideas. Sharon Wood, also referring to Lucia Re, agrees that 'the return to 'traditional' values supposedly espoused by the disenfranchised, unpoliticised — and thereby supposedly uncorrupted — Italian underclasses held out little promise of new roles for women in art or in society' (*Italian Women Writing*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 7). For this reason, she maintains, women writers tended not to be interested in neorealism:

major women writers of the post-war years such as Elsa Morante, Anna Banti and Anna Maria Ortese, all of whom had grown up and matured under Fascism and war, refused to recognize such traditional values; all distanced themselves from this enterprise, preferring to stand on the margins of mainstream cultural activity. (p. 8)

Wood continues, saying that, 'Natalia Ginzburg, too, refused the label of 'neorealist'. The criticism of Zangrandi's novel also gives an indication of the kind of conditions women were writing under. Although her novel is welcomed, as one of an increasing number by women writers, the very question of women writing and the way that they write was obviously an issue that provoked a certain amount of unease. There seemed to be a fear that literature could somehow become emasculated by the appearance of books by women. Vigorelli introduces his discussion of *I Brusaz* by commenting on the increasing number of books by women. He sees this as a 'buon segno', but warns against 'qualche polemica femminista che dato il numero crescente, finisce a galleggiare' and indicates that it would be a sign of the maturity of Italian literature if it could 'incorporare delle scrittrici senza più femminismi e soprattutto senza più "scrittura femminile"'. For, he says, writing may be said to have a sex, 'ma averlo è una cosa, e metterlo in mostra senza pudore è un'altra'. The particular danger, he seems to feel, is that writing by women might be over-sentimental, and he praises Zangrandi for being 'così integralmente "antisentimentale"' (*La fiera letteraria*, 9 January 1955, p. 1). Vicari also notes the increase in female writers and maintains that it is only fair that they should be considered equal to male writers. 'Tuttavia', he continues, referring to comments made by others on the subject, 'questa specie di allarme ora lanciato sembra che voglia soltanto mettere in guardia contro i pericoli di una morbidezza che potrebbe essere fatale soprattutto alla nuova narrativa italiana' ('La storia dei Brusaz', *Incom*, 5 February 1955, p. 61).

In this way, Zangrandi's novel stands in contrast to those of other women at the time (and critics of the time comment that they cannot easily find other writers to whom she is similar) in that it has more in common with the aims and style of neorealism. Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that Zangrandi's interest in the *popolo* and their culture — their storytelling in particular — had developed before and during the war. Moreover, as has been shown, the aspect of her novel that to her appeared the most 'committed' was not recognized by most critics. Certainly, only one, Adele Maria Jemolo, seems to have recognized what Zangrandi claims was the main point she was making with her novel. Other critics

prefer to see her protagonist in more traditional terms, as a saintly mother, and, in describing the story, they do not invent, but nevertheless only partially represent what is present in the novel. It is interesting to compare Viganò's *L'Agnese va a morire* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949) in this respect. One of the most successful novels of its period written by a woman, it was unusual amongst novels about the Resistance in that it had a female protagonist. However, although the fact that Agnese was a peasant protagonist was an innovation, in many ways she is an entirely conventional figure. The fact that she is a woman seems to be purely to serve the purpose of showing how even a peasant woman, the least politicized character there could be, could get involved in the Resistance and the PCI. Despite being the protagonist, there is, in fact, very little 'protagonism' in her character. Her political awakening never really occurs and she is never shown as operating above the level of instinct. Moreover, this instinct seems to depend very heavily on what her husband tells her to do (even after he has died he speaks to her in her dreams), or on the instructions she receives from the Communist partisan leader. It is interesting to note the way that this contrasts with the kind of female protagonists found in Viganò's much less well-known short stories, such as for example the autobiographical 'L'ufficiale sono io' in the collection *Arriva la cicogna* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1954, pp. 9–17), in which the whole point of the story is that she was an officer in the Resistance, contrary to the expectations of those around her. The success of *L'Agnese va a morire* is perhaps at least partly a reflection on the kind of female character that was most acceptable, and most appreciated; one in whom personal sacrifice (in her case, the ultimate sacrifice) was the most significant characteristic.

In conclusion, although Zangrandi's novel shows many of the characteristics that have been identified as typical of neorealist works, it is an original treatment of these themes. Vicari has commented that, 'il neorealismo velleitario oggi di moda subisce qui la sua più lieta sconfitta: infatti la materia usata è proprio quella (la vita dei poveri, il solito paesaggio della miseria, il gioco degli istinti elementari), ma la resa artistica è proprio all'opposto' (*Incom*, 5th February 1955, p. 61). On the whole *I Brusaz* is conventional in its realism and it does not solve any of the problems of representing real life in literature. But, in referring to a

story-telling tradition and locating itself in that tradition, this novel does suggest the way that it aimed to be understood and seen as relevant to every-day life. For Zangrandi was never in any doubt as to the relevance of legends and fables to the lives of ordinary people. In other ways, this work is quite unique. Just by choosing to write about this particular region, and from the point of view of a woman, Zangrandi produced a work unlike other novels of the period. Her use of language is also distinctive. And, in writing about the lives of women, this work shows a commitment that should not be underestimated, even if it was ignored at the time. One does get the impression, however, that giving evidence of a political commitment was never her first priority, and that, in the same way that fables aim to entertain as much as to teach, Zangrandi was most interested in telling a good story.

## Chapter Five: Truth and the Resistance in *I giorni veri*

Zangrandi's autobiography of the Resistance, *I giorni veri* (Milan: Mondadori, , by its very nature raises the issue of truth. Not only does the title suggest that there is some kind of truth inherent to the particular historical events covered by the book, but there is also a short preface in which the author affirms the veracity of the account itself:

Persone, luoghi, avvenimenti, parole riferiti in questo diario sono veri, non si tratta di una ricostruzione romanzesca. I nomi di località sono autentici e riscontrabili, quelli di persone pure, anche se per coloro che lo preferivano, che oggi non desiderano comparire, ho usato il nome di battaglia. Solo per alcuni luoghi e persone, laddove l'agire fu squallido e penoso, mi sono imposta di siglare e cambiar nome, per un senso di civile rispetto verso la persona umana.

This preface sets apart *I giorni veri* from Zangrandi's other autobiographical works, which, as discussed in Chapter One, may be said to establish an autobiographical pact with the reader (in Lejeune's terms), but do not make any explicit claim to truth. The claim which *I giorni veri* makes raises a number of issues concerning the nature of the truth it attempts to convey and the problematic relationship between truth and fiction in narrative. This chapter aims to examine these issues: it will discuss Zangrandi's assertion that *I giorni veri* is not a 'ricostruzione romanzesca' and will explore the ways in which the particular truth of this work is dependent on her interpretation of history and of her own life, and is inevitably shaped by its historical context and by cultural attitudes towards women.

In *I giorni veri*, Zangrandi describes her experiences during the period of the so-called *Resistenza armata* (from September 1943 until May 1945) in the Cadore. Her account begins at the time of the fall of the fascist government and of the ensuing armistice between the Badoglio government and the Allies, when she was working as a schoolteacher in a town she refers to in this book as C\* (which, as has been seen in Chapter Two, must be Cortina D'Ampezzo). It continues, describing the way that, prompted by a fellow teacher, Zangrandi became involved

in the Resistance, and worked alongside the local railwaymen to help escaped Allied prisoners and deserters from the Italian army avoid deportation across the nearby border to German labour camps.

As the Resistance became more organised, Zangrandi recounts, she joined the partisans as a *staffetta*, acting as a link between various partisan groups, delivering messages, food, clothing and arms. At first, she continued to work as a teacher, as she had jobs in both Cortina and Pieve di Cadore and therefore was able to travel freely between occupied Italy and the so-called *Alpenvorland* (the area around Bolzano, extending as far as Cortina, that the Germans did not consider to be occupied foreign territory but part of Germany itself). This, she points out, was of great use to the partisans operating in both areas. Later, however, the Germans became aware of her clandestine activities and she was obliged to leave her home and find shelter wherever her errands took her, sometimes staying with friends and other members of the Resistance, but often having to sleep rough in barns. Zangrandi goes on to describe the harsh Winter of 1944, when partisan groups in that area of the Dolomites had more or less disbanded, albeit temporarily, and she was forced to live bivouacked up on a mountain ridge, along with two other young *partigiani*, in constant fear of discovery by the Germans. They waited there for some months, surviving as best they could on the meagre supplies left over from the previous summer and on what they could beg from the local inhabitants down in the valley, until the coming of Spring, which brought with it a great upsurge in partisan activities. She describes her continued involvement in the Resistance, and the account ends at the time of the Liberation and the arrival of the Allies in early May 1945.

## **The Other Half of the Resistance**

*I giorni veri* is one of a huge number of diaries and personal accounts of the Resistance that have been published, and they provide a valuable source of information for anyone wishing to study this period of Italian history. It must be noted however, that Giovanna Zangrandi's account is relatively unusual, though certainly not unique, simply because it describes the Resistance from the point of view of a

woman. The vast majority of such diaries were written by men and describe the activities and experiences of men, rather than women, during the partisan struggle. This is also apparently true of many works aiming to be objective historical studies of these two years of the war and symptomatic of the tendency noted by Eleanor Riemer and John Fout in their introduction to their documentary history, *European Women: A Documentary History 1789–1945* (New York: Schlocken, 1980): ‘until very recently, history has generally been written by men and about men. Historians have either ignored women entirely or dealt with them only peripherally, inasmuch as their lives touched on men’s world and men’s concerns’ (p. xiii). It is only relatively recently, with the development of the Women’s Movement and the spread of feminism into many areas of academic research, that the participation of women in the Resistance has received wider attention.

Giuliana Beltrami has pointed to the gap in existing studies: ‘Nei numerosi libri di storia e di memorie che pure sono stati scritti, delle donne si parla soltanto per rapidi cenni’ (Lydia Franceschi and others, *L’altra metà della Resistenza* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978), p. 16). As Beltrami and other historians have shown, where women are seen to be making an active contribution to the partisan struggle, it tends to be presumed that they are exceptional individuals and not representative of any larger group. More often, they appear only as mothers, sisters and companions rather than in their own right. This is true of one of the best known historical works on the Resistance, *Storia della Resistenza* by Roberto Battaglia (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), where fleeting reference is made to particular characters such as the ‘eroica donna trentina’ whose refusal to betray her compatriots even under torture earned her the title ‘la leonessa dei partigiani’ (p. 491). The general impression is that the protagonists of the Resistance were, apart from a few exceptions, male. Charles Delzell, in an otherwise thorough study of the Resistance written in English, *Mussolini’s Enemies: The Italian Antifascist Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) also gives this impression and barely mentions women. Giuseppe Gaddi, in *Guerra di popolo nel Veneto: la stampa clandestina nella Resistenza* (Verona: Bertoni Editore, 1975), does recognize the fact that women’s groups (*Gruppi di Difesa della Donna*) produced many leaflets and

also records that posters were printed with the aim of raising the morale of women involved in the Resistance and encouraging more to join. Nevertheless, he does not consider this aspect of the partisan press sufficiently significant to include in his concluding chapter.

During the late 1970s and the 1980s, a number of works appeared dedicated to the subject of women and the Resistance and which have both publicized women's testimonies of the period and analysed the role that they played. These include the collection of papers from a conference published as *L'altra metà della Resistenza*, as mentioned above, edited by Lydia Franceschi and others (Milan: Mazzotta, 1978), a historical work by Mirella Alloisio and Giuliana Beltrami, *Volontarie della libertà: 8 settembre 1943–25 aprile 1945* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1981), which makes use of various sources including published diaries written by women about their experience of the Resistance, as well as Bianca Guidetti Serra's *Compagne: testimonianze di partecipazione politica femminile* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977) and *La Resistenza taciuta*, by Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele Farina (Milan: La Pietra, 1976), which are both based on oral testimonies by women. There have also been a number of studies dedicated to women and the Resistance in the various regions of Italy. As far as the province of Belluno, where Zangrandi spent the Resistance, is concerned, Hilary Siddons, for example, has published the paper 'Le donne nella resistenza bellunese: nuovi spunti di ricerca' in *Protagonisti*, 36 (1989), 19–30. Alongside works like these, other studies, not dedicated specifically to women, have begun to take more account of the contribution of women to the Resistance. For example, Emilio Gentile's book on literary aspects of the period, *La letteratura e la Resistenza: testimonianze e testi di narrativa e di poesia* (Naples: Federico Ardia, 1987), has an introduction that gives a brief history of the Resistance and that contains a section entitled 'La grande partecipazione femminile' (pp. 25–26). Claudio Pavone's study, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991), makes a number of references to oral testimonies by women published in *La Resistenza taciuta* and *Compagne* in particular, and frequently quotes Ada Gobetti's *Diario partigiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956). As will be discussed later, he shows an interest in general

in the issues arising from the participation of women in the Resistance.

Feminist historians in Italy have found, however, that this work of piecing together the history of women in the Resistance is far from straightforward:

la maggior difficoltà della ricerca sta nel fatto che le protagoniste di allora, anche quando sono ancora in vita, sono in gran parte sparite, risucchiate nella sfera del privato, dimenticate e dimentiche esse stesse dei loro giorni di gloria. (Giuliana Beltrami, *L'altra metà della Resistenza*, pp. 15–16)

At the end of the war, women were encouraged to help get life back to normal, return to domestic life and concentrate on their families rather than anything they may have done during the preceding two years. Diaries and accounts of the Resistance that women did write, like *I giorni veri*, are thus important sources of information, as they not only describe the activities of women during this period, but they do so from a woman's point of view. They are evidence that the participation of women in the Resistance was not a matter of a few isolated individuals but rather a mass phenomenon.<sup>45</sup>

*I giorni veri* testifies to this fact. It is true that Zangrandi's exploits read as those of a remarkable individual, yet she makes it clear that she was not unique and that there were large numbers of women involved in the Resistance in her part of the Veneto. There were other *staffette*, whose lives she describes as being very similar to her own. The *staffetta* provided vital links between different partisan groups and between partisans and those down in the valley. As will be discussed later, women were able to pass more easily through checkpoints and deemed less likely to arouse suspicion. Thus they travelled huge distances in order to deliver messages, clandestine newspapers, and often arms and ammunition. At the end of February 1945, Zangrandi says she knows of more than twenty *staffette* in her own area and they are all 'spericolate e certune addirittura incoscienti' (*I giorni veri*, p. 211).

The contribution made by other women was less obvious, but no less vital. Zangrandi describes a number of communities where the only men left were either

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<sup>45</sup>A number of these autobiographical accounts of the Resistance will be referred to later in this chapter (see section 'A Woman's Resistance').

very old or very young. All the others were away at war, or had been forced to take to the mountains to avoid conscription or German labour camps. It was the women who were left in charge of the family. They had to look after the domestic affairs. However, as Zangrandi indicates, considerable numbers of these women also played a very important role in the Resistance. They stayed in their villages and maintained the pretence of no involvement with the partisans, yet all the time they were providing them with food and shelter, and allowing their homes to be used for meetings and hiding places for arms and ammunition. It was the trust and support of these women that Zangrandi herself relied on, as she moved from house to house, and she often pauses to describe them more fully and tell their individual, and frequently amusing, stories of courage and strength. She points out that 'questa serie di donne di cucine' (p. 229), as she calls them, was as much at risk as any other group of people involved in the liberation struggle. They had to continue to live under constant German surveillance in the towns and villages, and could be tortured and, indeed, executed if it was suspected that they were working with the partisans.

Autobiographical accounts such as Giovanna Zangrandi's and the feminist histories mentioned above provide a useful corrective to earlier descriptions of the events of the Resistance. They show that previous historical studies, whilst apparently aiming to give a truthful, objective account, often failed to do so, as they concentrated only on men. By ignoring the activities of the other half of the population, such studies inevitably presented a distorted picture. Accounts by women, on the other hand, as discussed in Chapter One, give access to different versions of the truth.

### **A fictional reconstruction?**

The question of the way that these women's autobiographies, and *I giorni veri* in particular, relate to the truth needs to be examined further. As has been seen in Chapter One, there has been a good deal of discussion as to how autobiography might be said to relate to historical events. Giovanni Falaschi seems to make some attempt at differentiating between autobiography and fiction, in the context of the

Resistance, in the preface to his anthology of short stories of the Resistance *La letteratura partigiana in Italia 1943-45* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984). He makes a distinction between diaries and 'racconti' which he does not explain but considers to be 'evidente'. He discusses a short story by Giovanna Zangrandi, 'Gli ingrassavo le scarpe', which is very similar in style to *I giorni veri*: indeed, there is a certain overlap in content between this story and the later diary. According to Falaschi, this story

è un *racconto*, anche se, ovviamente, lei come tutti gli autori partigiani sono segnati per sempre dalla propria biografia e non possono sfuggire al peso delle memorie. Ma il taglio, il ritmo, il linguaggio sono insomma quelli del racconto vero e non del libro di memorie. (p. 16)

As the 'taglio', 'ritmo' and 'linguaggio' of this short story are very much like those of her later work, such an assessment could easily also be applied to *I giorni veri*. Falaschi's distinction is obviously a rather subjective one and rather hard to sustain; however, it does give an indication of the kind of difficulties encountered when faced with an autobiographical piece of writing of this kind, and shows that the more developed the style and form of a work, the further it is presumed to be distanced from simple memories and the plain truth.

On the other hand, as discussed in Chapter One, however truthful a writer is aiming to be, a written account cannot in any case be a simple repetition of the past. Writers may claim that they are reproducing events as they happened, as Bianca Ceva does in the introduction to her diary of the Resistance, *Tempo dei vivi 1943-1945* (Milan: Ceschina, 1954): 'ho rievocato in ordine di tempo fatti, impressioni e giudizi con la stessa immediatezza con la quale si fissarono nella mia mente nell'istante in cui avvennero', she says, maintaining that she can now record 'quello che non fu possibile affidare allora alla carta, ma che è possibile oggi trascrivere nella sua essenziale e limpida integrità' (p. 7). It is not surprising that the upheaval and dramatic events of the Resistance made such a deep impression as to seem easy to recall. But memories can never be perfect and something will always be lost. Maria Luigia Guaita recognizes this to some extent in her account of the Resistance, *Storia di un anno grande: settembre 1943-agosto 1944* (Florence:

La Nuova Italia, 1975)<sup>46</sup> : ‘dopo tanti anni è per me impossibile rendere ai fatti che riaffiorano alla memoria il fervore, la passione, con cui furono vissuti’. In any case, as has been seen, translating past events into written form inevitably brings with it a number of compromises and distortions.

Zangrandi suggests in her preface that she has ‘reconstructed’ nothing and that her intervention is limited to having changed a few names. This was a point that she also vigorously upheld when responding to a letter from Marco Forti of Mondadori, prior to the publication of *I giorni veri*. The letter, dated 17 December 1962, may be found amongst Zangrandi’s papers, and begins with the following passage:

Come d’accordo, Le scrivo le famose domandine che preparammo insieme qui a Milano, in occasione della Sua visita, e a cui spero che Lei vorrà rispondere con tutta calma nei prossimi mesi, in modo che si possa pubblicare il tutto prima dell’uscita del Suo libro.

There follow three questions:

- 1) *I giorni veri* è un diario o un romanzo? Quando è stato scritto con esattezza?
- 2) Perché solo oggi pubblica *I giorni veri*?
- 3) Che tipo di valori sono racchiusi, secondo Lei nel Suo libro; valori artistici soltanto, oppure anche il senso di una moralità e di una testimonianza?

Attached to this letter are two rough versions of answers to these questions. The two versions are similar in the kind of answers that they provide, but vary in the detail given to particular questions. It is impossible to say if they correspond to the final version sent back to Marco Forti, but nevertheless, they provide very important insights into the topics covered by this chapter.<sup>47</sup> MF2 begins with a paragraph that is a response to Forti’s first question and is almost identical to the

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<sup>46</sup>Formerly published in 1957 as *La guerra finisce, la guerra continua*.

<sup>47</sup>They will be referred to as MF1 and MF2, although these numbers are not indicative of any chronological order, and the page numbers are my own.

preface that appears in *I giorni veri* and is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. In MF1 too, Zangrandi emphasizes the truth of her account and states that, in *I giorni veri*, she has no interest in:

valori letterarii o artistici: se la realtà semplice e cruda ne ha, tanto meglio! In quei diciotto mesi di vita densa, tra scenari di montagne stupende, tra tipi di eccezione, eroici, pittoreschi o abietti, c'erano centomila occasioni di fare 'la pagina brava'. Non ne ho mai avuta nè la tentazione, nè la condiscendenza. (MF1, p. 1)

Thus, she suggests, by not consciously manipulating the events of the Resistance as she experienced them, in order to create good literature, a kind of 'bare reality' of the past emerges naturally from her writing. Yet, of course, such a suggestion is rather disingenuous, for there are a number of ways in which Zangrandi can be seen to have carefully constructed her account and to have used rhetorical devices to achieve particular effects, and with considerable success from a literary point of view.

Firstly, there is a great deal of direct speech in *I giorni veri*, used, no doubt to give an impression of immediacy. Although Zangrandi would have been able to remember the general gist of conversations that took place, she could not possibly have remembered the exact words, especially if writing some years later. The precise nature of the conversation is something that has to be recreated or, indeed, created. She can also be seen to select and order her material to encourage a particular interpretation of events. Such a selection is unavoidable if an account is to make sense and sustain the interest of the reader, but it means that the autobiographer inevitably gives a certain emphasis to events which seem important and not to others, and has the further effect that a particular event may be endowed with a meaning it did not have originally. There is an example of this in the first few pages of *I giorni veri*, which bear the title 'Quasi un prologo' (pp. 9–17). Zangrandi begins the account of her experiences during the Resistance by describing a conversation she has with her lodger, also a teacher at her school, early in the Autumn of 1943. It is the first time that they have had a proper conversation with each other. He is about to leave, called up by the army to go to Russia, and they talk together of their disillusionment with the fascist government

(suggesting that this was the period when Italians started to really talk to each other again, in a way they had not during the previous years of the fascist regime). From the way she talks of the fascists on this occasion, it is clear that there is no question of the other teacher having to convert her to antifascist ways of thinking. However, because of its position in the book, this episode becomes a kind of turning point for her, and a prologue to her Resistance activities. In this way, she invests it with a significance it could not have had at the time the fascist government had yet to fall and the Resistance had not yet begun.

Zangrandi can also be seen to structure *I giorni veri* so as to create more impact on the reader. On one occasion, she describes the way that she has been given information to pass on that one of the partisans is a spy and that the Germans have been informed of their latest plans. Unfortunately, the only man she can ask to tell the other partisans considers what she says to be ‘paura di donne, balle’ (p. 147). Readers know that lives depend on his reaction and Zangrandi appears to allay their fears, when, despite her anger, she ends the entry with the words ‘tuttavia penso che avviserà’ (p. 146). Thus, the shock is all the greater, when the first words of the next entry simply say ‘non ha avvisato’ (p. 147).

There is also a very clear rhythm to the diary which largely follows the progress of the partisans’ action in this area and their successes and setbacks. The narration begins slowly, dwelling on the conversation with her lodger and taking time to describe life in Cortina, but gains momentum, and builds up to a peak during the Summer of 1944 when partisan activity was very intense. From that point there are contrasting periods of action and inaction where the narrative varies in pace accordingly, as passages of detailed, leisurely description alternate with those of dramatic actions, recounted with little detail and following on in quick succession. There is a very slow frustrating period during the Winter of 1944–45, relieved in the Spring which, although slow in coming, ‘stentata come la nostra pace’ (p. 239), brings with it a gathering crescendo, a certainty that the war will end soon, and this leads up to the Liberation and arrival of the Allies. Such a pattern of events could only be perceived so clearly with the benefit of hindsight.

Zangrandi never admits within the text to writing any more than a few days after the events she describes. Thus the book is mostly written in the present tense, and past tenses, when they occur, just refer back to events of the same day or, at most, of the previous few days. In the preface, the work is described as a diary and it has the form of one, with separate entries each with a date (though often not a very specific one). Conversations are written in direct speech, and she often refers to a future which is unknown to her. At the beginning she talks of leaving Cortina, 'me ne andrò anche dal mondo della scuola, non ci sono, non ci fui mai tagliata, qualcosa da fare troverò' (p. 50), and there are frequent conjectures about what will happen after the Liberation. Any plans she has for the future are qualified by the words 'se vivrò' (p. 219). She also uses footnotes to add any information that could not have been known at the time. For example, she and others are discussing the fate of another partisan, Dery, and someone says: 'dicono che i tedeschi lo trovarono' (p. 188). It is only in a footnote that Zangrandi tells us that Dery Grava was deported to Mathausen, where he died (p. 253).

But *I giorni veri* was not written in its final form during the war. Indeed, as becomes clear from Zangrandi's responses to Marco Forti's question regarding the date of publication of this work, it was written some sixteen years after. In MF2, she explains that this book was based on notes she had made at during the Resistance and typescripts from immediately after the war, but the fact that she wrote *I giorni veri* later means, if anything, that she is able to be more truthful:

Perchè ho aspettato sedici anni a dar fuori questo diario? A rispolverarlo e controllarlo sui quaderni slabbrati e intrisi d'acqua recuperati tra i sassi della Memora,<sup>48</sup> da dattiloscritti buttati giù subito dopo (ingenui, esaltati), da relazioni, appunti, racconti orali che completavano fatti vissuti e soprattutto da ciò che rimase inciso in noi stessi, come un riposto nastro di dictafono a cui, quando ti pare, puoi battere il tasto verde d'ascolto?

Sedici anni d'attesa che credo siano stati un bene, sia per una rivalutazione autocritica soggettiva, che pure per il tempo ch'è maturato.  
(MF2, p. 1)

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<sup>48</sup>La Memora è circa a quota duemila, una gran roccia esposta al sole, non grotta, ma arcuata abbastanza per proteggere dalle intemperie e dalle slavine' (*I giorni veri*, p. 177). It was here that Zangrandi and the two other partisans spent the Winter of 1944–45.

Thus, Zangrandi claims the years between 1945 and the publication of *I giorni veri* have allowed her to understand the Resistance better. This understanding is based partly on the notes that she made at the time. As she says in MF1, ‘in quel tempo, quando potevo, annotavo su certi quaderni cose accadute, incontri, impressioni [...] erano a volte promemoria siglati, a volte sfoghi personali o sdoppiamenti da solitudine’, but these were certainly not ‘nella forma attuale’ (MF1, p. 1). In any case, it is unlikely that she could have written very much at the time because of the very life she was leading. To have carried such a document around with her would have been very impractical. As she describes it, she spent most of the Resistance on the move, carrying her few possessions with her. Indeed, at one point she describes this ‘survival kit’ of bare essentials that she keeps in her back pack. More importantly, it would have been very dangerous to carry such a diary around too much, even if it were written in note form, and this is presumably why she buried it under rocks at the ‘Memora’. For it should not be forgotten that she was of course under constant risk of arrest, and, if she had been caught, it would have incriminated not only her but many others too. Thus, *I giorni veri* can only have been based partially on notes made at the time and, as she suggests above, she does not see the ‘dattiloscritti’ written just after the war as accurate now, but as ‘ingenui’ and ‘esaltati’.

She also indicates that, in the intervening period, the Resistance seemed very unclear to her at times, and certainly wilfully distorted by others:

A volte ti pareva come nebbioso, indecifrabile e inafferrabile, talora anche urtante di certe rettoriche, lodi e incensi; troppi opuscolini ricchi d’aggettivi, deteriori e infantili hanno gravato di zavorre e fatto danno alla Resistenza e a quella che poteva essere pulita, efficace letteratura della Resistenza. (MF2, p. 2)

As has been seen in Chapter One, Zangrandi is well aware of the way an historical period can become altered and mythologized, but, as she makes clear to Marco Forti, this meant that an undistorted assessment of the Resistance was all the more necessary, therefore, if unachievable at the time:

In un mondo politico che le era ostile con forti propagande, la Resistenza aveva bisogno di una sua propria forza senza zavorre, essenziale

e non di rettoriche, di paludamenti parolieri o, nella migliore delle ipotesi, deamicisiani. Ma forse in quell'immediato dopoguerra era troppo presto per dir pane al pane e merda alle immondizie. (MF2, p. 2)

More recently, she says, she and others have begun to examine and discuss that time and what happened then and she assures Forti that for them the Resistance had not become 'un 'tempo perduto' favoloso e favoleggiabile come a volte succede all'osteria quando qualche d'Artagnan paesano ha festeggiato una sagra e racconta e sballa'. For, she states, 'non abbiamo santi da festeggiare e siamo casomai, ora, dei pignuoli e spietati demolitori di miti' (MF2, pp. 2-3). She is confident that 'ora io e altri riusciamo a vedere la Resistenza con più chiarezza e obiettività, senza passioni, nè odii, senza rivalse, senza timori' (MF1, p. 1). Nor, she says, should this 'possibile ritorno' be seen as a 'fatto eccezionale'. For it happens to many, 'dall'uomo della strada allo scrittore e allo storico' (MF2, p. 3).

Zangrandi's notes for Marco Forti give an important insight into the way that she wrote *I giorni veri*. It is clear that the truth Zangrandi refers to in *I giorni veri* is the product of her reflections a considerable time after the Resistance. When the tone of *I giorni veri* is compared to some of the impassioned articles that Zangrandi wrote for *Val Boite* immediately after the war, it is true that the later work does seem more measured and much less emotional. Her use of the word 'rigoroso' in these notes is obviously meant to imply some kind of scientific objectivity, an objectivity gained over time.

So should *I giorni veri* be described as a fictional reconstruction? It is clear that it was written, in its final form, after the war, even though there is the pretence that it was written during the Resistance. The way that Zangrandi chose to write this work has concealed the temporal gap (as described by Benstock and discussed in Chapter One) between her writing self and the self that is the protagonist of this autobiography. For the reader to accept the use of the present tense and the way that the future is unknown, there has to be a certain 'willing suspension of disbelief', as there is for fiction. Indeed, Zangrandi's style is very much like that of the realist novel and in this way it is hard to see *I giorni veri* as anything but the 'ricostruzione romanzesca' she claims it is not. For like any writer, she had to

choose (whether consciously or not) what was to be written and the way it was to be written, even when apparently constrained by historical facts.

On the other hand, however, Zangrandi clearly considers a ‘ricostruzione romanzesca’ to be incompatible with her expressed desire to tell the truth. The reader must not imagine that she has strayed from the truth or allowed her writer’s imagination to create any fanciful embellishments to her story. In rejecting the notion that her work might be a fictional reconstruction, the preface implies an attitude to truth and autobiography that considers neither as problematical. For Zangrandi, in this work truth is fixed and accessible, and, provided it is approached with honesty and not then cloaked in fiction, it may be transmitted to the reader. Such a view also presupposes a reader who has a similar ‘naive’ attitude to truth.

### Telling the Truth

As has been noted earlier, none of Zangrandi’s other autobiographical works make the same insistence that they are telling the truth: why did she treat *I giorni veri* differently? The reason appears to be that her interest in being believed is of considerable importance to her, on a personal level, and also from a moral and political point of view. In this work, Zangrandi does not use the word ‘truth’ simply to describe some kind of factual veracity. In the preface she seems keen to assert that it is the truth rather than lies or fiction that we are about to read. The title, on the other hand, suggests a different kind of truth. Days cannot be true or false — Zangrandi seems to be referring here instead to a kind of moral truth, an incontestable value inherent to the events of the Resistance as a whole and to her own individual experience of it.

Emilio Gentile expresses a view held by many in the introduction to *La letteratura e la Resistenza*:

se ci fu, infatti, un momento in cui le energie più valide della Nazione, da quelle intellettuali a quelle più autenticamente popolari, confluirono, pur nelle differenze — nel solco della tradizione risorgimentale e di là da essa — in un unico sforzo di liberazione e perseguirono gli stessi obiettivi, esso coincise con gli anni fra il settembre '43 e l'aprile '45.

Questa 'unità nella diversità' costituisce ancora la base della nostra democrazia. (p. 7)

It is the truth of these values as Zangrandi interprets them, and of the courage and selflessness of those involved in the armed struggle that she is referring to in her title *I giorni veri*. If she is to assert the truth of these values and their place in the Resistance then she also had to assert the truth, in terms of historical accuracy, of the events she is describing. Giovanni Falaschi, in his book *La Resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), links this adherence to the facts with neorealism and sees it as a characteristic feature of Resistance literature:

la obbedienza alla lezione dei fatti è stata considerata dalla critica letteraria come il presupposto fondamentale della letteratura neorealistica e quasi una proposizione di poetica; in realtà si può dimostrare che è un atteggiamento naturale e spontaneo di ogni forma letteraria (anche della più semplice) che si rifà alla Resistenza. (p. 27)

Thus, for these writers, and Zangrandi is typical in this respect, the historical facts, as they saw them, take precedence and the authors emphasize that they are writing the truth not a novel. As G. Paparelli and C. Scibilia say in their essay on writers of the Resistance (in *Letteratura italiana del Novecento* (Naples: Fratelli Conte, 1978, pp. 384–393), 'Queste memorie' were nearly always 'proposte al pubblico come "la vera verità"' (p. 386).

Zangrandi, like many others involved in the armed struggle of those years, wanted to convey the ideals and heroism of this time, so that they may be remembered and understood by future generations. Rather than concentrating on literary concerns, she says,

vorrei invece che dalla crudezza pulita della realtà uscisse una testimonianza e una moralità che molti miei contemporanei oggi o rinnegano o soffocano nell'adipe dei vari miracoli economici, che molti giovani non fanno. Soprattutto ai giovani è dovuto questo mio libro; per loro mi sono imposta di strappare i ritegni di un discorso in prima persona, assumendone le responsabilità.

Ai giovani ignari, infarciti di scolastiche storie di medievali guerre, re e date, si deve pure raccontare questa nostra storia di ieri, questa Resistenza miracolosamente nata in giorni di annientamento e subito cresciuta, divenuta vasta, pura e pulita nelle ore dell'azione, poi amaramente inquinata dopo guerra da interessi, speculazioni, accuse e sporcizie. (MF1, pp. 1-2)

Such an attitude was very important, then, in determining the choices she made when writing this diary. Telling the truth about the Resistance meant not only recounting the past honestly, but also writing from a particular historical and political perspective in order to counter the distortions and 'pollution' caused by others. It also meant drawing attention to a period of her own life and the value that she felt that those months of the Resistance had for her as an individual. As an autobiographical work, *I giorni veri* gives an account of the Resistance that is filtered through Zangrandi's description of her own, individual 'true days'. Indeed, as has been seen earlier, not only did Zangrandi identify the Resistance as a turning point in her life, she also gave it a central place in her writing, with *I giorni veri* devoted to it, as well as numerous short stories and the historical work *Risorgimento e Resistenza*. Moreover, by referring, in the title of her autobiography of the period to the 'days' of the Resistance, she points to a particular value or 'truth', not only in the overall aims of the Resistance as she saw them, but in the very daily activities in which she took part, and in the kind of life that she led during the Resistance. In *I giorni veri*, the intensity of Anna's life is striking; she is continually on the move, carrying out dangerous and arduous tasks with unquestioning devotion to the partisan struggle. Any equivocation could mean death for herself or other partisans. In her description of the Resistance, it is clear that she, like many other ex-partisans, was never able subsequently to recapture the single-minded sense of purpose of a time when everything was subordinated to a higher cause. Thus, Zangrandi identifies a simplicity, or purity, of motive which was unique to the Resistance, and which gave a moral truth to their everyday actions. Here, too, the ideas of a moral truth and a factual truth are intertwined; for the honesty and integrity of the participants and the legitimacy of their cause could only be conveyed if she also insisted on the accuracy of her account, both in

terms of the broader historical viewpoint, and of the particular picture of herself that she paints.

It should be noted, however, that on closer examination, it may appear that she herself is undermining her claim to be able to recount the facts of the Resistance in an unproblematical way. For, it is interesting to note that, despite her emphasis on the truth, and her insistence in her notes for Forti that remembering the past does not pose a problem, Zangrandi is fully prepared to acknowledge in *I giorni veri* that her memory is not infallible. She often comments that she has lived very much in the present and has blocked out certain memories of the past. When she goes to visit her last remaining relative in the town where she used to go to school, she finds it hard to believe that she ever really knew the place and feels detached from the memory she has even of herself:

sono arrivata in questa città dove ho studiato, dove ho abitato a lungo, pur non amandola. La conoscevo bene, ora sbaglio le strade e mi perdo anche dove è rimasta in piedi...questa dovrebbe essere la strada che *io* percorrevo andando a certe lezioni. Io?...Ero io...chi? (p. 33)

Later, in the house of her relative, she reacts in a similar way to portraits of her family : ‘dovrebbe essere *la mia famiglia*, già.’ (p. 35) (her italics). She would seem to be suggesting that it is not always possible to know the workings of one’s own mind and that the past is not always immediately accessible (as she does elsewhere, too, see Chapter One). However, this does not put the truthfulness of her account of the Resistance into question, for she applies such reflections only to the pre-war period, not to the time of the Resistance itself (the time-span of the diary does not extend beyond May 1945 and there is obviously no room for a later assessment of the events made with the benefit of hindsight). Thus, she is using the present tense not only to give a more vivid picture of the Resistance, but also so that the truth of her account cannot be contested by comparison with a later point of view that interprets them differently. Zangrandi is able to present the values of the Resistance and the aspirations for a better future of those who took part still intact, uncontaminated as it were by the later polemics about the Resistance and the disillusionment felt by many after the war. She is able to talk about the ‘fede

vera nel “domani” (p. 134) of the partisan leader Sandro Garbin and of her own hopes of being able to find some direction after the war ‘per continuare a fare quel che volevano i morti’ (p. 252), whilst concealing the fact that she was writing with hindsight. It also means that the readers themselves are made to reflect on what has happened since this time and to consider whether or not the ideals that were fought for have in fact been realized in post-war Italy. This can be seen as a far more effective way of explaining to readers of a younger generation just what the Resistance meant at the time and how it may still be seen as relevant.

If this is her aim, however, and if it is crucial that her account should be believed, why does she suggest at all that the past can seem so strange and unrecognizable? As she wrote this account some sixteen years after the war, could this not apply to her memories of the Resistance too? The answer lies with Zangrandi’s interpretation of fascism, its influence on her own life and the relationship, in her writing, between fascism and the Resistance. As has been seen in Chapter Three, she draws a clear distinction between the way she sees herself up till 1943 and her image of the later Giovanna Zangrandi, the *partigiana* and post-war writer. The pre-war, fascist period, the time of her own youth, is seen as a time of selfishness, ignorance and ‘menefreghismo’ that contrasts with the ‘mondo onesto’ of her mother and her generation. Zangrandi and her mother were unable to understand each other then because her mother ‘aveva le sue convinzioni, io nessuna’ (p. 11). The fact that she had completely different aims in life at this time is not for her an indication of the way that our attitude to the world and to ourselves changes over time, and that the truths we perceive are always relative to this, but rather that she was a product of her generation, of a fascist upbringing (at school and elsewhere, if not at home) and of fascist lies. The Resistance, by contrast, marks the rejection of these false values and the beginning of a truer (in the sense of the title) way of life; a life characterized, in *I giorni veri*, by commitment not ‘menefreghismo’, by selflessness not egoism, by action not rhetoric. As described earlier, the Resistance is shown, in *I giorni veri* as a very intense period, when Zangrandi was certain of her convictions, when she barely had time to stop and think or talk to others. After the Resistance, her writing shows that she continued to be inspired

by the same ideals as during the Resistance, but could not recapture the intensity of life, the solidarity with others and the over-riding sense of purpose. In *Il campo rosso*, there are echoes of the previous period, but they are really no more than that in a novel that is a testimony to the sense of loss felt after the Resistance.

So it becomes clear that, in *I giorni veri*, Zangrandi is not undermining her capacity to tell the truth, she is not questioning her own ability to make consistent analyses of events from different periods of her life, but rather saying, as she has stated elsewhere, that she was deceived by fascism and, like many of her generation, took some time to discover the truth. She draws attention to her conversion to antifascist values by describing two very different 'selves'. As we have seen, however, she does not acknowledge the post-war 'narrating self' and it seems likely that it was only after the war that she formulated this distinction between her 'fascist self' and her 'Resistance self'. Nor does her approach admit any possible divergence in the way that the partisan struggle was perceived during the war compared with afterwards. Instead, the 'truth' of the Resistance is not in question.

This explains then why the truth was so important to Zangrandi and how her attitude to it, although apparently contradictory, is in fact consistent. In this way, the particular truth that she is trying to convey becomes clear through the kind of Resistance she describes: as a struggle for freedom endowed with a moral value that sets an example for future generations and that distinguished it both from the fascist period that preceded it and from the disappointments of the post-war period, as seen through the framework of her own life. In her interpretation of the years 1943–45, as a period of her own life, and, on a broader scale, as a period in history, Zangrandi gives particular prominence to the idea that there was a popular uprising, following on in the tradition of the *Risorgimento*, and, as suggested earlier, to the role that women played in the Resistance. It is therefore necessary to explore these aspects more fully in order to understand the truth of Zangrandi's 'giorni veri'.

## Resistance and *Risorgimento*

Claudio Pavone suggests that an important aspect of the aims of those fighting in the Resistance was not just to get rid of the fascists and nazis, but to regain a sense of patriotism and national identity after the failure and humiliation of fascism and its war. The *Risorgimento* was an important point of reference in this effort. For, as he notes, when Italy had so often been the battleground on which other nations fought their wars, it was natural that the partisans would look for less depressing periods of Italian history and for this reason,

luoghi comuni, retorica, riciclaggi di memorie e di stereotipi culturali, autonoma riflessione sul proprio passato come popolo circolano nell'ambiente resistenziale, e puntano soprattutto sul Risorgimento, le cui guerre erano state fra tutte le più italiane e antitedesche. (*Una guerra civile*, p. 179)

Indeed, the Resistance was often described as a second *Risorgimento*, or as a continuation of the first. In *I giorni veri*, as will be discussed, there are also frequent references to the *Risorgimento*. However, such references are not necessarily indicative of a particular historical interpretation of both periods, because, as Pavone has written, allusions to the *Risorgimento* gave the Resistance 'forza', in his view, but also 'ambiguità', because 'più o meno tutte le posizioni politiche e ideologiche dello schieramento resistenziale, e gli stessi fascisti, si scelsero il proprio pezzo di Risorgimento cui riferirsi' (pp. 179–80). The two main groupings in the Resistance, the Communists with their 'brigade Garibaldi' and the *Partito d'azione*, gave themselves 'nomi evocanti i filoni risorgimentali rimasti soccombenti, nella lotta per l'egemonia nel nuovo Stato' and, therefore, these names 'contenevano implicito il programma di rimettere in discussione gli assetti postrisorgimentali, non solo quello fascista ma anche quello liberale' (p. 180). As Zangrandi was a member of a 'brigata Garibaldi', one would expect her to follow this kind of interpretation of the link between the Resistance and the *Risorgimento*. It is interesting in this respect that Zangrandi mentions the way her school teachers glossed over the details of the *Risorgimento* lest there should arise 'una domanda o una discussione su un Garibaldi antipapa nei momenti degli amori della Conciliazione. O, figurati,

una domanda su quel socialista di Pisacane...' (*I giorni veri*, p. 50). She also talks with admiration of the ideas of the leader of their brigata in the first year of the Resistance, Sandro Garbin. He and another partisan, Marcello, were the first to talk about the significance of the Resistance to the other partisans, 'guardando a un domani umano al di sopra delle sette, dando alla nostra lotta di oggi un valore per il futuro che molti di noi non vedevano' (p. 95). However, she adds the comment that many of the partisans still do not see the future in this way and, in fact, despite her admiration for their ideas, she herself shows considerable diffidence towards the idea that the Communist party could provide all the answers (not surprisingly, given the fact that she is writing with hindsight). Zangrandi's understanding of the reasons behind, and the aims of, the Resistance is not based so much on party political interpretations as on a view of the history and traditions of the Cadore in which the *Risorgimento* plays a very significant part. It is a view that is evident in *I giorni veri*, but is even more clearly expressed in an undated, unpublished, historical work that Zangrandi passed on to the *Istituto Storico Bellunese per la Resistenza* for publication: *Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore*.<sup>49</sup> The very fact that Zangrandi chose to pick out these two periods and put them together is significant, of course.

*Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore* in fact outlines the history of the area since ancient times, but most of the detail concerns the years 1848–1866 and the years 1943–45 and the events of both these periods are seen as the culmination of tendencies and traditions that can be seen much earlier. She suggests that the Resistance in the Cadore followed in the tradition of the *Risorgimento*, but that that in turn drew its inspiration from a much more ancient tradition of democracy:

nel 1337 in Cadore venne rielaborato sulle orme dei vecchi statuti longobardi, ecc. uno Statuto nuovo, piuttosto complesso ed steso con alto senso di giustizia (e oseremmo dire di 'democrazia', concetto ben insolito in quei tempi di violenti dominii feudali). (p. 4)

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<sup>49</sup> Although Zangrandi has not given this historical study any date, she does refer to a partisan 'recentemente perito nella sciagura del Vajont' (p. 30). The Vajont disaster, that all but destroyed the village of Longarone, occurred in October 1963 and it would seem therefore that *Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore* was not written much later than *I giorni veri*.

When it comes to the Risorgimento, Zangrandi maintains that the Cadore not only had an outstanding leader in Pier Fortunato Calvi, but ‘può vantare la più significativa ed efficace insurrezione popolare del Risorgimento Italiano’ (p. 15). This was partly because of the terrain and the efficient co-operation between armed bands and the *Comitato di Difesa Civica*, as well as the individual skills of the various leaders, including a number of priests. But, she adds:

tutto questo sarebbe stato inutile se *tutto* il popolo cadorino non avesse dimostrato maturità civile, amore per la libertà e una avanzata coscienza nazionale, un patriottismo vero che il linguaggio del tempo incrosta di una certa rettorica, ma che ha sano e vivo il nocciolo. Non esitiamo ad affermare (anzi a ripetere) che questa coscienza civile e questa *passione di libertà* deriva ai Cadorini da secoli di autogoverno, da antichi ordinamenti e statuti ammirevoli per forma pressochè democratica, per sagge amministrazioni comunitarie e per scambi commerciali e culturali con Venezia (ed anche con l’Europa). (p. 15)

Thus, according to Zangrandi, the *Risorgimento* in the Cadore was a popular uprising, inspired by a love of democracy and a love of freedom. When the Resistance began, Zangrandi recounts, ‘i cadorini ritrovarono ricordi risorgimentali autentici radicati in quel sentimento gelosissimo della Libertà e dell’indipendenza che aveva condizionato tutta la loro storia’ (p. 20). Like the *Risorgimento*, she adds later, the Resistance was ‘un moto popolare’, conditioned by a particular attitude to the nation: a movement ‘di liberazione nazionale più che di determinata politica’, or rather, ‘politicamente *tutti* i partigiani della Calvi e chi con loro collaborò erano dei rigorosi antifascisti e antinazisti’ (p. 34).<sup>50</sup>

The popular nature of the Resistance, as Zangrandi describes it, is also evident in *I giorni veri*. She is at great pains to point out the contribution of *contadini* to the Resistance and, in her notes for Forti, emphasizes that *I giorni veri* is told from the point of view of an ordinary *staffetta* and that she is recounting

quello che fu la Resistenza per noi umili gregari, garibaldini senza gradi, staffette o portatori che non sapevamo le grandi azioni e che anche oggi non sapremmo scrivere la storia organica dei Comandi centrali e dei retroscena.

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<sup>50</sup>The Brigata Calvi took its name from the Risorgimento leader Pier Fortunato Calvi, mentioned earlier.

Questo diario è l'annotare fatto nelle sere di ciò che avveniva in una regione italiana, nelle cucine, per le strade (lunghe) e le valli, nei fienili o all'addiaccio; talora in una sosta può anche accadere di riscontrare quel ch'è bruciato in noi e piaghe e miserie: la verità di come eravamo e come ci aveva ridotto una guerra. (MF2, p. 4)

Indeed, she stresses that ordinary people were even more important in the Resistance than they had been in the *Risorgimento*: 'sì, la Resistenza ebbe caratteri risorgimentali, ma anche una sua tipica nuova caratteristica: fu più vasta, spontanea, popolare, non sorse solo dai salotti, ma tanto più dalle cucine, dai casolari, dalle fabbriche' (MF1, p. 2).

There are also a number of disparaging remarks about the bourgeoisie and the richer classes in *I giorni veri*. For example, when, in the Winter of 1944, she is reduced to begging for food and shelter, the haylofts and farm buildings where she would like to stay usually belong to 'gente piuttosto ricca' who, if they discover a partisan, 'ti dicono duramente che sei sgradita ospite' (p. 173), a different reaction from that of most of the 'gente umile'. She also has little time for the 'borghesi' in general, although most of her comments are directed at her own relatives and at 'oriundi' in Cortina that she regarded as 'filonazisti'. In fact, in the Cadore itself, she comments in *Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore*, 'non esistè mai una borghesia notevole e appartata, anche gli elementi più colti o benestanti ebbero ed hanno qui sempre radici e dirette parentele popolari' (*Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore*, p. 6). In *I giorni veri* there is a very strong sense of 'them' and 'us', but it is always geographically based, in the way that has been seen elsewhere in Zangrandi's writing. 'Them' refers to the people of Cortina whose sympathies lay with the nazis, while 'us' refers to the *cadorini* and it is this distinction that is most prominent, rather than a class distinction, despite her emphasis on the role of the 'popolo'. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the question of class is really subsumed into this geographical distinction, for the *cadorini* are seen as somehow all belonging to one class, whilst the *cortinesi* are usually identified as bourgeois. It is not surprising that there should be a class element in Zangrandi's description of the Resistance, for the Communists obviously had a political programme in mind for the post-war period, and for many partisans the Resistance was also a

class war. As Claudio Pavone points out, however, the leaders of the parties of the left were concerned to follow a policy of national unity that was ‘necessariamente interclassista’ (*Una guerra civile*, p. 314) in order to ensure the success of the Resistance. In fact, such an attitude can be seen in Zangrandi’s writing too and she often prefers to emphasize the solidarity and unity of the Resistance, the fact that it was, she says, ‘un movimento che sul filo antico della parola Libertà affiancò allora mirabilmente elementi intellettuali e masse’ (MF1, p. 2).

Nevertheless, the idea of a split between ‘them’ and ‘us’ along geographical lines has further implications for Zangrandi’s interpretation of the Resistance. As seen above, Zangrandi uses the label ‘war of liberation’ repeatedly for both the Resistance and the *Risorgimento* and describes both as patriotic wars, stressing that, despite the strong sense of regional identity expressed by the *cadorini*, this sentiment has led naturally to a love for their nation. She herself says that it is her whole country she cares about, she says, ‘esisteva il mio paese — Italia, la mia gente e adesso la cotta ce l’ho presa, l’avevo nel sangue, è sbrocata fuori, ti resterà nel sangue’ (*I giorni veri*, p. 29). However, the emphasis on patriotism and liberation underplays the fact that, in the Resistance, the partisans were not only fighting a foreign aggressor, but also other Italians. Pavone comments that many antifascists have resisted the idea that the Resistance was a civil war, because such a definition seemed to consider both sides as equal. Instead, it was regarded as a patriotic war of liberation, with fascists no longer seen as true Italians. As he says: ‘i fascisti avevano sempre chiamato ‘antinazionali’ il loro avversari; e questi li hanno ricambiati espellendoli in idee — almeno quelli della RSI — dalla storia d’Italia, se non addirittura dall’umanità’ (*Una guerra civile*, p. 222).<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting that in *I giorni veri*, the enemy she refers to is nearly always German. This is inevitable in the first part of the book, where she is describing living mostly in Cortina and travelling to Bolzano, both of which were in *Alpenvorland*, overseen by nazi soldiers, rather than occupied Italy. However, even in the second part, the fascists are rarely seen as the object of partisan actions. In the area around Cortina and Bolzano, the local inhabitants who welcome the nazi

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<sup>51</sup>As an example of this, Pavone cites Vittorini’s *Uomini e no* (Milan: Bompiani, 1945).

invasion are not seen as Italians and therefore not described as Italian fascists. In the Cadore, Zangrandi underplays the role of fascists. In *Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore* she admits that ‘è doveroso notare che il fascismo in Cadore attecchì relativamente’, although it was ‘senza entusiasmo nella massa che dimostrò un freddo assenteismo in merito’ and ‘si limitò a pochi gerarchi le cui imprese di violenza non ramificarono gran che’ (p. 19). The *cadorini* did object strongly, she says, to the removal of their elected council and the imposition of a *podestà*. ‘Il Cadore ebbe scarsi aderenti entusiasti al Regime’, she concludes, and some of them ‘erano stati impaniati da un nazionalismo italiano e da un patriottismo che il fascismo s’era appropriato dovunque come monopolio e paravento’ (p. 19), and to which people in this area were particularly susceptible. It was for this reason that they had shown some enthusiasm for the First World War which had been ‘spacciata dagli interventisti come necessaria guerra di liberazione delle terre irredente da quel dominio austro-ungarico che il Cadore particolarmente aborrisce’ (p. 17). For the same reason, the Second World War was particularly unwelcome amongst the *cadorini* because in that area, ‘per tradizione secolare [...] il “nemico” era l’austriaco o il tedesco in senso lato’ (p. 20).

In *I giorni veri*, she goes rather further than in *Risorgimento e Resistenza in Cadore*, saying, ‘il Cadore è sempre stato molto italiano e poco fascista’ (p. 62). In the Resistance, she adds later,

la nostra zona considerata quasi ‘Reich’, pur essendo rigorosamente controllata dai tedeschi, finora ha avuto il vantaggio di non aver fascisti di sorta; già prima in Cadore il fascismo era esile, dopo l’otto settembre non ve ne fu mai più traccia e i tedeschi di occupazione non hanno voluto ‘pagliacci neri’. (*I giorni veri*, p. 200)

When, in February 1944, she notes that the ‘gendarmi di controllo’ at the nearby customs post are local people enrolled in the ‘Sud-Tiroler Ordnungsdienst’, she maintains that it is ‘per ragioni di minestra, per paura di servizio al fronte’, or ‘per opportunità’, and that the nazis have ‘approfittato soprattutto dell’agnosticismo politico assoluto di questa gente’ (p. 67), although she recognizes that ‘in mezzo c’è anche qualche convinto nazista’ (p. 68). It is interesting that she never refers to them as fascists, however. Nevertheless, she does not underplay the importance

of the fact that Italians found themselves on opposing sides: she knows that it will not easily be forgotten and that 'dopo sarà tanto più difficile tornare in pace' (p. 68). The fact that the Resistance was also a civil war means that she has to modify her identification of the Resistance with the *Risorgimento* and admit that it cannot be complete. The father of one of her pupils is the high-ranking fascist Pavolini (fascist party secretary during the Republic of Salò), and he is picked out as an obvious target by her partisan band who set about organizing an ambush. Zangrandi recognizes that they must carry out this kind of action, but reflects bitterly:

questa è la schifezza della repubblicetta di Salò: se non nasceva quella era come un altro Risorgimento, povero, scombinato, ma guerresco, militare, pulito; così bisogna intriderlo di Rivoluzione, eliminazioni e sangue italiano. (p. 83)

Later in her account, she describes the way that the 'gendarmi' have killed a man, 'così ora dicono che fummo noi a farlo fuori; così, dopoguerra, si formerà ancora una catena d'odio e di sangue, una delle tante zavorre di guerra civile' (p. 231).

In this way, Zangrandi's interpretation of the Resistance in the Cadore is closely allied to her interpretation of the history and traditions of that area. Linked most closely with the *Risorgimento*, the Resistance is seen as a patriotic war of liberation, inspired by centuries of tradition and a love of democracy more than any party political interpretation. Nevertheless, she recognizes the tendency that she and others have to be idealistic about the *Risorgimento*; for example she describes partisans who are inspired by sentiments that are 'risorgimentali' but, by the same token, their ideas are also unrealistic and 'romantici'. However, when it comes to the Resistance, her acknowledgement of the mistakes and compromises of the Resistance, as well as her experience at close hand of its tragedies and ambiguities does not allow her to paint an unequivocally idealistic picture of events. Nevertheless, inherent to these events are the absolute moral and political values that Zangrandi identifies in the *Risorgimento*.

Thus it is possible to see why Zangrandi felt it was imperative to present her diary as the truth, and to understand the kind of historical and political

interpretation that influences the nature of the 'truth' that she wishes to convey. Not that Zangrandi would admit there to be any other truth in this regard, for she implies that by telling the facts honestly, the only possible account emerges. Yet, of course, a different attitude to history and the role of the Resistance would result in a very different, and not necessarily less honest, description of events.

### **A Woman's Resistance**

As suggested earlier, also crucial to an understanding of the nature of the truth that Zangrandi conveys in *I giorni veri* is the question of women and the Resistance. It has been mentioned above that Zangrandi highlights the activities of women in the Resistance in this area, and this too gives her diary a particular emphasis and shape. In her notes for Marco Forti, she states that the Resistance owes a great deal to women, adding that 'veramente, alle donne delle cucine o alle scalciate soldatesse dei pedali avrei dovuto dedicare questo libro, ma so che esse approveranno che sia per i loro figli e nipoti' (MF1, p. 2). However, the whole question of writing as a woman and about women has further consequences when considering issues raised by truth and literature.

One aspect of Lejeune's approach to autobiography is that, even if a writer claims to be telling the truth, it must be considered believable by the readers. The reader decides if a work is autobiographical, and decides whether or not the author is telling the truth. So, it is very important to examine the accepted attitudes both of the time being written about, in this case the Resistance, and, just as important, of the time when the book was written and published. For a writer wanting to publish a book and attract readers must be aware of what will be accepted as realistic. This is particularly important for a woman writing about herself. Attitudes to women have changed greatly over the years, as has society's definition of what it is to be a woman. A woman cannot help but know what is expected of her by the world around her. As Lynn Sukenick writes in her paper 'On Women and Fiction' (in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, edited by A. Diamond and L.R. Edwards (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1977), 'as their diaries, letters and fiction show [...] few women

can escape a knowledge of what is generally considered feminine, since they are so often reminded of it' (p. 43). Needless to say, these varying interpretations of what a woman is are not presented as such, but rather as the truth about women. They will naturally also affect the way that a woman writer sees herself, what she feels she can write and the way she thinks it will be received. As indicated earlier, an author chooses the content of an autobiography, but this choice is inevitably constrained by the kind of truths which are available to him or to her in the particular cultural environment in which they are writing. For this reason, it is necessary to take a closer look at the historical context of *I giorni veri*, with particular regard to women.

Considering the fact that women only obtained the vote in 1946, it could seem that the process of the emancipation of women moved rather slowly in Italy compared to some other countries. However, as Franca Pieroni Bortolotti (in 'A Survey of Recent Research on the History of Feminism' (*Journal of Italian History*, 1 (1978), 511–530) points out, the first campaign for the emancipation of women in Italy occurred as part of the democratic movements arising from the Risorgimento. In the late nineteenth century, Italy had one of the most highly developed democratic feminist movements in Europe. Rapid social and economic changes at the beginning of this century also contributed to the emancipation of women of higher classes, and allowed them to have more access to education and employment. As Martin Clark indicates in *Modern Italy* (London: Longman, 1984, p. 163), by 1906 there were committees for female suffrage in all major cities, and women's groups were becoming more and more popular. Whilst these groups were mainly concerned with charitable works, they did also create national organisations which became forums for debate on political and social issues.

As Clark goes on to point out, the Great War meant even more women were needed in factories, and by 1918 over 20% of armament workers were women. Anna Nozzoli in her book *Tabù e coscienza: la condizione femminile nella letteratura italiana del novecento* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978) quotes the writer Rosa Rosà who says of women and the First World War:

se anche dopo la guerra dovranno ricedere agli uomini molte delle pos-

sibilità che ora amministrano come un capitale in prestito, il campo ristretto loro si è in tutti i modi allargato e non diventerà mai più unilaterale come prima. (p. 53)

Fascism, as has been seen in the last chapter, would try to halt the progression of emancipation in these terms and mould the behaviour of women to its own ends. As suggested earlier, although some women experienced it rather differently (see Chapter Three), it was essentially a return to much more traditional attitudes and to a conception of womanhood formed by the much more deep-seated attitudes, fostered by the Catholic Church, than just those put forward by twenty years of fascist doctrine.

What is clear is that the various roles that women took on during the Resistance conflicted greatly with official fascist rhetoric about women as mothers and servants of the state and also with traditional Catholic ideas which dictated not only what a woman *should* be but, indeed, what in fact, from their point of view, she actually *is*. For this reason, the Resistance has been seen as a particularly important period for the emancipation of women in Italy. Women were given the opportunity to find out and show others what they were capable of. Isotta Gaeta echoes the opinion of many Italian feminists, when she says that

la Resistenza segnò un momento fondamentale nel processo di emancipazione delle masse femminili italiane perché spinse centinaia di migliaia di donne a maturare la propria coscienza antifascista e a entrare direttamente nel fuoco della lotta accanto agli uomini. (*L'altra metà della Resistenza*, p. 33)

It is pointed out too that, whilst for many the choice to take on new responsibilities and to get involved in the Resistance was made for them, as they were obliged to support some male member of the family who had taken to the mountains, other women, such as Zangrandi, did have the choice. For it must be remembered that women who did not have any relations who were partisans could always choose to do nothing and cope as best they could until the end of the war. Giuliana Beltrami maintains that

“volontarie” lo furono più degli uomini, perché, mentre a questi, per ragioni di obbligo militare, una scelta di campo si imponeva, le donne

restando a casa non avrebbero rischiato nulla; se avessero collaborato ne avrebbero tratto vantaggi. (*Volontarie della libertà*, p. 26)

Moreover, as Beltrami indicates, in *L'altra metà della Resistenza*, there were strong incentives for women not to get involved. For whilst it was a 'scelta volontaria', Beltrami also maintains that it was also

una *scelta di rottura*, perché comportava a livello personale una vera rivoluzione, che stravolgeva valori e consuetudini e che, oltre al resto, era spesso mal giudicata. Quante ragazze son state considerate squaldrine perché si erano "messe coi partigiani". I genitori, le famiglie protestavano. (p. 25)

Thus involvement in the Resistance not only meant risking their lives, but also going against their families and risking their reputation. In other ways, it may have been experienced as less of a 'rottura'. Ironically, for some women, the very fact that they had been encouraged to get out of their homes and be involved in a more public life during the fascist regime, as described in Chapter Three, may have facilitated this decision to get involved. Indeed, Miriam Mafai quotes a certain Tersilia who maintains that the teaching of the regime opened her eyes to certain issues:

è stata tutta l'educazione fascista che ho avuto a scuola che ha deciso del mio ingresso nella Resistenza. Sembra assurdo ma è così. Il fascismo mi ha insegnato ad amare la patria, mi ha insegnato che la patria deve essere libera e indipendente, e che lo straniero se ne deve andare. (*Pane nero* (Milan: Mondadori, 1987), p. 227)

Such an admission is unusual, of course, because many partisans would be reluctant to admit that they learnt anything from fascism. As has been shown, Zangrandi certainly insists that her participation in the Resistance constituted a complete break with fascism. Yet, as has also been seen, a certain continuity may be discerned in the themes and perspective of her pre- and post-fascist writing. Nevertheless, as Pavone has suggested (see above), a more common feeling was that a sense of patriotism was something that had to be regained after the travesty fascism had made of it. In any case, as mentioned earlier, the way that women

experienced fascism had a great deal to do with the class they belonged to, and those women who could have benefited from greater opportunities under fascism were few in number. What is more, most activities for women encouraged by the fascist regime fell within what was traditionally seen as the female sphere of life, and, whilst it was one thing to be involved in activities officially promoted and sanctioned by the state, it was quite another to join the 'ribelli' of the Resistance.

So how did women react to this very specific historical situation and how did it affect the way that they wrote? In order to examine this, it is particularly interesting to consider *I giorni veri* alongside other accounts of the Resistance written by women and note the way that Zangrandi's book, and the way that she describes her own role in the Resistance, emerges as rather different from the others. Maria Luigia Guaita, for example, was a partisan in Tuscany and in her diary she refers to the kind of disapproval mentioned above. At one point, it seems that she is under suspicion and that her house is being watched, she writes 'Che dovevo fare? Dovevo sparire, diceva mia madre, e smetterla di occuparmi di cose che non sono da donne, e in questo dava ragione a mio padre' (*Storia di un anno grande*, p. 31). Joyce Lussu, in her diary *Fronti e frontiere* (Milan: Mursia, 1971), quotes the words of an Italian army officer who says 'è un peccato [...] che anche voi donne vi mettiaste contro di noi, e partecipate persino ad attività sovversive, invece di essere quell'elemento di pacificazione che si conviene alla vostra natura femminile' (p. 100). Both these writers object to these points of view and are convinced that their involvement is right; however, neither of them confronts the specific question of what exactly a woman's role should be. This is equally true of a number of works written about the Resistance by women, including accounts by Ada Gobetti, Bianca Ceva, and Iris Origo.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, none of them makes any kind of complaint about the fascists' denigration of women.

That a traditional image of women should persist in the minds of women themselves is hardly surprising, especially given the opinions of the Church towards them, and the fact that the Church continued to exercise a considerable influence

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<sup>52</sup>Ada Gobetti, *Diario partigiano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956); Bianca Ceva, *Tempo dei vivi* (Milan: Ceschina, 1954); Iris Origo, *War in Val D'Orcia* (London: Cape, 1947), published as *Guerra in Val D'Orcia* in Florence in 1968.

after the war when such accounts were written. But where a woman has a traditional image of herself and yet is involved in the Resistance there is bound to be a contradiction that is difficult to resolve. The influence of a restricted view of what women are capable of seems to lead them not only to an underestimation of their own abilities at the time of the Resistance, but also it continues to affect them after the war and influence the way that they write about themselves. Ada Gobetti is a good example of this. In her *Diario partigiano* she does not consider that being a woman causes her any particular difficulties. She confesses that,

dopo l'entusiasmo suffragistico della lontana adolescenza, non m'ero mai più occupata di cose femminili. Ma esiste veramente una questione della donna? Il voto ce lo debbon dare e ce lo daranno: è nella logica delle cose. Quanto al resto, mi pare che i problemi d'oggi, la pace, la libertà, la giustizia—tocchino allo stesso modo uomini e donne. Forse il non vedere il problema è deficienza mia. (p. 64)

Thus there are for her, quite understandably, more important questions to attend to. However, her way of approaching them betrays a very traditional attitude. She sees herself above all else as a mother. Her concern for her son, a young partisan, is not at all surprising; however, her stress on her role as mother and belief in a kind of natural sisterhood in motherhood which crosses all boundaries and nations and arises from 'l'istintiva profonda solidarietà materna' does seem significant after all the fascist propaganda she had lived through. She also considers that only certain activities are suited to women, mostly ones of support: collecting food and clothing and so on. She sees the men going off to perform some act of sabotage and longs to go with them. She resigns herself to the fact that she would be a hindrance, yet she describes other situations that are equally dangerous where she does happen to be involved and where she copes just as well as the men around her. She talks of her 'aspirazione eroica [...] sempre viva e sempre frustrata di tutta la mia vita', yet she does not consider the fact that she may be *suited* to a much more active role in life. In this way she does not seem to adapt her view of herself to the new situation she finds herself in because of the Resistance, nor indeed to her own reaction to that situation; she is still influenced by the traditional priorities of women. This leads to the rather absurd situation when she is crossing the Alps on foot with a group

of men and one of her main concerns is her appearance; she wonders whether she will still manage to look nice when she meets the French. This and the feeling that she should be mothering the partisans making the crossing with her clearly put her under pressure:

Mi sentivo sporca, spettinata, lacera; avevo i pantaloni a brandelli; mi pareva che soltanto una donna potesse capir tutte queste cose e aiutarmi, sia pur con la sua muta simpatia; una donna che ci avrebbe preparato da mangiare, che ci avrebbe sistemato un giaciglio, a cui avrei potuto cedere la responsabilità (che sentivo, pur senza completamente assolverla) d'organizzar per gli altri le forme primordiali della vita. (*Diario partigiano*, p. 315)

Women also had to strain against the idea of women as weak, rather incompetent, and generally unimportant; an idea that they often had of themselves. This clearly influences the choices that they make when writing these accounts and what they see as important. It is very noticeable that although Ada Gobetti spent most of her time working with women, we read practically nothing about this. There is the odd reference to meetings of the *Gruppi di difesa della donna* that she organised, but she never gives us any details. She does, however, spend much of the book describing what the men have been doing.

Another striking example is that of Maria Luigia Guaita. The descriptions in her account betray a very different attitude to men compared to women. Men are usually seen performing some kind of action, but when she describes women, she tends to mention their appearance first and she admires one particular *staffetta* 'per come riusciva ad essere sempre fresca ed elegante malgrado quella maledetta vita e con i chilometri che anche lei ogni giorno era costretta a percorrere' (*Storia di un anno grande*, p. 82). Even more striking is the general impression we get of Guaita's character. She seems rather ineffectual, she makes a number of mistakes and on the one occasion that she is called upon to do something particularly daring, she loses her nerve and has to rely on a fellow male partisan to do it for her. The general impression is that she had a great deal of goodwill but not much ability or courage. What is more, in *Mille volte no! Testimonianze di donne della Resistenza* (ed. by Mirella Alloisio and others, Edizioni Unione Donne Italiane, 1965) she is

quoted as saying that she gave the wrong impression in her diary and exaggerated her own bravery, whereas, in fact, she was very frightened during the Resistance: ‘dovevo fare uno sforzo terribile su di me per vincermi per essere efficiente’ (p. 103). In this way, she says, ‘io, che avevo paura, mi son fatta la fama di coraggiosa e, lo giuro, davvero senza intenzione’ (p. 104). However, Giuliana Beltrami and Mirella Alloisio tell a very different story in *Volontarie della libertà*. They point out that Guaita was in fact the only woman amongst the leaders of the Partito d’Azione in Tuscany, that she organized a network of *staffette*, and that she was in charge of maintaining links with other regions and with the Allies. None of this is mentioned in her own book.

Ida D’Este’s diary, *Croce sulla schiena* (Rome: Edizioni Cinque Lune, 1966) describes her activities as a partisan and her subsequent imprisonment. Not surprisingly, given the fact that she organised some of the first women’s groups in the DC and later represented that party in parliament, D’Este seems more concerned to describe the particular situation women found themselves in and the constraints that they were under. For example, she writes of another partisan, Marinella, who is ‘una delle poche donne che si sono messe a lavorare spontaneamente, spinte dall’idea senza che circostanze familiari ve l’abbiano costretta’ (p. 19), although D’Este is not necessarily criticizing the fact that many women were constrained by family circumstances, of course. She also has some vision of the future for women, saying that she enjoys talking with Marinella because ‘nel parlare dell’avvenire sociale politico della donna, ci troviamo all’unisono’ (p. 19) (she does not give any further details of the ‘future’ she is referring to). It is interesting to note, however, that she feels the need to defend the reputation of female partisans, albeit in an offhand, light-hearted manner (as a result of the kind of comments mentioned by Beltrami, perhaps). A chapter entitled ‘Non si può far tutto’ (p. 25) describes a conversation she has with a ‘dott. X’ who is giving her orders and suggests, “...e poi un’altra cosa...ma questa no...lei non la può fare”. She insists on knowing what this might be and finds out ‘si trattava di andare a S. Vito a fare all’amore (magari per finta) con i tedeschi per capire notizie segrete’. To this she responds in the following way: ‘rido, questo no. Questo realmente non lo posso fare. Non mi sento

affatto la vocazione della donna fatale' (p. 29). Although the incident is treated with a light touch, it is made clear that partisans like her did not compromise their reputation.

In the second half of the book, which describes her imprisonment, D'Este highlights the humiliation to which she was subjected to as a woman:

il motivo della nudità sarà poi il leit-motiv di tutta la mia prigionia.

Perquisizioni, interrogatori, campo di concentramento, docce, visite mediche, ecc. Mai come allora ho odiato di essere donna. (p. 52)

When she is first imprisoned, she comments that her gaolers know that they are threatening the worst possible torture when they suggest that they are going to strip her and that

ogni piccolezza ferisce egualmente, nonostante l'orrore della situazione. E se mi tolgono le scarpe e scoprono quel buco nella calza che stamane non ho potuto rammendare? (Quando mai una staffetta ha il tempo di rammendarsi le calze?) (p. 67)

She seems to experience the humiliation of being nude as a feeling of shame towards her own body: 'di scorcio vedo nudo questo mio brutto corpo, che ho sempre tanto odiato', and this is linked to an idea that she was responsible for having allowed such immodesty, even though she had no choice, of course. She says nothing in her account against her captors who inflict a kind of torture that is, she shows, peculiarly cruel to women, but suggests that she has become unclean by undergoing such an experience, and can only bear it by thinking of God who, she says, 'mi ammanta di purezza' (p. 68).

Giovanna Zangrandi provides a sharp contrast with the other writers mentioned above. She has a much less traditional attitude. It has been seen earlier that, in her notes for Marco Forti, she emphasizes the important role that women played in the Resistance and states that *I giorni veri* tells their story as well as her own. As has been seen in the last chapter, she was vociferous in her criticism of fascism after the war, and in this work she is particularly resentful of the restrictions that fascism

placed on her because she was a woman. It frustrated her ambitions, she says: we see her drawing maps for the partisans and she says ‘ci so fare, ho fatto rilievi geologici in questa zona, non vi conosco solo sassi e buchi, volevo far la topografa [...] Ma poi dissero di no, no a noi donne sotto il fascismo’ (*I giorni veri*, p. 93). At another stage in the book, she is making baby clothes for a neighbour and comments ironically: ‘ci fecero i corsi per far le brave fattrici, le casalinghe spose prolifiche che il duce avrebbe premiato’ (p. 88). She also shows some resentment at the way that she is treated by the partisans. Despite the fact that she greatly respects the leaders and is very loyal to them, she does highlight the unjust way that she is treated. When it is no longer safe for her to remain at home as the Germans now know that she is working with the Resistance, she is not allowed to join the partisans. She is told by a messenger sent by the partisan leader that

in banda non vogliono donne, si sa, mi dovrò arrangiare....Dai ferrovieri vien notizia che gendarmi travestiti sono andati a cercarmi a casa, che c’è mandato di cattura. E in banda non vogliono donne, anche se son meno lavativi di molti studentelli e impiegati. (p. 107)

When something goes wrong, it is blamed immediately on women, as when the Germans discover that there is to be a parachute drop of arms and ammunition and set up an ambush. This causes an outburst from one of the partisans, ‘Sì, a far delle chiacchiere, siete voi donne che sputtanate tutto e poi ci prendono’ (p. 201).

She is also all too aware of the problems Giuliana Beltrami referred to. As a *partigiana*, she is subject to considerable disapproval from some local people (particularly the rich, she points out, and especially during the time of the harshest reprisals by the nazis in 1944). Even amongst those who are prepared to give her food, she is aware that there are some people who look at her with ‘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”’(p. 142).

As suggested earlier, Zangrandi does not just write about her own individual experiences in *I giorni veri*, but is concerned to describe other women who were involved in the Resistance too and she presents a very positive picture of them. As Paola Pavanini comments in a review in *Cadore Democratico* (1 September 1966,

p. 3 and p. 6), written when *I giorni veri* was awarded the 'Resistenza' prize in Venice, 'le figure femminili, nel libro, sono parecchie e tutte straordinariamente nitide' (p. 3). These women are courageous, show great initiative and physical and moral strength. Pavanini continues,

i personaggi femminili finiscono per avere uno spicco e una caratterizzazione psicologica più determinata rispetto ai compagni di lotta, perchè la scrittrice sente in loro una sofferenza più dura e insieme una maggiore capacità di amore, nel senso più ampio del termine, verso gli altri. (p. 3)

It should of course be remembered that Zangrandi's description of the women of the Cadore is typical of her positive attitude towards the Cadore and its people in general, but that an emphasis on the female half of the population in that area is also a constant theme in all her writing. Thus it is significant that, in writing about a period that she felt had an intrinsic value, Zangrandi shows particular interest in the representation of herself as a woman and of other women

Zangrandi's interest in presenting women in a positive fashion does not mean that she is unrealistic about the physical strength of a woman. Writing about herself, she admits that there are days when all she can do is 'crollare nel fieno, questo sangue che puzza di umano e corre lento e fastidioso, i pedali lo tirano fuori: maledette donne, quale spietato, immisericordioso Iddio le ha fabbricate così, le donne?' (p. 160). However, she shows a very different attitude towards her own body, compared to Gobetti or D'Este, when she emphasizes that she herself had not realised that she was as strong as she appears to be, and becomes aware of having 'molta forza ed esattezza di riflessi fulminei' (p. 170). A pride in her strength and agility is stressed throughout the diary, to the extent that it is an indication of an awareness of the traditional stereotype of women and the traditional 'modesty' that women are supposed to feel with regard to their bodies and of the need she feels to contradict such ideas. There is another episode when she is cleaning a rifle and feels that she must do it extremely well, so that the men do not say "voi donne, guarda la ruggine" (p. 86). As Giuliana Beltrami and Mirella Alloisio have noted, it happens often that a woman feels 'la necessità di oltrepassare l'uomo per dimostrargli che lo equivale' (*Volontarie della libertà*,

p. 43). This need, too, will affect the way that a woman behaves and the way that she is able to write about the past. Even if she does not believe in the traditional restricted view of women, it still affects the way she writes about herself and about other women, for she must always be aware of having to justify her contradiction of it. Nancy Miller, in her essay 'Writing Fictions: Women's Autobiography in France', describes autobiographical writing by women as 'at once a treatise on overcoming received notions of femininity and a poetics calling for another, freer text' (in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, p. 50). However, this presumes that a woman who writes can be free of the influence of received notions of femininity. The picture is rarely so simple. Giovanna Zangrandi clearly rejects the idea that women are suited only to domestic life and are rather weak, yet she still seems to have rather stereotypical ideas about a woman's appearance. She says that her father had a face that was 'virile e bello' and that she takes after him, but, despite her pride in her own physique, adds 'quel che in lui fa uomo in me, donna, dà solo spiacevole durezza' (p. 36). She also talks of 'curiosità femminile' (p. 222), attributing this trait only to the one sex in a way that would not be acceptable to many women today.

Moreover, it seems that she could not assert this positive view of women whilst remaining a woman. When she talks of her relationship with Severino, a fellow partisan, she suspects that others believe that

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 una entità inafferrabile, esasperata, selvaggia, forse più per estrema difesa che per vendetta. (pp. 150–51)

She emphasizes this idea of being 'senza sesso' when Severino comments on the way that the life that she is leading is affecting her, 'hai le mani conciate, Anna; tutta sei conciata', and he adds, 'tu non puoi continuare a fare questa vita, non è fatta per una donna, è impossibile anche per noi, ma una donna non può andare avanti così'. This makes her realize that recently she had not thought of herself as a woman, 'fa un certo effetto sentirsi ricordare d'essere una donna, ecco , come

una nostalgia lontana d'inarrivabile infanzia' (p. 183). As we have seen above, she has not forgotten that biologically she is a woman; she is all too aware of this. Rather, it seems she has not been reminded recently of the fact that what she is doing does not fit in with the way that women should be and, as far as most people are concerned, with the way that women are. 'Woman' is no longer something she is, for she does not fit the criteria; rather it is something she dresses up to be. When the Germans are looking for her, she disguises herself, fully aware of the irony of the situation, by putting on a flimsy dress and wearing high heels and make-up! The concept of the active *partigiana*, on the other hand, has no place in accepted truths about women. It is in this respect that Zangrandi comes to describe herself as almost asexual. Susan Stanford Friedman, in her chapter 'Women's Autobiographical Selves', discusses the stereotypes imposed on women and identifies the way that, 'not recognizing themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness — the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription' (in *The Private Self*, p. 39). However, the 'self as culturally defined' has a name, is called 'Woman', but the 'self as different from cultural prescription' does not. It is for this reason too that women were given the job of *staffetta*. They were able to pass through check-points more easily. All women involved in the Resistance were aware of such consequences of received notions about women. Ada Gobetti, for example, comments on one occasion, 'ringraziando, come molte altre volte, la mia qualità di donna, passai tranquillamente in mezzo ai tedeschi' (p. 143) (even if she did not draw any particular conclusions regarding the position of women in society from this). For as everyone knew, women by their very nature would not be doing anything subversive like smuggling arms or delivering clandestine newspapers. Of course, this also made it more dangerous for them, they were outside the rules and truths of society, thus there were no constraints on the kind of treatment that they received if caught. As Severino says to Anna in *I giorni veri*, 'per voi donne è peggio, se vi prendono' (p. 99).

Perhaps this explains to some extent why women were not acknowledged in histories of the Resistance; it was only provisionally accepted that they were there

in the first place. Their behaviour did not fit the truth about women, even though it proved this 'truth' to be a fiction. Those who wrote about women in the Resistance (not including recent studies of a very different nature), seemed to feel the need to confirm that they were still behaving as real women. A rather extreme example, is the preface to *Lettere di condannati a morte della Resistenza italiana 1943-45* (ed. by P. Malvezzi and G. Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1952)), where Enzo Agnoletti writes

e se è vero che le donne hanno fatto tutto quello che si doveva fare, hanno agito come uomini, è anche vero che hanno spesso saputo conservare una nota particolare, una limpidezza di coscienza e quello spirito di semplicità e modestia che portano tanto spesso, in questo paese, nell'adempimento dei loro compiti femminili. (p. 18)

In *Volontarie della libertà*, Alloisio and Beltrami note the way that women have tended either to be compared to men, when being praised for their actions during the Resistance, or else commended for their feminine, almost saintly qualities of self-sacrifice. Giuseppe Gaddi gives an example of this which dates back to the period of the Resistance itself. He quotes from a *volantino* addressed to women of the province of Belluno which appeals to them to continue their acts of great selflessness and go on contributing to the 'opera santa di redenzione e di indipendenza' (*Guerra di popolo nel Veneto: la stampa clandestina nella Resistenza*, (Verona: Bertani Editore, 1975), p. 139). Roberto Cessi, writing considerably later, uses similar language to describe the contribution of women, emphasizing its non-political nature:

encomiabile opera quella femminile, che fra strazi e sacrifici portava non soltanto il viatico d'un aiuto, atteso con ansia, ma anche il conforto d'una parola ristoratrice e incitatrice. Sì che male suona l'interpolazione in quest'opera santa di qualche voce discorde intesa a turbare con inopportuni quanto ingiusti apprezzamenti politici l'armonia di una missione compiuta con serena e coscienziosa abnegazione, senza pregiudizi di sorta, a favore degli umili e degli infortunati da un'eletta schiera di virtuose donne, animate da profondo amor patrio e da alto senso di umanità. (*La Resistenza nel bellunese* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1960), p. 232)

Received notions of womanhood have clearly exerted a great influence both over the way that women have been written about by others and over the way that they have written about themselves. Giovanna Zangrandi was not free from this influence, but she does seem to have had a much less restricted view than other women writing about the same period. There may be a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, *I giorni veri* was published somewhat later than some of the other texts mentioned here. For example, the diaries of Guaita and Gobetti were published in 1957 and 1956 respectively and Bianca Ceva's in 1954. As has already been said, the popular conception of what it is to be a woman has changed considerably over the years, and, given the importance of expectations of readers as well as the kind of 'truths' available to the author herself in a given society, it seems reasonable to presume that Giovanna Zangrandi had a rather freer definition of womanhood open to her in the 1960s compared to the 1940s and 50s.

The process of the emancipation of women began again after the war; many feminists have seen the Resistance as a turning point in this process, especially as shortly afterwards women were given the vote. As Giulietta Ascoli has written, 'l'approvazione degli articoli in cui erano riconosciuti i diritti della donna alla parità e all'uguaglianza fu considerato in quel periodo un successo e una logica conseguenza della larga partecipazione delle donne alla lotta di liberazione' ('L'UDI tra emancipazione e liberazione (1943-64)' in G. Ascoli and others, eds., *La questione femminile in Italia dal '900 ad oggi* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1979), p. 120). However, laws were still biased towards men and when the coalition government formed by the Resistance parties fell, the Christian Democrats urged that everything should return to 'normal', including a return to traditional roles for men and women, and a return to traditional family values. Women's issues seemed to have been shelved. As Ascoli continues, at this time 'ebbe inizio una fase negativa per il movimento femminile,' and 'gran parte degli obiettivi specifici della lotta di emancipazione femminile, già elaborati con chiarezza e slancio furono messi in ombra' (p. 123). The parties of the left which had supported women in their struggle for emancipation now looked to what they saw as more important matters. As Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum writes, 'women's issues [...] were subordinated to the

Pci strategy of not alienating the Dc — until after 1968' (*Liberazione della donna: Feminism in Italy* (Connecticut: Wesley University Press, 1986), p. 53). As she says later, 'the fifties and early 1960s are regarded today by UDI women as a bleak period' (p. 61). Women's groups such as UDI continued to campaign; in the mid-fifties they opened a debate on birth control, in the early sixties they were promoting equal rights in the workplace, and by 1963 they were supporting the right of divorce. Thus it seems likely that there was a greater awareness of women's issues by the time that Giovanna Zangrandi's book was published, but the change would not necessarily have been particularly great, as such matters were not given much attention in Italian politics nor did they provoke much legislative change until after 1968.

It is particularly noticeable that, in later diaries of the Resistance by women, the question of the history of women and the different roles that men and women had during the Resistance is addressed much more directly. For example, Teresa Giacobino's book about the Resistance, *Sta bona Tecla!* (Giacobino Editore, 1978), begins with a preface in which the author says her aim is to show what women did in the Resistance, starting from the premise that, in the past, women have been marginalized and 'l'uomo e la società faticano a comprendere un concetto semplicissimo: che la donna non ha bisogno di protezione ma di comprensione e di giustizia' (p. 7). At the same time, it is interesting that in this work too, written in the late 1970s, there are still some of the same concerns regarding the reputation of women who were involved in the Resistance, and the author feels the need to pre-empt or counter criticism, confirming that 'più di una volta partigiani e staffette dormirono insieme, sullo stesso mucchio di paglia, ma tra di loro vi fu sempre il massimo rispetto' (p. 76).

Rina Chiarini admits in the preface to her diary, *La storia di 'Clara'* (Milan: La Pietra, 1982), that she gave no thought to women's issues at the time of the Resistance, but that she now sees the importance that that period had for women. Other diaries were given a preface that aimed to highlight their importance in terms of women's history. Ida D'Este's *Croce sulla schiena*, mentioned above, was republished in 1979 with an introduction by Mario Rigo, the mayor of Venice, in

which he says the work is being republished in order to honour *partigiane*. Ines Pisoni's work, *Mi chiamerò Serena* (Ravenna: Edizioni del Girasole, 1978), has an introduction by Arrigo Boldrini in which he sees the stereotypes used to describe women as an obstacle that must be overcome and states that the Resistance 'non fu un processo uniforme' for women, but was instead 'difficile e contraddittorio' since 'per i rapporti preesistenti da decenni nelle famiglie per tante ragioni, con un modello di vita sostanzialmente chiuso, non sempre le donne hanno potuto imporre la loro personalità' (p. 9). Nevertheless, he affirms, the contribution of women to the Resistance drew attention to the position of women in society:

la loro entrata in campo ha fatto emergere maggiormente quanto fossero emarginate nella società e sul lavoro. E appunto in molti casi, proprio nel clima arroventato della guerra si venne manifestando la volontà di mettersi in discussione la divisione dei ruoli tra l'uomo e la donna.  
(p. 9)

However, as mentioned earlier, Roberto Cessi's comments on the participation of women in the Resistance display a much more traditional attitude, and even Claudio Pavone's very recent work, which shows a good deal of interest in finding out how women themselves regard this period of their history, is rather ambiguous in some respects.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

The date of publication of *I giorni veri* would seem to have some significance, therefore, and for this reason it is important to differentiate between the protagonist of her book and the narrating self who was subject to these later influences, but the

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<sup>53</sup>For example, although Pavone recognizes that many women were involved in the Resistance, he continues to regard the activities of fighting partisans as the *real* Resistance, and anything else as auxiliary. It is interesting that the place where he deals with issues raised by women's involvement in the Resistance in most detail is in a section entitled 'La violenza' (pp. 413–505). He describes the ambiguous attitude that women had towards taking up arms, characterizing this as the choice between equality or difference. He does not seem to conceive of a possible difference that would not coincide with the traditional, pacifist idea of women. He describes the 'netta scelta di campo' (p. 442), yet continues to talk of a 'duplice atteggiamento verso la lotta armata' (p. 445) on the part of women, which seems more a transference of the confusion and 'contraddizioni maschili' (p. 443) towards fighting women that preoccupied male partisans, than any representation of the experience of women.

changes in attitude by the 1960s do not seem sufficiently great in themselves to explain her freer approach.

The impression we get of Giovanna Zangrandi from *I giorni veri* is, as in her other works, of a woman who is independent and strong-willed and whose sporting ability and courage make her different from the stereotype of woman. As has been seen in previous chapters, she describes herself in such a way as to make it clear that she was remarkably free of other influences in her life. *I giorni veri* is no exception in that respect. By the time she wrote *I giorni veri* she had no surviving family and was not married, and therefore no father, brothers or husband keen to protect her reputation, just as, at the time, she had had no immediate family who might have wished to curb her involvement in the Resistance. Nor, as we have seen in Chapter Two, was she likely to listen to the opinions of the Catholic Church, despite living in an area of Italy where the clergy had a great influence. Silvio Tramontin notes in his essay, 'Contadini e movimento partigiano nelle relazioni dei parroci bellunesi' (*Società rurale e Resistenza nelle Venezie — Atti del convegno di Belluno 24–26 ottobre 1975*, ed. by Istituto Veneto per la Storia della Resistenza (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1978), pp. 277–318), that it was often the clergy who encouraged the *bellunesi*, who were not very motivated politically, to participate in the Resistance. However, not surprisingly, they had reservations about the involvement of women. He quotes one priest who describes a nearby band of partisans, “si arruolano anche donne, da adibirsi quali staffette ed un decina di esse aderiscono al movimento. Con le conseguenze che sono note”, conclude amaramente quel parroco che vedeva soprattutto gli effetti morali nelle giovani costrette a vivere alla macchia' (p. 291). Given Zangrandi's attitude to the Church, it seems likely that she felt immune to the disapproval of the clergy.

At school she taught sciences, and at university she studied chemistry and geology; in this way too, she was going against prevailing attitudes which considered the humanities to be the subjects with the greatest prestige. At one point in *I giorni veri*, one of the partisans who has studied little at school draws perfect maps and she bursts out 'e ti vien di pensare con rabbia a tutti i laureati umanisti e sputacultura che hai sentito dire “non parlarmi di geografia o di tecnica, uccidimi,

ma non ci capisco, non ci capirò mai, mai!”’ (p. 126).

The idea that she was an outsider in Cortina, where she has been living and teaching for a number of years, comes over clearly in *I giorni veri* too. As she notes, ‘noi italiani immigrati’, she says, ‘siamo considerati una *razza* inferiore [...] Con gli oriundi c’è impossibilità di dialogo, soprattutto di amicizia’ (p. 15). She also suggests in this work that she is politically independent too. As noted earlier, she shows considerable admiration for the enthusiasm of other partisans and the inspiration they get from their leader, for ‘la forza e la fiammata garibaldina soffiata dentro di loro da Sandro Garbin’ (p. 134). Nevertheless, she objects to too much political theory and, as she describes it herself in this work, she remained at the margins of political activities. In her account of the Resistance, she does not toe any party line, unlike Viganò and Chiarini who stick firmly to official communist doctrine. Her politics are of a much more general nature; as we have seen, she is motivated by hopes of democracy and freedom in her country. Indeed, in *I giorni veri* she makes the point that she was only partially accepted as a partisan and never allowed to live with the partisan band; she certainly never had the same status as the men. Unlike women such as Guaita and Gobetti, she was never part of the command, but joined the predominantly working-class women who acted as *staffette*. Yet, as a middle-class woman from another area, she was an outsider in this sense too.

There is a further sense in which she may be described as an outsider: in her relationship with the literary world. As has been noted earlier, in her response to Marco Forti’s questions for Mondadori, she insists that artistic and literary concerns are incidental to this work. *I giorni veri* has certainly not been written to please certain literary elites:

non è nemmeno stato scritto per certe sofisticate elite letterarie, nè ambisce ad essere approvato da certe mafie intellettuali (così tra noi periferici le definiamo): una saggezza antica ci ha insegnato a misurare il nostro cammino con i nostri stessi piedi e a non intrigarci e perdere tempo con le isterie paroliere e gli ‘ismi’ di certa gente. (MF2, p. 4)

In Chapter Two we have seen Zangrandi’s scorn for publishing houses, yet also her agony when it seems that her books are not being published. So it seems hardly

likely that *I giorni veri* was written without any regard to what publishers might require. However, it is interesting to note that she does not regard herself as a member of the literary world and was perhaps aware, when writing this letter to her publisher in the early 1960s, that hers was not necessarily the kind of literature in which he would be most interested.

Thus, *I giorni veri* is the story of an individual who is an outsider in a number of ways and who, it is emphasized, regards her individuality as very important. Yet, at the same time, a feeling of community and collaboration is also described as a very significant aspect of her life. The tension between these two needs results in a work that is at once asserting its individuality and difference, and also confirming a sense of belonging. Moreover, the question of truth, as Zangrandi interpreted it and in its relationship to autobiography, is essential to an understanding of *I giorni veri*. As has been seen, Zangrandi considered the Resistance to be 'true' both morally and politically, by contrast with fascism, but also by contrast with postwar Italy; she identifies a certain purity, or integrity, in the Resistance that she did not consider to be present in Italian political life after the war (even if, as mentioned earlier, she does suggest that the Resistance could have been 'cleaner' if it had not been a civil war). She also describes the Resistance as a 'moment of truth' on a personal level, a time when she was put to the test, a turning point in her life, a period when she was entirely devoted to a cause that she continued to believe in. In order to convey this 'moral' truth, she insisted on the 'factual' truth of her account. As shown in this chapter, a closer examination reveals the nature of that moral truth and the way that Zangrandi's particular interpretation of the Resistance shapes *I giorni veri*. It also reveals her attention to the question of women and the Resistance and the contribution that she makes to describing the 'other side' of the Resistance. It emerges that, for Zangrandi, the armed struggle was a time when she undoubtedly enjoyed greater freedoms from the usual constraints put on women by society, and that some of that freedom seems to have persisted in the writing of her account, but that, nevertheless, her autobiography of the Resistance was necessarily moulded, not only by her own stated priorities, but also by the society in which she was writing.

## Conclusion

As Chapter Five has shown, the relationship between autobiography, fiction and history in *I giorni veri* is a complex one. Telling the truth about the past cannot be as straightforward as Zangrandi claimed in her preface; there is always some kind of distortion, and a written account in many ways has to be a 'ricostruzione romanzesca'. What emerges is inevitably a subjective version of the truth, but that does not necessarily make it fiction. For it is also clear that our very way of understanding the past, of recounting and making sense of events, seems to rely on the same kind of distortions, if indeed they can be called distortions, given that we do not have any access to an undistorted version. Authors of autobiography maintain that they are telling the truth and, as readers, we are prepared to accept what we read as the truth, if under certain conditions. The subjective nature of autobiographical accounts is not always immediately evident. The differences have emerged in this case through a close study of Zangrandi's interpretation of history and by a comparison of her account with other diaries and historical studies of the Resistance. It has been possible to examine how these different versions of the truth arose and what contradictions they contain, as individuals form their own particular versions of the truth in response to the different beliefs and accepted values to which they have been exposed.

Accounts of the Resistance written by women have highlighted gaps in male versions of the truth found in previous historical studies. Zangrandi's own diary is particularly interesting as she was not subject to the same influences as many other women who have written about this period and was keen to assert her independence. Zangrandi's approach to writing, and to writing about the Resistance in particular, meant that she was less concerned to seek the approval of others and she was used to the idea that she did not fit in. That gave her greater freedom both in her actions and in her writing. Moreover, she used her writing in *I giorni veri* as a means of establishing and asserting the independence both of her actions in the past as a partisan and as a writer, writing that diary. Whereas other writers of such diaries have shown greater concern, whether conscious or not on their

part, to fit in with conventional ideas, by its nature, *I giorni veri* aimed to reject those influences that would have been working on other authors. In this way, Zangrandi was able to describe her experiences in a rather less contradictory manner that seems much closer to present-day attitudes towards women. Yet, at the same time, Zangrandi was very concerned about the reception of her work; *I giorni veri* is a work that aimed to be understood and to influence the young with its moral message about the sacrifices of the Resistance, and, for all her comments about the literary world, she obviously wished it to be published too. Moreover, she had a particular image of herself that she wished to project through *I giorni veri*. Her diary was shaped by the priorities she had in writing about the partisan struggle and the truth that she perceived as inherent to the Resistance and, though freer in her interpretation of what it is to be a woman, she was still limited by the possible meanings available to her; her very individual truth was inevitably constrained by the truths and fictions of her historical and cultural context.

As has been demonstrated, Zangrandi described the Resistance as a turning point in her own life, and in that of her country's, and such a view confers special status on *I giorni veri* when considered amongst Zangrandi's works. Nevertheless, as it has been possible to show in previous chapters, with the first comprehensive study of Zangrandi's life and works, the priorities that are evident in her writing of *I giorni veri* are also major themes in her other work. Despite the fact that she interpreted the Resistance as a period in which she underwent a significant change in attitude towards herself and the world around her, there was considerable continuity in her writing, with regard both to the subjects she chose to write about and to her interpretation of history and of her own life. The interplay between history, fiction and autobiography is present throughout her work and, as for *I giorni veri*, a close study of that relationship has given a number of insights not only into Zangrandi's writing, but also into the contexts in which she was writing and the periods she described.

In *I giorni veri*, Zangrandi insisted on the historical truth of what she had written and, in presenting the events of a particular period, aimed to show the broader implications of those events. Her concern with history is expressed no less

keenly elsewhere and manifested itself both in an interest in writing history, and in the way that she gave her fictional works very defined historical settings. Zangrandi pointed to a direct relationship between fiction and real life and considered that writers should show a commitment to the world around through their writing. Such an attitude applied equally to her autobiography. Much of it, like *I giorni veri*, tended to be outward looking in the further sense that, when writing about herself, she was acting as a witness to historical events, whether they were those of the fascist period or the Resistance, or of the years immediately following the war. In this way, she demonstrated a commitment to the past that was also a commitment to creating a more equitable society in the present time. Moreover, as has been demonstrated, throughout her work she gave particular emphasis to the lives of women. She showed a constant interest in women, in the inequalities to which they were subjected, and in their own, distinct traditions. Her writing was thus also a means of drawing attention to the unfair treatment of women and of asserting a more positive, active image of them. In this respect, Zangrandi's work not only gives us important historical information about the lives of women and the difficulties they faced, under fascism, during and after the war, but, when considered in the light of recent feminist literary criticism, also offers significant insights into the question of women and writing in those specific contexts.

As has been seen, although Zangrandi was interested in society at large, when writing about various historical periods, she was always referring to the history of one region: the Cadore. In writing about that area, Zangrandi aimed to create a well-defined picture of the physical world and of the *cadorini*. From the mountains with their beauty and danger, to the people with their simple and honest approach to life, combined with an heroic and democratic tradition, that picture remains constant in her work and it is an image unique amongst Italian writers. Even when, under fascism, the qualities she was describing took on a wider significance in the context of fascist propaganda, her concern for the welfare of the *cadorini* and the strain of their daily lives was the feature that emerged most strongly. Her anti-bourgeois sentiments, linked strongly to an appreciation of the lower class *cadorini*, were evident both in her journalism during fascism and after

the war, as was the idea that the *cadorini* could be seen as some kind of ideal, offering hope for the future. That theme is most blatant in her early articles, where the idea is couched in fascist terms referring to heroism, patriotism and national characteristics, but may also be detected later in her description of the Resistance and, in her fiction, in *I Brusaz*, where Sabina's qualities of love and stoicism offer a way forward. Nevertheless, such an attitude towards the people of the Cadore was always balanced by a recognition of the difficulty of life there, even when she was writing under the restrictions of fascism. Later, in her post-war writing, she also acknowledged the divisions caused by fascism and the Resistance, so that, while her view of society had elements of idealism, it was tempered by an awareness of the realities of everyday life. It is significant that, even when writing about herself, the periods that she chose to write about afterwards were, to a great extent, those that she identified as important to the people of the Cadore.

If her autobiography was outward-looking, however, at the same time it remained a description of her own life as well as of the world around her and was an attempt at self-analysis, or, as has been seen, at self-creation. Indeed, as has been shown by an analysis of her work within the context of theoretical discussions of autobiography, at certain points, her writing inevitably crossed the blurred line between autobiography and fiction, to become invention rather than recollection. Ironically, however, this was one of the aspects that most strongly linked her autobiography to a specific historical context. As described in Chapter Five, there are elements of fiction within *I giorni veri*, but a more obvious fiction that emerges is the one described in Chapter Two regarding her childhood. Although it is true that her attention was turned inwards, in order to describe her early years, yet her portrayal of herself was still very much connected to her interpretation of the historical and cultural context of the Cadore. She always emphasized that she belonged to that area, to the extent, as has been seen, of inventing a childhood and a kind of female ancestry for herself there. She stressed the idea throughout that these were *her* people; it is also significant that where her writing is not autobiographical, the narrator is one of the community and events are described from within, as it were. The very fact that her writing was always set in that area

meant that she created a link between the Cadore and herself, but, as has been seen, she took it further, identifying herself with the characters, history and traditions of the *cadorini*. As suggested above, her interpretation of her own experience of the Resistance is intimately connected to her assessment of its importance to the *cadorini* and her broader historical interpretation of the period. The setting of her writing became part of a personal agenda to rediscover and re-invent herself. Their ideals, as she identifies them, were her ideals, their environment the place where she felt most at home, and their traditions were the ones she chose to adopt.

One of the more significant traditions of the Cadore that Zangrandi can be seen to have identified and adopted was that of story-telling itself. She collected the stories of the *cadorini* and included them, and references to them, in her fiction and autobiography. As has been described in Chapter Four, she was influenced by the oral story-telling tradition and it is clear that she attributed great value to stories both as entertainment and education. Zangrandi wrote for a purpose, and she had a message she wished to convey, but she never lost sight of the pleasure of reading. Even in *I giorni veri*, where the urge to convey the truth in all its forms about the Resistance took precedence, the demands of literature and the importance of creating a work that involves the reader were never forgotten. For Zangrandi, stories were the key to understanding the past, including her own past, and provided lessons for the future. Such an attitude can be found in her writing, from the articles she wrote for *Dolomiti* in the early 1940s through to her last publications. As has been noted, story-telling is also an important element in the realism of *I Brusaz*.

In this way, Zangrandi attributed great importance to recounting history and lived experience, and her ideas in that regard were very much linked to the value she perceived in the traditions and way of life of the *cadorini*, and to her commitment to a better society, for women in particular. As a result, she produced a unique picture of that area of Italy and its female population in the first half of this century. At the same time, by placing her writing in its historical context, and by taking account of critical debates regarding women and history, women and writing and the theory of autobiography, we gain access to a clearer picture of

the way that her history and autobiography were conditioned by the contexts in which she was writing, and by attitudes towards women. It also becomes clear that such works necessarily contained fictional elements. But Zangrandi was a writer of fiction too, and, although, as this thesis has shown, fiction inevitably intrudes into her autobiography, it should be remembered that fiction and story-telling had great importance for her, for she did not see them as belonging to a world removed from that of everyday lived experience, but rather as an integral part of real life that she saw as vital to an understanding of both the world and herself.

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