A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES IN ENGLISH AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS IN ITALIAN AND FRENCH.
J. WINTERSON, A.S. BYATT AND JAMAICA KINCAID:
THREE CASE STUDIES

Submitted by ELIANA MAESTRI

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath
Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies
October 2011

Copyright

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with the author. A copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that they must not copy it or use material from it except as permitted by law or with the consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three contemporary autobiographical narratives – Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), A.S. Byatt’s *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987) and Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) – and their Italian and French translations. My comparative analyses of the texts are underpinned by the latest developments in Translation Studies that place emphasis on identity construction in translation and the role of translation in moulding various types of identity. They focus on how the writers’ textual personae make sense of their sexual, artistic and postcolonial identities in relation to the mother and how the mother-daughter relationship survives translation into the Italian and French social, political and cultural contexts. My Introduction outlines my methodology and approach. Theo Hermans (1999) has provided me with a model capable of encompassing Descriptive Translation Studies and cultural analysis. Recent studies on the mother-daughter relationship have offered the framework of analysis of the female characters. The six chapters that follow show how each Target Text activates different cultural, literary, linguistic and rhetorical frames of reference which bring into relief the facets of the protagonist’s quest for identity that might be hidden or ambiguous in the Source Text: religious icons and the cult of the Madonna; humour and irony; gender and class; mimesis and storytelling; spatial representations and geographical sense of self; narrative performance and performativity; negativity and women’s strength. Whereas the French translation of *Oranges* highlights the interplay of gender and class, the Italian version brings into focus the religious and political constraints on the protagonist’s quest. The Italian and French translations of ‘Sugar’ emphasize Byatt’s fictional explorations of the maternal artistic model. The French version of *Autobiography* normalizes orality and performativity; the Italian one enhances complex aspects of negativity. This thesis highlights the fruitfulness of studying women’s narratives and their translations and the polyphonic dialogue between the translations and the literary and theoretical productions of the French and Italian cultures.
For Adalgisa

with love, admiration and respect
Il sole se n'è andato

Non tornerà che domani

Domani se n'è andato

Non tornerà che col sole.

(Daniele Morresi)
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ix

## INTRODUCTION

1

0.1 Identity Construction in/through Translation

1

0.2 Approach and Methodology

6

0.3 Overview of the Chapters

11

## CHAPTER ONE

Assessing Irony, Characterization and Religion in the Italian Translation of Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 18

1.1 Introduction: The Success of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and the Study of *Non ci sono solo le arance* 18

1.2 Humorous and Ironic Depictions of the Mother Figure 21

1.3 The Italian Rendition of the Mother’s Religious Vocation 30

1.4 Collocative Clashes and the Allotropic Nature of the Mother 42

1.5 The Body, Gender Roles and Transvestism in the Italian and English Texts 52

1.6 Conclusion 59

## CHAPTER TWO

Recodification of Class and Gender in the French Translation of Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 61

2.1 Introduction: Adoption and Class in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* 61

Eliana Maestri

Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The Mother's Social Class and Status: Limited Possibilities, Hoarding, Envy and Rituals</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The Mother's Position in Relation to the Working Class: Repulsion and Disassociation from Corruption and Pathology</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 The Regulation of Motherhood, Power and Ethics</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 The Maternal Precepts: Class Mobility and Female Emancipation</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 The Daughter's Principles and Attitude to Issues of Class</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER THREE**

The Passion for the Real: Empowering Maternal Precepts in the Italian Translations of A.S. Byatt's Short Stories 106

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction: Gendered Reality and Problematization of Truth in Diotima</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 'Sugar' and the Untruthful Mother</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Stories, Tales, Narratives and Accounts versus Racconto and Resoconto</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Fabricated Lies and Truths</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The Mother’s Realism</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 The Art of Knitting</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Byatt’s Self-Conscious Realism</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Sensory Adjectives: Pink and White</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Sensory Adjectives: Soft versus Morbido and Soffice</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Princesses and Goddesses: Their Gendered Symbolism in Italian</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Conclusion</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR

Dialogic Spaces and Intertextual Resonances in the French Translation of A.S Byatt’s Autobiographical Story ‘Sugar’ 152

4.1 Introduction: Autobiography/Autofiction Querelle Revisited 152
4.2 The Mirror Stage as Deictic Space of Interrelational Explorations 158
4.3 The Iconicity of the House as the Transitional Mother-Daughter Space 167
4.4 Open Spaces and the Semiotic Chora in the Mother’s Tales 175
4.5 Conclusion 191

CHAPTER FIVE

Jamaica Kincaid’s Autobiografía di mia madre: Voices from the Abyss 195

5.1 Introduction: Gloom and Doom in Kincaid’s The Autobiography of My Mother 195
5.2 Definitions of the Negative and Its Significance in Kincaid and Diotima 200
5.3 The Political Significance of Chiasmus and Litote in Autobiografía 205
5.4 Mises-en-abyme and Patterns of Redundancy in Source Text and Target Text 210
5.5 Muraro’s ‘complesso’ and Autobiografía 221
5.6 The Magical Powers of the Abyss 227
5.7 Conclusion 239

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
## Table of Contents

**CHAPTER SIX**  
Orality, Performativity and the Body in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Autobiographie de ma mère*  

6.1 Introduction: Orality in African-Caribbean Storytelling 242  

6.2 The Narrative and Theatrical Performance in English and French 244  

6.3 A Butlerian Approach to the Narrator’s Performance in English and French 262  

6.4 Writing the Mother’s Face 274  

6.5 Conclusion 282  

**CONCLUSION** 284  

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** 295
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Adalgisa Giorgio and Nina Parish, my supervisors, for their immense support and guidance. In particular, I am grateful to Adalgisa for her invaluable help, both academic and personal. Adalgisa is my role model and I admire her dedication and passion for her research and these values have guided me steadily along this journey. Adalgisa is my ‘maestra di dottorato e di vita’ and I feel I have been very lucky to have her as my supervisor and friend. She has taught me to read women’s writing, to appreciate women’s strength and to value my own strengths and complexity. For this, I am also grateful to Nina who has helped me believe in my abilities.

A number of people have assisted me in completing this PhD thesis: my ex-colleagues and fellow postgraduate students at the University of Bath, and my current colleagues in the Italian Sub-Faculty at the University of Oxford. In particular, I am grateful to Ela Tandello whose love and care have been immensely important and helpful throughout the last stage of my PhD.

I would like to thank my family, my mother and my beloved father who will always live in my heart. Chiara (Pinotto), Cinzia (Cizzy), Donatella, Elena (Genzy), Federica (Fenzy), Nadia and Sonia as well as Eraldo, Matteo (Metiu) and Fabio have been great: I can really say that true friendship exists and your love and support have been invaluable.

Finally, I would like to thank Gavin for his love, care and patience. The poem that opens this PhD thesis contains the hope that light will accompany your life forever.
INTRODUCTION

0.1 Identity Construction in/through Translation

In the past, translation was considered as a secondary activity rather than a genuine mode of writing. In order to preserve the deep sense of the text, the so-called ‘reine Sprache’ (Eco 2001: 10), translators were not expected to alter the literal significance of the cultural references in which the original text was framed. However, new conceptual paradigms have been animating Translation Studies since the 1990s. Scholars (Bassnett 1998; Bassnett 2002, orig. 1980; Gentzler 1993; Munday 2001; Snell-Hornby 2006) have identified in this decade the blossoming of Translation Studies into a proper interdisciplinary. They speak of a ‘cultural turn’ as well as of a cross-fertilization to emphasize both the productive contribution of Cultural Studies and the new focus of Translation Studies on cultural, political and gender issues (in addition to linguistic and philosophical matters that had attracted scholars’ attention before the 1990s). These latest trends have placed special emphasis on identity construction in translation. The aspects discussed range from considerations of professional identities, such as translators’, to the role of translation in moulding various types of identity or the impact of certain identities and institutions on the outcome of translation.

I wrote my undergraduate dissertation at the University of Parma, Italy, during this effervescent period. Translation Studies represented for me a new and stimulating discipline which offered exciting tools to conduct research on negotiations of identity through a range of sites and, in particular, literature. I chose to work on the French translation of ‘Sugar’ (1995, orig. 1987), an autobiographical short story by British author A.S. Byatt, and I focused on the imaginary dialogue and love relationship between real and fictional personae, namely the translator and the character of the mother, which I believed underpinned it. I was fascinated by the attention and care that the French translator appeared to have devoted specifically to the female characters and by

Eliana Maestri
Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
the ensuing revised interrelational dynamics between daughter, mother and grandmother within the text. My approach, which straddled the fields of Women’s Studies and Translation Studies, made visible the role of ethics and love in the reconstruction of gender as a culture-bound concept.

As I intended to explore further the ethical, ideological and political complexities in the recreation of fictional identities in translation and, at the same time, to study contemporary women’s writing, I developed a doctoral project that could allow me to pursue my interest in Translation Studies and Gender Studies through an analysis of Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (2001, orig. 1985), A.S. Byatt’s *Sugar and Other Stories* (1995, orig. 1987) and Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and their translations into Italian and French. I selected these texts because all three are autobiographical narratives focusing on the protagonists’ quest for identity, a quest in which the mother-daughter bond is fundamental. All these texts and translations were published at a time when, both in theoretical writings and in women’s narratives, the mother-daughter relationship had gained much ground and was considered as ‘the dominant structuring principle of female identity in Western cultures’ (Giorgio 2002a: 7). I therefore decided to use this illuminating and informative material to cast light first of all on the specificity of this bond in Source Texts (STs) and Target Texts (TTs) and secondly on the intertextual dialogue between the theoretical resources and primary texts. I was confronted with a rich theoretical and narrative output which reflected upon motherhood, as one of the most important institutions for women and for society, and the maternal, as a crucial component in the formation of female identity and in the exploration of gendered writing.

The fundamental theoretical and critical texts on the subject are *The Mother/Daughter Plot* by Marianne Hirsch (1989) and *Writing Mothers and Daughters*, edited by Adalgisa Giorgio (2002e). Both take as their point of departure the idea that the mother-daughter bond is, to use Adrienne Rich’s words, ‘the great unwritten story’ (1976: 225) and, as a consequence, both aim to

_Eliana Maestri_  
_Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011_
give voice to the mother, who has been unjustly silenced, misrepresented and ideologically regulated or idealized by patriarchy and heterosexuality for centuries. They offer sophisticated and in-depth analysis of literary productions and reflect upon how mothers and motherhood have been constructed and represented in fiction (as well as, in Hirsch’s case, in non-fiction). Both scholars acknowledge the difficulties and the challenges posed by such objectives, because appreciating the intrinsic value of mothers and motherhood entails facing collective ghosts. Hirsch and Giorgio state the need to override a long tradition of writers and philosophers who have marginalized mothers by dispossessing them of the central role they play in the formation of subjectivity and gendered identity. Hirsch sets psychoanalytical texts against fictional works and uses Freud’s reading of the Oedipus complex to show that the kind of ‘family romance’ that nineteenth-century novels depict revolves around the overshadowing of the mother in favour of the husband. In examining the significance of the theoretical (feminist and non-feminist) apparatus which could help scholars shed light upon the mechanisms of silencing and disassociation, Hirsch advocates an in-depth revision of the methodologies employed to date to approach representations of motherhood and the mother-daughter dyad. Taking her cue from Hirsch, Giorgio opens the way to new challenging strategies of assessing the mother-daughter bond in fiction. In particular Writing Mothers and Daughters goes beyond psychoanalysis and focuses on how socio-political, economic and cultural differences impinge upon the mother-daughter bond and the perception of the maternal legacy in fictional explorations of identity.

Inspired by these books and encouraged by the need to enrich my knowledge of this controversial subject of feminist inquiry, I set myself the task of taking further Giorgio’s framework and, at the same time, of contributing to the interdisciplinary debate on identity re/production in translation. A comparative analysis of autobiographical narratives by women writers and their Italian and French translations would give me the opportunity to investigate the interplay between mothers and daughters and the ideology, cultural dis/values and discursive constructions at work in the different versions of the texts. I, therefore, embarked
upon an exploration of how the female protagonists are characterized in the Source Texts, how their identity is reconstructed in the French and Italian translations and, at the same time, how the political, ideological and cultural references and implications remap the interaction between mothers and daughters and the negotiation of their bond in translation. In so doing, I hoped to contribute to the critical debate around translation and gender and fill the gap which Translation Studies and Gender Studies have not succeeded in bridging to date. The aforementioned ‘cultural turn’ in Translation Studies had encouraged some scholars to look for potential benefits in the intersection between translation theories and feminist theories (Arroyo 1999; Munday 2001; Palusci 2011; Santaemilia 2005, Simon 1996, Snell-Hornby 2006; von Flotow 1997). This fruitful cross-fertilization led some others to investigate translation as a feminist practice, the feminization of translation and, especially, the gendered identity of the translator (Bellessi 2002; Golavar 2009; Leonardi 2007; Taronna 2006). Most critical works were concerned with the translation of sensitive sex-related terminology, the cross-cultural transfer of feminist experimental writing in translation and, even, the application of the translators’ feminist agenda to the manipulation of fiction.¹ Whereas scholars focused on such crucial identities and institutions as writers, translators and publishing houses in the creation and recreation of gender-oriented texts and translations, they did not consider (or not sufficiently) the dynamics among fictional characters within the texts and, above all, the convergence of ideological and cultural factors in the representations of the subjectivity of mothers and daughters in translation. Considering the visibility that the mother-daughter bond had been acquiring since the 1970s (Giorgio 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d) and the growing significance attributed to this dyad

¹ Mary Snell-Hornby claims that the work done in Translation Studies and Feminism is still poor and would need further research: ‘whereas postcolonial studies flourished during the course of the decade [1990s] and was soon “imported” into research on translation, interest in feminist perspective largely remained limited to those feminists (immediately) concerned, and in European Translation Studies this field of research was for years more or less ignored. There is a conspicuous lack of contributions on feminist aspects of the discipline in the journals TextConText, Target, and The Translator and there is no relevant entry in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies’ (2005: 101).
not only in Women’s Studies but in the exploration of the formation of personhood in women’s writing, there was a definite need to study these issues of feminist inquiry and the dynamics they enact in translation.

The area which could serve my purposes very well (and in which I felt I could also make an original contribution) was the interconnection between two fundamental concepts of Translation Studies and Gender Studies, a vital and productive space which is still not fully explored between functional equivalence and cultural identity. The former (which will be examined in Chapter One) aims to produce results in translation which serve the same function as the original. The latter can be defined as:

one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall 2006: 435)

In the past scholars claimed source and target cultures achieved functional equivalence, and translatability, if they shared the same Weltanschauung, as Humboldt defined it. Namely if they shared the same systems of representation or discursive constructions that, as Stuart Hall (2006) or Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (1999) explain, people associated with a social group or community. If we apply these theories, which strike at the core of the ‘cultural turn’ in Translation Studies in the 1990s, to any autobiographical text focusing on identity, we may find ourselves wondering to what extent autobiographies are ‘translatable’. If the autobiographical persona relates to ideological principles and systems of representations of his/her culture, what kind of outcome does this dialogue produce in translation? This issue is particularly relevant when translation obliges the autobiographical persona and the translator to confront new
and/or revised systems of representation at work in the target culture and/or activated by the implied readership. This becomes even more complex when the autobiographical persona is a daughter who reflects upon herself and upon her position in the world in relation to her mother, who, as Nancy J. Chodorow claims (1978; 1989), represents the social as well as the psychological institution central to the development of the daughter’s personality. As mentioned above, mothers do not only/simply mother, but they also pass onto their daughters consciously or unconsciously crucial psychological, ethical and socio-political precepts, inevitably shaping their gendered substratum. Thus the analysis of the reconceptualization of the socio-political and ethical institutions that mothers represent in translation and their significance for the personal development of the daughter (and autobiographical persona) becomes fundamental and necessary. The need for such an investigation is confirmed by the high number of translators and academics who have called for an in-depth study of autobiography and for suitable and fair linguistic and cultural renderings of its complexity.²

0.2 Approach and Methodology

My study of translation as a cultural phenomenon is not solely process-oriented, it is also product-oriented. It does not focus on the translation strategies in order to understand the translator’s approach, or the translating process, although this is not excluded from the analysis. It focuses on the final product, the translated book, and the stylistic dynamics within it (Boase-Beier 2006). This reading of translation allows me to consider the linguistic shifts³ that I have identified through my comparative analysis as valuable cultural and ideological data. These

² Further justification for such a theoretical move is to be found in recent market considerations on the large number of requests and productions of translations and retranslations of autobiographies into various languages.

³ In my work, I have endorsed Popović’s definition of shift, namely ‘all that appears as new with respect to the original, or fails to appear where it might have been expected’ (quoted in Marco 2009: 70).
data have not been used to investigate the translators’ personal, cognitive and/or social reasons behind their choices and strategies. They have been used to assess how their Target Texts have recontextualized motherhood as a private and political institution and the consequences of this recontextualization on the daughter’s personal and psychological development. They have also been used to situate the translations in relation to the theoretical and literary productions on mothers and daughters of their receiving Italian and French cultures. To this aim, the descriptive-explanatory approach to translation shifts has helped me identify, classify and explain the variations (and, in some cases, the similarities) between Source Texts and Target Texts. This approach, which was introduced by James Holmes in 1972 and later revised by Gideon Toury in 1995, replaced the prescriptive practice of assessing translations against ideal or idealized solutions as if in a ‘vacuum’, namely without considering the socio-cultural constraints with which translations are normally confronted. Unlike the former approach, the descriptive-explanatory method comprises two main stages which help scholars factor a number of cultural, ideological and normative elements into their analysis. The first stage takes the form of a descriptive component, namely a surface description of the information units that make up the texts; the second is represented by an explanatory component by means of which the scholar explains the nature of the identified shifts and the norms governing them in a systematic and organized manner. Toury defines translation norms as practices, conventions or instructions ‘directing the decisions made during the act of translation itself’ (Toury 2000: 202). In my own case, by exploring the conventions that regulate textual productions and translations, I have obtained additional background knowledge which has helped me delineate relevant cultural frames of reference and historical specificities in the Target Texts and anticipate target readerships’ responses.

Lists and arrangements of the translation shifts into various classifications are part of this systematic approach to Source and Target Texts and they help the scholar identify useful trends and patterns. I have drawn, in particular, on those scholars who, availing themselves of the descriptive-explanatory methodologies I have just...
Introduction

outlined, suggest strategies for the identification of patterns of shifts (Baker 1992; Cragie et al. 2000; Faini 2008; Fawcett 1997; Laviosa 2005; Taylor 1998). In my work, I have grouped and analyzed constant features: cohesive alterations that repeat themselves throughout the individual Target Texts and that, because of their visible and interconnected recurrences, impinge upon the macro-structure of the translations and their content. On account of the varying nature of the shifts that I have identified, I had to strike a balance between qualitative and quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is thematic and focuses on conspicuous shifts, often of a semantic nature, impinging upon the macro-structure of the text. Quantitative analysis is language-oriented and looks at recurrent shifts (of a linguistic but also of a semantic nature) that escalate through the text bringing about macro-structural changes in cohesion and coherence. For instance, in Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and its translations it has emerged that qualitative aspects of some shifts outweigh the quantitative ones. On the other hand, I have found that Byatt’s short stories require a different sampling strategy, i.e. quantitative strategy, because of the recurrence of specific words. Most of my chapters, however, show an underlying alternation of sampling strategies combining qualitative and/or quantitative approaches.

The methodological framework that I have developed integrates Maria Tymoczko’s bottom-up and top-down approaches. Research carried out by means of a bottom-up approach discovers contextual effects on the basis of text-presented information at the micro level of the word and sentence. Research that employs a top-down approach relies on contextual information to analyze linguistically words and sentences. Tymoczko’s research method is aimed at connecting two infinite orders:

> in a sense two new infinite orders have opened up: the virtually inexhaustible possibilities suggested by segmenting texts into smaller and smaller linguistic units, and the equally inexhaustible possibilities suggested by the relationship of texts to layer upon layer of context, including the context of other texts. (2002: 11)
These two interconnected approaches require the support of various disciplines. As Tymoczko explains, ‘if we look at the domains opened up by turning a microscope on language, we would have to include fields such as [...] comparative linguistics’ (2002: 12). If, however, ‘we turn to the macroscopic investigations of language and text’ (2002: 12), we would have to include semiotics, sociolinguistics and intertextuality, to name but a few. In order to analyze various types of translation shifts, I have developed an interdisciplinary approach drawing on translation theories, linguistics, stylistics, narratology, discourse analysis as well as literary criticism, psychoanalytic theories, cultural, genre and gender studies. All these disciplines have been necessary to combine analysis carried out at the level of the word and sentence (as in stylistics and linguistics) with analysis carried out at the level of the texts and themes. Psychoanalytic theories, narratological observations, translation hypothesis and cultural contextualization have therefore been employed to cast light on and explain linguistic differences and/or similarities between Source and Target Texts. In developing such an eclectic approach, I have also complied with Mona Baker’s earlier view that research in Translation Studies should ‘draw on a variety of discourses and disciplines’ (Baker 1996: 10).

Tymoczko concludes the illustration of her methodological approach by claiming that ‘the best work shows a convergence – working toward the macroscopic from the direction of the microscopic, or vice versa, so that one’s data from the macroscopic level are complemented and confirmed by data from the microscopic level’ (2002: 17). Because Tymoczko does not explain in detail how to obtain this convergence, I have followed a model extensively used within the field of Descriptive Translation Studies and suggested by Theo Hermans. Hermans offers a very useful framework by adopting Toury’s icon of the spiral:

this movement from the general to the particular and back again to the general corresponds to the scheme later proposed by Toury (1995) in which ‘discovery procedures’ spiral down from the translation’s outward presentation to the detailed confrontation of source and target texts (or sections thereof), followed by ‘justification procedures’
which climb up again from translation units and first-level tentative
generalizations to overall correspondences between the texts in
questions, before finally locating the translation in relation to existing
texts and concepts of translation. (1999: 66-67)

Hermans’s model, based on a general-to-particular-to-general movement, has
been ideal for my research, which, requires continuous movement between
textual, contextual and paratextual information. At the same time, it has provided
a warrant against the ever-present risk of projecting theoretical notions and other
background information onto textual evidence. The model consists of six stages.
The first is the discovery stage, whereby the researcher investigates
characterization strategies in original and translated texts, integrates these initial
results with preliminary contextual information, formulates initial research
questions and, at the same time, preselects representative fragments or units. The
second stage is a manual stage and includes a detailed confrontation, at the micro-
level, of words and sentences of Source and Target Texts. This stage identifies
shifts (or alterations) in translation and verifies whether they become recurrent
patterns and trends at the textual level. The third stage is the justification stage,
which accompanies the description of these shifts with the explanation of their
linguistic and semantic causes. The fourth is the tentative generalizations stage
which extends and integrates the analytical results obtained in the previous stage
with contextual information. The fifth stage is the overall correspondences stage,
whereby the researcher investigates the patterns (or accumulations) of shifts to see
whether they are linguistically and/or semantically incisive and whether they
trigger higher-order shifts of characterization, overall message or goals (or
skopos)\(^4\) of the text. At this stage the researcher is also able to infer translation
strategies and techniques adopted within the translated texts in the light of the
patterns of shifts detected in the previous stage. Conclusions on functional and

\(^4\) For an in-depth examination of the skopos theory, namely the study of a specific purpose of a
translation, produced for a particular recipient and in a particular situation, see Nord (1997).
pragmatic equivalence (the correspondences) between the compared texts are also drawn in order to ascertain whether the translations are designed to achieve the same goal as the original texts. The last stage in Hermans’s model is the locating stage whereby the researcher reverts to his/her findings in order to locate the translation in relation to existing texts and concepts of translation. By means of an overview of my chapters, I will now show how I have endeavoured to follow these steps in my research and how I have brought the theories mentioned above to bear on my chosen texts.

0.3 Overview of the Chapters

I started with my research on Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit. My first step was to read the three texts in parallel, namely the English original and the French and Italian translations at same time. I thus realized that this method was casting light only on linguistic shifts. When I then proceeded to read each translation only in relation to its original, namely independently of the other translation, applying Hermans’s icon of the spiral, I found that their specific cultural aspects were brought more into focus. It emerged that the translations were artefacts in their own right and were strongly grounded in their socio-cultural context. I therefore adopted this method also for the other two novels. My thesis consists of six chapters, each chapter being devoted to one translation and the original text. Each chapter shows that each translation sets in high relief specific cultural, political and ideological aspects which comprise: religious icons (for instance, the cult of the Madonna); gender and class consciousness; negativity and women’s strength; mimesis and storytelling; spatial representations and a geographical sense of self; narrative performance and performativity. Each chapter focuses on each text’s cultural specificity. The latter is closely intertwined with style and narrative format as well as with gender and psychoanalytic issues running transversally throughout the thesis. The feminist concepts produced by Diotima, the Verona-based female philosophical community, have been particularly useful to contextualize the Italian translations of Byatt’s ‘Sugar’ in Chapter Three and Kincaid’s The Autobiography of My Mother in Chapter Five, and to situate these
texts within the Italian feminist criticism on mothers and daughters. Theories of performance and performativity are employed in Chapter One to explore the interconnection of the burlesque and transvestism with the representation of the mother figure. In Chapter Six they help to bring into relief the corporeality of the maternal body caught within the deictic space of the mirror. Mirrors and representations of the physical space between mother-daughter are closely analyzed in Chapters Five and Six, but they are particularly developed in Chapter Three which looks at the mother-daughter intersubjective space. Paratexts, whose relevance has been illustrated for instance by Genette (1997, orig. 1987), prove to be particularly useful in justifying my approach to the French translation of ‘Sugar’ and to the Italian translation of The Autobiography of My Mother, in Chapters Four and Five respectively.

Chapter One shows the impact of domestic, religious and patriarchal frames of reference on the characterization and reading of the mother-daughter bond in the 1997 Italian translation of Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit. I draw on studies on Catholicism and Protestantism to explain the particular brand of religiosity embodied by this mother and, especially, her idol: the Madonna. I also avail myself of studies on cognitive linguistics and irony to analyze to what extent the Italian characterization of the mother differs linguistically from the mother in the original English. The gradual integration of initial findings with contextual information on Mariology leads me to question the extent to which the translation is informed by Catholic ethics and whether this ethics flattens the ironic tone of the original by bringing about new political reconfigurations. The chapter focuses on the different roles attributed to the mother in the two texts and uncovers the mother’s resistance to patriarchy (despite her genuine religious devotion) in the Source Text and the mother’s loss of attributes related to the ‘militant’ Madonna in the Target Text. The chapter looks at ideologically loaded terms relating to the mother’s public activism as well as her domestic role and shows, for instance, that in Italian her public role is downplayed while her private role is enhanced. Not only is the tone of the Italian version less ironic and more serious, but also the intratextual links with the mother’s fictional alter egos (introduced into the
embedded fairy tales) are loosened. These alter egos are employed in the original to reflect upon the maternal body as a stage of gender performances (a topic which will also be explored in Chapter Six). The role model that the mother represents for homosexual Jeanette in the English text is distorted in Italian.

Whereas Chapter One reveals that the Italian translation brings into focus the religious and political constraints which weigh on the protagonist’s quest for homosexual identity, Chapter Two demonstrates that the French translation of Oranges (published in 1991) highlights the interplay of gender and class as constraints on the protagonist’s quest for identity. This chapter engages with autobiographical narratives of working-class mothers from 1970s England to clarify the mother’s class (and sense of class) in the French version. The chapter’s premise is that class is a discursive construction produced by the middle-class elite to legitimize its power and ‘pathologize’ the working class. On this basis, I proceed with analyzing whether the mother conforms to or rebels against these class conceptualizations in English and French. Whereas contextual analysis helps us understand that the mother upholds concepts of uprightness, decorum and hygiene as markers of class (the respectable class), textual analysis shows that these concepts are used in French as indicators of the mother’s ambivalent approach to class. Unlike the Italian text, the French text disambiguates the original and helps the reader understand the mother’s apparent contradictions, without departing from the original text. The mother’s agenda confirms Nancy K. Miller’s view that working-class mothers, unlike middle-class ones, directly and/or indirectly foster their daughters’ liberation from socio-political norms and constrictions, thus advocating emancipation. The daughter’s discourse in French unsurprisingly re-enacts the same linguistic mechanisms as the mother’s, using words with ethical connotations to criticize not working-class people but sexually biased people.

The thesis moves from sexuality and sexual identity to examine in the following two chapters artistic legacy in the Italian and French translations of Byatt’s Sugar and Other Stories. Chapters Three and Four investigate Byatt’s fictional
explorations of her mother’s identity as a storyteller and as her artistic model. In Chapter Three, I set the author’s theoretical disquisitions on the meaning of truth, reality and mimesis in the light of the work of Diotima on such topics. I have been able to find similarities between Diotima and the Italian Translation of ‘Sugar’, ‘Zucchero’ (2000). The resonances between repeated lexical patterns of reference within the Italian text and between the Italian text and Diotima’s texts progressively reveal the meaning of the words ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ for Byatt’s mother, a meaning that is linguistically implicit in English and explicit in Italian. In particular, the Italian translation enhances the mother’s realist approach to storytelling and life, which appears to be in line with Diotima’s notions of ‘feminine realism’ and subjective perception of reality. These results generate other research questions which are addressed in the second part of the chapter. To what extent does the maternal precept, made explicit in ‘Zucchero’, on how to be a woman and how to value women, inform Byatt’s writing style and the fictional representation of female subjectivity in the Italian version of the fairy tale ‘Cold’ (2000)? Here linguistic findings are integrated with Irigaray’s ideas, perhaps the main influence on Diotima’s theorizations of ‘feminine realism’. These theories locate the translated text within the Italian theoretical literature on mothers and daughters and show that the Italian text offers an enhanced sensory, visual and tactile representation of reality and the female body which are part of Byatt’s mother’s conceptualizations and legacy.

Chapter Four focuses on the literary and psychological significance of the fabricated nature of the mother’s storytelling. A comparative analysis of ‘Sugar’ and ‘Le Sucre’ (1997a, orig. 1989) enables me to engage in a rereading of the French literary autobiography/autofiction querelle from a gendered perspective. The mother is the imaginative and insolent contestant of traditional modes of autobiographical writing imbued with male grandeur and pretences of exactitude. By setting the maternal character against the French autobiography/autofiction querelle, I demonstrate that the French mother’s challenge to paternal principles can be interpreted as a literary allegory of this debate. The chapter also calls into play such paratextual information as the preface to the French translation which
Byatt wrote specially for the French edition and in which she appears to both justify the translator’s own rereading of the mother-father disputes and to echo the current literary debate on autobiography. The comparative analysis of Source and Target Texts is carried out vis-à-vis Donald W. Winnicott’s and Julia Kristeva’s theories of ‘transitional space’ which circumscribe the intersubjective space between mother and daughter, a space which I examine in relation to studies of the mirror stage (a stage in personality development which will also be discussed in Chapters Five and Six). These theories help demonstrate that the French translation accomplishes a number of tasks: it improves the maternal sensitivity towards intersubjective space; it reterritorializes the daughter’s geographical sense of self; it remaps the mother’s dynamic interspatiality in relation to storytelling and life writing; and, finally, it intervenes in the debate on French autofiction in gendered terms. Marie MacLean’s analytical framework of spatial representations and interrelations in fiction offers a valuable methodological approach which helps to read space in the French text as a fluid, dynamic and dialogic entity.

Diotima’s work has also been helpful with the analysis of the Italian translation of The Autobiography of My Mother by Kincaid, a Caribbean writer. Chapter Five engages with Autobiografia di mia madre (1997) as a polyphonic text that enters into a dialogue with Diotima and with the European thinkers who inform their work on negativity, notably Julia Kristeva. Both Kristeva’s and Diotima’s conceptualizations of the negative and the intersections between them are useful in understanding the implications of the destructive and homicidal desire of the female protagonist and the links of these desires with the mother and the maternal in Italian. Like the other chapters, this chapter looks at lexical and thematic reverberations within the Target Text, at the different key images, tropes and narrative devices and at the cumulative effects produced by their explicit repetitions in the Source Text and Target Text. Some of these key elements, which enhance in different forms the aesthetic value of the negative, are holes, abysses, chiasmus, litotes, aporias, participative oppositions and mises-en-abyme. These embedded and embedding figures open a laceration in the text and invite the Italian reader to listen carefully to the attractive chanting of the abyss which
unearths maternal precepts and challenges dual thinking and the Master-Slave logic presiding over colonial territories. I use Maclean’s discussion of the rhetorical figure of the *mise-en-abyme* to show the Italian translation’s linguistic sophistication, the semantic approach to the original and the faithful consistency in reproducing Kincaid’s ideologically loaded rhetoric.

Whereas Chapter Five focuses on the image of the abyss and its related figures of speech, Chapter Six focuses on orality and its value within the postcolonial world. This chapter first identifies the oral and performative devices in Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996) and then attempts to discover whether the French version *Autobiographie de ma mère* (1997) succeeds in rendering these devices successfully and in contributing to the postcolonial debate on oral literature. It shows that the style of the French version does not always succeed in recreating the printed text as an act of telling, namely as an oral performance. Judith Butler’s performativity theory is used to understand the nature of the performance staged by the autobiographical persona, her vocal presence and corporeal expressivity (in theatrical terms) and the image of the body she wants to promote. By looking at stylistic and rhetorical aspects (Free Indirect Discourse, syntactic inversions, metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy), I investigate the connection between the narrator’s bodily performance and the mother figure. My results show that the physicality and performativity of the English text is grounded in the narrator’s ability to portray with precision and exactitude the female/maternal body and its parts. The French version, on the contrary, fails to do so as a consequence of its domesticating and normalizing the original text.

My conclusion summarizes the results of my comparative analyses, highlighting the fruitfulness of studying women’s narratives and their translations, the variety and richness of the translators’ approaches, and the polyphonic dialogue between the translations and the literary and theoretical productions of the French and Italian cultures. In this way I attempt to close the circle, showing how my thesis, together with other results which I have not been able to include here because of space constraints, contributes to an understanding of the interconnections between

*Eliana Maestri*  
*Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011*
Women's Writing and Translation Studies and has the potential to open the way to further research in this new and productive area.
CHAPTER ONE

Assessing Irony, Characterization and Religion in the Italian Translation of Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

1.1 Introduction: The Success of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and the Study of *Non ci sono solo le arance*

As an autobiographical novel of lesbian adolescence, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (2001, orig. 1985) by Jeanette Winterson, a writer from the North of England, tells the story of Jeanette and her struggle to come to terms with her sexuality. Jeanette is adopted and brought up in a religious community in the North of England between the 1960s and the 1970s. During her early formative years she is instilled with Christian principles by her mother. However, as she grows up, she discovers how parochial, limiting and choking such values are. This realization is not simple, sudden or one-dimensional, but is represented as gradual, tormented and multifaceted. While continuing to believe in God and his all-encompassing love, Jeanette is forced to leave her mother, native town and religious community whose stale beliefs prevent them from accepting her homosexuality and subversive ‘Unnatural Passions’ (*Oranges*: 83). The protagonist’s exile is not, however, any less painful or destabilizing. Despite her achievements and growing sense of independence, Jeanette misses home and, especially, her mother, with whom she has always had a conflictual relationship. Like Hamlet, mature and conscious of her choices, Jeanette eventually decides to return home. She is uncompromising about her ‘rebellious’ sexual identity but, at

---

1 Earlier versions of some sections of Chapter One have been published in Maestri (2005; 2007a).
the same time, is prepared to live with her mother’s opinions. Sexuality, religion, God and personal independence are not as important as that all-embracing familial bond with the mother whose uniqueness and significance in the text are symbolically reinstated by Jeanette’s final return.

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* achieved great success and won the Whitbread Prize in the year of publication. Since then and especially following its adaptation for BBC television in January 1990, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* has been positively received and translated into many languages, including into Italian in 1994. The book has been hailed by both mainstream and alternative media as brilliant and eccentric (Hinds 1992: 153). It has also been praised for its courage in voicing the protagonist’s problematic desire to express her homosexuality freely in a repressive religious, patriarchal and heteronormative environment (Anievas Gamallo 1998). Many scholars and reviewers attribute the success of the book to Winterson’s intelligent exploration of various discourses, to her ironic portrayals and her nuanced attitude towards religion and the politics of religion, despite her controversial and critical disposition to socio-religious ideologies. It appears that the book does not write off those institutions that discriminate against alternative and/or ‘dissident’ forms of sexuality. Religion and its representatives (pastors and various members of the religious community) are in fact not demonized or rejected outright in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Although they are at times a source of amusement for the narrator, they continue to represent values and to exert authority, as Chapter Two will also show. Despite her struggles to assert her sexual ‘diversion’ and the brutal, if rudimentary, exorcism that she has to suffer once her homosexuality is made public, Jeanette never disavows religion completely. She persists, in her heart, to be faithful to God, who, in her view, is never gender-biased. She also continues to express the desire to preach and teach the Bible, its principles and values, even against the pastors’ will.

Religion and its dogmas, therefore, are critiqued and depicted as parochial and restraining, but, at the same time, they are never entirely dismissed or overthrown. This fine balance is achieved in the text by means of a number of strategies.
Chapter One

encompassing irony, humorous effects, culture-specific intertextual evocations, and con/fusion of points of view. Irony and humour, claimed to be the most original aspect in this novel and the reason for its worldwide appreciation, target all members of the community, both men (pastors, uncles, husbands and, even, the Wise Men) and women (the mother and the female members of the religious congregation). Everybody seems to become the victim of the nonconformist protagonist’s ironic stance and youthful point of view, employed to criticize, in a witty manner, traditional principles and to monitor the readers’ identifications with her. Despite this, part of the authority and appeal of the communitarian principles are re-established in the text, with an original twist, through recourse to mythology, fantasy and fairy tales.

This chapter compares *Oranges* with *Le arance* (1997, orig. 1994)\(^2\) with the aim of discussing how the above-mentioned balanced critique of the politics of religion is rendered in Italian. I will focus on irony and, subsequently, will integrate my results with an analysis of the metafictional references to fairy tales to be found in the ST and TT. Specifically, I will attempt to explore how the Italian narrator succeeds in criticizing religion or fails to do so and what (if any) aspects of the latter are valued as key elements in her identity formation and sexual cognition. I will concentrate on the mother figure and her ambivalent relationship with Jeanette, religion and power. The mother is a crucial character in the novel, not only because she is, essentially, omnipresent, but also because she is Jeanette’s educator and first port of call and, as such, she mediates the values and principles of the religious community of which they are both part. Jeanette’s mother, like all mothers in Western societies, as Nancy J. Chodorow (2001) teaches us, is the social and psychological institution central to the development of a consistent sense of self of her daughter. Hence not only does she mother her, she also passes onto her daughter some central psychological and socio-political factors which, in turn, contribute to shape Jeanette’s gendered substratum.

In order to analyze how such dynamics are rendered in translation, I will combine key notions in descriptive-explanatory methodologies in Translation Studies

\(^2\) In this chapter I will refer to the English original by Winterson as *Oranges* and its Italian translation as *Le arance.*

*Eliana Maestri*  
*Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011*
(functional equivalence) with key notions in cognitive linguistics (semantic frames) and the pragmatics of irony. Studies on Catholicism and Protestantism conducted by scholars in Gender Studies and in Religious Studies will be useful in clarifying the ideological values at work in the texts and the semantic frames of reference of the female protagonists as well as of source and target readerships. The ultimate aim is to understand how and to what extent culture-bound approaches to political criticism can be translated into Italian. Such explorations will be particularly fascinating for two reasons: because these approaches are generated from a personal perspective, the perspective of a young English girl formed in reaction to a strong-minded mother, and because the receiving culture of the Target Text has been historically imbued with religious symbolism and Christian ideology, namely with those aspects of the protagonist’s life which are the target of her ironic attacks.

1.2 Humorous and Ironic Depictions of the Mother Figure

According to post-Gricean studies on the pragmatics of verbal irony, irony contains an intrinsic complexity which cannot be understood and mastered by simple recourse to classical rhetoric or Gricean maxims. Although irony is renowned for being a trope that works according to a principle of ‘permutatio [...] per contrarium’ (Ghiazza and Napoli 2007: 283), implying the opposite of the literal meaning, its cognitive scope encompasses areas of study beyond pragmatics and classical dichotomies of literal versus figurative. Deirdre Wilson reminds us that the Gricean approach to irony is now considered obsolete or incomplete because it is ‘simply a modern-dress variant of the classical account, and shares many of the same weaknesses’ (2006: 1724). Wilson also maintains that irony cannot be regarded as a violation of Grice’s first maxim of Quality, namely ‘do not say what you believe to be false’ (Wilson 2006: 1723), because this corresponds broadly to the classical substitution of what is true and hidden – or figurative – with what is false and blatant – or literal. Figurative versus literal, true versus false might still represent valid tools of analysis, enabling us to bring to light the semantic inversion or substitution behind ironic constructions. However, if these oppositions are not contextualized, they might produce only partial results. In classical accounts of irony, what seems to be missing, according
to Wilson, is a more inclusive exploration of the setting or background where ironic statements take place. This contextual information provides a 'step in the direction of a genuinely explanatory account of' (Wilson 2006: 1723) and rationale for irony and situates the speaker's critical intentions behind his/her mere ironic comment. Setting and background also compensate for the lack, in written texts, of paralinguistic and peripheral signs, such as 'intonation, facial expression, gestures, interjections, discourse particles, [...] parentheticals' (Wilson 2006: 1732), that is to say those signs that normally, in spoken conversations, help the interlocutor disambiguate ironic meaning.

While post-Gricean theories of irony will help us understand the mechanism behind Winterson's writing in a more contextual sense, Ana Maria Rojo Lopez's work will help us investigate the translatability of irony together with any other culture-bound textual features. Lopez explains that irony stands on the manipulation of semantic frames of reference or mental constructs. The latter are:

structures of knowledge that represent the world view of a particular society, that is its beliefs, values and emotions, its prototypes of people and things, of sequences of situations and events, its social scenarios and the metaphorical and metonymical structure of thought.
(Lopez 2002a: 312-14)

To achieve functional equivalence in translation, defined as a 'type of equivalence reflected in a Target Text which seeks to adopt the function of the original to suit the specific context in a form which it was produced' (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997: 64), and, therefore, to achieve (cultural) translatability, Lopez explains that source language and target language have to share the same semantic frames. The issue of a semantic mutual ground between interlocutors was first raised when Translation Studies started to become a discipline in its own right. Early disquisitions revolved around the lack of a 'tertium comparationis' (Eco 2001: 11), namely an intermediate construct between languages, cultures, systems of

---

1 Other scholars in Translation Studies have brought up the issue of semantic frames without resorting to cognitive linguistics. Other expressions than 'semantic frames' have therefore been adopted and passed onto other Translation Studies specialists. For example, Susan Bassnett borrows 'situational features' (2002: 39) from J.C. Catford, an eminent linguist and phonetician.
representation and discourses people identify with as a social group or community. In this light, irony, as a culture-bound concept, appears to be a challenging aspect in translation. This aspect may be adequately rendered with functional equivalents (both lexical and textual), when the Target Text succeeds in activating in the recipients' minds equal structures of knowledge or frames to those of the Source Text.

I will now examine the opening lines of the novel introducing the mother figure against Wilson's post-Gricean analysis of irony, hoping to cast light on the ironic depiction of the mother and her relationship with religion and power in both ST and TT.

Example 1
My father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle; it didn’t matter what. She was in the white corner and that was that. (Oranges: 3)

A mio padre piaceva guardare la lotta, a mia madre piaceva farla; non importava quale. Lei era nel giusto, e poche storie. (Le arance: 7)

Example 2
I had been brought in to join her in a tag match against the Rest of the World. (Oranges: 3)

Ero stata messa al mondo per essere sua alleata nella guerra santa contro il Resto del Mondo. (Le arance: 8)

Example 3
She always prayed standing up, because of her knees, just as Bonaparte always gave orders from his horse, because of his size. I do think that the relationship my mother enjoyed with God had a lot to do with positioning. She was Old Testament through and through. Not for her the meek and paschal Lamb, she was out there, up front with the prophets, and much given to sulking under trees when the appropriate destruction didn’t materialise. (Oranges: 4)

Umberto Eco (2001: 10-11) explains that a tertium comparationis was somehow conceptualized to refer to a propositional content, a metalanguage C between a language A and B. This notion was related to a more ancient one, the reine Sprache, of a more mystical nature. While the former was thought of being rooted in the human mind, the latter was thought of having divine origin, the Sacred Language of the Pentecostal gift. The expression reine Sprache was later used by Walter Benjamin to explain how a reader was introduced to the foreign text via a translated version bearing as many aspects of the Source Text as possible. This approach echoed Schleiermacher’s notion of foreignizing translation (van der Louw 2009: 8), which was later elaborated by Lawrence Venuti (1995: 20). According to Benjamin, the reine Sprache is the language of truth. Its purity does not necessarily derive from the divine, but from a consonance of languages whose privileged site of confluence is represented by the translated text itself.
pregava sempre in piedi, per via delle ginocchia, proprio come Bonaparte impartiva gli ordini da cavallo a causa della sua statura. Sono convinta che anche il suo rapporto con Dio fosse in fondo una questione di schieramenti. La mamma era Vecchio Testamento dalla testa ai piedi. Il docile Agnello pasquale non faceva per lei, che al contrario era lì, in prima fila coi profeti e incline a ritirarsi imbronciata sotto un albero se il giusto annichilamento tardava a concretizzarsi. (Le arance: 9)

Before claiming that the English sentences in the above-mentioned examples are ironic, it should be agreed that they are humorous. We can then move on to understand how the narrator succeeds in adding ironic overtones to humour. According to Jonathan Culpeper, a historical pragmatic and sociolinguist, jokes reproduce ‘an exaggeration of a schematic link between the social role category and a personal category’ (Culpeper 2001: 156). In other words, humour springs from a hyperbolic association of public and private images, which here corresponds to the juxtaposition of the mother figure and a wrestler and, then, Bonaparte. Despite the similarities that might strengthen the metaphorical link between such disparate characters, or prototypes, the correlation between these figures remains amusing. Example 2 is emblematic not only because it is constructed around the same idea of power as the one animating the simile of Bonaparte in Example 3, but also because it employs the same humorous device as Example 1. In Example 2, wit is provided by the expression ‘tag match’ which fosters access to stored repertoires of prototypical fights/games, among which is the tag match, a kind of fight in wrestling that requires teamwork and cohesive effort. Humour is elicited by semantic cohesion which links the cognitive stored inventory of bellicose games to the opening lines of the book: ‘my father liked to watch the wrestling, my mother liked to wrestle’ (Oranges: 3).

In Italian the humorous tone is not conveyed with the same strength. Culturally, the reference to wrestling and the amusing association between the mother and a martial artist disappear. The generalizing translation ‘lotta’ might hint at ‘lotta greco-romana’ or at a more modern ‘lotta libera’ (both being variations of

---

According to Culpeper, prototypes are cognitive organizations of knowledge structures. They correspond to semantic frames, but they are more specific. Prototypes are usually divided into hierarchies of categories or into clusters of categories.
wrestling), but the Italian replacement of ‘white corner’, setting the scene for a match, with ‘nel giusto’ weakens the metaphor and dilutes its humorous effects. In addition, the Italian ‘lotta’ echoes another expression in the book, namely ‘Buona Lotta’ (Le arance: 46) which has nothing to do with wrestling but with Evangelical campaigns for new members and followers. ‘Buona Lotta’ is the translation of the English ‘Good Fight’ (Oranges: 34) which, as we can see, does not share any morphological or lexical resemblance to the sport the mother liked to play. Along the same line, Example 2 fails to activate the prototypical game of tag match stored in the English recipients’ mind, because ‘tag match’ is replaced by ‘guerra santa’, which not only eliminates the playful tone but also introduces religious connotations where originally are none. The translator has decided here to underline the religious facet of the maternal character by dropping the wrestling metaphor and picking up instead the thread of religion by linking ‘guerra santa’ to ‘il Diavolo’ (Le arance: 7). The Devil, which in the medieval era was believed to foment the Holy Wars against the Muslims, appears a few lines before the declaration of the mother’s religious fanaticism, namely when readers are told that he was also the mother’s greatest enemy.

Finally, by using the military term ‘schieramenti’ in Example 3, the Italian version emphasizes by implication the military importance attributed to ‘guerra santa’ and the mother’s intention to ‘fight’ for the Lord. While the English generalizing term ‘positioning’ has a military, political and social meaning, the Italian particularizing translation ‘schieramenti’ focuses only on the mother’s military skills. Unlike ‘schieramenti’, ‘positioning’ is strictly linked with power (because it comes after the description of Bonaparte who used to give orders from his horse because of his size) and with social mobility, thus anticipating social tensions (which will be explored in Chapter Two) accompanying this female character throughout the novel. The mother’s military facet also emerges from Chapter 2 of Le arance when the congregation organizes training weekends ‘to prove the Lord relevant to the farming folk of Devon’. During these weekends ‘my mother was in

---

6 In addition, the use of ‘guerra santa’ in Italian recalls the metaphor “‘Guerra” in prima linea’ (Rossi 2005: 41) that those religious movements such as the Salvation Army employed to describe their Evangelical campaigns for new members.
charge of the camp stores, and had already started to buy in huge tins of beans and frankfurter sausages' (Oranges: 35). In Italian the term expressing the mother’s role in this campaign, ‘the camp stores’, is translated with ‘approvvigionamento’ which has military connotations and suggests that the mother embraces fully the military propaganda of the congregation’s religious ‘Good Fights’ (Oranges: 34).

The religious connotations added to the mother by the Italian translation are entirely justified seen her passionate commitment to the congregation and the role of religious preceptor she plays for Jeanette. Her vocation is introduced to the readers very early on when, as in Example 3, she is associated with the Old Testament, the prophets and, last but not least, the Virgin Mary of whom she thinks she is a modern reincarnation.\(^7\) Hence, she is the embodiment of the strict religious doctrine which she teaches Jeanette and which dictates the behaviour of the whole community. However, the very first pages of the novel are interspersed with other information which, while indeed contributing to the religious characterization of the mother, also confers political and satirical connotations upon her. We will now use Wilson’s theory of irony in order to bring to light what is missing in the Italian translation.

If we read Example 3 in isolation, without considering the context and resonances, we could appreciate partially the ironic effects in English and fully their translation in Italian. Jeanette seems to portray her mother according to a schematic frame of reference centred on power, as embodied by the historical figure of Bonaparte. Removing the context and reading the excerpt using the principles of *permutatio per contrarium*, the association Bonaparte-mother appears to be humorous *and* critical towards the mother. As Bonaparte had to give orders from his horse to compensate for his height, the mother had to pray while standing up because of her knees. As a result, even if for different reasons, they both performed their roles, as a leader and as a religious person, from a peculiar position, a position which would guarantee them visibility and impact. However, whenever politicians are ridiculed for their physical defects the outcome is usually an intentional caricature and deflation of the authority they represent. Their

\(^7\) This echoes what Winterson herself recounted in a 2002 article in the *New Yorker*. 

_Eliana Maestri_  
*Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011*
physical shortcomings (Napoleon’s size and the mother’s painful knees) therefore tell us that irony stems not only from a juxtaposition of roles (‘social role category’ and ‘private category’) but also from a humorous inversion of such roles enacted to criticize the mother. The latter is in fact depicted as a pretentious character hyperbolically associated with Napoleon, with grandiose ideas of power and supremacy which, unfortunately, are bound to remain unfulfilled. Their physical shortcomings and the apparent (but false) pretension of respect paid to both are here intended to undermine and overthrow the mother’s illusory idea of power and control. In this light, it could be argued that the Italian version re-enacts the same humorous tone and critical effects as its English counterpart. The cultural translatability of Napoleon (and his clichéd size) turns the Italian simile into a form of criticism of the mother’s unrealistic fantasy and desire for power. However, before ascertaining the reliability of such a claim, we should understand exactly what kind of power is parodied in the English text. After that we will return to the Italian version.

The simile in Example 3 appears to have a double function because it stands for power, authority and political control as well as for parody and mockery of power itself. This is not, however, the (only) interpretation that the English text encourages. There is no doubt that the English reader is prepared to be tricked and deceived by Winterson’s light-hearted and witty style. The above-mentioned semantic inversion is, as a matter of fact, emphasized by the extended metaphor of the prophets which, as a consequence, accentuates the mother’s unrealistic idea of power and supremacy. The amusing detail of her sulking under a tree for not seeing annihilation coming to completion should be, however, read as a warning against possible oversimplifications of the author’s critical message. In other words, the readers seem to be cautioned against taking such criticism of the mother too seriously and encouraged to explore further the critical intentions of the text.

According to Wilson, irony is generated not only by a semantic inversion, but also by an ‘echoic allusion to an attributed utterance or thought’ (Wilson 2006: 1724, author’s italics), an utterance, thought, or mental construct that the speaker
attributes to someone else, or to herself/himself at another time, and from which s/he dissociates her/himself, as ‘ludicrously false, inadequate or inappropriate’ (Wilson 2006: 1724). Wilson claims that it is easier to identify the genuine scope of ironic statements whenever there is ‘an explicit prior utterance that the speaker can be taken to echo and reject’ (Wilson 2006: 1728). This kind of utterance appears in the first pages of the novel (where the three examples come from) which draw attention to gender-specific forms of power and authority. Example 1, for instance, casts light not only on the mother’s proactive temperament (she liked to wrestle whereas her husband liked to watch the wrestling), but also on her confidence in women’s abilities to outdo men, seeing the nature of the sport she liked to play. Wrestling is a physical competition whose contestants win by gaining a superior position and by reducing their opponents to a state of submission. If Example 1 highlights the mother’s masculine traits and her faith in women’s strength and potential, the following witty pun emphasizes her distrust of men and their abilities: ‘we had no Wise Men because she [my mother] didn’t believe there were any wise men, but we had sheep’ (Oranges: 4). The homonymy is clearly used to highlight the mother’s critical opinions of men, in general, and religious ones, in particular, for not being wise or clever. Their intellectual failure cost them their eviction from the mother’s house and their ‘wise’ replacement with sheep.

In the light of this contextual information, the figure of Bonaparte is not simply one of a series of metaphorical or historical figures of power and authority with whom the mother is associated or would like to be associated. Given her propensity for being authoritative and domineering, one could safely assume that the association mother-Bonaparte also reflects the mother’s own viewpoint. However, considering her unambiguous distrust of men and their intellectual abilities, we cannot really endorse, as serious and convincing, her identification with Bonaparte. Nor can we justify a classical interpretation of the ironic simile Bonaparte-mother put forward by the Italian translation, whereby the ridiculous and outlandish French military and political figure reflects the mother’s pretentious ambitions. In view of the mother’s gendered perception of power,

---

8 Older studies of irony, such as Wayne C. Booth’s *A Rhetoric of Irony*, do not prove to be as useful as Wilson’s, because they do not draw on pragmatic principles.

*Eliana Maestri*  
*Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011*
Bonaparte represents not only power but the male power she dissociates herself from because, in Wilson’s words, it is ‘ludicrously false, inadequate or inappropriate’ (2006: 1724). Bonaparte’s sitting on a horse and imparting orders from a high position is indeed the kind of authority which the mother has to come up against regularly and which she sets out to counter. What she wants to emulate is not his supremacy as such but his hierarchical position which, if appropriated, would help her compete with God and eventually overtake him. Placed in context, the ironic simile does not solely reflect the narrator’s point of view and humorous tone, but also the mother’s critical intentions. The association of the mother with the French leader therefore is not a strategy to criticize the mother’s idea of power but a means to present and support her ideas in a witty and uncompromising way. As Example 3 shows, she hopes to dispossess Bonaparte and God of their powers and privileged positions and to establish her new ‘Old Testament’ and justice, a reign based on women’s determination and reappropriation of roles. This view is further supported by a series of resonances present in the original text which stress her sacrilegious attitude. These resonances oppose the mother to the image of the ‘meek and paschal Lamb’ (Example 3) ironically served by her on Sundays in a special dish ‘with potato’ (*Oranges*: 4).

Wilson’s theory, therefore, proves to be helpful not only to understand in a more cohesive way the ironic tone of the original text but also the limitations of the Italian version, especially in relation to the mother figure. The characterization of the latter in fact seems to be normalized in a culture (the Italian culture) which does not set religion against power but endorses them uncritically, without questioning the validity and legitimacy of the holy wars. In Italian, humour disappears in favour of a more serious and sober tone and so does irony, distorted by the Italian translator’s *permutatio per contrarium* reading of the text. It is this approach that seems to guide the Italian version’s localized rendition of the mother, who is portrayed in isolation from crucial intratextual details which underplay the ‘echoic allusions’, evocations of mental constructs and perception of power present in the original. According to this reading, the mother does not parody or destabilize power, but endorses it wholeheartedly. In the Italian translation, distortion and semantic alterations are noticeable with the mother’s
military agenda of holy wars, marshalling arrays and alignments (‘schieramenti’), in favour of and in the name of God. Humorous jokes such as the Wise Men’s eviction from the mother’s house or the Sacrificial Lamb in a Sunday dish ‘with potato’ (Oranges: 4) cannot find functional equivalents in Italian either because the pun does not translate or because their disruptive potential is not properly contextualized. The phrase ‘non avevamo Re Magi, perché lei non credeva ci fossero uomini saggi, però avevamo le pecore’ (Le arance: 8) is confusing both because the pun does not work and because it comes directly after the mother’s declaration of her religious fanaticism. Despite this half-successful joke, what appears to be rhetorically effective and convincing is the mother’s religious vocation which, as we shall see, she nourishes in a personal and subjective way. Distortions, therefore, do not only concern scattered images in the Italian text but also the mother’s opinions and unorthodox agenda. Within the context of a serious and stern religious community, the maternal point of view is critically targeted in the Italian version by an ironic apparatus turning counterproductively back onto itself like a snake eating its own tail.

1.3 The Italian Rendition of the Mother’s Religious Vocation

This comparative analysis vis-à-vis Wilson’s theory of irony can be used as a starting point to address the question of whether the Italian translation succeeds in rendering Winterson’s special brand of criticism of religion and power. Considering how it initially recharacterizes the strategic role of the mother figure, we might anticipate that it does not. The very first pages of the Italian version reveal that the mother is attributed special functions as a champion of religion, which overshadow her more complex role of defender of minorities (such as women) within a traditional and patriarchal system of Gods, prophets, pastors and political and military leaders. I will now continue to explore the two texts in order to see whether the Italian version’s initial approach is applied throughout the text and to what extent the mother figure is recharacterized in translation. The final section of this chapter will be devoted to the exploration of the impact of this ‘new’ Italian mother on Jeanette’s sexual awareness.
Example 4
You Don’t Need Spirits When You’ve Got the Spirit. (Oranges: 82, author’s italics)

Non hai bisogno di spirito quando hai lo Spirito. (Le arance: 102, author’s italics)

Example 5
Then she extemporised on the nature of the world, the folly of its people. (Oranges: 7)

Improvvisava poi un sermone sulla natura del mondo, la follia dei suoi abitanti. (Le arance: 13)

Example 6
‘They’ll lead you astray’. (Oranges: 16)

«Ti condurrebbero alla perdizione». (Le arance: 25)

Example 7
She had gone back into the kitchen, and I could hear her muttering to herself against the static as she fiddled for the World Service. (Oranges: 22)

Era tornata in cucina e la sentivo maledire tra sé le interferenze mentre cercava la stazione del World Service. (Le arance: 28)

Example 8
She [...] instead wrought her own huge chords that sounded the length of the piano. No note was exempt. (Oranges: 53)

Mia madre [...] per inserire invece i suoi enormi accordi, che facevano rimbombarre tutto il piano. Nessuna nota si salvava. (Le arance: 67)

Example 9
‘So it just shows the Lord provides for Christian countries’. (Oranges: 113)

«Questo ti dimostra che il Signore provvede alle sue pecorelle cristiane». (Le arance: 136)

Oranges is full of puns which rarely prove to be successful in Italian. The previous pun on the ‘wise men’ results in a phonic translation loss, because the adjective ‘wise’ cannot be repeated in Italian, having two different meanings. The English adjective ‘wise’ is a hypernym of the Italian ‘saggio’ and therefore requires two particularizing translations, ‘magi’ and ‘saggi’, which are not semantically interchangeable. The Italian pun, in Example 4, on the contrary, is phonetically successful but semantically infelicitous. It is pronounced by the mother, involved in an anti-alcohol campaign, and plays on the double meaning of
the word 'spirit' to stress that we only need God, not alcohol. The Italian pun plays on the same ambiguity but produces a contextual distortion, because 'Spirit' and 'spirito' are not exact interlingual synonyms. The Italian pun is based only apparently on the same phonic effects as the English 'Spirits'/'Spirit' but adds additional connotations to the mother figure. Both 'Spirits' and 'spirito' mean alcohol, but whereas the English plural noun 'Spirits' also means temper and mood, 'spirito' also means good humour ('ingegno pronto, vivace; in partic., senso dell'umorismo'). The first meaning for 'spirito' one thinks of in Italian is not alcohol but wit. As a consequence, while singing religious mottos to support the anti-alcohol campaign, the Italian mother also says, between the lines, that we do not need good humour because we have God ('Spirito'), which, in the light of my previous analysis, makes perfect sense in Italian. Not only does she lose her gay and playful traits, but she also validates that translation loss with her own words. Undoubtedly her serious and solemn commitment to religion and God prevails to the point of overshadowing, as we shall see, another more articulated aspect of her character.

The remaining examples corroborate my initial results. They are either part of the mother's direct speeches or of the narrative about her and they all show that the construction of her character is religiously overloaded in Italian. In Example 5 there is an unmistakable religious addition as she improvises 'un sermone' while walking with her daughter. In Example 6 she talks about 'perdizione' which, unlike 'astray', has religious overtones. In Example 7 she does not whisper to herself, but she swears ('maledire'), which, while revealing sinful behaviour (alien to the mother), shows to what extent her personality is imbued with religion. The notes that she plays cannot be saved in Example 8, nor can all the souls previously involved in sexual relationships, sex and 'fornicare' (Le arance: 67) secure a place in heaven, according to the Italian mother. In Example 9 she hints at the parable of the lost sheep which reinforces her religious formation and precepts. Everything that concerns the mother is unquestionably religious in Italian. Not only do her religious fervour and dedication exemplify her

---

9 Dizionario Garzanti Della Lingua Italiana Online (http://garzantilinguistica.sapere.it/dizionario/it/cerca?q=spirito) [accessed on 23 March 2010].

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
personality, they also shape and mould her world and life, saturated with religious metaphors and loaded with religious overtones.

Italian readers are continually stimulated to activate Christian frames of reference especially when they are guided to interpret the mother’s profound vocation in religious terms. These terms are, most probably, reinforced by their historically sedimented religious substratum. The confluence of these factors contributes, in my view, to the semantically altered perception of the mother especially in relation to the figure of the Madonna, which is an object of cult still widespread in Italy. Before the ironic simile of Bonaparte, readers are informed that the mother made her daughter believe that she was the Virgin Mary and that she had conceived Jeanette’s flesh from her head, by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no in-depth explanation for this in the book. The narrator only states that her mother envied the Virgin Mary for succeeding in bearing a child without sexual intercourse. However, if this idea may appear as an expression of religious fanaticism or intense devotion to an icon (as it might do to many Italian readers), it can also be seen as a form of social frustration. As a female wrestler and female contestant of God’s position and power, the mother desires to be a virgin as a rejection not only of sexual intercourse, but also of men’s sperm, now totally useless for conception and, generally, for everything. Or, if we take into account her playful and humorous approach to life, we could also hypothesize that taking the cult of the Virgin Mary to such an extreme could mean, for the mother, dramatizing (in an ironic way) the common perception of women in society. Women, as Luce Irigaray would argue, are seen as generally defective or ‘castrated’ (quoted in Haas 2001: 655) and therefore ‘not symbolically self-defined’ (Haas 2001: 652). Thus the mother’s unconventional sexual politics could be interpreted, in English, not as a form of unnecessary extravaganza, but as a desire to explore and reconstruct her identity in a man-less world. She is a woman who is aware that women do not have a place of their own in society and who, therefore, fights for their recognition and human rights.

For Italian readers, it might be difficult, if not impossible, to see the mother’s social frustrations and political agenda. In addition to a partial rendition of the
character’s complexity, their approach and judgment may well, as I have claimed above, be coloured by their cultural mental constructs. The Italian hegemonic religion has always been Catholicism which, as Luisa Accati (1995 and 1998) explains, after the Council of Trento in 1563, sided with the Western world where Marian imagery remained part of the religious framework. The cult of the Madonna was in fact one of the watersheds which marked the split, within Christianity, between Protestant and Catholic cultures. In the former, power was redistributed among such male figures as the Father and the Son. By contrast, in the latter, Mary was kept as the sacred female figure placed between the Father and the Son in the holy symbolic framework. This regime asserted itself gradually over the centuries until it acquired political inferences. Florinda M. Iannace (2000) extends Accati’s socio-religious study by pointing out that, after the Second Vatican Council in 1945, Mariology, a series of practices expressing devotion to the Virgin Mary, became a form of exaltation of motherhood and female submissive dedication to men/husbands. In the eyes of the Catholic Church women acquired moral status only if they were mothers and wives. Catholicism has thus managed to integrate the figure of the Virgin Mary within the symbolic order converting the cult into a form of reinforcement of female subjugation to a restrictive patriarchal (Lacanian) Law.

Protestant cultures, Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling explain (1997: 150), followed a different path but increased their patriarchal strength by virtually eliminating ‘the Virgin Mary from the theological economy of Christianity’ because she was seen as ‘an interference in the natural rights of fathers’. This eviction started directly after the Reformation both as a reaction to Catholicism and as a reinstatement of the primary role of Jesus, as male representative of the divine trilogy:

the English Reformers of the sixteenth century reacted strongly against what they saw as the excess of Marian piety, supported by the Catholic Church, and sought to prune away devotions which obscured the central place of Jesus Christ in Christian belief and practice. (Nazir-Ali and Sagovsky 2007: 131)
According to Protestants, the only divine element in charge of salvation was the Trilogy which explicitly excluded Mary. Mary was not, as in the Catholic faith, the Queen of Heaven. She was, therefore, removed from active participation in and contribution to salvation as a result of the loss of her privileged position as mediator, spouse of God and Queen placed above all saints, which she used to enjoy in Catholicism. As further evidence, Mellor and Shilling (1997: 150) state that Protestantism did not advertise at all the series of apparitions of the Madonna that were recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries around Europe, because they were seen as forms of 'eruptions of female power [...] within the predominantly male, Protestant culture of modernity' (1997: 150). These studies have proved to be enlightening for an understanding of the characterization of the figure of the mother in Winterson's novel and of her recharacterization in the Italian translation. As a member of a fundamentalist Evangelical community, she belongs to the Protestant culture that overshadowed the Virgin Mary. Thus, her obsession with the Madonna appears to be an even stronger form of challenge to the male order. Namely, the mother's claim that she is a personification of the Virgin Mary can be interpreted as a reaction against gender polarities and social roles as cultural constructs imposed for centuries by society and history. This interpretation is justified by the fact that the Madonna that inspires the mother is the pre-reformation Queen, described by Accati (1995) as powerful and visible. Her power is only later removed from her, because this interferes with the power of the Father and Son. However, this reading is not justified (and is actually downplayed) in the Italian version because the Madonna that inspires the mother is the post-reformation Catholic one, described by Accati as 'domesticated', tamed and disempowered. Only in English can the mother express fully her reaction against male power not only as a form of hegemony and domination but also as a form of symbolic erasure of women and women's roles in society.

At this point we might wonder whether the Italian version eclipses the mother's political and public connotations (as a form of disruption of the male symbolic order) and whether, as a consequence, it enhances her maternal and private side. Without trying to force any transition between micro-evidence and macro-claims, or without projecting the theories that I have just outlined onto the textual
evidence, I now explore the circular mechanism whereby language affects ideology/culture and ideology/culture impinges upon the linguistic channel, bringing about new political reconfigurations of the figure of the mother in the translation. I will continue to follow Lopez’s combination of linguistic and cognitive factors, drawing on stylistics. Lopez argues that, in order to test whether humour works in cultural transfers, the exploration of the textual or immediate context is not sufficient. We need to resort to the speakers’ frames of reference, namely ‘the expectations and attitudes that speakers build on the basis of their experience of the world’ (Lopez 2002b: 35). Lopez’s study of humour can be usefully applied to investigate more serious aspects of the text, namely to explore the way the mother rehaunts, in another language, her religious working-class community. Examples 10 and 11 concern her public life and role outside the domestic walls. Examples 12, 13 and 14 concern her private life and role as mother and wife.

Example 10
She was auditing the Society for the Lost. (Oranges: 30)

Partecipava ad una riunione dell’Associazione per le Anime smarrite. (Le arance: 40)

Example 11
She didn’t come back for three weeks, and after that went regularly […] to audit the accounts and campaign for new members. (Oranges: 54)

Rientrò tre settimane dopo, per poi tornare regolarmente […] a tenere i conti e a fare opera di proselitismo. (Le arance: 69)

These two extracts show the mother’s administrative commitments and public involvement within her religious congregation. Despite her activism, typical of women in new religious movements, the mother’s role as treasurer for the Society for the Lost is minimized in the Italian translation in favour of her missionary tasks. In Chapter 2 (Example 10) this role is omitted since ‘riunione’ does not specify the mother’s job as an accountant, and in Chapter 3 (Example 11) it is belittled because ‘tenere i conti’ is not the same as ‘to audit’. ‘Proselitismo’ has strong religious and ethical connotations in Italian, while ‘campaign for new members’ has stronger connotations of political and/or military propaganda. These connotations are culturally related to the pragmatic reality of British
religious movements such as, for instance, the Salvation Army since its foundation in 1865-66. Ilaria Rossi explains:

sia la *Christian Mission* sia la *Salvation Army* offrirono alle donne della *working-class* opportunità sorprendenti rispetto alle altre organizzazioni religiose, e non solo, dell’epoca vittoriana. Associazioni volontarie della *working-class*, sindacati e movimenti politici raramente includevano le donne nei ruoli decisionali, poiché la loro condizione naturale veniva considerata inferiore e marginale. Anche a causa delle responsabilità domestiche, le donne venivano escluse dalla vita organizzativa; [...] In questo contesto la *Salvation Army*, sia per la sua struttura che per la sua teologia, favorì la partecipazione delle donne della *working-class* ad un movimento che prometteva orizzonti più ampi in cui ricoprire posizioni di autorità. (2005: 23, author’s italics)

Hence, these religious groups, exhibiting an almost military organization, valorise the role of women not just as helpers or supporters of their Christian mission but as active participants recruited to play roles of authority. If we take on board the ethos and the rationale behind such new religious movements, we can identify a cultural loss here. In terms of the terminology related to the labour market, the English verb ‘to audit’ is employed twice in the first half of the book to describe the mother’s work for the congregation, while the phrase used in Italian, ‘tenere i conti’, appears just once. The English ‘to audit’ is more formal and technical than the Italian ‘tenere i conti’, the first suggesting a profession (with proper retribution), the second a task, possibly voluntary, which does not require specific skills. The English reiteration of this technical term acquires important social inferences paying tribute to skilled working women and what they represent politically for the next generation: personal and public dignity, sacrifice, aspirations to improve the quality of their lives. These linguistic discrepancies help the analyst draw a clear line between the depiction of the mother in English and in Italian. While in English she covers a position of authority within her congregation, in Italian she is domesticated into a figure with minor public ambitions and impact. Her work outside the domestic sphere is toned down and overshadowed by her Christian mission of holy wars and proselytism.

*Eliana Maestri*  
*Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011*
Chapter One

In the light of the studies by Darlene M. Juschka (2001) and Janet Jacobs (2001), one can also argue that, unlike the Italian text, the English foregrounds the ‘deprivation theory’ applied by feminist scholars to women’s behaviour in new religious movements. This theory presupposes that women took part in new religious movements ‘for no other reason than to subvert the status quo [...] to compensate for the power they are denied in their current social and cultural systems’ (Juschka 2001: 160). On a smaller scale, this is exactly what happens to the women in Oranges. In Jeanette’s religious community, women work outside the domestic sphere, engage in manual jobs and preach in the church like pastors. The mother is involved in the management of the congregation as an auditor and as an active participant and her role is valued by the pastors and the rest of the community. She campaigns for new members and always responds to the pastor’s requests promptly and without hesitation, even at the cost of neglecting her own family. For example, when she is asked to write the script for the Christmas recital, she locks herself in her parlour to be able to work on her new project single-mindedly and leaves her husband and daughter without food for a few days. This shows how important her public role is for her and counters the trend that women would often give up their religious commitments after getting married.10 Finally, while the English text tends to praise women’s active participation in society, the Italian translation still reflects the Catholic Church’s long-standing emphasis on Mariology by failing to convey consistently the significance and valorization of the mother’s input in the community and by enhancing her maternal side. The next set of examples demonstrates this point.

Example 12
After the service we were having the banquet; my mother had made twenty trifles and her usual mound of cheese and onion sandwiches. (Oranges: 11)

Dopo la cerimonia ci fu il rinfresco; mia madre aveva preparato venti zuppe inglesi e il solito vassoio di tartine al formaggio e cipolla. (Le arance: 18)

---

10 Rossi explains that at the end of the nineteenth century, when the Salvation Army was very popular in England, if women got married to Salvation Army officers, they were removed from Evangelical missionary fights and were assigned to more domestic roles within the home. In the 1960s and 1970s, women enjoyed more freedom, but they always prioritize their family over their public commitments (Dobash and Dobash 1992: 13).
Example 13
She quite liked *Now Voyager*, because she had done her courting during that film. *(Oranges: 47)*

Le piacque molto *Now Voyager*, perché durante quel film l'avevano corteggiata. *(Le arance: 62)*

Example 14
‘We had to have something for you’. *(Oranges: 72)*

«Dovevamo pur avere una famiglia per te». *(Le arance: 90)*

Example 12 comes from the description of a religious banquet organized by the congregation. Despite the fact that the mother never confines herself to the domestic sphere, her being the angel of the hearth is deliberately emphasized in the Italian version, especially in front of the pastors for whom, as we shall see in Chapter Two, she has respect. The Italian term ‘vassoio’ gives an idea of order and elegance that is lacking in the English version. ‘Tartine’ indicates cooking abilities and presentation skills since their preparation is more elaborate and requires more effort and time than sandwiches. Both terms back up the cliché of the Italian mother and her dedication to food. They might not directly reinforce the cult of the Virgin Mary, but they contribute to reinstating Jeanette’s mother within the patriarchal symbolic order and revalidating age-old assumptions about mothers as nurturers and caregivers symbolically represented by the Catholic mother of God.

Example 13 is the most striking example of this process. The excerpt comes from a section where the narrator tells the story of how her mother and father met and courted. Language limitations and cultural perceptions are intermingled in the Target Text to the detriment of the mother figure. In the English example the agent of the courting is definitely the mother, as reinforced by the active rather than reciprocal or passive construction of ‘to court’. In Italian, the verb cannot be used in the reciprocal form and an agent (one party of the courting) has to be chosen over the other. One has to court the other: the two persons involved cannot court one another. However, rather than translating literally the English expression, namely that she did the courting, the Italian version enhances the passive role of the mother by making her the passive agent (she is the one who
was courted). This reflects the Italian traditional canon of romantic love where women have to seduce and men have to court. The use of the plural ‘l’avevano corteggiata’, moreover, emphasizes indirectly the passivity attributed to the mother by giving agency to more than one man, while an English reader assumes that only one man was courted by her. It finally contributes to the ‘semantic memory’ of Italian readers who build up a distorted image of the mother by reverting partly to the analyzed instances of semantic domestication and partly to their genetic and historical religious substratum.

In Example 14, Jeanette asks her mother the reason why she got married and her mother gives a general answer which avoids intentionally, in my opinion, the use of ‘family’, introduced, unsurprisingly, in the Italian translation. From a private point of view, ‘something’ reveals the mother’s indifference to marriage, even avoidance of the word and idea of family, and thus a degree of emotional and physical independence from her husband. From a public point of view, it discloses her opposition to modern perceptions of marriage resting upon Protestant principles. Over the centuries, Reformers and Protestants adopted strategies to reinforce patriarchy, among which the institution of marriage as a voluntary act, namely as a relationship entered into by individuals as a result of free choice. By introducing the concept of marriage as a voluntary contract (unpopular in Christianity before the Reformation), they cunningly concealed behind such idealistic interpretation the fact that ‘the “individual” upon whom contractarianism rests is actually male’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 150). The Italian mother, on the contrary, embraces such a view and conforms to Protestant and, especially, Catholic beliefs of heterosexual union and motherhood. By choosing ‘family’ over a general ‘something’, she also chooses symbolically to identify with the Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary shaped to enhance the private role of women as mothers and wives.

In 1987 (only seven years before the publication of the Italian translation of Oranges) Pope John Paul II wrote the encyclical letter Redemptoris Mater to reinforce the content of the Second Vatican Council, encouraging Marian devotion in Italy and all over the world and defining the role of women in the
twentieth century. The letter sings the praises of the earthly life of the Virgin Mary as mother and as a model for women. By flaunting the ecclesiastical aspect of Marian devotion over the christological one, the Pope attempted to persuade all women to identify with the Virgin as holy wife and mother in compliance with Christian symbolic signification. In Redemptoris Mater, Mary is not depicted as a Queen (as she was for example in artistic expressions before the Council of Trent)\(^{11}\) or involved in salvation, but as mother of Jesus and of all believers and, above all, as receptor of the gift of God. This image of the Virgin as receiver and beneficiary is linguistically reproduced with the metaphor of light in the Italian text. This metaphor appears when Jeanette summarizes the early life of her mother when she went to Paris and led an independent and audacious life. Her religious conversion, which took place after such an experimental stage, is rendered in Italian as ‘aveva visto la Luce’ (Le arance: 105) against the English ‘she was […] with the Lord’ (Oranges: 85). Although both images have clear religious connotations, their effects on the characterization of the mother figure and impact upon the reader are completely different. One could argue for example that the idiomatic expression ‘vedere la luce’ is part of a more communicative and reader-oriented approach adopted by the Italian translator as opposed to a more source-oriented and literal way of reading the text. Yet, despite the fact that the expression ‘vedere la luce’ is more standard than, for instance, ‘essere con Dio’, the metaphor of light associates the mother to the Virgin Mary as receiver of the gift of God. This image triggers cultural and semantic memories by evoking an immense Italian artistic heritage of paintings depicting the divine annunciation to Mary as beams of light enveloping the angel of God, Gabriel.

In conclusion the Italian version of Oranges flattens the original metaphor of the mother as a campaigner for women’s emancipation and subversion of the status quo. It reinscribes the mother in a culture (the Italian one) that, on the one hand, appreciates and reinforces her traditional maternal values and, on the other, weakens her original innovative and rebellious characteristics. Unlike the English text, the Italian version focuses on motherhood, marriage and patriarchy as the

\(^{11}\) On the role of the Virgin Mary as Queen see Accati (1995).
only parameters of the mother’s subjectivity, which exalt her roles within the domestic walls to the detriment and even suppression of her public aspirations.

1.4 Collocative Clashes and the Allotropic Nature of the Mother

While the mother in Oranges exhibits innovative and rebellious traits, we soon realize that Winterson’s intention is not to depict her solely as a rebellious character in a male world. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, readers and reviewers praised the book for its balanced critique of religion and patriarchy. How then did irony and the mother figure contribute to the success of the book and to its moderate critical tone? And how is this rendered in Italian?

As we have seen in the previous pages, irony can be a carrier of sharp criticism and as such it may turn out to be annoying, undesirable and unwelcome. However, the very format and tone of irony usually play to their advantage. As highlighted above, irony can be humorous and therefore pleasant for those who deliver it as well as for its recipients. Humour can result from unexpected clashes and juxtapositions (like the private figure of the mother and the public figure of Napoleon) thus triggering surprise and amusement. What is essential for the appreciation of irony stems not only from the ironist’s ability to conjure up unpredicted or startling combinations but also from the interlocutor’s ability to be sensitive and receptive to such rhetorical games. This is metatextually illustrated by a play on words in the second chapter of Oranges, ‘Exodus’, when Jeanette attempts to criticize her teacher for not understanding the originality of her needlework:

Example 15
What constitutes a problem is not the thing, or the environment where we find the thing, but the conjunction of the two; something unexpected in a usual place (our favourite aunt in our favourite poker parlour) or something usual in an unexpected place (our favourite poker in our favourite aunt). (Oranges: 44)

Il problema infatti non è tanto la cosa in sé, o l’ambiente in cui la troviamo, ma il nesso tra i due. Trovare, per esempio, qualcosa di inaspettato in un posto familiare (la nostra zia prediletta nella nostra bisca favorita) o qualcosa di noto in un posto imprevisto (il nostro attizzatoio favorito nella nostra zia prediletta). (Le arance: 58)
Example 16

All things fall and are built again / And those that build them again are gay. 
(Oranges: 30, Winterson’s italics).

Tutto cade e viene ricostruito e chi ricostruisce è gay. (Le arance: 39)

In this chapter, Jeanette would like to take part in a school needlework competition. The needlework she presents does not depict sheep and hills, like that of many other school girls, but biblical scenes with flames and devils, which the teacher sees as disturbing and therefore rejects. Jeanette’s reaction is emblematic. She does not try to defend or justify the beauty and precision of her work but blames her teacher’s defective vision both literally and figuratively for her failure in the competition. The teacher is both visually impaired and narrow-minded and, in Jeanette’s view, she can only recognize ‘things according to expectation and environment’ (Oranges: 43-44). Following this logic, only ‘white and fluffy’ (Oranges: 43) sheep and hills are welcomed in this context, as these subjects are typical and recurrent in needlework. By the same logic, Jeanette’s work cannot be accepted because devils and flames are unheimlich. They do not comply with the surrounding environment and therefore they have to be rejected or ignored. The pun in Example 15 invites the English reader to be visually and ideologically open to the unforeseen or the unconventional, which at first sight could seem as absurd as ‘an elephant in the supermarket’ (Oranges: 44). Coming in the wake of Jeanette’s account of her needlework, Example 15 acquires metatextual value, as it reads as a defence of her ironic strategies. The unconventionality of the elephant in Jeanette’s hypothesis or the devils in her needlework spring from a series of collocative clashes which cause unexpected collisions of elements, such as our favourite poker in our favourite aunt, and which provide the basis for her criticism. As Wayne C. Booth explains,

if a speaker’s style departs notably from whatever the reader considers the normal way of saying a thing, or the way normal for this speaker, the reader may suspect irony. The effect is easy when there is a quick temporary clash of meanings – what in fact amounts to a direct conflict of information conveyed. (Booth 1974: 67, my italics)
Humour and collocative clashes, essential to the construction and appreciation of irony, represent, therefore, the key to the English novel’s success and the vehicle for moderate criticism. Readers’ ideological positions are challenged but we are, at the same time, amused and guided by metanarrative interventions. Not only do these metanarrative interventions help the readers understand the text, they also monitor their ideological positioning. If the teacher is to be blamed for visual and ideological impairment and for her blindness to the originality and value of Jeanette’s biblical message, the English reader is invited to align with Jeanette and appreciate absurdities or unusual clashes. These clashes are linguistically visible in the English text through sacrilegious combinations of religious and secular elements. For example, at the beginning of the book, the narrator recounts that one of her earliest memories is of her sitting on an Easter sheep. The joyful story focuses on the Sacrificial Lamb, the religious symbol of Christ’s passion, which is the subject of her mother’s educational tale, but which is also, as seen above, in a Sunday dish ‘with potato’ (*Oranges*: 4). More unexpected and sacrilegious juxtapositions are to be found, as, for example, when we are told that Jesus’s portrait, displayed on the mantelpiece, is stained by egg or when Pastor Spratt is described as good-looking as Errol Flynn, the mother’s idol. Joyfulness, humour and hilarity are often fostered by the naivety and innocence of young Jeanette, who likes playing with creative and unexpected combinations. These elements usually belong to disparate semantic spheres and, cunningly but inoffensively, undermine religion. Simplicity and ingenuousness are, therefore, other essential ingredients in the success of the narrator’s criticism. While Jeanette pretends to be simple and pure for the sake of the pastors, she also takes pleasure in singing her lesbian friend’s poem in Example 16. Here ‘gay’ is employed in its meaning of ‘happy’, but it is proposed as a synonym for ‘homosexual’ by the cunning narrator.

In Italian neither metanarrative interventions nor collocative clashes are rendered functionally within the economy of the text, especially when they spring from puns. As Example 15 shows, it is impossible to reproduce the polysemic ambiguity of the English ‘poker’ in Italian and the fun deriving from it. This is because ‘poker’ has two completely different meanings, one referring to a metal
rod used to stir a fire and the other to a well-known card game. The Italian can only disambiguate the pun and use two different words with two different meanings: ‘bisca’ for the card game and ‘attizzatoio’ for the fire rod. As it is, the translation does not make much sense because the aim of the pun is to challenge vision and perception and to overthrow usual *versus* unusual/unexpected categories. To help understanding and appreciation, the Italian text is accompanied by a footnote by the translator placed at the end of Example 15: ‘gioco di parole intraducibile basato sul doppio significato della parola “poker”, che indica sia l’attizzatoio sia il noto gioco di carte’ (*Le arance*: 58). Despite the fact that the subversive message is ultimately conveyed, some readers might still miss it. This is partly because footnotes are sometimes skipped in favour of a more fluent mode of reading and partly because of lack of clarity. The footnote in fact specifies a not very obvious connection. ‘Bisca’ translates ‘poker parlour’ but does not contain within its morphology the word ‘poker’ which is only mentioned in the Italian footnote. Hence, despite the efforts to clarify the interconnections between ‘bisca’ and ‘attizzatoio’, the two terms continue to exist separately without any necessary relation. The only aspect that may survive in Italian is the sexual image of the poker (or sexual toy) in our favourite aunt.

Sexual connotations are unfortunately lost in the Italian translation of Example 16. Here Jeanette is quoting Yeats whose lines are originally used by her lesbian friend, Elsie, to tell Jeanette (and the reader) that gay people are powerful and subversive: they overthrow the world and build it again according to a different order and logic. In Italian the political charge of the pun is completely lost in both text and footnote. The latter reclaims only the literary origin of the quotation: ‘versi tratti dalla celebre poesia di W.B. Yeats “Lapis Lazuli”: *All things fall and are built again / And those that build them again are gay.* [N.d.T]’ (*Le arance*: 39). The translator does not interpret Yeats’s lines for the Italian readers who, if they do not know English, will not enjoy the ambiguity of Elsie’s precept. Even if they read English, they might still not be able to add ‘homosexual’ to the field of ‘gay’, because the poem does not contain sexual connotations. Mark Abley explains that the word ‘gay’ ‘as a euphemism and proud substitute for “homosexual” [...] became widespread only in the 1960s’. The poem, written in
Could we claim that the role of the mother figure serves the same purpose as humour and irony? In the light of the previous analysis, can we argue that the mother’s criticism of religion and patriarchy is moderate, restrained and, somehow, inoffensive? What is her real role in the religious and sexual upbringing of Jeanette? From a narratological and stylistic point of view, it might be difficult to make a parallel between the mother, humour and irony and the way in which they are made to convey a controlled critique of patriarchy. As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, the mother is a rebellious character, generally going against patriarchy. Can we therefore assume that, as she is a rebel, then maybe the nonconformist daughter does not clash with her? Or that she will be receptive to her daughter’s unorthodox sexuality? If this is the case, what kind of lesson does Jeanette learn from her mother? Or should we expect her to still play the role of enforcer of patriarchal rules as all mothers do/did?12 And finally, how is all this rendered in Italian? One issue should be addressed first: what do the narrator’s ironic personality and the mother figure share? Ironic renderings of the mother figure unravel her covert subversive nature in English. As seen above, she undermines male power and supports women’s rights to work and self-fulfilment. Despite this, we cannot really say that the mother is always ironic. She is a member of a fundamentalist Evangelical community. She is extremely religious, is horrified by her neighbours’ fornications and upholds the sexism, androcentrism and misogyny inherent in her religion. She also seems to disapprove of her daughter’s quest for homosexual identity. Indeed, on a first reading, she appears to be a phallic mother (Gallop 1982), namely a supporter of patriarchy. However, on closer inspection, like most characters in novels, she is

---

12 Rich (1980) maintains that mothers enforce the patriarchal system.
far from being monothematic. She is prismatic, fragmented, dialogic and, therefore, contradictory or, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) would say, allotropic.  

Aporia and dialogism are indeed the constitutive traits of the mother figure who, at times, confuses or unsettles the readers by embodying collocative clashes, oppositional traits and practices. These traits are immediately revealed in the first pages of the book where, for instance, the simile mother-Bonaparte appears and we are given an amusing picture of the mother sulking under trees when the annihilation that she longed for did not materialize (Example 3). Yet, the lines that follow the simile partially contradict its political and ideological significance (as explained earlier on in this chapter). After reminding the reader of how the mother used to pray, the narrator completes her depiction of her thus: ‘first of all she thanked God that she had lived to see another day, and then she thanked God for sparing the world another day’ (Oranges: 4). How is it possible that the mother wishes for total destruction if she then thanks God for sparing the world another day? How can these two opposing aspects (being merciless and compassionate) be reconciled in one single character?

The contradictions characterizing the figure of the mother are numerous. Readers are told that her parlour is her private and almost sacred space where no one is allowed because ‘it was her place of prayer and meditation’ (Oranges: 4). Yet, a few chapters later we are told that her parlour is also a place for pleasure where she listens to Johnny Cash, thus encompassing the marriage of disparate elements: secular and religious, country and western music and religious hymns. In addition, as a member of an Evangelical community, she professes Protestantism, yet she is inspired by Catholic icons, namely the Virgin Mary. Despite the fact that her religion does not approve of the ‘collective effervescence of sacred forms of sociality’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 38), characterizing the Catholic Church, she supports collective experiences, parades, religious demonstrations and Evangelical campaigns. She takes part in all sorts of activities and initiatives

---

13 The latter term, usually used in chemistry to define elements ‘having different physical properties, though unchanged in substance’, expresses the same properties as the figurative term ‘aporia’ (Oxford English Dictionary Online, http://www.oed.com.ezp2.bath.ac.uk [accessed on 30 June 2010]).
organized by the community: the Harvest Festival, the Sisterhood Choir, the Salvation Army and the Christian Anglers’ Association, to name but a few. However, although she enjoys interacting with the community and contributes to the organization of communal events, she seems to draw power from the individual relationship she has with the word of God. In the name of Protestant solitude and individual practices, the mother cherishes her moments of prayers and creativity in the loneliness of her parlour. Upon the pastors’ request, she locks herself up at home, removed from the noise of Heathens and Christians, to interpret the Bible and prepare a new script for the Nativity Play to be dramatized by Jeanette and other children from the community. She is thus capable of combining disparate and contradictory aspects pertaining to Catholicism and Protestantism, thus creating her own original approach to religion and God.

Like all devout Protestants, the mother dislikes Saints, considered as ‘really wicked, and given to nameless desires. Not fit for worship’ (Oranges: 15). Yet she appreciates St Paul’s precepts, insistently mentioned by the pastors in conversation and in their sermons. Against the principles of her own religious beliefs (the Reformed church which, together with the Enlightenment, swept away superstition, magic and ancient practices), she treasures holy objects: a parchment from Lebanon, believed to be a ‘bit of the Old Testament’ (Oranges: 11) or ‘a DEED OF THE OLD TESTAMENT tablecloth’ (Oranges: 10). By worshipping both the parchment and the tablecloth, she follows into the footsteps of the Roman Catholic Church which in the Middle Ages incorporated within its cult all sorts of practices, including sorcery and witchcraft (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 100), in order to attract new followers and extend its control over more counties and countries. Pastor Spratt’s photo, kept as a lucky charm on the mother’s bedside table, is also a sign of medieval devotion, combining religious dedication, magic and Catholic superstition.

Clashing Protestant and Catholic elements are part of the constitutive nature of the mother figure, resulting in an imaginative and unusual fusion. In keeping with her Protestant credo, she is convinced that ‘you made people and yourself what you wanted. Anyone could be saved and anyone could fall to the Devil, it was their
choice’ (Oranges: 126). Her convictions reflect exactly the spirit of Protestantism and the Enlightenment which ‘objectified the world as a profane environment, emptied it of its magical content, and thereby made it a place conducive to rational intervention’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 107). God is no longer embodied by holy objects or mystical scenarios, but ‘is made transcendent, and the status quo cannot be justified by divine will’. Stripped of its medieval and Catholic past, the new Protestant world ‘opens to the plans of humans’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 107), among whom Jeanette’s mother. Yet, alongside her modern philosophy, the mother continues unambiguously to nourish a fatalist view of the world and to fear God’s wrath and ultimate annihilation. On the one hand, she believes in the power of the Protestant word and the preachers, whose dialectics enhances the cognitive experience and dimension upon which Protestantism is based. On the other, she evokes the sensuous experience of the medieval Church and its magical powers. She claims to be able to heal the sick like Jesus, practises exorcisms (especially upon Jeanette), speaks about diseases in terms of ‘Humours’ (Oranges: 109), confuses internal organs (the stomach with the heart)\(^1\) and participates in the prayers for the good weather. Like the medieval Church, her life choices are guided and inspired by pagan symbols, such as the Greek Goddess Athena. She is ‘Old Testament through and through’ (Oranges: 4) but also devoted to the Virgin Mary, an emblematic figure of the New Testament. She is, as the narrator puts it eloquently, ‘enlightened and reactionary’ (Oranges: 126). To sum up, she is an aporia whose allotropic elements are part of a world that refuses to worship the Catholic Saints and their relics and is at the same time the product of magic and paganism.

As a result, the mother is an ambiguous, eclectic and unsettling character who incorporates and personifies the constitutive elements of irony. She is not, or not always, spontaneously ironic, nor is she always depicted in ironic terms, but she embodies skilfully the underlying principles of irony: oppositions, clashes and

\(^1\) According to Mellor and Shilling, this confusion is part of a more general ‘anxiety related to the instability of the body’ (1997: 39, authors’ italics) and typical of the medieval era. As the inside of the body was not scientifically known, it was perceived and represented as a flux of ‘natural liquors’ (1997: 39) and this therefore caused misunderstandings and confusion of organs. This aspect is ironically reread when the young Jeanette hears for the first time the word ‘testicles’ (Oranges: 41). Being kept sexually in the dark from a very early age, Jeanette confuses the male organ with another one: ‘they sounded like intestines only on the outside’ (1997: 41).
Booth and, later on, Linda Hutcheon (1994) explain irony’s dual aspect by means of the famous figure originally used by Wittgenstein and Gombrich to present optical illusions:

As Gombrich says, you can see the figure either as a rabbit or as a duck, but you can’t see it as both at the same time. The figure clicks back and forth, visually, much as we have described our perception of ironic working as a click of recognition and reconstruction: what appeared as one figure suddenly appears as another figure. (Booth 1974: 127)

Like irony, the mother does not reveal herself in all her complexity at once, but only after a methodical work of reconstruction and reflection on our part. It is after such work that the reader realizes that both sides of her personality do not cancel each other out, but they exist independently in their own rights. Hence, by engaging in a dialogic relationship with the two religions, she experiments with both individually and works out ad hoc solutions that, we hope, will improve the system. In gender terms, she is generally against male power but, at the same time, she is not prepared to reject the pastors’ words and precepts. In her view, they continue to represent authority and as such they should be respected (and at times revered). This explains not only why she keeps the pastor’s photo by her bed, but also why after refusing for a long time to play any song about the Wise Men, a religious symbol but also a metaphor for a male lack of wisdom, she finally agrees to include them in her repertoire.

If we now move to the Italian translation, we are confronted with major issues. The mother’s overzealous religious devotion and maternal qualities coupled with the Italian readers’ religious baggage and background risk overshadowing the beneficial qualities of both in order to redesign a more democratic system for all.
mother’s eclectic nature and balanced critical attitude. Her religious attitude and devotion to the Virgin Mary and her irrational attachment to holy objects, her unshakeable loyalty to St Paul’s precepts and her strong commitment to the community as a collective experience strengthen her Catholic side to the detriment of her Protestant one. In Italian she is not a rabbit and a duck in equal terms. She is more one than the other, disproportionate and lopsided. Moreover, this unbalanced depiction eclipses the mother’s experimental and nonconformist traits which end up being read as hypocrisy rather than critical thinking. Finally, this series of distortions and alterations of the mother figure does not help the reader appreciate the tone of the ST and the narrator’s intention. To this effect, the Italian text is interspersed with idiomatic expressions, such as ‘si mise a piangere, a fiumi’ (Le arance: 116), ‘me la diedi a gambe’ (Le arance: 12), ‘tremava come una foglia’ (Le arance: 82), ‘era proprio sulle spine’ (Le arance: 100), ‘non fa un baffo’ (Le arance: 43) and ‘stringere la cinghia’ (Le arance: 91), which are added ex novo when they are not originally present in the ST. Such phrases, which at first could be interpreted as compensations, are only marginally effective. They add humour and make TT depictions more amusing than they are in the ST, but they do not cast light on the bigger picture. While the Italian mother appears to be a major religious devotee (of Catholicism), the narrator’s portrayal of the mother is at times humorous, at times serious and at times an original combination of the two.

One final issue should be addressed now: how can the mother think of redesigning a more democratic system for all in practical terms? This can be investigated by referring to her precepts and their positive impact upon Jeanette’s sexual upbringing. We will thus obtain a more rounded picture of the mother-daughter relationship in both the original and the translation. In English the daughter’s description of her mother’s temperament and dispositions can be interpreted as a declaration of affection, despite and beyond their quarrelsome relationship. By depicting her double-sided nature in such an articulated way, the English narrator-protagonist implicitly declares that the mother is a source of rhetorical wisdom for her. It is the mother who teaches Jeanette the subtleties of irony and, presumably, how to make good use of it. Hence, we also wonder: can the mother have a
positive impact upon Jeanette’s discovery and recognition of her homosexuality (even while she is such an unambiguous supporter of religion and heterosexuality)? Dreaming of empowering women, as she does at the beginning of the novel, cannot be enough to bring out a more democratic system contemplating all forms of sexuality (including homosexuality). It may be anticipated that the mother’s positive impact is partially concealed or obscured in Italian.

1.5  The Body, Gender Roles and Transvestism in the Italian and English Texts

Before we venture into such an investigation, we need to decide which side of the mother’s personality is worth exploring: Catholic devotion or Protestant loyalty? The rabbit or the duck? Or could it be a combination of the two? Considering the mechanisms of optical illusion and the impossibility of seeing both figures at the same time, we should focus on one aspect at a time. But where should we start from? I believe that the fairy tales, which are interspersed throughout the narrative, represent a fruitful point of departure and a criterion for selection. Even though so different from one another, these fairy tales are all set in a remote, unidentifiable and legendary past populated with princes, kings, knights, sorcerers and women. Some rewrite the legend of King Arthur, Sir Parsifal and the Holy Grail, others are more the fruit of the author’s imagination. In all cases, they have a metanarrative function, being not only entertaining but also enlightening in that they highlight the mother’s medieval Catholicism.

Among the characters in the fairy tales, two women, in particular, seem to act as the mother’s alter ego. The first story, in the chapter entitled ‘Genesis’, introduces us to a ‘brilliant and beautiful’ princess who, feeling suffocated by her family’s care and attentions, leaves her protective castle. Walking through a forest, she comes to ‘the hut of an old hunchback who knew the secret of magic’ (Oranges: 9) and is about to die. The princess then decides not to return to her reign and stay with her in the forest. Soon after the death of the old lady, she takes charge of a small village of humble people (whose social importance will be further illustrated in Chapter Two) that she educates and over whom she rules. One can
now see similarities between the princess and Jeanette’s mother as both share practical and symbolic duties: apart from milking the goats, they both serve as preceptors and cultural mediators and have to compose songs for festivals. They also have complementary qualities. Both are educated: the princess is acquainted with the laws of physics and the nature of the universe, while the mother can speak French and read the Bible. The second fairy tale appearing in Chapter 3 also features a woman who lives in a forest. The reader could assume that this woman is the princess of the previous story, seen that apart from being humble and wise, she is ‘beautiful’ (Oranges: 59), likes to ‘sing songs’ (Oranges: 59) and performs magic: ‘the mere sight of her healed the sick and gave a good omen to the crops’ (Oranges: 59). This woman is courted by a prince who is told that she is the embodiment of perfection and therefore deserves to be married. Like Jeanette’s mother, however, she is very busy with deadlines and cannot pay him too much attention. The similarity between the story’s character and the mother is also highlighted by the double-sided nature of the former’s personality, described as ‘symmetrical’ and ‘a perfect balance of qualities and strength’ (Oranges: 62, my italics). The women share two further qualities: they are both volatile and theatrical.

According to Mellor and Shilling, volatility and theatricality are the two distinguishing features of the medieval church and people (Mellor and Shilling 1997). ‘Medieval bodies’ are considered to be more volatile, theatrical, impulsive and ‘unpredictable than those of their modern counterparts’ (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 35-36). These characteristics were expressed by a wide range of instinctual and emotional reactions to life. These reactions showed corporeal awareness and aimed to achieve ‘a sensual relationship with the sacred’ (1997: 37): aggression, for instance, connected its emotional and the physical manifestations, typical of the medieval era, to religion and its goals. These extremes gave way to physical and (almost) theatrical performances encompassing fasting, sexual abstinence, prayers and exorcism which could ‘effectively deconstruct the person’s physical and social habits and make possible the reconstruction of a new orientation’ (1997: 37).
In the light of Mellor and Shilling’s cultural definition of volatility and theatricality, we can claim that both the mother and the woman/princess are characterized by these distinguishing marks of the medieval body and the Catholic Church. Hence, they activate in the reader’s mind a series of semantic frames which, by associating the two characters, provide critical assonances. For instance, both women appear to be instinctual and, at times, irrational. They both drop in social status, which is considered unreasonable and foolish, especially in medieval times when marriage was a political instrument to secure status and heritage. The princess abandons her reign to live in a forest, whereas Jeanette’s mother (according to her angry father) has ‘married down’ (Oranges: 36) and is now working-class, as Chapter Two argues. They both exhibit disrespectful attitudes towards authority, especially men’s authority. The woman/princess refuses to talk to the prince who has travelled a long way to go and propose to her: ‘if you want to chat,’ she says to him, ‘you’ll have to come back later, I’m working to a deadline’ (Oranges: 61). Despite her veneration for St Paul, Pastor Spratt and other missionaries, the mother sees herself on a par with Bonaparte, the prophets and even God himself. In addition, both women sing beautifully, practise sexual abstention, are generally abrupt, tend to overexpress emotions through the body, gestures and facial expressions and are, on one occasion, mistakenly confused with witches with doubtful magic powers.

In Oranges volatility and physical theatricality are also connected with the spiritual and enhance the link between women’s bodies and the sacred. Both women, for instance, claim to have healing powers which they use to cure illnesses and diseases or, in the case of the mother, to convert heathens, described as monsters or, in the medieval fashion, as disproportionate humans. The protagonists of the fairy tales are beheaded by the prince because of their ‘magic’ powers, whereas the mother’s healing abilities provoke scepticism and hesitation in Jeanette’s teacher. The mother even claims that she had to fight against demons and hellish creatures when she gave birth, metaphorically, to Jeanette. As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, Jeanette has been adopted and this

---

15 This aspect is highlighted by the Italian translation with the use of an adjective to describe a group of men camping next to the congregation’s camp site, ‘energumeni’ (Le arance: 134). Unlike ‘angry men’ (Oranges: 112), its English counterpart, the Italian ‘energumeni’ emphasizes the disproportionate size of these men, considered to be heathens and unbelievers.
adoption (which will be discussed in Chapter Two) is imagined by her mother almost in mythical terms as a birth from her head. Like the medieval mystics, she practises fasting, refuses to cook for her family and prefers to work non-stop for the pastors and God rather than wasting time in the kitchen. She even inflicts these practices upon Jeanette, as a form of punishment and ritual, intentionally leaving her without food or drink, after she causes public sexual scandal with her ‘homosexual promiscuity’. The fasting and exorcism that Jeanette’s sinful flesh has to endure leave the young girl physically exhausted, feverish and hallucinating (or so it seems to the mother). By mortifying and vilifying her daughter’s body, the mother does not so much wish to reject physicality but to sublimate corporeality as a means of reaching God and achieving Truth. Many other physical aspects of the body are underscored by the mother who, by encouraging torture and promoting ecstasy, negotiates religious meanings with sensuous responses and exalts the body’s potential and expressive nature.

It seems, therefore, evident that the parallel that the narrator wants to draw between the woman/princess and the mother aims to highlight their positive, if apparently contradictory, attitude to the body as a site for cultural negotiation and ideological contestation. By exalting corporeality and the body’s potential, both at literal and metaphysical levels, both women fight those political and religious institutions which annihilate the body and exalt silence, individual meditation, solitude, the soul and transcendence (as is the case in Protestantism). In this respect, should we expect the Italian version to support the women’s political agenda of opposition to and contestation of the Protestant system? This seems to be the case when we consider that most reporting verbs framing dialogues and speeches uttered by different members of the congregation, among whom Jeanette’s mother, have been translated into Italian with elaborate verbal expressions, which if on the one hand mark a ‘natural-oriented’ (Ardekani 2002: 127) approach to translation in keeping with Italian stylistic requirements, on the other accentuate corporeality. For instance, when the mother is asked by the pastors if she could write a new script for the Christmas play, her initial response,

---

16 According to these rules, Italian writers should employ different reporting verbs to avoid repetition of common and un-expressive verbs such as ‘to say’ or ‘to tell’ (Gabrielli 1982, orig. 1974).

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
Chapter One

expressed in English with ‘my mother [...] said she couldn’t’ (Oranges: 117), is translated in Italian with the more precise and evocative verb ‘si schermi’ (Le arance: 140). Unlike its counterpart, the Italian solution highlights the mother’s physical movement of withdrawal, in line with many other similar responses, such as ‘mi fulminò con lo sguardo’, (Oranges: 120) which celebrate the fusion between the maternal body and the uttered word.

However, the Italian translation does not consistently support the women’s political agenda of opposition and contestation. This is evident not only in light of what I have been arguing so far, but also in relation to other solutions specific to the mother and the woman/princess. For instance, in Chapter 1 of the book the princess’s melancholic nature attracts advisers and kings who try in vain to cheer her up. While the English employs ‘kings’ (Oranges: 9), the Italian uses ‘più di un cavaliere’ (Le arance: 15) which, unlike the English term, has crucial ethical values. Although the figure of the knight activates in the Italian reader’s imagination a prototype typical of Italian fairy tales, it also represents an archetype in traditional courtship, male gallantry and romanticism inspired by the ephemerally beautiful and forever passive woman. Passivity characterizes, by reflection, the mother figure in Italian who does not do any courting but, as we have seen earlier, is courted. Finally, not only is the woman objectified in Italian, she is also desexualized and sublimated by the male imagination and expectations. The woman that the prince is desperately looking for is ‘flawless’ (Oranges: 58) in English and ‘immacolata’ (Le arance: 75) in Italian, the Italian term constituting the main attribute of the Virgin Mary, who conceived without sexual intercourse.

We now have to answer fully the question asked above: how does the mother express her desire for a more democratic system for all? And how is it conveyed in Italian? To answer this question we should try to reconcile the mother’s political agenda with the other issues that affect her characterization: irony, medieval Catholicism, volatility, theatricality and the corporeal. The framework is offered again by Wilson’s post-Gricean analysis of irony according to which irony is not only constructed around echoic allusions but also around pretence.
According to Wilson, an ironist succeeds in being ironic because s/he can pretend to be somebody else by uttering something that s/he does not really believe and from which s/he deep down dissociates her/himself. Representation, performance, mimicry and interpretation of different roles are therefore skills that the mother and, consequently the daughter have to exhibit. In one of the novel’s fairy tales the woman/princess offers the king a theatre of dwarfs both as a form of entertainment and as an introduction to the beauty and magic of acting, imitation and bodily parody. If the woman/princess of the embedded narratives promotes imitation by expressing her love for miniature theatres, performances and minstrels, the mother of the embedding narrative embodies the woman/princess’s gift by performing different roles and wearing many masks. Winterson’s novel is animated by sexual overturning and gender role-swapping, as enacted by the mother’s playful attitudes and ‘transvestism’. She is alternatively a man pretending to be in turn Bonaparte, the prophets, God, William Blake and Jesus (who is endowed with healing powers and extemporizes on the nature of the world in the garden of Gethsemane) and a woman usurping the place of male deities such as Zeus and God. In Chapter 1, she claims to be the Virgin Mary and Athena who, by giving birth to Jeanette from her head, re-enacts Athena’s own monstrous birth from her father Zeus’s head and, at the same time, displays her disrespect for and challenges male power and status.

The medieval aura characterizing the mother and her fairy-tale alter egos is not simply a feature of their idiosyncratic nature, it becomes a crucial element of contextualization and interpretation. As Mellor and Shilling claim, sexual transvestism was typical of the medieval era and was epitomized by a playful approach to gender, allowing for role-swapping and sexual experimentation. The fact that in medieval times the body was considered as unstable also affected gender identities:

in many respects gender identities were not as strong in medieval times as they became in modern societies. The striking religious imagery of Christ as embodying both male and female, and the

---

17 For a feminist reading of the birth of Athena, see Miglena Nikolchina (1991).

18 See also Beattie 1999.
acceptance of flux and change in the body, meant that categories of sex were not opposites. (Mellor and Shilling 1997: 39-40)

Mellor and Shilling carry on explaining that ‘if men used up too much of what was considered to be their superior heat and energy, for example, the concern was that their bodies could lose their maleness and become identified with the bodies of women’ (1997: 40). Even if sexual anxieties were not totally absent in medieval times, this porous and fluid approach to gender meant that sexual playfulness was welcomed or tolerated more than previously. Gender polarities were not so fixed and did not exist as nowadays because the burlesque allowed men to be women and women to be men. This is the aspect that the mother appears to appreciate and that she presents to Jeanette. Her desire to be Bonaparte is also a desire to overthrow gender polarities (not only male power). Her attraction to Catholicism can also be justified by the fact that, as Tina Beattie suggests, the Catholic orthodoxy has always contemplated burlesque ‘theo-drama’ and ‘a drama of mimetic parodies’ (2006: 142 and 129): God is endowed with the female ability of procreation, Christ represents both men and women assuming therefore feminine traits and, finally, priests represent the Church which is symbolized at times by God and at times by the Virgin Mary.

Considering Jeanette’s sexual experimentation, homosexual desire, and criticism of heteronormative constrictions, the mother’s transvestism is an important model for her. The Italian translation does not appear to be too sensitive to this, because linguistically the carnival is downplayed. For example, in Chapter 1 the expression ‘begetting of children’ (Oranges: 3) with reference to the mother, consciously used to highlight the link between her and God (because the verb ‘to beget’ is mainly employed to define God’s act of procreation of the world and man), becomes a more general ‘generare’ (Le arance: 8). In the last chapter, the translation ‘orfana di madre’ (Le arance: 167) replacing ‘she had no mother’ (Oranges: 141) normalizes gender roles in Italian. Here Jeanette is Winnet, the young protagonist of the last fairy tale, who meets a sorcerer in a forest who casts a spell on her and keeps her in his castle as his daughter. Being a powerful magician he succeeds in making her forget who she is and convinces her that she is his daughter and that she has no mother. The text never says if he is her real
father and, thanks to some features that he shares with the mother and her fictional alter egos, we can even assume that he is yet another maternal alter ego and perhaps Zeus who gave birth to his daughter from his own head, thus replacing women and appropriating (like God) women’s generative power. Unfortunately, such suggestions are not available in the Italian text as ‘orfana’ implies that Winnet has lost her mother and therefore that she had one before. Italian readers would not be able to assume that the sorcerer could be (or pretend to be) the mother. The sorcerer is only her father, who is now trying to look after her and mother her, but who never gave birth to her. The parallel with the mother and her playful gender carnivalesque inversions are therefore lost. Hence, whereas in the English version transvestism is a powerful practice of contestation, which is exhibited, as we shall also see in Chapter Six, by those who want to criticize the system, in Italian it is not.

1.6 Conclusion

With the help of Wilson’s post-Gricean theories of irony and Lopez’s semantic frames as a framework of analysis, I have shown that not only humour and irony are diffused in the Italian translation of Oranges, but also that the recharacterization of the mother figure produces serious distortions and semantic alterations that impinge upon the final message of the book. The mother is a strategic character in the novel with political and ideological overtones and is metanarratively used to criticize patriarchy and religious institutions from within the system. She has a serious political agenda both in support of women’s social emancipation, an aspect which will be further explored in the next chapter, and of conceptual reconfigurations of the body as a site of cultural negotiation and ideological contestation. Her medieval alter egos guide the English readers’ interpretation and help them understand that their temporal dimension is not only fictional but also political. The mother is attracted by gender performances, a theoretical notion whose fictional application will be examined in Chapter Six, and by medieval Catholicism because of its theo-dramas and burlesque parodies which enhance the body as a stage on which to experiment with gender freely.

---

For instance, “the sorcerer was very good to the villagers who lived in clusters under the hills. He taught them music and mathematics and put a strong spell on the crops” (Oranges: 142).
The Italian translation overshadows the rebellious and ironic aspect of the mother who becomes a more monothematic character departing from the allotropic ironist of the original. Her attraction to Catholicism is domesticated in Italian because she endorses the family as a religious heterosexual institution as well as embodying the Virgin Mary as a symbol of female submission and passivity. The mother is objectified, her public commitments are belittled and her religious devotion normalized. While the Madonna that inspires her in *Oranges* is medieval (depicted as a powerful Queen in artefacts of the time, as Accati explains), the Madonna that becomes her source of inspiration in Italian is the post-reformation one, desexualized and continually reconceptualized by the male gaze (for example by John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Mater*). Her body is a sterile theatre that cannot even dream of having children and is instead a place of instincts, nervous frustrations and unresolved aggression. The next chapter discusses in detail whether the French version succeeds in conveying the rebellious component of the mother’s character or whether, once again, her characterization undergoes normalization and domestication. In order to do so, additional socio-political aspects, such as class consciousness and class positioning, which come to light in the comparative analysis, will be considered and explored.