CHAPTER TWO

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

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

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (2001, orig. 1985) is a postmodern autobiographical novel which explores, through different modes of discourse, the protagonist’s quest for identity, a quest which is culture-bound and class specific. As discussed in Chapter One, the book is a reflection upon girlhood and motherhood, and how patriarchy restrains dynamic affirmations of subjectivity around homosexual and unorthodox erotic drives. Most critical works on *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* praise the author’s courage in challenging religion and heteronormative biases. These works also acknowledge the culture-specific nature of the text intrinsically tied to class and gender issues of the North of England (of 1970s Lancashire, in particular). In contextualizing Jeanette’s personality and the community in which she grows up, they do not, however, explore in depth the social aspect and the importance of class and class consciousness. Class is rarely fully regarded as a key factor in the critical explorations of the narratives of female development in postwar England. One attempt has been made by Margot Gayle Backus (2001), who, unlike other critics, considers the interconnections of class and sexuality specifically in relation to adoption practices, which she consequently applies to cast light upon the mother figure in *Oranges*. Her analysis has, however, a number of limitations. We will now look at these limitations and their relevance for the study of the French translation *Les Oranges*,\(^1\) which

\(^1\) In this chapter I will refer to the English original by Winterson as *Oranges* and its French translation as *Les Oranges.*
Chapter Two

appeared in 1991 with Des Femmes. The point of departure of this chapter is the belief that the key to a correct interpretation of Jeanette’s mother is an analysis of her social status and class consciousness.

Backus illustrates adoption policies in North America and Great Britain and invites her reader to reflect upon such legislations as a means to preserve the heteronormative, heterosexual and middle-class status quo. She explains that, in the past, adoption rights were granted only to heterosexual couples in the belief that homosexuals, despite being capable of loving and looking after children, could not exactly ‘mimic’ straight couples or reinforce the idealized icon of the bourgeois ‘traditional family’ (Backus 2001: 133, author’s italics). In addition, in the years before legalized abortion, institutions used to remove children from their unwed biological mothers and give them to married adults who could thus sanctify heterosexual unions symbolically with children. This ‘morality play’ (2001: 137), which underlined the extent to which ‘social entitlement has been saliently at issue in the consolidation of adoption practices within the white American middle class’ (2001: 137), supported heteronormativity and reformed unwed women. By removing their babies, the establishment aimed at correcting those who did not really want to get married or who had sex, by ‘mistake’, before securing ‘the protection of a loving husband’ (2001: 137). Not all women, however, deserved to be ‘reprimanded’ and ‘cured’. This practice was in fact in place especially for the benefit of those middle-class white women who had been inadvertently led astray, but who could paternally be ‘initiated into the values of normative female heterosexuality’ (2001: 137) and given the chance to marry and live happily ever after.

Backus identifies similar dynamics in Jeanette’s adoption and, as a consequence, sees the mother as a cunning woman who tried, via the practice of adoption, ‘to assert her middle-class status in the face of the family’s working-class surroundings’ (2001: 137-38). Adopting Jeanette provides the mother with all the necessary tools to enact the ‘morality play’ Backus speaks about. According to this scholar, the mother adopted Jeanette only to comply with the establishment’s
social rehabilitation programme, to help another woman to be reformed and, especially, to reform herself after spending her adolescence in sin. Backus in fact proposes that the mother had once been gay and that she had to get married and adopt a child to erase her reproachable past, to regain social respectability and to sanctify, like all bourgeois people, the irreplaceable union of the heterosexual family. Backus does not explain, however, the reason why Jeanette’s mother desired to be reformed or to become straight. From her analysis, the mother emerges as sly, strategic and devious, because she craftily uses religion and the system ‘to preserve her imperilled class position’ (2001: 138). She is a woman with no moral values who only cares about appearances and her middle-class status.

In contrast to the analysis of Backus, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the mother is not middle-class and that, despite her middle-class aspirations, she is the carrier of traditional working-class values which promote in herself and her daughter the search for and construction of an authentic and independent subjectivity that runs counter to middle-class notions of gendered self. As a result, my analysis does not simply yield an alternative reading of the mother figure to that provided by Backus, it also affords an insight into the author’s overall characterization and ‘morality play’ of the mother. It considers many more factors than adoption practices in order to obtain a more inclusive picture of the mother, including: her feelings, fears, sense of class and political agenda. Thus, the mother will not simply appear as a reformed middle-class woman, the outcome of the petite bourgeoisie who tried in every possible way to extend the lifetime of their hypocritical principles. On the contrary, she will emerge as a powerful character who, thanks to her critical engagement with class, is capable of teaching Jeanette to live freely and intelligently in a difficult world. This will become evident when we reconsider carefully Jeanette’s mother’s social status, aspirations and position in society. The French translation Les Oranges casts light on the mother figure

2 In this chapter I will refer to the English original by Winterson as Oranges and its French translation as Les Oranges.
Chapter Two

and on her precepts precisely in these terms. As Italian writer Italo Calvino stated, ‘si legge veramente un autore solo quando lo si traduce, o [quando] si confronta il testo con una traduzione’ (Calvino quoted in McLaughlin 2010: 203). Unlike the Italian version analyzed in Chapter One, which exemplifies the extent to which a translation can depart from its original and what other messages it can convey, the French version brings about a better understanding of the original and of its subtle political and social challenges to traditional views of class, gender and motherhood.

In keeping with these methodological reflections, my comparison of the two versions of the text will avail itself of recent work by Carolyn Steedman (1986), Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989), Beverley Skeggs (1997) and bell hooks (2000) on two important issues that had almost disappeared from the agenda of feminism and cultural theory: class as a social notion and working-class women as a social group. In order to throw further light on the mother’s sense of class and political consciousness, this chapter also draws on autobiographical and theoretical works on class and motherhood by the above-mentioned working-class scholars. Their work interweaves personal and theoretical observations with what it means, as a woman and a daughter, to come from a working-class environment and to be brought up by working-class parents in America and in Great Britain in the 1970s. Despite their different personal backgrounds, they all give voice to marginal women whose marginal stories have never been represented or analyzed in a fair way. Their personal and unique accounts of working-class hardship are set against popular, religious and media representations of the working class or against illusory and romanticized versions of class. In different yet similar ways, these scholars try to invalidate these representations and to highlight the political meaning of motherhood in general and of working-class motherhood in particular, by turning their personal experience and reflections into almost ethnographic studies on the social regulation of motherhood. They, therefore, prove to be enlightening in understanding both the original text and the strategic choices of the French version regarding the maternal negotiations of the self across a range
of different sites (gender, class and power) and through social sectors (the labour market, education and the family).

2.2 The Mother’s Social Class and Status: Limited Possibilities, Hoarding, Envy and Rituals

Before analyzing the French translation, this section considers similarities between Steedman’s mother, hooks’s mother and Jeanette’s mother in order to reflect upon the latter’s social class. Despite the fact that Backus’s reading revolves around how adoption practices, in general, and, in Winterson’s novel, in particular, support the traditional bourgeois family as an idealized icon, she does not really justify why she considers the mother’s social status as middle-class. She simply infers it from her education. In Oranges, the narrator maintains that the mother studied French and that, when she was young, she went to Paris to work as an au pair. Education can indeed help to define social class but it should not be considered as the only factor. As all the above-mentioned feminist scholars maintain, social class is the outcome of various factors which range from feelings to economic availability. Education and qualifications in themselves cannot provide class mobility especially if they have not been fruitful in the labour market. This is very well demonstrated by the English original and the French translation when the mother thinks of her uncle and of his death as a pauper:

Example 1
She walked out one night and thought of her life and thought of what was possible. She thought of the things she couldn’t be. Her uncle had been an actor. ‘A very fine Hamlet,’ said the Chronicle. But the rags and the ribbons turn to years and then the years are gone. Uncle Will had died a pauper, she was not so young these days and people were not kind. She liked to speak French and to play the piano, but what do these things mean? (Oranges: 9)

Une nuit, elle sortit pour marcher et réfléchir à sa vie et à ce qui était possible. Elle réfléchit à tout ce qu’elle ne pouvait pas faire. Elle avait eu un oncle acteur. «Un excellent Hamlet», avait écrit La Chronique. Mais des oripeaux et des rubans, il ne reste bientôt que les ans, et des ans eux-mêmes il ne reste plus rien. L’oncle Will était mort dans la misère, elle n’était pour sa part plus si jeune, et les gens n’étaient pas tendres. Elle aimait la langue française et le piano, mais à quoi cela lui servait-il? (Les Oranges: 21)
In this passage Jeanette’s mother thinks about her life through her Uncle Will’s life and success. She reflects on the practical uselessness of people’s ambitions and aspirations in making their life better in economic terms. Despite this apparently negative attitude, the mother tries to cheer herself up by thinking that her education (speaking French and playing the piano) has been to some extent pleasurable. The reader knows that, at that point in her life, the mother does not ‘use’ her qualifications because she lives in Lancashire, does not speak French, works as a treasurer for the Society of the Lost and spends the rest of her time improving her house and bringing up her daughter. Moreover, the reader knows that, at that point, the mother no longer plays the piano for an audience. She only ever played it for an audience when she started working for her religious congregation. Notably music concerts are beyond her working-class league which only allow for modest performances in local pubs in order for her to attract new religious followers. Jeanette claims that she was so loved that she was called ‘the Jesus Belle’ (Oranges: 35), a title which also paid tribute to her knowledge of the French language. The final Free Indirect Question in Example 1, therefore, tells us that her love for languages and music outgrows the disappointment with the mediocrity of her life. It is therefore obvious that, in this case, the mother’s cultural capital (i.e. education) does not define her social status, unlike what Backus claims.

What defines her social class is instead ‘the things she could not be’ or, even better, ‘tout ce qu’elle ne pouvait pas faire’. As the French translation rightly underlines, the mother feels frustrated by what she cannot do rather than what she cannot be. She does not have a problem with who she is, but rather with what she does not have or cannot do. Skeggs in fact maintains that we should ‘think of social class in terms of access and exclusion, that is, what people do not have rather than what they have’ (1997: 13). This explains why she is building a bathroom almost on her own: her house is not as comfortable as a middle-class
Chapter Two

one because it only has an outside toilet. An outside toilet is a significant sign of poverty both in Great Britain and in the United States. Bell hooks’s first house displays the same signs which, although elegantly defined as ‘primitive ecology’ (hooks 2000: 11), are presented as indicative of the class to which her family belonged. Like Jeanette’s house, bell hooks’s house ‘lacked too much. There was no bathtub [...]’. Bathing took place in the kitchen to make this ritual of boiling and pouring and washing take less time. There was no such thing as privacy’ (2000: 11). Space people have to share and the material a house is made of are crucial markers of class for Winterson, hooks and Steedman. Jeanette’s house has to be reorganized and part of her room has to be sacrificed for a new bathroom. Hooks’s first family house is cold and unwelcoming with ‘concrete floors’ which ‘made one pull naked feet back under cover’ and with ‘a liminal space between the living room and kitchen where a dining room might have been’ (2000: 11). Lack and deficiency also characterize Steedman’s mother’s house displaying ‘material deprivation’ (Steedman 1986: 36) and ‘curtainless windows’ (1986: 5). Like Steedman’s mother or bell hooks’s mother, Jeanette’s mother suffers for the restrictions that mark her house and that make her desire for middle-class comfort even stronger.

In this context, therefore, the choice of the French expression ‘tout ce qu’elle ne pouvait pas faire’ invites the reader to apply Pierre Bourdieu’s metaphors of capital to the mother’s class. These metaphors, illustrated by Skeggs, translate the outcome produced by the movement of economic capital and cultural capital through social space, and in so doing they become class indicators. Economic capital ‘includes income, wealth, financial inheritances and monetary assets’ (Skeggs: 8) and cultural capital includes the ‘institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications’ (Skeggs: 8). In pointing at material restrictions and the inability to do certain things, the French expression crystallizes the ineffectiveness of the mother’s cultural capital in a general

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3 It is significant that the mother is never depicted in the toilet. The only two protagonists that spend time in it are Jeanette and her father.
Chapter Two

panorama of economic deficiency and poverty, to the detriment of working-class women. No wonder why in French Jeanette’s mother expresses lack of faith in any possible purpose education might realistically ‘serve’. Yet, the comparison with Bourdieu’s model should not be contemplated as exclusive. If it were, Backus’s reading of the mother’s class would be acceptable and justified. As Skeggs explains, Bourdieu’s model factors in mainly material and economic aspects which, according to him, serve as markers of class. Skeggs, hooks, Steedman and Walkerdine and Lucey, on the contrary, offer a more holistic perspective of class (and the working class in particular) insomuch as they include emotions, desires, aspirations, frustrations and disillusionment. According to them, class formation and perception operate at an intimate and emotional level and, for this reason, they explain that an in-depth social analysis of class should also include the emotional substratum. To illustrate this, hooks quotes Rita Mae Brown, a woman who, working with collectives and consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s, confronted ‘the issue of classism in their feminist collective’ (hooks 2000: 103). Like other women scholars, Brown did not think that ‘class was [...] simply a question of money’ (hooks 2000: 103). She, therefore, stated:

class is much more than Marx’s definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involves your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act. (Rita Mae Brown quoted in hooks 2000: 103)

In all the works analyzed here, the working-class mothers’ sense of class appears to be configured through exclusion and deprivation which engender envy.

Envy is indeed the major feeling which colours the mothers’ judgment and life choices. Jeanette’s mother and Steedman’s mother, for instance, start supporting

\[4\] Steedman for example states: ‘if we lived within my father’s earning power, being uncomplicatedly his children, two meals a day round the kitchen table, parents sharing a bed (and the car; in all those years my mother was never driven anywhere in the firm’s car) then our household would actually have represented, and represented to its children, the unambiguous position of upper working class. But it was my mother who defined our class position, and the emotional configurations that follow on such assessment’ (1986: 56).
the Conservative party, as a way to voice envy and 'resentment against the unfairness of things' (Steedman 1986: 30). Like Jeanette’s mother, Steedman’s mother ‘grew to political Conservatism out of a Labour background’ (Steedman 1986: 115) as a way to express defiance ‘fuelled by the substructure of envy and exclusion’ (Steedman 1986: 121). Envy is then the most prominent working-class emotion, unchained by an unbearable sense of exclusion. Envy, set by ‘motions of desire’ (Thompson quoted in Steedman 1986: 112), expresses longing for an easy life: for Marks and Spencer’s goods in Winterson’s case, for New Look coats in Steedman’s case or for ‘little special things’ (hooks 2000: 21) in hooks’s case. These mothers care about appearance and they wear nice clothes to be presentable and to mirror those who can afford expensive items and luxuries. Jeanette’s mother, for example, prefers not to eat rather than shop at Maxi Ball, a second-hand store. Their desire extends to embrace electrical appliances, television sets, radios, fridges and all those goods which add a hint of consumerism and sophistication to the mothers’ modest households and class performance.

Against such a complex background of mixed feelings for limited access to wealth, the French translation of the following examples appears appropriate and helps us reflect upon better ways to define the mother’s social class:

**Example 2**
My mother was furious; we always covered up the television on Sundays. We had a DEED OF THE OLD TESTAMENT tablecloth, given to us by a man who did house clearances. It was very grand, and we kept it in a special drawer with nothing else but a piece of Tiffany glass and some parchment from Lebanon. *(Oranges: 10-11)*

Ma mère était furieuse; on recouvrait toujours la télévision le dimanche. On avait une nappe des SCÈNES DE L’ANCIEN TESTAMENT que nous avait donnée un monsieur qui faisait des débarras. C’était une nappe très chic et on la rangeait dans un tiroir spécial où les seuls autres objets étaient un morceau de verre de chez Tiffany et un parchemin libanais. *(Les Oranges: 23)*

**Example 3**
It was always the same; we sat down on either side of the radiogram, she with her tea, me with a pad and pencil; in front of us, the Missionary Map. *(Oranges: 5)*

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C'était toujours le même rituel; on s'asseyait de chaque côté de la radio, ma mère avec son thé, moi avec un bloc-notes et un stylo; en face de nous, il y avait la Carte des Missionnaires. (*Les Oranges*: 15)

In these two examples, the adjective ‘chic’ and the additional noun ‘rituel’ are loaded with classist connotations which can be better understood *vis-à-vis* bell hooks’s study of class consciousness. First of all, Jeanette’s house appears to be ‘decorated’ with found or donated objects. Owing to financial constraints, everything that cannot be bought becomes desirable and, automatically, precious, regardless of whether it has any market value or whether it caters to the family’s needs. Every found object has a special story, is unique in its own way and, consequently, has to be handled with care: tablecloths, Tiffany glasses, parchments from Lebanon or a ‘recorder and a tune book’ (*Oranges*: 24). Like Jeanette’s house, hooks’s house is full of found objects: ‘found objects were everywhere. Some were useful, others purely decorative. Every object had a story. Nothing enchanted me more than to hear the history of each everyday object – how it arrived at this particular place’ (hooks 2000: 15). Excessive care for things, longing for what cannot be bought or owned, lack of middle-class style and emotional investments in what is, by luck, found or donated justify the French choice of ‘chic’. For Jeanette’s mother, indeed, objects should not only be expensive, magnificent or ostentatious, namely ‘grand’, they should be classy, namely ‘chic’. In their being ‘grand’, objects can only symbolize their market value or the money spent on them. In their being ‘chic’, they show additional values, namely taste, elegance, fashion and style, values which cannot be bought but are naturally acquired if one belongs to the right social class. In this context, domestic objects have the same function as the mother’s clothes. Clothes are not only items to be worn, they become part of class performance and status symbols, symbols which associate the mother with what she tries to imitate. According to this logic, details are essential and are, therefore, ministered with care. This is why Jeanette’s mother, despite being busy with housework: ‘turned to the mirror to adjust her headscarf’ (*Oranges*: 75).
The French extract in Example 3 displays another element that characterizes hooks’s family as well: rituals. Hooks claims: ‘in this house everything was ritual, even the manner of greeting. There was no modern casualness. All rites of remembrance had to be conducted with awareness and respect’ (hooks 2000: 14, my italics). By reading hooks, it becomes clear that working-class families try in every possible way to go beyond their modest life by adding emotional value to everything they have or do. Emotional additions, like emotional investments in objects, increase the mere market and economic value of things. Likewise, actions are not formulaic or void if they are repeated conscientiously and voluntarily. Repetition turns circumstances into valuable and meaningful situations, which imitate middle-class manners or, even, aristocratic rituals and rites. By sitting on either side of the radio and by drinking tea, the mother and Jeanette introduce middle-class traditions and rituals and rewrite their working-class family history, a history which is commonly presented as ‘without the tidy rules of middle-class mannerisms’ (hooks 2000: 19). Rituals, rites and traditions are indeed typical of the higher classes because they repropose their value ad infinitum and make them proud of what they are. By eliminating ‘modern casualness’, by having Sunday lunches, by sitting in the same chairs and by drinking the same tea at the same time, Jeanette and her mother justify their existence not merely as individuals but as working-class-aspiring-to-be-middle-class women, namely women moved by strong desires and with a clear sense of class.

Economizing, haggling on prices, saving money, using donated objects and being self-sufficient with the little that one has are characteristics of all these mothers’ working-class lifestyle. The French translator is very careful with precise details concerning, for instance, domestic objects, which evoke an idea of working-class lifestyle. The term ‘gamelle’ (Les Oranges: 36), a container where soldiers and sailors had their food, is used to translate ‘dinner’ (Oranges: 22). Whereas the English text focuses on the function and content, the French one focuses on the object where the mother prepared the food the father took to work, thus adding a working-class flavour. Moreover, like Steedman’s mother, Jeanette’s mother is good at negotiating the price of meat at the market. Like hooks’s mother, whose...
‘house was there for the growing of vegetables and flowers and for the breeding of fishing worms’ (hooks 2000: 14), Jeanette’s mother grows lettuce in her ‘potager’ (Les Oranges: 119), a word which is added in French to describe where the mother had her crops. Unlike the English text, the French translation gives value to the mother’s self-sufficiency typical of the working class: the piece of land where she grows vegetables is not, presumably, simply part of her back garden, it is a piece of land specifically designated for the growing of lettuce and potatoes to help the general economy of the mother’s household. Moreover, like all working-class-aspiring-to-be-middle-class women, Jeanette’s mother does not like to talk about money. When she hears about the opportunity of a job as a waiter in a local pub, she encourages her daughter to take it and this is because money is needed in the house. However, she does not admit to it, just as hooks’s parents ‘did not discuss money matters openly’ (hooks 2000: 61). This is because ‘censoring of public discussions of money was not simply a matter of polite social decorum, it deflected attention from underlying competition about money’ (hooks 2000: 61). Jeanette’s mother and hooks’s parents are therefore working-class racing desperately for opportunities to make money. However, in wanting to emulate the middle class, they also avoid talking about the importance of money because this does not comply with middle-class politeness and decorum.

2.3 The Mother’s Position in Relation to the Working Class: Repulsion and Disassociation from Corruption and Pathology

Now that the mother’s social class has been explained, other aspects will be considered, namely the way the mother inhabits her social position, how she positions herself in relation to the working class and how her class consciousness informs the production of her subjectivity. The mother’s working classness is configured not only through exclusion, envy or restriction, but also through social differentiation, as is often the case with working-class women. As Skeggs points

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5 In English, the sentence: ‘my mother […] had to be fetched from her lettuce’ (Oranges: 86) has no reference to ‘potager’ which appears, as underlined, only in French: ‘ma mère, […] il avait fallu aller chercher dans son potager au beau milieu de ses laitues’ (Les Oranges: 119).
out in her study, unlike working-class men who see class as ‘a way of including themselves in a positively valorised social category’ (1997: 74), working-class women do not want to take on working-class identifications and therefore try to dissociate from the working class. On the one hand, they live with economic restrictions, envy the middle class and embrace middle-class values. On the other, they try to distance themselves from the working class or, even better, from the public representation of the working class. To illustrate this representation, Skeggs offers a historical excursus that starts from nineteenth-century Great Britain, namely when the British Empire began to collapse and the working class was made responsible for this disintegration and the failure of the nation. It was therefore ‘pathologized’ and ‘othered’ as polluting, atavistic and potentially dangerous. Walkerdine and Lucey also explain that the working class was seen as a ‘threat to the bourgeois order’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 41) and, at the same time, it was made ‘an object of fantasies and fears’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 37). Example 4 illustrates how the working class is depicted in the ST and TT and Example 5 how the mother positions herself in relation to it.

**Example 4**

Maxi Ball owned a warehouse, his clothes were cheap but they didn’t last, and they smelt of industrial glue. The desperate, the careless, the poorest, vied with one another on a Saturday morning to pick up what they could, and haggle over the price. (*Oranges*: 6)

Maxi Ball avait un entrepôt; les vêtements y étaient bon marché mais ne duraient pas et sentaient la colle industrielle. Les désespérés, les négligents et les plus pauvres se querellaient la tous les samedis matins, grappillaient ce qu’ils pouvaient et marchandaient les prix. (*Les Oranges*: 16)

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6 This term recurs on a number of occasions in all the feminist works used here. Skeggs, for instance, first describes the working class with the following list of adjectives: ‘dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, *pathological* and without respect’ (1997: 1, my italics). Walkerdine and Lucey employ the same adjective to highlight the oppositional features attributed respectively to the middle class and the working class: ‘in this book we seek to uncover and tell twin histories of oppression, of the regulation of mothers in the bourgeois order, which set woman against woman, rendering one normal and the other *pathological*, making one responsible for the regulation and oppression of the other’ (1989: 5, my italics).
The colourful choice of French verbs in Example 4 testifies to the translator's intention to depict the working class as closely as possible to its socio-political representation in Great Britain. Both in English and French it is clear that the working class is seen and imagined publicly as poor, miserable, desperate and quarrelsome with tacky second-hand clothes and no sense of style. In addition, the French verb 'grappillaient' adds moral judgement to the extract because its figurative connotations refer to the action of taking things almost illegally. By representing the working class almost as a group of thieves, the French version strengthens the link with the public representation of this class and with other descriptions of poor people in the book. Moral corruption leading to robbery, crime and generally unacceptable behaviour is the main reason why the working class and the poor have been 'demonized' (hooks 2000: 72), rejected and projected into an imaginary frightening world, never to be visited. In Winterson’s novel, the otherness characterizing this world is identified with Jeanette’s reclusive and antisocial neighbours. They are defined as Heathens, Godless, fornicators, dirty, loud, bad-mannered and poor. They throw potatoes into the mother’s garden as a way to express their dislike for her. They are always quarrelsome, drunk and scruffy and they cause general social disorder. They remain in the background and are never presented individually to the reader. What distinguishes them is the incredible noise that they make when, according to the mother, they ‘fornicate’. Like many other British novels (set for example in London in the Victorian era), Winterson’s autobiography is populated with immoral drunkards and beggars who, because of their corruption, laziness and generally dishonesty, do not deserve to be helped. Hooks, for examples, explains that ‘once the poor can be represented as totally corrupt, as being always and only morally bankrupt, it is possible for those with class privilege to eschew any responsibility for poverty and the suffering it generates’ (2000: 68). This is exactly how the working class is described by Jeanette’s mother and why she does not feel they deserve any help from her.

In this light, the discrepancies between the English text and the French translation are not real discrepancies. They turn out to be helpful reading tools which not
only emphasize crucial aspects of the text but also clarify the interplay between cognition and social practices, social representations and ideological legitimation (implemented in the nineteenth century but still valid in the 1970s in Great Britain), with particular attention to the mother’s social sense of class. These discrepancies, brought about by additions and hyponyms in French, can be found both in general descriptions of the poor through the eyes of the narrator and in specific depictions of the working class through the eyes of the mother. For this reason, gypsies, as quarrelsome as the working class, not only ‘made a mess’ or ‘stayed up all night’ (Oranges: 6) but they also ‘sémaient la pagaille’ and ‘faisaient la fête toute la nuit’ (Les Oranges: 18). These colourful expressions, which highlight corruption and lasciviousness, succeed in juxtaposing well-known and common representations of the ‘self-centered, corrupt, and dysfunctional’ (hooks 2000: 72) working class with the mother’s description of their godless and dirty neighbours. The following example helps us discuss the mother’s conceptualization of the working class and the reasons why she tries to disassociate herself from it.

Example 5
‘Did you hear that? [...] The family life of snails, it’s an Abomination [...]’. 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. I went after her. ‘The Devil’s in the world, but not in this house,’ she said. (Oranges: 21-22)

- Tu as entendu ça? [...] La vie familiale des escargots, c’est une Abomination [...].
Elle était retournée dans la cuisine et je l’entendais marmoner tout haut contre les parasites tandis qu’elle cherchait à capter L’Office du Monde. Je l’ai suivie. « Le Diable est présent dans le monde, mais pas dans cette maison », a-t-elle dit. (Les Oranges: 36)

Example 5 has to be read as an anthropological metaphor and vis-à-vis other examples in the novel. In order to express the mother’s disapproval of the pathological working class, the author employs the image of snails. Snails, which she superimposes on her much hated slugs, live in the dirt and, therefore, personify negativity and disease. The mother states explicitly, on different occasions, that she does not like them. She is obsessed with slugs not just because
they damage her garden and ‘potager’, but because they are dirty creatures whose
sight causes horror, disgrace and ‘abomination’. The very beginning of the novel
introduces the mother’s revulsion towards them when her Manichean vision of the
world is presented to the reader. The mother’s world is made up of ‘enemies’ and
‘friends’. The former comprises ‘the Devil (in his many forms), Next Door, Sex
(in its many forms), Slugs’ (Oranges: 3), the latter comprises ‘God, Our dog,
Auntie Madge, The Novels of Charlotte Brontë, Slug pellets’ (Oranges: 3). It is,
therefore, clear that the metaphor of ‘slugs’ is congenial to the mother’s
conceptualization of working-class people because they are both dirty and
parasitical. Together with corruption, hoarding, restrictions, lack of good manners
and free sexuality, dirtiness and laziness are discursively considered as some of
the main features of the working class. Dirtiness is a synonym of lack of hygiene
and moral and physical impropriety, whereas laziness (and slowness) is a
synonym of lack of ambition, desire and aspiration. ‘Next Door’ are therefore
listed as enemies beside slugs because, similarly to the latter, they live by other
people’s work, are not regulated and cause social disorder. In addition, by
drinking, partying and having sex, they generally waste their life and do nothing
to improve its quality. The mother, therefore, believes that they, similarly to slugs,
need to be eliminated.

The intensity of the mother’s repulsion is metaphorically conveyed by her
obsession with cleanliness and hygiene, a reaction which she develops by
observing and criticizing ‘Next Door’. She insists on cleaning her house
meticulously so it does not look like their scruffy, tatty, shabby and filthy house.
She often boasts about the spotlessness of her lounge whose ‘cleanliness is next to
godliness’ (Oranges: 15) and whose immaculate conditions would allow her to

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7 One of the conversations analyzed by Walkerdine and Lucey between a middle-class mother and
her daughter displays fear for the window cleaner whose face is dirty: ‘she [the daughter] is
alarmed, as many four-year-olds would be, by the appearance of the strange man in the garden;
that too is obvious and cannot be ignored. The window cleaner is both a man and working-class,
simultaneously, and this will have effects for her puzzlement and her fear’ (Walkerdine and Lucey

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Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
host respectably a ‘coffin in here without feeling guilty’ (Oranges: 97). This obsessive attitude to cleanliness justifies why Jeanette’s father had to clean everybody’s shoes, being full of dust and dirt. It also justifies some specific choices of cultural elements in French. At the beginning, for instance, Jeanette is allowed by her mother to go to the fair, run by gypsies once a year, on condition that she brings back a ‘tub of black peas’ (Oranges: 6) for her. The fact that the text does not offer the exact translation of ‘black peas’ makes us wonder what is really central here. The translation of ‘black peas’ does not seem to be as important as the connotations attached to these black seeds. Jeanette says that they look like rabbit droppings and that they are sold by the gypsies, who, as the reader knows, are loaded with as many negative connotations as working-class people. One then is led to wonder what kind of food could be associated with excrement and the working class. At first, one might be surprised at the choice of ‘baies de sureau’ (elderberries) which are the black fruit of a small tree which grows wild or in gardens. There are no connections between black peas and elderberries, apart from the fact that they are both small and that they can both be used in cooking. Unlike black peas, however, elderberries are employed at times as a detoxifier with laxative properties. The subtext that the French tries to offer here is not only the subtle connection between excrement, rabbit droppings, elderberries and the working class, since they are all characterized by waste of some sort. The translation attempts to reveal the mother’s obsession with cleanliness and internal as well as external purification.

In this light, we can claim that the mother’s repulsion and desire for dissociation from the working class is clearly emphasized in Example 5 by the French. The noun ‘parasites’, which skilfully plays around a significant ambiguity, is mainly used to refer to parasites (both denotatively and connotatively, in the singular and

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8 This is another trait that allows us to associate Jeanette’s mother with the working class. Skeggs explains: ‘the education of working-class women in the “domestic ideal”, that is, domestic practices based on the structure and organization of the Victorian upper and middle classes, in which moral precepts were incorporated such as “cleanliness is next to godliness”, was seen to be the solution to national social order’ (1997: 46).

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Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
in the plural form). It is also used in the plural to refer to TV or radio interferences. Considering the fact that the mother is complaining about the radio, a French reader would understand that ‘parasites’ are annoying interferences, but in the light of the mother’s revulsion to the dirtiness and laziness of those slow-moving creatures (both physically and metaphorically), a French reader might well be led to interpret ‘parasites’ as bloodsuckers, namely as those who are on the dole and expect others to support them unconditionally. Public narratives could also be triggered by this reading of ‘parasites’ as bloodsuckers, as hooks maintains: ‘by the early seventies, the entire nation was being socialized via mass media to see the poor as parasites and predators whose ongoing need would make it impossible for anyone to have a good life’ (hooks 2000: 123). Hence, thanks to contextual information and semantic ambiguities, the mother’s mental and emotional attitude to discursive representations of working-class dirtiness and laziness becomes more vocal in the French version. It acquires ‘expressive’ and ‘verdictive’ force (Searle quoted in Hatim and Mason 1997: 60), relaying judgments already expressed in other conversations and descriptions. The semantic ambivalence of ‘parasites’ helps the French reader retrieve all these intratextual connections and appreciate the socio-political implications of the mother’s sense of disgust and disassociation. It also helps us reflect upon the legitimacy of the mother’s parameters in assessing respectability, social recognition or abomination. These parameters, informed by middle-class prejudices and discursive constructions of the working class, embrace cleanliness and propriety as essential class markers. 9

9 Cleanliness also informs Steedman’s account of her working-class mother. She notes that cleanliness was regarded as a quality and even a skill essential to obtain work: ‘I found a reference written by the local doctor for my mother who, about in 1930, applied for a job as a ward-maid at the local asylum, confirming that she was clean, strong, honest and intelligent. I wept over that, of course, for a world where some people might doubt her – my – cleanliness. I didn’t care much about the honesty, and I knew I was strong; but there are people everywhere waiting for you to slip up, to show signs of dirtiness and stupidity, so that they can send you back where you belong’ (Steedman 1986: 34).
Chapter Two

2.4 The Regulation of Motherhood, Power and Ethics

Reading the English text and the French version alongside feminist works helps us understand the mother's social sense of class, her attitude to it and the values and/or lack of values that inform her own reading of class. This section will examine where these values originate and reflect upon the socio-political situation of the North of England in the 1970s, in terms of power and hegemonic infrastructures affecting ethical discourses and gender politics. It therefore ventures into the micro-politics of power in order to explore how dominant ideology regulates the perception of class and, consequently, whether the two female characters conform to or rebel against it. As we have also seen in Chapter One, in *Oranges* what regulates cognition, values and social interaction is the cooperation of three ideological institutions: patriarchy, religion, and heterosexuality. The following examples are used to identify cognitive mechanisms underlying social discourses of power that affect mental representations of situational identities, to use Teun A. van Dijk's terminology, namely identities which depend on the time and circumstances in which they are. They are also used to identify the frictions and tensions they are situated within the system and their impact on the mother's identity.

Example 6
After the service we were having a banquet; my mother had made twenty trifles and her usual mound of cheese and onion sandwiches.

'You can always tell a good woman by her sandwiches,' declared Pastor Finch. My mother blushed. (*Oranges*: 11)

Après l'office, il y avait un buffet; ma mère avait fait vingt trifles et sa pile habituelle de sandwiches à l'oignon et au fromage.

- Il suffit de goûter vos sandwiches pour savoir que vous êtes quelqu'un de bien, lui a déclaré le pasteur Finch. Ma mère a rougi. (*Les Oranges*: 23-24)

Example 6 is a compliment paid in public by Pastor Finch to Jeanette’s mother on an extremely special occasion: a religious banquet. Not only is it a social event, but it is also one of the occasions when the pastor (the elite) exercises his persuasive power. By exalting domestic-feminine ideals, metaphorically...
represented by her cooking abilities, the pastor relegates the woman (and by extension all women) to the domesticity of the house, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles and advocating, by implication, male superiority.

National institutions and agencies involved in the production of meaning, such as Evangelism (that, as discussed in Chapter One, is the religion of the community in Oranges), were used in the past to contribute to traditional representations and moral conceptualisations of motherhood and womanhood, in terms of both social behaviour and sexuality. Discursive representations of motherhood and womanhood flourished particularly after the 1960s when ‘the white working class got dumped by the Left’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 27). Walkerdine and Lucey explain that until then the Left had for a long time upheld the working class as exemplary, the carrier of moral principles and entitled to be treated democratically. After the 1960s, however, the political agenda changed and ‘traditional working-class struggles were no longer placed centre-stage because now a politics of liberation included a personal politics which criticized middle-class lifestyle’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 26). According to this agenda, people had to be liberated, and, in principle, everybody was encouraged to be free, to experiment with other commitments than bourgeois marriage, and to gain pleasure from their bodies. The problem was that such political issues as ‘the exploration of sexuality and of the domain of the private, the domestic’ were ‘outside the scope of traditional working-class politics’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 26). In addition, the new Left started to be influenced by a new middle-class generation who moved to considering the working class as ‘a worse version of what the middle classes were struggling against’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 26-27). As a consequence the working class became once more the scapegoat of all the sins of a nation that was desperate for change, both in the public and in the private domain. Hence, the working class ‘became to be seen [...] as failing to support the demands for liberation because they were reactionary, conservative and authoritarian’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 27). Along this line, the rise of fascism started to be seen as the natural consequence of the empowerment of the working class, which, therefore, had to be regulated. If at the end of the nineteenth
Chapter Two

century, the working class was blamed for the failure of the Empire, after the 1960s, they were blamed for the rise of fascism.

To save democracy the working class had to be ‘cured’, especially within the realm of the family. If the initial aim was to get rid of old bourgeois principles (such as marriage and heterosexuality), the final aim paradoxically reinstated those principles. Mothers and especially working-class mothers had to be watched, regulated and, on some occasions, even, ‘tamed’ (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989: 40). Their biological qualities were emphasized and their abilities to meet human needs were glorified. In this context, the compliment paid by the pastor to Jeanette’s mother is not casual. It is part of those regulatory practices which produced mothers who were sensitive and ‘good enough’ for their children to be raised appropriately and to become valuable citizens of a better nation. In the book, the behaviour of the pastors towards women and mothers is therefore crucial for the reader to understand the politics of hegemonic institutions and its effect upon the public, in general, and women, in particular. On different occasions, the pastors preach that women have to be watched and supervised because they can be tempted by the Devil more than men:

it has been known for the most holy men to be suddenly filled with evil. And how much more a woman, and how much more a child. Parents, watch your children for the signs. Husbands, watch your wives. Blessed be the name of the Lord. (Oranges: 12)

The compliment paid by the pastor to the mother in French offers us a clearer picture of the socio-political situation of England in the 1970s. The French expression ‘quelqu’un de bien’ is not exactly ‘good’. Considering the mother as ‘quelqu’un de bien’ still reinforces the social regulation of womanhood and motherhood as well as validating the dominant (religious, patriarchal and heterosexual) ideology. But the linguistic shift ‘quelqu’un de bien’ carries additional connotations. While the English adjective ‘good’ pays tribute to the domestic qualities of the mother as a cook, the French locution places the mother’s moral rectitude and integrity to the fore. Being ‘good’ implies being
nice, lovely, good-hearted and kind. It describes someone with good inner qualities. ‘Quelqu’un de bien’ depicts someone with humane qualities as well as with the ability to comply with a socially codified ethical etiquette. By highlighting her ethical qualities, the French version clarifies the semantics of ‘good’ which is widely employed by society to exercise power. It emphasises the way the pastors (the elite) reinforce social structural inequalities and legitimate their dominance and ideology.

In another part of the text the French translator clarifies the real semantics of ‘good’. This is when Jeanette describes the Factory Bottoms, an estate which is frequented by working-class people. As she is around that area, she bumps into Mrs Arkwright staggering out of the pub, The Cock and Whistle, ‘where nobody good ever went’ (Oranges: 130-31). In French the adjective ‘good’ is translated as ‘respectable’ (Les Oranges: 177) which clearly codifies the middle-class perspective of being morally and socially acceptable. Good people and good housewives are good inasmuch as they display a moral rectitude to that which makes them socially accepted, praised, respectable and respected. As a consequence, the French version makes the reader reflect upon the significance and real value of respectability which is only a social construct (as class is) created to legitimize insiders and outsiders. Respectability comes in fact with dignity, rectitude and moral decorum that are the main ingredients of class, namely the middle class. These ingredients justify power and gender roles and, along with hygiene and cleanliness, are the parameters to assess class access and positioning in England. As Skeggs explains, ‘the regulation of moral behaviour [...] was part of a wider formation of class identity, nation and empire’ (Skeggs 1997: 42).

\[\text{The effect of these structural inequalities is highlighted by Skeggs in a quotation from a 1992 interview to Yvonne, a working-class woman. This quotation opens Formation of Class and Gender:} \text{“all my life I’ve wanted to say “look I’m as good as you”, well now I think this house says it. It says “I’ve made it, I’m respectable and you can’t put me down”” (1997: 1).}\]
While interviewing working-class women, Skeggs notices that ‘home and bodies are where respectability is displayed but where class is lived out as the most omnipresent form, engendering surveillance and constant assessment of themselves’ (1997: 90). In other words, Skeggs sees that these women are always conscious of their behaviour and that they attempt to modify it as a response to bourgeois regulating practices, as promoted in the nineteenth century and reinforced after the 1960s. In the 1970s (namely when Jeanette’s mother was young) the government organized caring courses to raise the standard of domestic competence of young working-class women (Skeggs 1997: 42-48). Domesticity was fostered not only to maintain gender inequalities but also to endorse practices based on middle-class precepts which politicized ethics and religion. As a result, women were left at the mercy of powerful institutions which attempted to control their bodies and their mind. Most of them started to support the elite’s ideology because they did not know any other way and/or because they had to. We now have to ask to what extent the pastors’ Weltanschauung is pervasive and whether the mother embraces the pastors’ ethics both as a way to legitimize class access (Example 7) and as a way to regulate sexuality (Example 8). In the meantime, one could underline that the mother’s blushing at the pastor is indicative of a certain response which acknowledges the pastor’s power and confers value upon his precepts.

From the style of these extracts, the reader can assume that the narrator’s words reflect the mother’s viewpoint:

**Example 7**
She told me a story about a brave person who had despised the fruits of the flesh and worked for the Lord instead… *(Oranges: 7)*

Après, elle me racontait l’histoire d’un brave homme qui avait renoncé aux plaisirs de la chair afin de travailler pour le Seigneur… *(Les Oranges: 19)*

**Example 8**
Imagine my mother’s horror. She had given away her all for an ailment. *(Oranges: 85)*

83

_Eliana Maestri_  
_Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011_
On peut imaginer comme ma mère s’est sentie horrifiée. Elle avait cédé son bien le plus précieux à cause d’une maladie. (*Les Oranges:* 118-19)

Example 7 is part of a passage which contains the story of the religious conversion of three men. The first is a lascivious man who gives up the pleasures of the flesh to find God. The second is a corrupt man who gives up the pleasures of drinking to find God. The third is Giant Alleluja, a monstrous and gigantic man: ‘a freak of nature, eight feet tall [who] shrunk to six foot three through the prayers of the faithful’ (*Oranges:* 8). At first, it seems as if they are simple conversion stories of people who somehow devoted themselves to God and became morally redeemed. Although we only know the job of the second man, “the converted sweep” [...] who suddenly found the Lord whilst scraping the insides of a flue’ (*Oranges:* 7), we can infer their social class from what they do and like. As they all display pathological traits (sex, alcohol and physical monstrosity) they all belong to the working class or, more precisely, to the public representation of the working class populated with filthy, brutal, immoral and lascivious people. Their religious conversion, therefore, allows them to cleanse their sins and also their moral and material filth, vices and defects. By becoming religious believers, they get rid of dirt, corruption and sex, which, as underlined above, are markers of the working class. The language that is used to describe this process is semantically imbued with ethical connotations, which, as we already know, are part of the parameters of class access and positioning. However, while in English the ethical connotations are intermittent, in French they are consistent. The terms used to describe the second and third man in English are ‘filthy degenerate’ (*Oranges:* 7) and ‘freak of nature’ (*Oranges:* 8) which highlight dirt, lack of moral rectitude and monstrosity. These terms are faithfully rendered in French with ‘dégénéré crasseux’ and ‘monstre’ (*Les Oranges:* 19). The adjective used to qualify the first man, however, presents semantic alterations in French. In English the man is described as ‘brave’, namely courageous, whereas in French he is described as ‘brave’ that means good. The French ‘brave’ is one of the adjectives which change their meaning according to their position in the phrase. When ‘brave’ is placed before the noun, it means kind and good, instead of
courageous and bold. As a result, whereas the English highlights the mother’s personal opinion about sex and lascivious men, the French reflects the public opinion about them through the mother’s words. Considering the mother’s repulsion towards sex, which is clearly expressed every time she calls ‘Next Door’ ‘fornicators’, giving up sex for a woman (herself in the first place) is uncomplicated and, almost, natural. Considering, however, that she thinks that men are slaves to their own bestiality and that lust is intrinsic to their nature, giving up sex is hard for a man and a real act of bravery. In French, giving up the pleasures of the flesh does not necessarily imply courageousness, but moral rectitude and public decency which mark people as ‘good’ and, at the same time, as middle class.

The same approach is applied to Example 8 where ethical connotations are conferred upon the mother’s female organ defined as ‘her all’ in English and as ‘le bien’ in French. This is when she finds out that her decision to have sex with a French man was not due to love, as she thought, but to an upset stomach whose symptoms had been confused by her with love (this is due to her ‘medieval’ confusion with organs discussed in Chapter One). She is, therefore, depicted as horrified, because by having sex with that man she devalued the one thing that, according to her middle-class views, carried ‘ethical values’. As the previous example shows, the French translator keeps the mother’s language as coherent as possible. A few pages earlier in fact Jeanette claims that her mother went to Paris in her youth working as an au pair and that, while there, she also tried to lead a ‘clean life’ with ‘high standards’ (Oranges: 84) which the French translates as ‘vie pure’ and ‘un code moral élevé’ (Les Oranges: 117) to emphasize her perception of a moral life full of good and honourable principles. In so doing, the translation reinforces the impact of religion upon the mother’s language, values and cognitive system and invites the scholar to associate her with the working-class women interviewed by Skeggs. By maintaining textual cohesion, the French translation seems to be inclined to characterize the mother as a woman who, aspiring to transcend the limits of her class, is happy to self-regulate and to embrace middle-class decorum, rectitude and values. Religion might therefore
become a means of achieving those values and accessing the class to which she desires to belong. If this were the case, we would be led to think that, like all other characters in the novel, the mother promotes *ad infinitum* the social representations of the ‘good’ citizen imbued with ethical and religious principles.

However, despite the fact that, as van Dijk argues, ‘once these mental representations are in place, dominated group and its members will tend to act in the interest of the dominant group ‘out of their own free will’ (1998: 162), not all members end up endorsing the elite’s ideology. Those who have developed critical skills tend not to support unconditionally interpretations, thoughts or beliefs. In the light of the critical approach to life highlighted in the first section of this chapter (as well as in Chapter One), it can be suggested that Jeanette’s mother (and Jeanette) do not take on these principles unconditionally. In addition, the above-mentioned feminist works vis-à-vis the ST and TT encourage us to find similarities between working-class mothers which, in turn, help us explain translation choices and shifts.

### 2.5 The Maternal Precepts: Class Mobility and Female Emancipation

All the mothers analyzed so far present potential: they succeed in instilling into their daughters the desire to understand their selves through writing. Moreover, hooks’s mother teaches her the value of hard work, because ‘idleness and self-sufficiency did not go together’ (hooks 2000: 14). She wants her to pursue a teaching career that could offer her the opportunity to be self-sufficient and, above all, independent. She does not even want her daughter to have sex lest she falls into the trap of heterosexual love and marriage. She also underlines, on numerous occasions, that idleness is the worst negative value and that hard work makes you respectable. Despite the fact that she is herself attracted by the middle-class logic of money, luxury, decency and ease, she does not forget to teach her daughter the value of hard work and ambition. Similarly to hooks’s mother, Jeanette’s mother does not encourage her daughter to get married as a way to access the middle-class lifestyle that she has always desired and mimicked. She wants her daughter
to become a missionary, to work hard, and to travel the world. Like hooks’s mother, who ‘used the threat of ruin as a way to warn us away from sexuality’ (hooks 2000: 20), Jeanette’s mother insists that sex is bad, because ‘you’ll get married and get involved’ (Oranges: 126). Neither mother sees marriage as a viable way to become respectable and to make their dreams of social improvement come true. As discussed in Chapter One, Jeanette’s mother even claims that she got married to give Jeanette ‘something’ (Oranges: 72), namely something that could keep away public criticism. She did not get married with the same desires as Steedman’s mother, namely to ‘marry a prince’ (1986: 9), nor to apply for family allowances. Jeanette’s mother wants to work, build her own bathroom, improve her house, be useful to her religious congregation, be successful and able to support her family. Most of all, neither woman pushes her daughter to look for a prince, a fairy-tale man who could rescue her and offer her his kingdom. Both of them go against the grain of public thinking which, regardless of issues of class, promotes marriage and heterosexuality as the only ways to respectability.

In the light of my analysis, Jeanette’s mother is ambitious and she desires to distance herself from the working class, but in fact she lives according to working-class values. The following two examples show what distinguishes her as a ‘true’ working-class mother: her attitude to sex and marriage. They also demonstrate the importance of reading the English text against the French translation because this comparison brings to light the mother’s desire for disassociation from the working class. This desire, as we shall see, is connected to discourses of improvement through education and perceptions of sexuality, which do not reflect the elite’s ideology.

Example 9
I was curious about school because my mother always called it a Breeding Ground. (Oranges: 16)

L’école excitait ma curiosité parce que ma mère disait toujours que c’était un Foyer d’Infection. (Les Oranges: 30)
Example 10
She had a mysterious attitude towards the begetting of children; it wasn’t that she
couldn’t do it, more that she didn’t want to do it. (Oranges: 3).

Elle avait une attitude mystérieuse envers la conception des enfants; ce n’est pas
qu’elle ne pouvait pas en avoir, mais plutôt qu’elle n’avait pas envie de les faire.
(Les Oranges: 13).

In Example 9, the mother defines the local school as a ‘Breeding Ground’, a place
where people meet, have sex, reproduce like animals and, eventually, get married.
As she is afraid that this would lead Jeanette ‘astray’ (Oranges: 16) she refuses to
send her to school. Jeanette is on the contrary excited and she does not understand
her mother’s ideological position. Whereas ‘Breeding Ground’ has sexual
connotations, the French ‘Foyer d’Infection’ has social connotations. Unlike the
former, whose subtext refers distinctively to animal-like sexuality, the latter
suggests dirtiness and contagion, which (as illustrated above) belong by
association to the semantic field of poverty, passivity and the working class. In
French, the mother does not want her daughter to go to a mixed-sex school not
because this would entail flirting, engagement and finally marriage, but because it
would entail socialising with the poorest people at the bottom of the social ladder
(as most of the school children are lower-class). By adding these social
connotations, the French enhances the mother’s class consciousness and desire to
disassociate from the working class not only to fulfil her personal desires but to
help her daughter live a better life. It has to be underlined, however, that the
French translation of ‘Breeding Ground’ does not apply any semantic alteration to
the original text. By adding nuances pertaining to the semantic field of dirt and
filth, the French does not turn the mother into a classist, snobbish or exclusivist
person. After all, the mother of the English original does not want her daughter to
have sex, not because it would be bad in itself, but because, by experiencing sex,
Jeanette would conform to societal heterosexual norms. She would then settle
down, get married and embark on a different career from the one the mother has
planned to her. The extra connotations in the French expression, therefore, allow
us to understand the mother’s psychology in a more rounded way. They invite us
to trace back in both texts the maternal unorthodoxy and retrieve details that could back up the French translator’s choices. The mother’s rejection of such working-class negative values as dirt, filth and disease encourages the reader to find out the reasons why the mother despises the school and, at the same time, appreciate her belief in female emancipation through class mobility and professional development.

Since the French expression ‘Foyer d’Infection’ does not contain the sexual connotations inherent in ‘Breeding Ground’, a French reader might assume that the reasons why the mother discourages Jeanette from going to school, finding a husband and getting married stand more on grounds of class than sex. In actual fact, the sexual connotations are skilfully retrieved by a series of intratextual resonances. The French ‘infection’ recalls ‘infecté’ (Les Oranges: 175) as well as ‘infesté’ (Les Oranges: 115). The adjective ‘infecté’, which translates ‘infected’ (Oranges: 129), is used when Jeanette is blamed for ‘Unnatural Passions’ (Oranges: 83), the maternal terminology for sex. The adjective ‘infesté’, which translates ‘ridden’ (Oranges: 83), is used by Pastor Finch to explain that those who practise homosexuality have diseases. Pastor Finch’s monologue confirms this accusation: ‘Ridden they were. […] Yes ridden, and do you know why? […] Unnatural Passions’ (Oranges: 83). Both adjectives combine images of diseases, filth and sex seen as an ‘Unnatural’ passion and invite the reader to appreciate the mother’s difference and subversive ideology. This ideology emerges by means of a series of contrasts, namely by placing the mother against the traditional Victorian-like environment in which she lives. In Victorian middle-class representations of working-class women, sexuality was employed to justify their presumed pathological nature. Quoting prior literature on class, Skeggs maintains that ‘working-class women have often been associated with the lower unruly order of bodily function such as that of expulsion and leakage (and reproduction) which signified lack of discipline and vulgarity’ (1997: 100). By despising sex and, by consequence, giving birth, the mother disassociates from discourses on primitive sexuality and gender biases which saw women as unruly, irrational, natural, physical, and, metonymically, dirty. Contrary to what Backus states, the

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
mother does not adopt Jeanette to assert her middle-class virtues, but to distance herself from such discursive configurations of the working class as well as from their filthy practices.

To define the school Jeanette is supposed to go to, the French mother employs an expression that in its turn has been used by the pastors to qualify sexuality negatively, in general, and homosexuality, in particular. Unlike the pastors, though, the mother does not intend to criticize homosexuality, but heterosexuality because the school is undoubtedly a mixed-sex school where Jeanette could find a husband to marry. This is why she tells her that she rejects sexual copulation and, consequently, giving birth to children. This is underlined in the French translation of Example 10 with the use of the pronoun ‘les’. In this extract there is a subtle difference between the English text and the French translation, enhanced by the use of this pronoun, which explains in a clearer way some of the peculiarities of Jeanette’s mother in relation to sexuality (and in particular heterosexuality). Whereas in English the pronoun ‘it’ refers to ‘begetting’ which implicitly makes us think of sex, in French the plural pronoun ‘les’ does not refer to ‘conception’ (‘begetting’), but to ‘enfants’ (‘children’). Sexuality is not bad in itself; it is bad because it creates ties with men and dependence on them. These are the same precepts that hooks’s mother tries to teach her: ‘and it was mama who let me know that cultivating the mind could place one outside the boundaries of desire. Inside the space of heterosexual desire a woman had to be dependent on a man for everything’ (hooks 2000: 21).

One could argue that ‘infection’ is an audacious solution because if French readers were able to retrieve all the intratextual resonances discussed here, they would uncover some of the mother’s controversial features. How is it possible that she is so passionate about religion and the congregation, if she then rejects heterosexuality upon which patriarchy and religion are based? Once again, the French text does not alter or overturn the mother’s characterization; it allows the reader to further understand the mother’s psychology in the light of contextual information.
Like many other critics, Sue Sharpe (1984) states that despite the progressive growth of the Women’s Movement in the 1970s, marriage was still a central component in the construction of sexual subjectivity as well as in social mobility. In a working-class environment, the marriage market secured a site for women’s future resources, guaranteed the conversion of their cultural capital into symbolic capital (representative of power and privilege), and perpetuated dominant heterosexual discourses of femininity and gender. While on the one hand the marriage market allowed women to profit from their embodied capital (physical appearance), on the other it imposed on them models of bourgeois femininity. According to these models, male fantasies and Victorian ethics and aesthetics attributed to married middle-class women the moral qualities of rectitude and integrity. Women gained social superiority, distinction and respectability through marriage. The Establishment, therefore, employed ethics both to judge womanhood and motherhood and to assess class positioning and relocation.

The socio-political implications of the marriage market, characterizing England in the 1970s, are raised by Winterson too. In ‘Numbers’, when Jeanette starts to understand the politics of sexuality, she is made to confront her aunt’s ideology which is traditionally informed by the logic of the marriage market.

**Example 11**

She spread the cards. ‘There’s time enough for you to get a boy.’
‘I do not think I want one.’
‘There’s what we want,’ she said, putting down a jack, ‘and there’s what we get, remember that’. (*Oranges*: 72)

Ma tante a étalé les cartes.
~ Tu as bien le temps de te trouver un petit ami.
~ Je ne crois pas que j’en veux un.
~ Il y a ce qu’on voudrait avoir, a-t-elle dit, en abattant un valet, et ce qu’on obtient, souviens-toi de ça. (*Les Oranges*: 101)

This conversation takes place while Jeanette’s aunt and her friend from the church club are playing cards. Their conversation focuses on the discrepancy between the
public meaning of marriage and the private significance that women, mistakably, attribute to it. According to Jeanette’s aunt, women initially think that they are going to marry a prince but, after a while, they find out that they have married a ‘beast’ (*Oranges*: 71). The beast she is implicitly referring to is her husband, defined as such by Jeanette who ‘half expected him to have a tail’ (*Oranges*: 72). Despite the seriousness of the topic, the aunt is half joking about it. She admits that she still loves her husband despite his faults and ‘monstrosity’ and invites her niece to find a boyfriend for herself. Being naively and strongly convinced that some men are beasts, Jeanette does not want to fall into that trap and, at the same time, starts to understand that some women (among whom her aunt) have learnt to live with this monstrosity. The reader is led to justify the aunt’s resigned attitude, because it is clear that these women’s mentality has been so affected by the patriarchal ideology of the ‘prince’ that they know no other way out. The prince metaphor, which recurs frequently in all feminist literature, is conveyed in French in a more sophisticated way by the image of the ‘valet’, which culturally replaces the jack. This inevitable cultural shift serves the purpose of evoking the image of the prince or courteous man who comes and redeems working-class women. Princes or ‘valets’ make women honourable and respectable because they do not only offer them money and the opportunity to move up the social ladder, they also cleanse them of the original sins which, as discussed above, mark their social class.

In the book almost all working-class women are married or are expected to get married. If they do not find a husband, they are considered strange and people start to gossip about their sexuality. This perverse logic is underlined by Nellie, one of the working-class women in *Oranges*, when she says that she wants her daughter to find a husband. Nellie claims that ‘if she don’t get a boyfriend folks

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11 In French ‘beast’ is translated as ‘monstre’ (*Les Oranges*: 101) which recalls the monstrosity of the Giant Alleluja, a disproportionally huge working-class man that I have mentioned when I have explained Example 7. Their monstrosity is the effect of a ‘dehumanization’ (hooks 2000: 127) process which the working class suffers in discursive configurations of class.

12 One critical book, for instance, is entitled: *Don’t Bet on the Prince*. 

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

will talk’ (Oranges: 74). This justifies the reason why Jeanette’s mother also had to get married and explains some of the shifts in the French translation. These shifts invite the scholar to go back and read the original text carefully in order not to miss crucial details about the mother’s peculiar and subversive agenda. By refusing to send her daughter to school, by discouraging her to have sex and by encouraging her to develop her own career path, the mother wants to teach Jeanette that female emancipation has the power to allow class mobility. The social adjustment she would like for her daughter should not be enacted by feminine beauty, a beauty traded in the marriage market, but by hard work and self-motivation.¹³ This also justifies why the French chooses ‘fructueuse’ (Les Oranges: 155) to translate the adjective that the mother employs to define the religious campaign for new members. Unlike ‘glorious’ (Oranges: 114), used in the original to qualify the work done by the congregation to attract new souls, ‘fructueuse’ enhances metaphorically the fruit that hard work produces. Hence, marriage is definitely not seen by the mother as a positive goal in life and neither is sex seen as part of life. Being religious, therefore, does not prevent her from being critical about some of the traps that patriarchy has laid out for women. The instrumentality inherent in the marriage market is an obstacle for her and her daughter’s career as missionaries. She, therefore, discourages Jeanette from looking for a husband or a sexual relationship. Her warnings are quite pragmatic at times and do not lead to misunderstandings: ‘don’t let anyone touch you down there’ (Oranges: 86). Her mother’s sense of class and class limitations also encourage Jeanette to dissociate from those working-class women who, like Jeanette’s aunt, ‘got married, […] laughed for a week, […] cried for a month, and settled down for life’ (Oranges: 71).

¹³ In Chapter 1, the narrator tells the reader about another example that reinforces the mother’s precepts: ‘whenever I am tempted to cut corners I think about that whalebone and I know better’ (Oranges: 6). The whalebone is part of her mother’s corset that she buys from Maxi Ball’s Catalogue Seconds. Because it is cheap and bought in a hurry, the whalebone breaks straight away. The metaphor is polysemous and implies the fact that you should not do anything in a hurry and that you should not avoid difficulties. The French text translates ‘to cut corners’ as ‘solution de facilité’ and by so doing it emphasizes the social implications of the maternal precept: if you opt for an easy solution you are as lazy as the working class (that shops at Maxi Ball’s) and you will never achieve anything good.
A contemporary reader could consider the maternal precepts as almost obvious or
dated and, therefore, they could miss the complexity and value of the mother’s
personality. It is only if we appreciate the mother’s social class and the tensions
between the working-class and middle-class values at play within her that we can
understand her originality and invaluable contribution to her daughter’s spiritual
upbringing. This complexity emerges through the double-sided relationship that
the mother has with class values, with the public narratives of the working class
and, as we have also seen in Chapter One, with religion. From the very beginning,
she is presented as a religious woman, yet her faith is not so blind as to make her
believe, unconditionally and automatically, in everything that is preached. The
reader is led to assume that she might admire God because he is ‘high-class’. At
the beginning of ‘Genesis’, Jeanette claims: ‘I do think that the relationship that
my mother enjoyed with God had a lot to do with positioning’ (Oranges: 4). This
positioning might be metaphorically associated with class positioning and power,
a link that is picked up and developed by the translator. In French, when the
mother ‘improvisait sur la nature du monde, la folie de ses peuples’ (Les Oranges:
19), she also speaks about ‘le courroux divin’ which confers a high-class status to
God. ‘Courroux’, an uncommon term which means violent agitation and irritation,
is employed ‘à propos d’une personne occupant un rang social élevé, d’une
divinité’.14 Her attraction to religion and her devotion to God then could be in line
with her desire to disassociate from her low-class status and with her ambition to
move up the social ladder and acquire middle-class respectability. Jeanette’s
mother, therefore, is very similar to hooks’s mother and grandmother who admire
God for his high position and claim that ‘that’s the reason we have God […]. God
is above the law’ (hooks 2000: 17).

At the same time, however, Jeanette’s mother does not think that it is always a
good idea to emulate God and his power, especially if women try to do so. These

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14 Le Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé (http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/courroux) [accessed on 16 July 2011].

94

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
ideas uncover her traditional and reactionary side, but they also reveal her critical attitude to class. This emerges from the mother’s notorious short-sightedness which prevents her from distinguishing ‘a flea’s head from a King’ (Oranges: 9). Her physical shortcoming does not only expose her as being awkward, confused and inexperienced, it also discloses her social inability to tell those who are upper-class from those who are working-class. By being (deliberately?) confused and mistaken, the mother is critical, acute and, once more, subversive. As we already know, she is critical about the working class and tries in every way to disassociate from it. However, her desires and aspirations to become middle-class do not make her embrace middle-class principles instinctively, impulsively or uncritically. Hence, a king is not really a king for her, unless he deserves to be so. If he does not, he cannot automatically be considered one and may well fall into the flea category (another type of parasite, which symbolizes, as we know, the working class). This justifies the mother’s twofold attitude to religion and class. Her attraction to religion is as strong as her desire to be middle class, as both God and the middle class enjoy elevated positions and, at the same time, are the depositories of those moral values which confer social respectability. However, she is not so blind and, paradoxically, short-sighted to long to be like them unconditionally. She does not want to be as ‘pathological’ as the working class, but she does not want to share the ‘pathological hysteria’ and ‘disdain for the poor’ characterizing ‘greedy upper- and middle-class citizens’ either (hooks 2000: 45).

All this explains why, like hooks’s mother, Jeanette’s mother teaches her daughter ethical values that transcend class *stricto sensu* and that regard work and critical abilities highly: ‘hard work was a virtue. As children we heard again and again that idleness was dangerous’ (hooks 2000: 22). In *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, hooks demonstrates clearly that she understands the complexity and intelligence of her mother’s character who, being conscious of all the limitations and dangers of the public narratives of class,
had to train her daughters to be the kind of girls men would want to marry – quiet, obedient, good homemakers – and at the same time secretly shared with us that we needed to prepare ourselves to work. Sex and race were the dangers that made it possible for a girl to get off track, to get lost, and never be found again. (hooks 2000: 20)

Acquiring class awareness was extremely important for all women and especially working-class women, because, as hooks shows, by understanding class dynamics, they could identify mechanisms of power struggles and work out strategies to overturn them. In the 1970s, class consciousness became a necessary item on the political agenda of many feminist collective groups who believed that they could only start fighting patriarchy once ‘the issue of class was confronted’ (hooks 2000: 103). In this light, Jeanette’s mother’s Conservatism could also be read as an expression of political radicalism typical of the 1970s. As is the case with Steedman’s mother, Jeanette’s mother chooses to be a Conservative to convey her dissatisfaction with the status quo and her desire for change. Steedman, for instance, claims that her mother’s Conservatism did not express deference, nor traditionalism; nor was it the simple result of contact with rich women who could afford to have their nails painted. She did not express by her political allegiance a tired acceptance of the status quo; in fact, she presented her Conservatism as radical, as a matter of defiance. (1986: 115)

Defiance, disobedience and lack of co-operation with fellow workers articulate dissatisfaction. These mothers do not intend to support the Establishment nor do they want to reproduce verbatim the discursive configurations of class that the middle class has created to legitimize their own power and injustice. They intend to generate an unconventional narrative of class that could allow for diversity and unorthodox social discourses. This narrative is not clearly defined though, because they do not have a strong and/or organized political agenda. As we have seen, these mothers are victims of the system that has somehow moulded them. The experiences and the frictions animating their life help them become more aware of how their social environment affects their own subjectivity and, consequently, this
understanding helps them work out a way to be free from hegemonic holds. The unconventional narrative of class which they hope to create is implicit in the text and emerges only intermittently. An analysis of the daughter’s behaviour and moral principles indirectly casts light upon the mother’s identity as a parent and as a social individual.

2.6 The Daughter’s Principles and Attitude to Issues of Class

Nancy J. Chodorow and other feminist theorists claim that Western feminine subjects have fluid ego boundaries and tend to define themselves in relation to other subjects and especially their mothers and/or daughters. Motherhood is thus one of the most important ideological institutions that shape women’s lives (Giorgio 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d). In this light, we wonder: what is the impact of the mother’s class consciousness on Jeanette’s negotiation of identity? What socio-political meaning does her homosexuality acquire? This last section tries to object to Backus’s theory that the mother’s choreography to appear middle-class has devastating effects on her daughter and that, in order to counteract these effects, Jeanette finds comfort in fictional narratives. I show that, despite some misunderstandings between mother and daughter, the mother turns out to be a positive example for Jeanette whose adolescence is marked by two parallel painful discoveries. On the one hand, she is taught by her mother that marriage is a terrible conspiracy against women, as all men are pigs or beasts, and on the other she becomes aware of her homosexuality. The gap between her idiosyncratic memories of childhood and the more polemical experience of adulthood starts to be metaphorically bridged at the end of Chapter 1 where we find Example 12.

**Example 12**
‘It was nearly my downfall.’
‘What do you mean?’ I persisted, whenever I could. But she only shook her head and muttered something about me being too young, that I’d find out all too soon, that it was *nasty*. (*Oranges*: 16)

- Le français a failli être ma *perte*.
J’ai insisté et je lui ai demandé « Ça veut dire quoi, ta perte? » chaque fois que je pouvais, mais elle se contentait de secouer la tête et de marmonner que j’étais trop jeune, que je découvrirais bien assez tôt pourquoi et que c’était une vilaine chose. (Les Oranges: 30)

This is part of a conversation between the mother and the young daughter about the former’s perception of heterosexual love. Although I have already focused on this subject in the previous section, it is worth dissecting the implication of this conversation because it not only confirms my previous analysis, it also shows how the French enhances the legacy of the maternal precept. Here the mother talks about her experience in Paris when she was young and she is trying not to reveal something which she already anticipates as being ‘nasty’. Later on the reader finds out that it is about her first boyfriend. The whole love story is recounted in ironic overtones, but it ends in a serious way, since the mother decides not to get involved with men anymore. Therefore ‘nasty’ and ‘vilaine’ acquire crucial connotations as they anticipate the mother’s ideology on heterosexual coupling. This ideology will condition Jeanette’s disposition towards sexual politics not just in terms of do’s and don’ts, but also in terms of the socio-political meaning attributed to it. Once more the French translation contributes to a better understanding of the maternal legacy and, implicitly (considering the plot), its implication for Jeanette’s identity.

The first clue is offered by the term ‘vilaine’, which translates ‘nasty’ but which also relates to ‘perte’ (the equivalent of ‘downfall’). As ‘vilaine’ is stronger than ‘nasty’, it might be interpreted as a semantic compensation for the fact that ‘perte’ is weaker than ‘downfall’.15 ‘Nasty’ means: ‘bad or unpleasant, unkind, dangerous or violent, rude or offensive’.16 ‘Vilaine’ is denotatively attributed to someone

15 According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary ‘downfall’ is not just a loss (‘perte’) it is ‘(something that causes) the usually sudden destruction of a person, organization or government and their loss of power, money or health’ (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/downfall?q=downfall) [accessed on 30 November 2005].

who is ugly, to something that is wicked and/or dangerous and, connotatively, to that which is not noble, 'contraire à la bienséance' and, therefore, the opposite of decorum. Ethics is brought up again so that the French text can problematize and overturn its intrinsic meaning. To be decorous and, therefore, respectable the daughter should not try what is not decorous which, in this context, is heterosexual normalcy. While the French version reveals that the mother's ideology does not coincide exactly with the community's ideology, it also highlights the strategies she uses to warn Jeanette against social traps. Jeanette responds positively and critically to the maternal warnings. As she grows older, she becomes aware that sexuality is not one-dimensional. Other girlfriends and women that frequent the church are homosexual and Jeanette soon understands that sexuality is more complex than the pastors are letting on.

Unlike heterosexuality, which is refused very early in the book, class (and especially the working class) is not immediately rejected. When Jeanette receives feedback from her teacher about her needlework displaying devils and demons, she becomes furious. She believes that 'une vilaine tache dans le coin' (Les Oranges: 65) does not exactly describe her 'work of art' or her characters. In French Jeanette's reaction expresses clearly the anti-classist ideas according to which every individual deserves to be respected regardless of their social class and position. Moreover, by claiming that her embroidery is good, she insists that the working class can be seen as an artistic subject and is therefore praiseworthy. The French intratextual resonances expand therefore what Jeanette claims in the middle of the book: 'everyone has a demon like cats have fleas' (Oranges: 106). Demons and fleas are to cats as the working class is to humans: Jeanette is suggesting that everybody has something of the working-class nature within oneself or that features of the working class can be found everywhere in society. We should therefore try to be more introspective and understand that what we criticize in others is also part of ourselves. Apart from these social considerations, Jeanette comes to terms with her homosexuality. It is therefore worth considering

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17 Le Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé (http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/biens%C3%A9ances) [Accessed on 5 November 2005].

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
what (if any) social issues her homosexuality raises and if the French translation reinforces class divisions after Jeanette comes out. When the book was translated into French, in 1991, consumerism had already endorsed a standard or homogenized middle-class lifestyle. In addition, Marion Demossier and Susan Milner maintain that French society had already started to be defined more in terms of age than in terms of class (2000: 69) and lesbians had already become more politically active within feminism and/or homosexual groups (Tidd 2000). We might therefore wonder whether the French translation, apart from giving value to the British culture and setting, was also affected by the socio-cultural atmosphere of France at the time. Examples 13 and 14 show Jeanette’s attitude to class divisions before and after her homosexual disclosure in the French version.

Example 13
‘How old are you, little girl?’
‘Seven.’ I replied.
‘Ah, seven,’ he muttered. ‘How blessed, the seven days of creation, the seven-branched candlestick, the seven seals.’
(Seven seals? I had not yet reached Revelation in my directed reading, and I thought he meant some Old Testament amphibians I had overlooked). (Oranges: 11)

- Quel âge as-tu, ma petite fille?
- Sept ans, ai-je fait.
- Ah, sept ans, a-t-il marmonné. Bénis soient-ils, les sept jours de la création, les chandeliers à sept branches, les sept sceaux.
(Les sept sots? Je n'étais pas encore arrivée aux Révélations dans les textes qu'on me donnait à lire et j'ai cru qu'il y avait peut-être dans l'Ancien Testament une histoire de simples d'esprit que j'aurais oublié de lire). (Les Oranges: 24)

As discussed in Chapter One, irony arises from ‘a collocative clash’, that is to say, as Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short maintain, ‘from the contrast in values associated with two different points of view’ (1981: 278). One point of view reflects the perspective of the narrating I, who rejects patriarchy and religion and all sorts of androcentric socio-ideological institutions. The other point of view echoes the experiencing I who perceives the world in a childish and innocent manner free from deviancy and maliciousness. The clash is linguistically visible in the pun with the two meanings of ‘seal’: an official mark on a document and a
large fish-eating mammal. The pastor, who recalls all the biblical objects related to number seven, refers to the first one. Jeanette, who is still young and inexperienced, refers to the second one, thinking that the pastor is talking about amphibians. The authorial voice intervenes in brackets to explain the hilarious misunderstanding and to uncover her critical position towards the religious congregation.

The French version plays on a different pun with ‘sceaux’ meaning seal, or official stamp, and ‘sots’ meaning stupid. The word ‘amphibians’ is intentionally replaced by ‘simples d’esprit’, an expression which, by association, acquires political meaning. This expression recalls ‘des gens simples’ (Les Oranges: 21) which translates ‘homely people’ (Oranges: 9) and which Jeanette uses to refer to poor and illiterate people in need of being governed and educated by a princess. Their simplicity validates the bourgeois presumptuousness, which, standing on beliefs of superiority, aims to rule and regulate the working class according to hypocritical principles. Simplicity is also the hallmark of poverty and spiritual purity which, as hooks explains, was idealized and praised by religion for a long time before the 1970s. Before the 1970s, namely before consumerism bloomed, people did not necessarily think that wealth was good. Wealth brought ease, but it also encouraged envy and bred greed. This view was supported by religion which for years shared with Communism principles of economic simplicity based on frugality and parsimoniousness: ‘living simply and sharing resources with others was a basic tenet of spiritual faith and action’ (hooks 2000: 59). Simplicity also characterizes the people of the congregation defined as ‘ces gens simples’ (Les Oranges: 178) as well as the seven stupid people in the pun in Example 13, which, in the light of these intratextual resonances, can be associated with the working class. In French the narrating I displays strong polemical attitudes towards class politics. She not only attempts to question the pastor’s authority over some bizarre Old Testament gospel (in the ST), but also wants to criticize his patronising attitude towards the poor. The message that the French narrating I wants to put across is simple and direct: poor people might be illiterate, but they are not stupid and therefore they deserve respect. The French narrator sounds well
aware of class frictions and clearly sides with the poor, the working class, like other women in the story. In French, Jeanette’s political agenda recuperates the genuine principles which religion used to preach and, at the same time, expands her mother’s ideas so as to support the poor and the working class.

The last example uses the French translation both to clarify Jeanette’s position towards class identification and to prove linguistically her political agenda regarding class and gender politics. After hoping in vain that the religious community would accept her unorthodox erotic drive, it becomes impossible for Jeanette to live there. As she is the victim of some exorcist practices performed by the pastors, she realizes she is too tired to fight prejudices and preconceptions grounded in, as Adrienne Rich calls it, ‘the compulsory nature of socially constructed heterosexuality’ (1980: 631). Early on in the book her homosexuality assumes the form of a free biological expression demanding legitimacy and political protest. As a small child, Jeanette finds it less problematic to relate to her mother. Once she has grown up, however, her political agenda does not correspond any longer with what her mother says. Jeanette is therefore forced to leave her mother who, partly imbued with the community’s ideology, refuses to face the scandal. Liberation is one of the main points of the mother’s political agenda (and being working-class helps to raise her political consciousness), but unfortunately her understanding of the term does not include the freedom to express and act upon sexual desire. In other words, the mother is an innovative character, but she is not so innovative to accept Jeanette’s lesbianism.

Example 14
‘You’ll have to leave,’ she said. ‘I’m not havin’ demons here.’
Where could I go? Not to Elsie’s, she was too sick, and no one in the church would really take the risk. If I went to Katy’s there would be problems for her, and all my relatives, like most relatives, were revolting. (Oranges: 134)

- Tu vas devoir partir, a-t-elle dit. Je ne veux pas de démons ici.
Où pouvais-je aller? Pas chez Elsie’s, elle était trop malade et aucun autre membre de l’église n’oserait courir le risque de m’accueillir. Si j’allais chez Katy, je lui causerais des ennuis; quant à tous les gens de ma famille, comme c’est le cas la plupart du temps, ils étaient ignobles. (Les Oranges: 181)
This is part of the last conversation between Jeanette and her mother before Jeanette leaves town. The mother has decided that she wants nothing to do with her daughter’s demonic homosexuality. Jeanette is slightly hesitant, as she does not know where to go. In her interior monologue, she thinks of the only two friendly people she knows who might want to help her, Elsie and Katy, and by doing so she realizes that all her relatives would not want to have anything to do with her. The adjective ‘revolting’ expresses her pain and also her anger towards those obtuse and narrow-minded people who keep away from homosexual people as if they were ‘infected’. The French translation ‘ignobles’ adds socio-political connotations to Jeanette’s pain because whereas the former describes the people who have rejected Jeanette as disgusting, repellent and sickening, the latter defines them as vile, mean, disgraceful and, also, morally bad. The intercultural metonymic relation between the English ‘revolting’ and the French ‘ignobles’ (where the former is the effect of the latter) brings ethical connotations to the French text. Those who do not approve of Jeanette’s homosexuality lack morality as well as socially aspired respectability and recognition. By saying so, the French Jeanette linguistically overthrows and destabilizes the traditional equation according to which heterosexuality is to respectability as perverse sexuality is to (unrespectable) working-class women and lesbians. In her discursive construction of lesbians, Hart (quoted in Skeggs 1997: 122) explains the homophobic position that was rooted in Europe before the 1970s and that feminism has tried to eradicate since. It is this position as well as the gay/lesbian opposition (spread in France and England) that the French translation evokes by attributing an ethical reaction to Jeanette. Hart claims: ‘lesbianism was recognized as prevalent among women of colour and working-class women: foreclosure would “properly” pathologize it in order to obviate the “contagion” of the White, middle-class European female’ (Skeggs 1997: 122). In the end, Jeanette refuses any sort of ethical and/or ideological institutionalization and her subjectivity becomes the site for reappropriation and reformulation of the public signified both in terms of class and in terms of sexuality.
Jeanette’s adolescence appears to be problematic, as the person she relates to most is also problematic and controversial. Jeanette’s mother’s life revolves around a number of paradoxes encapsulated in the dichotomy: ‘my mother is enlightened and reactionary at the same time’ (Oranges: 126). Despite her limitations and attraction to the middle class, she tries to fight some of the principles instilled in her by the dominant order. She adopts forms of resistance to patriarchy by promoting education for women and alternative careers to marriage and childbearing. Nonetheless she is constantly seeking approval from religious authorities which offer security and personal reassurance. According to her, the pastors can rescue working-class women from the clutches of non-respectability, yet they can improperly guide female life trajectories along the patriarchal path of monogamy, marriage and motherhood. In laying emphasis on some of the mother’s feminist facets, the translation succeeds in disambiguating the original text. Some of the lexical choices, which could at first appear as a way of departing from the original, encourage the scholar to go back to it and reread the mother’s social understanding of class in feminist terms. Unlike the Italian translation’s domesticating strategies, the French translator displays a foreignizing approach to the original text. The lexical choices and syntactic shifts discussed above recall the frictions of the British socio-political context and advocate the 1970s icon of the British working-class mother. This mother has class awareness, understands the mechanisms of power and promotes ‘oppositional consciousness’ (hooks 2000: 127) which prevents her from becoming a victim and an instrument of those mechanisms. In ‘Our Classes, Ourselves’, Nancy K. Miller sees the mother-daughter bond within a working-class environment as liberating. By comparing some working-class autobiographies, among which Steedman’s, she explains that working-class mothers see family as a traditional institution that reinforces patriarchy and its religious belief. And that is why they oppose it and see it as a threat to women’s emancipation or, in Simone de Beauvoir’s words, ‘the master with tyrannical authority’ (2001: 89). This is the reason why Jeanette’s mother does not want her daughter to get married. In her semi-autobiographical
Landscape for a Good Woman, Steedman admits that her working-class mother did not instil in her any desire to mother, because this would have meant reproducing ad infinitum the circumstances of her marginality and dehumanization:

her reproduction of children and the wishes and desires that the production embodied were a manifestation [...] of a bargain struck between working-class women and the state, the traffic being a baby and the bargain itself [...] state benefits and a council house, the means of subsistence. (Steedman 1986: 70)

The analysis of the French and the Italian translations in relation to the English text allows us to maintain that, in the French text, the mother’s precepts have a clear effect on Jeanette’s episodic memory, evaluative beliefs and cognitive schemata of social interaction. In the Italian version, Jeanette’s relationship with her mother is at times confused, confusing and overwhelmed by an overzealous Catholic mother. In the French version (and in the original), Jeanette does not shelter her fears in fictional narratives (as claimed by Backus). On the contrary, she is brave enough to face the challenges of the outside world to negotiate her happiness. The development of her identity is anchored in both her early experience of homosexuality and her mother’s political agenda of female liberation and discourses of social improvement. The plays on words, the humorous tone and the sharp critique of society, successfully and cohesively rendered only in the French translation, suggest a democratic approach to class and gender politics which allows for social and sexual diversity. Finally they reflect and advocate what Demossier and Milner (2000: 71) see happening also in contemporary France, namely ‘a huge cultural shift away from the social divisions which marked the major part of the twentieth century and [...] the decline of Marxist-inspired analysis based on class struggle’ (2000: 71). The next chapter will be devoted to the analysis of another maternal figure in translation: A.S. Byatt’s mother. Like Jeanette’s mother, Byatt’s mother plays a crucial role in the personal and, especially, artistic development of the British writer.