Chapter Three

CHAPTER THREE

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

3.1 Introduction: Gendered Reality and Problematization of Truth in Diotima

Over the past thirty years, literary critics and writers have reflected upon and, consequently, challenged mimesis, or linguistic and formal adherence to factual reality, as a constitutive element of realism. As a consequence, recent experimental writing has problematized the validity of the realist novel, a genre where ‘the reader is required to identify the products being imitated – characters, actions, settings – and recognize their similarity to those in empirical reality, in order to validate their literary worth’ (Hutcheon 1980: 38). A.S. Byatt’s literary and critical production (1978a; 1991) reveals over time a passionate interest in the realist novel, an interest which has resulted in an original and fruitful contribution to the debate on realism in the Anglo-Saxon world (Alexander 1989; Alfer 2001; Becker 2001; Dusinberre 1982; Gitzen 1995; Kelly 1996; Kenyon 1988; Neumeier 1997; Todd 1997), and even beyond the Anglo-Saxon context (Carpi 1993; Chevalier 1993). Byatt claims that this genre is not dead and can still be inspirational because it represents a valuable canvas for British novelists (1991: 149). Her work, translated into many languages, including Italian, by renowned publishing houses all over the world, has inevitably participated in the outlining of a new approach to mimesis, realism and the realist novel, affecting, in its turn, a wide range of personalities involved in literary productions, including translators. In particular, the Italian translations of Byatt’s novels have emerged from

---

1 Earlier versions of some sections of Chapter Three have been published in Maestri 2007b.

Eliana Maestri
Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
a rich debate animated by gendered revisions not only of literary practices that pretend to mirror accurately and objectively reality, but the real itself, as a reference schema, tangible as well as recognizable by readers and writers. In the light of these cross-cultural connections, this chapter will highlight the dialogue between the Italian literary and theoretical debate on truth and the real and the Italian translation of Byatt’s short stories ‘Sugar’ (1995, orig. 1987) and ‘Cold’ (1999, orig. 1998). Chapter Four will analyze the dialogue between the French translation of Byatt’s autobiographical text ‘Sugar’ and the French debate on the same issues. This will help me unearth, as anticipated at the end of Chapter Two, Byatt’s aesthetic legacy and the artistic role that her mother played in her life.

In Italy, the Verona feminist philosophical community Diotima, led by Luisa Muraro, has made a major contribution to the retheorization of reality. Their first publications and collections of essays revolve around the concept of ‘realismo femminile’ which, as Luisa Villa explains, concerns ‘la selezione di ciò cui si deve accordare lo statuto di realtà’ (1990: 43). The outcome of this selection does not simply reflect a personal preference, an extract or a fragment of a multifarious and prismatic reality. It reflects a range and a variety of options which articulate and unveil what has been unjustly neutralized and universalized by male patriarchal thought. Therefore female realism, as interpreted and advocated by Diotima, is more than a mere literary form or alliance between text and aesthetic forms of realism as prescribed by certain cultures. It is ‘una pratica di pensiero e di scrittura esplicitamente e consapevolmente sessuati’ (Villa 1990: 43). It is a passionate force, a loving care and a political practice that ground knowledge, writing, vision and revision in contingency, limited location, radical multiplicity and irreducible difference. It is also an attempt to valorize experience by means of an embodied thought of sexual difference.

---

2 Retheorizations of the concept of reality have informed Italian and British feminist debates. See Serena Anderlini-D’Onofrio (1999) on the British debate.
Whilst ‘female realism’ still reinstates such traditional principles as mimesis and adherence to empirical reality, it also opens up new ways of perceiving the world, of situating the subject within it as well as of conceptualizing its irreducible plurality in accordance with ‘il fatto nudo e crudo’ (Villa 1990: 74) of sexual difference. In order to enact this practice of thought and writing, the members of Diotima have promoted strategic approaches to it. They have engaged in imaginary dialogues with past female philosophers, writers and psychoanalysts, thus enhancing female legacies and bonds. They have problematized such realism-related concepts as truth, what conforms to factual reality, objectivity and truth-telling in autobiographical writing. They have encouraged trangressive attitudes aimed at disrupting the stale coherence of the male symbolic order. Finally, they have reviewed and revisited literary practices that configure experience according to established conventions.

This chapter is concerned with two short stories by A.S. Byatt which lend themselves to a cross-cultural reading in terms of the debate I have just outlined. These short stories are: ‘Sugar’ (1995, orig. 1987) and ‘Cold’ (1999, orig. 1998) and their Italian translations ‘Zucchero’ (2000) and ‘Freddo’ (2000), both published in the collection Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato (2000). ‘Sugar’, published in Sugar and Other Stories (1995, orig. 1987), is considered to be Byatt’s only overtly autobiographical narrative. It is a family portrait, a collection of biographies of members of the author’s paternal family told and retold by her mother during her best moments of oral fictional production. It is also a female Bildungsroman in which Byatt’s quest for relational identity resuscitates ghosts and family myths. ‘Cold’ published in Elementals. Stories of Fire and Ice (1999, orig. 1998) and defined by Byatt as ‘una velata, giocosa, autobiografia’ (2000: 183) in a postscript that she wrote specially for the Italian collection, is the story of Fiammarosa, a young princess, who breaches the law of the father by running secretly out of the castle to play, naked, with ice and snow, which are seen as sources of sexual and orgasmic pleasure. Fiammarosa is then reproached by her father for her impudence in rejecting the castle/family’s warmth and protection. She is given a husband, whom she happens to fall in love with, and lives with him happily ever after. ‘Zucchero’ and ‘Freddo’ reveal interesting lexical
features in comparison with the English originals which invite an in-depth exploration of the literary representation of reality in translation against the influential background of Diotima’s female realism.

The analysis of lexical cohesion, defined as ‘the role played by the selection of vocabulary in organizing relations within a text’ (Baker 1992: 202) is an important interpretative tool in translation studies, as it enables us to trace repeated lexical patterns of reference within the Target Text and the Source Text. Lexical cohesion is conveyed by chains of lexical items, which, through semantic and/or morphologic ‘reiteration’ (Baker 1992: 203), create networks of words, ideas and concepts. This chapter looks at the reiteration of the same word or its synonym, near-synonym, superordinate or general word. In this case, this approach is doubly productive as it also enables us to identify lexical correspondences between the Italian translations and Italian theoretical texts, such as those by Diotima, which deal with the issues of storytelling, autobiography, realism and truth. ‘Freddo’ reveals additional lexical correspondences with Luce Irigaray’s work, which, though French, has been highly influential among Italian feminists and can thus be considered as a part of the Italian feminist heritage. In particular, reference to Diotima’s realist practice of thought and writing will cast light on Byatt’s mother’s approach to storytelling, truthtelling and life in ‘Zucchero’ and on Byatt’s own investigations into the nature of the real and truth (interchangeable concepts, as we shall see, in Byatt), mimesis and experimental writing, which are a common concern in ‘Sugar’ and ‘Cold’. Finally, the network of references between Source and Target Texts and between them and feminist theory will help to retrieve intergenerational dialogues and alliances between fictional, imaginary and real characters, that is to say, Byatt and her mother, the Italian translators and their conscious and unconscious sources and intellectual models.
3.2 ‘Sugar’ and the Untruthful Mother

Byatt’s declared goal in ‘Sugar’ is to investigate the veracity of storytelling and, ultimately, the nature of truth via fictional explorations of her mother’s identity as a storyteller. Despite the fact that she praises her mother for being a breathless and breathtaking storyteller, she also casts doubt on her truthfulness from the very first line of the short story: ‘my mother had a respect for truth, but was not a truthful woman’ (‘Sugar’: 215). Her lack of sincerity, intermingled with her infinite pleasure for fabulation, results in flowery lies, phantasmagoric stories, morally untruthful and undignified. As Byatt clarifies in two essays on ‘the problems of the “real” in fiction’, and ‘the adequacy of words to describe it’ (1991: 3-4), to be truthful acquires multiple and complex connotations with religious, ethical, aesthetic and gender nuances. To a religious practitioner, to be truthful means to be honest to oneself and to reject ‘illusion and distraction from moral virtue and the Inner Light’ (1991: 21). To Byatt, the daughter, to be truthful means to comply with the moral precepts set by her righteous and virtuous father, ‘a man with an unwavering instilled respect for evidence, for truth, for justice’ (‘Sugar’: 217). Being a judge, he believes in evidence, the concrete and bare reality displayed before his eyes: the only truth he is prepared to acknowledge. Finally, to Byatt, writer of fiction, it means to be realistically accurate, descriptive, almost photographic or ‘supremely mimetic, “true to life” in the Balzacian sense’ (1991: 23).

Lying, on the contrary, is not only morally unforgivable. It is also the outcome of a process of contamination of reality with fantasy, imagination and such structural elements as ‘the fixed form, the set arrangement’ (Byatt 1991: 23), formal and conventional filters which select the real and confect lies or, alternatively, fictions. For Byatt lying, for whatever reason, seems to be a female prerogative. Hence the opening line in ‘Sugar’, followed by such declarations as ‘the idea that I had [...] derived from my mother’s accounts, was not to be trusted’ (‘Sugar’: 219), sounds indeed like a j’accuse in the name of the father. It sets the tone of the story while...
highlighting the mother’s unreliability, immorality and irrationality, evident in her storytelling full of fantastic alterations, colourful amplifications, mood and infinite pleasure for invention. However, Byatt’s postscript to the collection Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato seems to modify her earlier gendered dichotomy. This original dichotomy can be identified as an opposition between ‘logos’ and/or ‘Logos’ (Cavarero 1993: 194-95) (for man) and pathos (for woman). Written initially to illustrate the leitmotif that runs through the apparently hybrid Italian collection, the postscript touches upon such crucial themes in Byatt’s writing as realism and her urge for autobiographical truthtelling in her fairy tales. Here Byatt reconfirms her mother’s passion for lies evident in the fact that her stories are corrupted by the power of fantasy. However, at the same time, she claims that what is told in ‘Zucchero’ is absolutely true. This is deeply contradictory: if everything we read proceeds from the mother, and the mother’s stories have been exposed as untrue, how can everything in the story be true? A cross-cultural reading of ‘Sugar’ and ‘Zucchero’ helps to unveil Byatt’s mother’s perspective, what she means by truth and reality and how the Italian translation has succeeded in unearthing her ‘real’ truth.

3.3 Stories, Tales, Narratives and Accounts versus Racconto and Resoconto

One of the most obvious lexical patterns of reference in ‘Sugar’ is the repetition of words such as ‘story’, ‘tale’, ‘narrative’ and ‘account’:

**Example 1a**
The events of my grandfather’s passing, the family intrigues [...] were one of my mother’s best tales. (‘Sugar’: 218)

Ciò che aveva accompagnato la morte del nonno, gli intrighi [...] erano un pezzo forte dei racconti della mamma. (‘Zucchero’: 7)

**Example 1b**
I do not know where this vision came from: not from my mother, though it was indissolubly connected to her eyewitness narrative. (‘Sugar’: 219)

---

Diotima’s thought on sexual difference.

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
Non so da dove provenga questa visione: non da mia madre, sebbene sia indissolubilmente legata al suo racconto di testimone oculare. (‘Zucchero’: 7)

**Example 1c**

“Have you ever thought,” I said, “how much of what we think we know is made out of her stories? (‘Sugar’: 240)

– Hai mai riflettuto, – dissi, – sul fatto che gran parte di quello che sappiamo è frutto dei suoi racconti? (‘Zucchero’: 33)

**Example 1d**

The idea that I had, which was derived from my mother’s accounts, was not to be trusted and bore no very clear relation to truth or reality. (‘Sugar’: 219)

L’idea che ne avevo, derivata dai racconti di mia madre, non era affidabile e non aveva alcuna chiara relazione con verità e realtà. (‘Zucchero’: 8)

**Example 1e**

My father maintained more and more acrimoniously that this account was a fabrication. (‘Sugar’: 219)

Mio padre sosteneva con sempre maggiore ostinazione e acrimonia che quel resoconto era del tutto inventato. (‘Zucchero’: 7)

**Example 1f**

So his account had also his bias. (‘Sugar’: 219)

Anche nel suo resoconto c’era una certa parzialità. (‘Zucchero’: 8)

In the English text, the terms ‘story’, ‘tale’ and ‘narrative’ are interchangeably used to refer to the stories told by both the mother and the father. The Italian version, on the contrary, seems to reorganize this internal lexical coherence according to a different principle. ‘Racconto’ is mainly used for the mother’s stories (Examples 1a to 1d), while ‘resoconto’ is employed for the father’s version of the same stories (Example 1f) or as a term (hence viewpoint) used by him (Example 1e). The creation of this lexical dichotomy in Italian appears to reinforce the initial connotations attributed to each parent. ‘Resoconto’ refers to a simple written or spoken description of an event, a report where imagination does not alter the realistic aspect of the statement. It consequently strengthens the paternal moral attributes of honesty, justice and clarity. ‘Racconto’, on the other hand, denotes a tale/story that might not bear any connection
with reality, and consequently underscores the dishonest, false and imaginative character of the mother.

Diotima’s volume *Mettere al mondo il mondo* (1990) offers some enlightening extratextual lexical parallelisms. According to Diotima, the genre of ‘racconto’ is a special kind of female discourse that gives voice/body to the thought of sexual difference and expresses women’s a-topicality (their not being represented in other discursive forms). Muraro mentions as an example the case of Teresa of Avila. Teresa lived in the sixteenth century and preferred to take orders to getting married. She was ‘una pensatrice che dice e insegna a dire la verità’ (Muraro 1990: 65). Her truth was voiced during her moments of ecstasy when she wrote a ‘racconto’ of her life and personal experiences. Muraro defines ‘racconto’ as ‘[un] invenzione che riguarda più strettamente la libertà di pensiero’ (1990: 66). While it retains the status of ‘invention’, a concept that has also been explored by Diana Sartori (1999: 13-18), it rigorously requires autobiographical overtones, indispensable features that empower the ‘soggettivismo femminile’ (Muraro 1990: 66) or, as Muraro prefers to call it, ‘realismo femminile’. Hence, considering that the word ‘racconto’ has been privileged and preferred over other possible translations of ‘story’, ‘narrative’ or ‘tale’ (for example ‘storia’) to define the mother’s style of fabulation, its recurrence acquires special significance in ‘Zucchero’. It foregrounds possible imaginary female cross-connections (also hailed by Diotima as a fruitful practice): both between the translators and Diotima and between Teresa of Avila by way of Muraro and Byatt’s mother. Moreover it invites us to investigate whether Byatt’s mother embodies ‘realismo femminile’, the practice of thought and writing grounded in sexual difference and advocated by Diotima. If she tries to find a possible discourse to voice her own female thoughts and truths, we might hypothesize that she partakes in the ‘vocazione realista del pensiero femminile’ (Villa 1990: 40).
3.4 Fabricated Lies and Truths

In the English version, this feminist reading of the mother’s figure is not tenable due to the numerous repetitions of such words as ‘to affect’, ‘untrue’, ‘fabricated’, ‘fabrications’ and ‘lies’ that connote the mother as a liar and question the veracity of her stories, introduced by the narrator’s use of such expressions of doubt as ‘or so my mother said’ (‘Sugar’: 217-18).

Example 2
She also told other kinds of stories [...], monotonous, malevolent, unstructured plaints, full of increasingly fabricated evidence of non-existent wickedness. (‘Sugar’: 215-16)

Raccontava anche un altro genere di storie [...], lamentazioni monotone, malevole, non strutturate, disseminate di prove via via più artificiose di malvagità inesistenti. (‘Zucchero’: 3)

Example 3
Alongside this fabrication are the long black shadows of the things left unsaid. (‘Sugar’: 214)

A lato di questa costruzione si allungano le ombre nere delle cose non dette. (‘Zucchero’: 34)

These examples show that the Italian translation repeatedly offers different alternatives for the terms ‘fabricated’ and ‘fabrications’ such as ‘artificiose’ and ‘costruzione’, words that, although they render the concepts of artificiality and construction, do not bear any etymological resemblance with the Italian literal translations ‘fabbricato’ or ‘fabbricazione’. It seems as if the translators have endeavoured to avoid ideologically loaded terms that might confuse rather than clarify the concept of maternal realism.

These terms appear, for example, in Wanda Tommasi’s contribution to Mettere al mondo il mondo (1990). Here she insistently uses such expressions as ‘mondo falso, fabbricato’ (Tommasi 1990: 79) and ‘realità fabbricata’ (Tommasi 1990: 80) to overthrow logical/traditional oppositions of true versus false and to unmask
traditional discursive regimes of truth. She claims in fact that what we think as real and true is actually a resounding lie. It is instead the false world of the other centred on a ‘fabricated’ (male) order that alienates the living being gendered in the feminine. The female world, though real and true, is therefore unrepresented, unrepresentable and visible only to the female perceptive eye/I. What is truly real is inaudible, unspeakable, unthinkable and paradoxical. Therefore, Anna Nadotti and Fausto Galuzzi, the Italian translators, seem to be the bearers of a culture imbued with feminist ideas and to follow in the footsteps of Diotima’s idea of ‘realismo femminile’. Anna Nadotti is indeed familiar with feminist research as she has translated feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s *The Bonds of Love* along with other contemporary texts by women writers, among whom Anita Desai. Moreover, she collaborates with ‘Associazione per una Libera Università delle Donne’, a cultural, non-profit organization founded in Milan in 1987 by a group of women promoting the understanding of the female condition in Italy and worldwide. By rejecting ideologically loaded literal translations, Nadotti and Galuzzi refuse to claim that the mother’s stories are part of those ‘lies’. They therefore refuse to support ‘discursive regimes encod[ing] and enforc[ing] structures, power relationships, knowledges that pass for the natural, real, common-sensical – the truth’ (Smith 1990: 154). Instead of supporting those hegemonic structures of knowledge and power, the Italian text tries to cast light on the mother’s wisdom and on her female realism. Her stories cannot be ‘fabricated’ as they contain her female wisdom. They are ‘artificial’ because they are a product of her prolific imagination, but they are not fabricated lies.

### 3.5 The Mother’s Realism

The following examples illustrate in detail the mother’s realism and how she applies it to her life and personal experiences. It is useful to analyze the opening passage of ‘Sugar’ where the narrator, after accusing the mother of not being a truthful woman, tries to explain the reason why she used to lie:
Example 4
She lied in small matters to tidy up embarrassments, and in larger matters, to avoid unpalatable truths. (‘Sugar’: 215)

Mentiva nelle piccole cose, per spazzare via gli equivoci, e in cose più importanti, per evitare verità spiacevoli. (‘Zucchero’: 3)

In Italian, the term ‘embarrassments’ is replaced by ‘equivoci’, ambiguities, equivocations, misunderstandings. English readers make sense of Example 4 especially when they find out, a few pages later, that the mother’s eccentric personality caused embarrassment ‘with her indisciplined rush of speech, fantasy, embarrassing candour, endless barbed outrage’ (‘Sugar’: 217). Italian readers, on the contrary, remain confused for a while: the mother cannot possibly be a liar if she does not want to be intentionally equivocal, confusing, unclear and hiding the truth. Although in apparently paradoxical terms, the Italian text unmasks the conspiracy of its English counterpart. It helps us understand that the maternal label of ‘liar’ comes from the father’s terminology, from his world of abstractions and ‘fabrications’, from his cogito ergo sum. In addition to this, the term ‘equivoco’ returns in the adverbial form ‘inequivocabile’ in a significant moment of the text. This is when Byatt had her ‘first absolute confirmation that my mother’s myth was untrue, that the hearth’s warmth did not keep off the cold blast’ (‘Sugar’: 226). The myth Byatt is referring to here is normality, family life, the image of the hearth, which is mentioned in the story of Sylvia, one of the father’s sisters who killed her little daughter and then committed suicide. In Italian the message is reinforced by the skilful replacement of ‘absolute’ (an adjective that mainly belongs to the domain of the father) with ‘inequivocabile’, which, while clarifying the mother’s realism, weaves intratextual references in the Italian text along with an intricate and intimate layer of correlations between Diotima, the mother and the translators. In the light of the maternal interpretation and delivery of Sylvia’s story in ‘Zucchero’, the mother’s realism reveals itself to be a pragmatic way of making good use of other women’s lives in order to warn her daughter against dangerous ‘lies’. In Sylvia’s story, the lie is symbolized by the image of the hearth whose warmth is false, a male fabrication that limited Sylvia’s freedom, self-discovery and self-fulfilment. Sylvia was condemned to ‘hearth’s warmth’ but she

Eliana Maestri  Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
could not tolerate it and committed suicide. The mother, on the contrary, pretended to believe in it and succeeded skilfully in including her truths, or ‘various manageable dicta’ (‘Sugar’: 228), in her stories for her daughter’s éducation sentimentale.

The Italian version continues to help the readers disentangle the intricacies of the ‘feminine’ message of the mother’s stories by means of linguistic hints, namely intertextual lexical repetitions. This is precisely when the term ‘velo’ turns out to be particularly significant. Byatt criticizes her mother, by saying:

**Example 5**

These accounts are dyed with her own perpetual anxiety as to whether she herself was [...] acceptable or unacceptable to them’. (Sugar’: 219)

Questi racconti sono velati dalla sua insopprimibile ansia sul fatto di essere apparsa loro, alla fin fine, accettabile o meno. (‘Zucchero’: 8)

**Example 6**

I thought there were two sorts of people in the world, those to whom terrible things happened [...] and those condemned to the protection of normality. (‘Sugar’: 227)

Pensavo che al mondo ci fossero due tipi di persone, quelle a cui capitavano cose terribili [...] e quelle condannate al velo protettivo della normalità. (‘Zucchero’: 17)

The pronoun ‘them’ in Example 5 refers to Byatt’s father’s family who apparently did not like Byatt’s mother. In this example ‘dyed’ is translated as ‘velati’. The metaphor of the ‘velo’ (a female/feminine metaphor) is intertextually reproposed in Italian (without being used in the original text) a few pages later when Byatt says that as a child she thought there were people condemned to ‘il velo protettivo della normalità’.

The image of the ‘velo’ has clearly a negative connotation in ‘Zucchero’. It is the same as in ‘Simone Weil: Dare corpo al pensiero’, where Tommasi (1990: 78) repeatedly employs the same metaphor to refer to all our reassuring projections that ‘veil’ with illusions the true world, what Adriana Cavarero defines as the ‘here and now’. In both Source and Target Texts, normality and the myth of the angel of the hearth embody maternal reassuring concepts, namely what the mother thought, at times, to be comforting, comfortable and protective. Byatt might have inherited this.
myth from her mother or, most probably, from her father’s family who tried to impose it upon all the members, even against their own will and aspirations. In this light, the Italian choice of ‘velati’ and ‘velo’ confers upon the text and the mother additional nuances which clarify her realism. In the English original, the mother’s anxieties are seen as a mystification of the truth by the father’s family whose judgment is coloured by their ‘false’ ideologies. In the Italian text, the mother’s passion for the real and what she thought was the truth is not a mystification, it is a reality that is challenged by the family’s cultural and ideological frames of reference. In line with Diotima, the mother’s realism is therefore an invitation to approach critically and seriously such tragic clichés as ‘la sconfitta tragica […] della differenza delle donne’ (Villa 1990: 43), popular in nineteenth-century realism. According to Villa, this defeat is evident in ‘la morte e la follia da una parte, il matrimonio convenzionale dall’altra’ (1990: 43).

Without distorting the text, the Italian translation brings out the mother’s realism: a desire to raise her daughter’s self awareness via her own and other women’s mediation, experience and wisdom. ‘Her eyes sharp to detect my opinion’ (‘Sugar’: 215) invite the daughter to emulate her mother’s perceptive skills. They encourage the daughter to improve her observation skills, her abilities to perceive reality and to learn from other women’s experiences. The following example shows how important the paternal grandmother was for the mother and how the latter tries to pass her precepts onto her daughter.

**Example 7**

My mother’s accounts of my grandmother’s selflessness were like pearls, or sugar-coated pills, grit and bitterness polished into roundness by comedy and my mother’s worked-upon understanding of my grandmother’s real meaning. (‘Sugar’: 229)

I racconti di mia madre sull’altruismo della nonna erano come perle, o pillole rivestite di zucchero, i grumi di amarezza essendo stati levigati fino alla rotondità dall’ironia e dalla comprensione faticosamente maturata di ciò che la nonna era. (‘Zucchero’: 19)

Despite the fact that there are no blood connections between the mother and the paternal grandmother, their relationship celebrates female genealogy and reveals
Chapter Three

itself to be fruitful for the mother’s realism. Initially Byatt states that when her father
was in hospital he talked a lot about himself, his father and also his mother. However,
Byatt’s paternal grandmother is somehow brought back to life only by the words of
the mother which enhance the grandmother’s ‘real meaning’, her wisdom, importance
and charisma. This real meaning is not apparently easy to understand as the mother
has to work upon it. In both texts, the mother appreciates the grandmother’s precepts
which are embellished by the beauty of the mother’s stories. Her effort to understand
the grandmother’s altruism unveils her desire to go beyond the grandmother’s
apparently bitter nature in order to enjoy her real essence and make it enjoyable to
others. In so doing, both the English and Italian mother can be equated to Diotima’s
members who celebrate the maternal figure as auctoritas, a concept initially
employed by Hanna Arendt to explain the prominence of mothers. Sartori (1992)
explains that the Roman concept of auctoritas originates from Republican Rome,
where the Senate was invested with auctoritas, the authority to which the government
referred for advice and approval. Those with auctoritas did not have real or
decisional power (which was given to the potestas), they showed charisma and
wisdom, essential qualities to guide citizens through important decisions in life. Like
the Roman Senate, the paternal grandmother was granted auctoritas by the mother
who worked hard to appreciate and celebrate, via her beautiful stories, her real and
charismatic nature.

Both English and Italian therefore acknowledge the auctoritas of the grandmother
and her significance in the mother’s life. But only the Italian succeeds in relating this
to the mother’s female realism. The mother’s stories are, in fact, qualified as
‘comedy’ in English and ‘ironia’ in Italian. Despite the fact that both comedy and
irony might trigger the same response, that is laughter, they do not share the same
approach. As we have seen in Chapter One, irony always expresses criticism, unlike
comedy. However, unlike comedy, irony is ‘un particolare modo di esprimersi che
conferisce alle parole un significato contrario o diverso da quello letterale’. In this

---

4 Dizionario Garzanti Della Lingua Italiana Online (http://garzantilinguistica.sapere.it/
it/dizionario/it/cerca?q=ironia) [accessed on 4 March 2011].

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
light, the word ‘ironia’, much more than ‘comedy’, encapsulates the mother’s realistic approach to life that encourages her to make use of storytelling in order to hint at another level of reality. This level is not literal but metaphorical: other but of this world. Villa confirms that comedy is a mode of writing and thought that belongs to old forms of realism, nineteenth-century realism, which corroborated the tragic defeat or the comic demise of sexual difference.

As a result, Italian readers can now make sense of other accusations laid at the mother’s door. Her unclear stories, ‘dyed with her own perpetual anxiety’ (‘Sugar’: 219) and with ‘frustration and rage’ (‘Sugar’: 220), are the realist output of a woman who, being in touch with her feelings, lets her emotions out and into language and representation. Some of her stories express, in Sidonie Smith’s words, ‘a cry, a refusal’, (Smith 1990: 152) or, in Kristeva’s words, the ‘hysterical symptoms’ (quoted in Smith 1990: 152) of a mal de vivre. Some others act as a role model. They invite the daughter Byatt (as we shall soon see) to use language in a revitalized way, to play creatively with words, verbs, and especially adjectives ‘found […] in the reading endlessly supplied by my mother’ (‘Sugar’: 245) so as to reinvent female discourse.

3.6 The Art of Knitting

In order to show how important the mother’s style of storytelling is for Byatt’s own fictional production, I shall now refer to the description of the production of sugar sweets:

Example 8
The overall man pulled off an armful of it, which he rolled roughly into a fat serpent coil, a heavy skein, like my mother’s knitting-wool, on his two arms. (‘Sugar’: 244)

L’uomo in tuta ne prese una bracciata che arrotolò alla bell’è meglio sulle sue braccia, come spirali di un grosso serpente, una pesante matassa, come la lana che la mamma lavorava ai ferri. (‘Zucchero’: 37)
**Example 9**

We took the white rope back into the factory, and laid it on a dark one, and the two were wound round and round each other, spiralling and decreasing in girth, by skilled slapping hands, until the tapered point could be inserted into the snapping machine. (‘Sugar’: 245)

As a result, in ‘Zucchero’ the dramatization of the metafictional process is gendered and rendered more powerful. It underscores the crucial impact of the maternal legacy in Byatt’s writing, which, in the end, overrides the paternal precepts of clarity, balance and reason. While the clues interspersed in the Italian text clarify the mother’s realism, the initial homage to the father’s precepts of clarity and respect for bare ‘evidence’ progressively fades. ‘Zucchero’ climaxes thus with an empowering and promising image of the skein. It is the mother who is given auctoritas and granted recognition for ‘speaking the world’, to use an expression typical of Chiara Zamboni (1990: 12). It is the mother who introduces the daughter to the real world.
and to the realist practices of storytelling. This image also invites us to discover the extent to which Byatt’s writing foregrounds, via the careful mediation of the Italian translators, the mother’s realist practice of thought and storytelling.

3.7 Byatt’s Self-Conscious Realism

Before proceeding to the analysis of the second short story, ‘Freddo’, we need to discuss Byatt’s defense of realism in her critical writing. These preliminary clarifications will help me situate Byatt within the postmodern debate on realism and understand her ‘realismo femminile’. In Passions of the Mind, Byatt defines her writing as ‘self-conscious realism’ (1991: 4) in an attempt to merge what have been considered as two opposite genres: novelistic realism, on the one hand, and postmodern metafiction, on the other. By using this expression, Byatt does not dismiss either. She in fact supports postmodern problematizations of the realist canon. She is in favour of parody, disruptive authorial interventions and dramatizations of reader-author interactions in fiction. The mother-daughter’s conversations in ‘Sugar’, for example, can be read as a fictional mise-en-scène of narratological dynamics between storyteller and audience which break the suspension of disbelief and reveal the unreality of fiction. However, despite this, Byatt does not abandon some of the pillars of novelistic realism. She does not uphold completely the postmodern metafictional paradox which, in an attempt to unmask the written text as a self-reflexive construct, claims that the only referent hors-texte is the written text itself. On the contrary, she thinks that empirical reality still exists and that it is still possible for a writer to be ‘supremely mimetic’ (1991: 4), ‘true to life’ (1991: 4) and to ‘think about form’ (1991: 4). By coining the expression ‘self-conscious realism’, Byatt asserts that she can be both realistic and metafictional at the same time. What refines her double nature is: vision of things and their linguistic representation, in primis with adjectives.

5 Hutcheon (1980: 37) defines novelistic realism as mimesis of product and postmodern metafiction as mimesis of process.
Chapter Three

Byatt’s approach to writing echoes the practice of ‘realismo femminile’. Indeed, Byatt’s critical reflections on ‘what limits and constitutes our vision of things’ bring to the fore concerns with ‘the nature of language’ and ‘perception’ which are also Diotima’s concern as well as that of the mother’s character in ‘Zucchero’. In an attempt to mirror reality ‘more truthfully and more exactly than any autobiographer, biographer or historian’, (Byatt 1991: 23) Byatt uses adjectives profusely in her often descriptive narratives. Adjectives, she claims, are exceptionally good linguistic tools that refine our perception and representation of things. Things become more real, precise, tangible and vivid to the imagination if they are qualified by ‘the abused and despised adjective, that delimiter of plain nouns which, if properly used, makes every description more and more particular and precise’ (Byatt 1991: 18). Abstractions are consequently eliminated by means of long lists of attributes which accompany, precede, frame and/or follow nouns. Hence, in order to find to what extent Byatt has been perceptive and receptive of her mother’s recommendations to improve her observation skills, I will now focus on some sensory adjectives in ‘Freddo’. My choice of ‘Freddo’ has been dictated by its evident links with the maternal. As Byatt explains in the epilogue to Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato, ‘Freddo’ contains autobiographical overtones in the broad sense of the term. It does not narrate Byatt’s life stricto sensu, but it relates to her life as a child. It includes such visual images as ice, glass and crystals as well as descriptive adjectives that Byatt found, as she explains in ‘Sugar’, in fairy tales endlessly recounted by her mother. It is also, like ‘Sugar’, a true family romance, a story that reflects upon the structural elements of storytelling, language and the mother-daughter bond. In particular, the adjective ‘white’ appears to be the most interesting one to occur in the Italian translation, especially in the section devoted to the princess’s discovery of sexuality.

As it is a fairy tale, ‘Cold’ also fits well into Diotima’s considerations on fairy tales. In ‘Di madre in figlia’, Tommasi (2002: 14) claims that fairy tales are part of a living tradition passed onto younger
3.8 Sensory Adjectives: Pink and White

The following examples are taken from the first part of the short story focusing on the puberty of the princess, Fiammarosa, who goes through a distinctive change: the replacement of her pinky glow with pale, almost transparent, complexion and the development of a passion for ice. The first part focuses on lexical repetitions of the colour pink, the second part of the colour white.

Example 10a
So the blush of the blood was *fiery and rosy*. ('Cold': 115)

Cosi il rossore del sangue traspariva *come fiamma*. ('Freddo': 110)

Example 10b
Her father came in, and picked her up in her new *rosy* shawl, holding the tiny creature clasped in his two huge hands, with her little red legs waving, and her composed *pink* face yawning perfectly above his thumbs. ('Cold': 116)

Entrò il padre, e sollevò tra le grandi mani la minuscola creatura che, avvolta nello scialle *rosato*, agitava le gambette rosse mentre il viso *roseo* e pacifico si apriva in un rotondo sbadiglio sopra i pollici del padre. ('Freddo': 110-11)

Example 10c
As she drank in her mother’s milk, she became milky; the *flush* faded as though it had never been, and the child’s skin became softly pale, like white *rose petals*. ('Cold': 117)

Poiché beveva il latte materno la bambina si fece lattea; il colorito *roseo* svaní come se non fosse mai esistito, e la pelle assunse un pallore morbido, come bianchi petali di *rosa*. ('Freddo': 111)

Example 10d
She had a habit of yawning, opening her *shell-pink* lips to show a row of perfect, gleaming, tiny white teeth, and a *rosy* tongue and gullet. ('Cold': 118)

Aveva l’abitudine di sbadigliare, apriva le labbra *perlaccce* mettendo in mostra una fila di minuscoli dentini, lucidi, bianchi e perfetti, lingua e gola d’intenso *rosa*. ('Freddo': 112)

---

Eliana Maestri

Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011

generations by our mothers: to retrieve myths and fairy tales helps us to keep alive our traditions and origins as well as our maternal language, our mother’s voice and hidden meaning.
Example 10e
Her parents loved her, her nurses loved her, her twelve brothers, from the young men to the little boys, loved her, and tried to think of ways to please her, and to bring roses to the pale cheeks and a smile to the soft mouth. (‘Cold’: 118-19)

I genitori l’amavano, le bambinaie l’amavano, i suoi dodici fratelli, giovanotti fatti e ragazzi, l’amavano e s’industriavano per farla divertire, per far affluire il rosa sulle guance pallide e fiorire il sorriso sulla tenera bocca. (‘Freddo’: 112)

Example 10f
She had her own little rose-garden, with a pool full of rosy fish in green deeps. (‘Cold’: 119)

Aveva un giardinetto di rose tutto suo, con un laghetto nelle cui verdi profondità guizzavano pesci rosei. (‘Freddo’: 112)

Example 10g
With a wide straw hat tied under her chin with pink ribbons. (‘Cold’: 119)

Con un ampio cappello di paglia legato sotto il mento. (‘Freddo’: 113)

In these examples, the English text uses extensively the adjectives ‘rosy’ and ‘pink’ to describe both the Princess and the objects that belonged to or surrounded her throughout her childhood and adolescence. Their redundancy reinforces the reason why at birth she was given the name Fiammarosa, a name which came into her mother’s head as a perfect description of her transparent skin and the rosy blush of her blood.

In Example 10a, the Italian simile ‘come fiamma’ reproduces on a figurative level a twofold connection: both with fire, the elemental leading theme of the collection, and with the maternal choice of name for the princess. On a physical level, the simile reproduces only part of the hendiadys (a single idea expressed with two words) ‘fiery and rosy’: it reproposes the effect of the flame and fire, evoked by ‘fiery’, but it fails to convey the colour pink, evoked by ‘rosy’. The Italian reluctance to reproduce cohesive ties and the colour pink (and the subsequent ‘rosy’ effect) is reinforced in the following examples, which are all taken from the initial paragraphs in the story. Out of the remaining five cases where ‘rosy’ and/or ‘pink’ appear in the original text,
two cases avoid the use of the Italian equivalents for ‘rosy’ and ‘pink’ (namely ‘roseo/rosato’ and ‘rosa’). Example 10d translates ‘shell-pink’ as ‘perlaceo’ which is not pink or ‘rosa’. ‘Perlaceo’, in fact, conjures up the image of pearls which are ‘di colore grigio chiaro, luminoso e iridescente’ or of ‘creamy white shiny colour’.

Neither grey nor creamy white are exactly like pink nor shell-pink, which could have been rendered with ‘madreperlaceo’, namely nacreous, a hue attributed to objects with lustrous rainbow-like colours. In addition, the colour ‘rosy’ in Example 10d is not simply translated with ‘roseo’, but with an expression containing a modifier, namely ‘intenso’, which reminds the Italian reader more of fuchsia than of the soft impression rendered by ‘rosy’ or ‘roseo’/‘rosato’. Example 10g even omits an element of the original description, ‘pink ribbons’, and, consequently, the use of its related adjective of colour. To summarize, the Italian translation does not seem inclined to stick to the rendition of soft and delicate colours. Consistency definitely suffers, as lexical reiterations are not faithfully reconstructed.

Given these immediate lexical differences, we now need to discover whether the Italian translation reveals any coherent reason that might account for this surface consistency breakdown. Example 10c represents a good starting point. The shift from ‘flush’ to ‘roseo’ can be interpreted as the result of a semantic compensation. Being unable to repropose the adjective ‘roseo’/‘rosato’, because of the simile ‘come fiamma’ in Example 10a, the Italian translation compensates for this obvious lexical loss with ‘roseo’ in Example 10c. The adjective ‘roseo’ thus replaces ‘flush’ whose intensity has nothing to do with the delicacy of ‘rosy’. The balance of colours is altered in Italian, but not in favour of pink (which appears faithfully only in Example 10b), because, as remarked previously, the equivalents for ‘rosy’ and ‘pink’ appear less and less than in the original text. Example 10d introduces the idea that other colours such as pearly grey or creamy white start to take over in the description. In Example 10e the abstraction rendered by the transliteration of a concrete object (the

---

7 Dizionario Garzanti Della Lingua Italiana Online (http://garzantilinguistica.sapere.it/it/dizionario/it/cerca?q=perla) [accessed on 24 November 2005].

8 Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/)

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

roses) into a colour (pink), together with the vertical movement enacted by the verbs ‘fare affluire’, stresses the gradual disappearance of pink. In Italian Fiammarosa’s brothers are not trying to cheer her up by bringing ‘roses’ to her cheeks, but by attempting to recover superficially (on her cheeks) the pink that they assume is in Fiammarosa’s body. The morphology of ‘affluire’ recalls the image of a fluid or a liquid flowing inside the Princess. The fact that the brothers are trying in vain to brighten up ‘her normally expressionless face (‘Cold’: 119) uncovers the Italian translation’s intention to draw attention to the absence of such a colourful fluid in the Princess’s body. Example 10f reiterates the efforts made by other family members to bring back the initial pink that characterized Fiammarosa’s birth. Like her brothers, they surround her with pink flowers and roses. In this light, the omission of ‘pink ribbons’ in Example 10g declares the definite disappearance of that colour from the narrative scene (and possibly from Fiammarosa’s body).

At the beginning, the Italian translation stresses pink and rosy (Example 10b and 10c) as the colours which initially characterize the child and, consequently, pink and rosy are the colours that progressively fade in the Italian text: while in the English text red fades into pink, in the Italian one pink fades into white. This gradual and consistent change can be traced as follows in Italian. Initially Fiammarosa’s complexion appears to be pink (not red), then her lips becomes greyish (rather than nacreous) and finally her cheeks turn pale, because no pink fluid seems to be running under her transparent skin. The alteration of Fiammarosa’s adornments also reinforces this gradual progression. At birth they are pink (as they reflect her glow), but after a few months they are discoloured and washed out. This justifies why ‘pink ribbons’, which originally adorn Fiammarosa’s straw hat in English, are removed from the Italian translation.

The following examples will help us discover why the Italian text intends to highlight that white, not pink, is the colour that characterizes Fiammarosa and what significance this colour has in feminine terms.
Example 11a
She grew thinner and whiter. (‘Cold’: 117)

Divenne più esile e diafana. (‘Freddo’: 111-12)

Example 11b
The white limbs filled out, the child’s cheeks rounded [...]. But with the milky flesh came languor. Her pale head dropped on its pale stalk. The gold hair lay flat and gleaming, unmoving like the surface of a still liquid. (‘Cold’: 118)

Le membra pallide si riempirono, Ie guance si arrotondarono [...]. Ma con la carne lattea venne il languore. La pallida testa reclinava sul pallido stelo. I capelli color dell’oro giacevano piatti e lucenti, immobili come una superficie liquida. (‘Freddo’: 112)

Example 11c
He would leave their study [...], and return to find the white head dropped on to the circle of the milky arms. (‘Cold’: 120)

Capitava che lui s’allontanasse [...], trovandola al ritorno con la testa abbandonata sul cerchio delle braccia lattee. (‘Freddo’: 113)

Example 11d
She threw off her silk wrap, and her creamy woollen nightgown, and lay for a moment, as she had imagined lying, with her naked skin on the cold white sheet. (‘Cold’: 125-26)

Si liberò del drappo di seta, della camicia da notte di lana cremosa e per un istante giacque come aveva immaginato di giacere, nuda sul freddo lenzuolo gelido. (‘Freddo’: 116)

The adjective ‘white’ is not given any immediate equivalent in Italian. While in English ‘white’ is repeated on four occasions, in Italian ‘bianco’ is never used. Like with story/tale (in Examples 1), here the Italian translation does not render the original repetition of the adjective ‘white’. However, considering the translational shifts in ‘Zucchero’, we might assume, for reasons of consistency, that the Italian translation of ‘Cold’ continues to be informed by feminist discourse. Intratextuality provides further clues and shows that the Italian elimination of ‘white’ brings about stronger textual and semantic cohesive effects than its English equivalent. The adjective ‘bianco’ is used throughout the text mainly to depict the snow and all
natural elements covered in white. The adjectives 'latteo' and 'pallido', on the contrary, are used mainly to describe parts of Fiammarosa’s body or elements immediately connected to it. Hence, it can be argued that the original adjectives of sight, and, consequently, the authorial visual perception have been reorganized so as to do justice to Fiammarosa’s body and the particularity of her female sex. If ‘latteo’ shifts the Italian reader’s attention to the fluid nature of Fiammarosa’s body, the extensive use of the Italian ‘pallido’ in Example 11b reveals deeper connotations celebrating genealogical and gendered links. ‘Pallido’ in fact does not only refer to fair complexion and fragility, it reveals lack of blood. Fiammarosa has no blood in her veins (and this might be the cause of her frailty), because her body is pervaded by a white fluid, or milk, whose source is the mother’s breast. This would explain why in Example 10c, Byatt claims that Fiammarosa’s glow faded away as she drank her mother’s milk. Unlike in English, in Italian the princess’s paleness is highlighted and comes out, as we have seen above, in other parts of the text. The gradual disappearance of the colour pink from the narrative scene reveals the absence of pink fluid in her body: Fiammarosa’s veins are full of milk not blood.

Other adjectives of sight are equally empowered in Italian. In Example 11d, ‘cremosa’ is normally used in Italian to describe liquids. It thus calls to mind density, concentration and thickness, three concepts that are directly connected to physicality, corporeality and the senses. Apart from evoking fluidity, ‘cremosa’ recalls synaesthetic pleasures by appealing simultaneously to taste and touch. Both the adjectival reorganization and the synaesthesia in these examples improve authorial visual and sensory perception, which enhances and genders Byatt’s study of perception. They thus bring to fruition Diotima’s and the mother’s female realism, which, as we have seen, also includes ‘educazione della percezione’ (Villa 1990: 50). This education, which lays the basis for ‘realismo femminile’, is founded both on ‘adesione al particolare’ and on ‘una cultura del sensibile’ (Villa 1990: 51). Hence, while the adjectival reorganization in Examples 11a, 11b and 11c echoes Diotima’s unwavering adherence to the particular, the concrete and the female body, the

9 In Example 11a ‘diafana’ does not only mean white. It also means fine, in the sense of frail.
synaesthesia in Example 11d brings together objective reality and female subjectivity. In other words, this figure of speech enhances a fruitful fusion of subjectivity and objectivity which also corresponds to Muraro’s philosophy of female realism, a realism founded upon ‘soggettività non opposta all’oggettività ma posta per tramontare nella sua assolutezza e dar così luogo al mondo di cui il soggetto si conoscerà allora come facente parte’ (Muraro 1990: 72). To conclude, all these translational moves accentuate the sensory, the tangible, the corporeal and, by implication, the maternal: an undeniable aspect of life which, as Diotima claims, should be acknowledged and welcomed.

Example 11d further corroborates my argument. Here the adjective ‘white’ is not used to describe Fiammarosa’s body, but to depict the snow, an element that provides libidinal pleasures to the touch (especially when Fiammarosa is a teenager) and that, at the same time, starts her consciousness-raising process. This process is accompanied by Fiammarosa’s remarks: ‘this is who I am […] this is what I want’ (‘Cold’: 126). In Italian, the text displays the skilful substitution of ‘white’ with ‘gelido’ which is not a semantic replacement, but, in the light of what has been argued so far, a case of synonymy. Irigaray (1981) can be considered as this source, because here the French philosopher, like our Italian translation, associates ice with milk, the maternal white fluid:

With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. And I walk with even more difficulty than you do, and I move even less. You flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me. My blood no longer circulates to my feet or my hands, or as far as my head. (1981: 60)

The ambivalent symbiosis between mothers and daughters and the danger of the fusion are perfectly dramatized here. Ice and milk emphasize maternal power and its potential for disruption: while milk represents nurture and care, ice represents the
unconscious. By using these multiple layered metaphors, Irigaray encourages us to exhume what is still censured and hidden in the glacial meanders of our collective unconscious: the mother. Exhuming the repressed, the ‘devouring monster’ (Irigaray 1991a: 40), the removed object, represents a positive step towards female self-affection and self-representation. Going deep into the glacial realms of the unconscious is necessary if we want to learn to love the mother and to appreciate her positive effect upon women’s lives. In line with Irigaray, the Italian text uses images, such as whiteness, paleness, milk and ice that interchangeably connect to the mother in a crescendo of choices that celebrate the female quest for identity and jouissance. Thanks to these interconnections, the icy sheet in Example 11d can be seen as a metaphor for the mother and the placenta, the latter being ‘the first house to surround us, whose halo we carry with us everywhere, like some child’s security blanket’ (Irigaray 1991a: 40, my italics). Moreover, Fiammarosa’s desire to lie naked in the snow, along with the sensual, sensuous and haptic pleasures that it stimulates, symbolizes the bodily encounter or re-encounter with the mother: the teenager’s eagerness to look for her, touch her and be in physical contact with her. As a result, the substitution of ‘white’ with ‘gelido’ brings together and empowers genealogical connections, female mediation, female affection and sensory perception of gendered reality in Byatt’s writing.

3.9 Sensory Adjectives: Soft versus Morbido and Soffice

The following examples on the qualifying adjective ‘soft’ provide further textual evidence of the authorial visual and sensory perception, which celebrates and genders Byatt’s study of perception and practice of sexual difference in the Italian translation. On the one hand, they bring to the fore the unwavering adherence to the particular,
the concrete and the female body. On the other, they demonstrate the extent of maternal empowerment in ‘Freddo’.

Example 12a
When her hair was washed, it sprang into a soft, black fur. (‘Cold’: 116)

I capelli, una volta lavati, divennero una morbida peluria nera. (‘Freddo’: 110)

Example 12b
The little creature, whose wavering hand brushed against the soft curls of his beard, whose fingers touched his warm lips. (‘Cold’: 116)

Alla creaturina, e le manine incerte gli sfiorarono i morbidi riccioli della barba, e le piccole dita gli toccarono le labbra calde. (‘Freddo’: 111)

Example 12c
The child’s skin became softly pale. (‘Cold’ 117)

La pelle assunse un pallore morbido. (‘Freddo’: 111)

Example 12d
In spring weather, well-wrapped in lambswool shawls and fur bonnets, she was driven out in a little carriage, in which she lolled amongst soft cushions, staring indifferently at the trees and the sky. (‘Cold’: 119)

In primavera, ben avvolta in scialli di lana e berretti di pelliccia, veniva portata fuori in carrozzina, dove si cullava tra morbidi cuscini, guardando indifferentemente gli alberi e il cielo. (‘Freddo’: 112)

Example 12e
Fiammarosa reclined on a grassy slope, swathed in soft muslins. (‘Cold’: 119)

Fiammarosa si stendeva su un pendio erboso avviluppata in morbida mussolina. (‘Freddo’: 112-13)

Example 12f
So that the coloured streamers of reflected flames chased each other across the carved ceiling, and moved in the soft hangings on the walls. (‘Cold’: 121)

In modo che le scie colorate dei riflessi di fiamma si rincorressero nel soffitto intagliato e ondeggiassero tra le morbide cortine. (‘Freddo’: 114)

Example 12g
The wind spoke with many voices, soft and shrill, rushing and eddying. (‘Cold’: 122)
Molte erano le voci del vento, morbide e acute, precipitose e ululanti. (‘Freddo’: 114)

**Example 12h**
She felt stifled in her soft blankets, in her lambswool gown. She went to the window, and dragged open the curtain. Behind it, her breath, the breath of the room, had frozen into white and glistening feathers and flowers on the glass, into illusory, disproportionate rivers with tributaries and frozen falls. (‘Cold’: 122)

Si sentiva soffocare sotto le coperte soffici, con la sua camicia di lana. Andò alla finestra e tirò completamente la tenda. Dietro di essa il suo respiro, il respiro della stanza, si era gelato in piume e fiori bianchi e scintillanti sul vetro, in fiumi illusori, sproporzionati, con affluenti e cascate di ghiaccio. (‘Freddo’: 114)

**Example 12i**
Her soft skin adhered, ever so slightly, to the ice. (‘Cold’: 122)

La sua morbida pelle, mai così lieve, aderiva al ghiaccio. (‘Freddo’: 114)

**Example 12j**
And her body came alive with the desire to lie out there, on that whiteness, face-to-face with it, fingertips and toes pushing into the soft crystals. (‘Cold’: 122-23)

E il suo corpo s’accese per il desiderio di stendersi laggiù, su quel biancore, faccia a faccia con esso, ficcando le dita di mani e piedi nei soffici cristalli. (‘Freddo’: 114-15)

**Example 12k**
The whole of her short, cosseted history was against her, she drew back from the glass, telling herself that although the snow blanket looked soft and pretty it was dangerous and threatening; its attraction was an illusion of the glass. (‘Cold’: 123)

Tutta la sua breve storia di bambina vezzeggiata era contro di lei; si ritrasse dal vetro, dicendo a se stessa che per quanto morbida e bella in apparenza la coltre di neve era infida e minacciosa; la sua attrattiva un’illusione. (‘Freddo’: 115)

**Example 12l**
All along her body, in her knees, her thighs, her small round belly, her pointed breasts, the soft inner skin of her arms, she felt an intense version of that paradoxical burn she had received from the touch of the frosted window. (‘Cold’: 126)

Sentiva in tutto il corpo, nelle ginoceche, nelle cosce, nel piccolo ventre rotondo, nei seni appuntiti, nella morbida pelle all’interno delle braccia, un’intensa versione del paradossale calore provato al tocco della finestra ghiacciata. (‘Freddo’: 116)
Example 12m
The milky softness induced by her early regime was replaced with a slender, sharp, bony beauty. ('Cold': 127)

La lattea mobidezza prodotta dalla consueta alimentazione veniva sostituita da una snella, affilata, ossuta bellezza. ('Freddo': 117)

This time the translation of 'soft' does not seem to present any particular problem. In eleven out of thirteen instances, the adjective 'soft' is translated as 'morbido'. Apart from Examples 12h and 12j where 'soft' is rendered with 'soffice', all other examples consistently use 'soft' in English and 'morbido', its Italian equivalent, to describe the objects that the child enjoys touching and caressing. The redundancy and consistency of 'soft' and 'morbido' signify their importance in the narrative texture which I will now explain by drawing on Nancy J. Chodorow’s object-relations theory.

Chodorow (1978) uses this theory to explain that the bourgeois family produces women as mothers and to analyze that the relational dynamism between mothers and children is articulated differently in boys and girls in the pre-Oedipal and the post-Oedipal period. This theory is based on cathexis mechanisms, which enact investments of libidinal energy in an object or an idea. Sentimental attachment to a familiar object constitutes an example of catheysis. An object may in psychoanalytic terms be ‘people, aspects of people, or symbols of people’ (Chodorow 1978: 42). Using Benedek and Fairbairn’s theory according to which the child’s relationship with its mother is ‘the foundation upon which all his future relationships with love objects are based’ (Benedek and Fairbairn quoted in Chodorow 1978: 79), Chodorow’s next step is to postulate that libido, erotogenic zones, and personal development through a love relationship with the mother are strictly interrelated. This development is often enacted by clinging to the loved object. Chodorow in fact endorses Bowlby’s ‘primary object clinging’ according to which human beings have an in-built inclination to cling to other human beings or their interposed objects. Hence, unlike Freud or Melanie Klein, Chodorow proposes that primary love is expressed by cathexis and clinging. The application of these notions to my analysis
Chapter Three

enables me to continue to read Fiammarosa’s relation to loved objects (especially the cold white sheet of snow) both in terms of quest for sexual identity and primary relation to the mother.

In ‘Cold’ as well as in ‘Freddo’, Fiammarosa’s need for physical contact is consistently expressed by the reiteration of the qualifying adjective ‘soft’ and ‘morbido’ which define parts of her body and objects touched by her. It could, therefore, be argued that the translation’s faithful adherence to the original substantial use of ‘soft’ can by itself be seen as an effort to convey the authorial propensity to depict the relational aspect of Fiammarosa’s psychology. This effort can be identified specifically with the careful reorganization of cohesive ties, namely with lexical and grammatical repetitions. While lexical repetitions (for instance ‘bianco’, ‘latteo’ and ‘pallido’) guarantee consistency and semantic correspondence effects on a textual level, grammatical repetitions not only continue to guarantee consistency but they also unveil the translators’ emotive intelligence and subjectivity behind the overall structure of the text and characterization of the female protagonists. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan calls this overall structure ‘the norms of the text’, that is to say the ‘general system of viewing the world conceptually, in accordance with which the events and characters of the story are evaluated’ (1983: 81). Examples 12 show that the conceptual view of the world through the eyes of the princess reflects a high degree of sensory perception and a synaesthetic mélange of objective reality and female subjectivity. This mélange constitutes the maximum common denominator in Italian between the mother’s approach to storytelling and life, Byatt’s visual and sensory description of her fictional characters and the Italian translators’ reading of the texts.

In Examples 12 it can be observed that not only is the adjective ‘morbido’ repeated in almost all sentences, but also it is faithfully reproduced within the same grammatically marked position. In the Italian language, as Marina Nespor (1988: 426) illustrates, the adjectival marked position is, apart from specific cases, pre-

12 Freud and Klein stress the infant’s oral relationship to the mother and her breast.

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
nominal (especially after determinants such as the indefinite article). The post-nominal position is, on the contrary, unmarked. Post-nominal and pre-nominal adjectives perform different and, at times, opposite functions. Post-nominal adjectives have restrictive functions, because the adjective refers to a sub-class of the noun.\textsuperscript{13} Pre-nominal adjectives have purely descriptive and non-restrictive values. In the examples above 'morbido' has a marked position in almost all sentences which contributes to the highly descriptive aspect of the text, a stylistic mark of Byatt's writing \textit{per se}. It also reinforces the 'clinging' relationship to loved objects that surround Fiammarosa, a relationship loaded with emotional, sensory and sentimental values. Nespor points out that

\begin{quote}

stanno nell'ordine sintatticamente marcato, cioè in posizione pre-nominale, gli aggettivi che hanno un ruolo semanticamente connotativo rispetto al nome, cioè gli aggettivi che, esprimendo un gusto o un parere del parlante, producono determinate emozioni nel parlante e/o nell'ascoltatore. (1988: 430, my italics)
\end{quote}

The pre-nominal position of 'morbido', therefore, increases the metaphorical and connotative charge\textsuperscript{14} attributed to Fiammarosa's physical relationship to these objects and, at the same time, Fiammarosa's tactile zest and investment of libidinal energy in these objects. The Italian reader is consequently directed to appreciate the female protagonist's sensations, sensuality and, to a certain extent, eroticism.

The intent to strengthen the link between the love objects and the synaesthetic pleasure that they offer emerges even more clearly in Examples 12a, 12b and 12l. In 12a the English dichotomy 'soft' and 'black' is split in Italian into 'una morbida peluria nera' attributing pre-nominal position only to one adjective, namely 'morbida'. The post-nominal position of 'nera' emphasizes the preference to prioritize touch over sight (in Italian the solution 'nera peluria morbida' would have been acceptable). In Examples 12b and 12l the nouns, 'riccioli' and 'pelle', are

\textsuperscript{13} It also has distinguishing functions when the quality it expresses is 'contrasted to others which might refer to the same noun' (Lepschy and Lepschy 1991: 190).

\textsuperscript{14} Lepschy and Lepschy (1991) also underline the metaphorical and connotative value of pre-nominal marked adjectives, in opposition to the literal and denotative one attributed to post-nominal adjectives.

\textit{Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011}
followed by a specification, namely ‘della barba’ and ‘all’interno delle braccia’. In this case the position of the adjective ‘morbido’ defining the nouns should not be free. Nespor (1988: 425) specifies that only post-nominal adjectives are allowed to have a complement. Despite the fact that both examples display specifications, neither noun is accompanied by unmarked adjectives, namely ‘i riccioli morbidi della barba’ (Example 12b) or ‘la pelle morbida all’interno delle braccia’ (Example 12l). Their marked position in the actual translation is acceptable only within a framework that conveys great emphasis to softness and haptic gratification. Their peculiarity can thus be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, they can be seen to provide semantic compensation. This is the case in Example 12g where it is impossible for syntactic reasons (in order to reproduce the parenthetical ‘soft and shrill’) to give marked priority to ‘morbido’. On the other hand, they can be seen to contribute to a climax, which reaches its peak with the very last synaesthetic expression ‘lattea morbidezza’ (Example 12m). This expression, encompassing different love objects on a multiple level, highlights how articulated and complex Fiammarosa’s libido is and, at the same time, enhances the author’s female realism.

Additionally, the repeatedly marked position of ‘morbido’ corroborates my attempts to see the mother as the main loved object which Fiammarosa symbolically identifies with the snow blanket. As stressed before, the snow can be associated with the maternal milk that offers nourishment, pleasure and satisfaction. The tactile zest provided by the snow crystals (Examples 12j and 12k) continues to reinforce this association, attributing emotional and physical values to the snow which justifies Fiammarosa’s passion for and attraction to it. Hence, by putting ‘morbido’ in a pre-nominal position, the translators succeed in emphasizing the figurative value of the irresistibly attractive softness of the snow blanket, a symbolic substitute for Fiammarosa’s mother as well as the child’s implacable need for the mother’s protective and appeasing warmth. The main difference between the English and the Italian text, however, cannot only be identified with the pre-nominal position of the adjective ‘morbido’ enhancing Fiammarosa’s clinging and physical relationship to the loved objects, and in primis the mother/snow. If we look at the previous
examples, the translation’s skilful adjectival choice displays a more complex and comprehensive relationship to the maternal constituting the foundation of Fiammarosa’s libidinal charge and quest for identity.

I will now draw the reader’s attention to the use of ‘soffice’, which in the light of what has been underlined so far can add important implications. In the English text, the only adjective that is used to give the idea of softness is ‘soft’. In Italian, on the contrary, apart from ‘morbido’, there is ‘soffice’, which is proposed twice (Examples 12h and 12j). In Example 12h ‘soffice’, as an alternative to ‘morbido’, seems at first to be used more for aesthetic and phonetic reasons than for semantic effects. The use of ‘soffice’ completes as well as reinforces a figure of speech, namely an alliteration, which by exploiting the sibilance of the soundless fricative ‘s’ tries to recreate silence, typical of nocturnal soundlessness. In Irigaray’s analysis, while the night is the darkness where women have been abandoned, silence perpetuates the most atrocious and primitive phantasies – woman as devouring monster threatening madness and death – that are an indication of unanalysed hatred from which women as a group suffer culturally, bound into archaic projections which belong to the male imaginary.

(Whitford 1991a: 25)

Although no monstrosity or atrocities are dramatized, Fiammarosa’s senses and desire start awakening both in English and in Italian when she is in bed one night. Darkness and silence, which also characterize the primal womb, ‘our first nourishing earth, first waters, first envelopes’ (Irigaray 1991a: 39), contribute to Fiammarosa’s arousal and discovery of erotic pleasure with ice. In this scene, the stimulus is represented by the soft blanket which, as has been noted before, symbolizes the child’s security blanket and double skin, namely the placenta. However, it does not only represent (especially in the Italian translation) the child’s protective halo but also the connections between maternal body, self-affection and eroticism (emphasizing further the cathexis mechanisms, which I have explained before).
Additionally, in Example 12h 'soft' and 'soffice' (in opposition to 'morbido') come to define a new sensation, namely a sense of suffocation caused by the soft blankets. This sensation is particularly highlighted by the use of the Italian verb 'soffocare'. Irigaray illustrates this sense of suffocation, when she states, addressing her mother, that 'you feed me/yourselves too much, as if you wanted to fill me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate' (1981: 61). However, while Irigaray uses food as a metaphor for the mother's overwhelming attentions as well as the child's difficult attempts to de-cathec her mother's body, the fairy tale reproposes the image of the blanket in order to disclose its ambiguous connotations. This ambivalence comes out clearly in the Italian translation via the differentiated use of 'morbido' and 'soffice'. While 'morbido' turns out to have positive connotations of protection and warmth, 'soffice' acquires negative connotations of suffocation and oppression. The soft blanket that wraps up warm Fiammarosa is both protective and suffocating. The suffocation is rendered literally and concretely through the object blanket. Example 12k corroborates my interpretation by stressing verbally the fact that, although the snow blanket looks soft and welcoming to Fiammarosa's eyes, it is threatening and dangerous. On a figurative level, it is not important whether the blanket is real (Example 12h) or metaphorical (Example 12k). Despite their differences, they provide tactile pleasures (the former), multisensorial pleasures (the latter) and paradoxical (for combining heat and ice) gratifications (Example 12l). But why does the Italian version emphasize this ambiguity by employing a differential use of synonymous attributes ('soffice' versus 'morbido')?

Irigaray uses strong images such as prison, poison and ice as well as strong concepts such as engulfing, immobility and haemorrhaging to dramatize the intricacies and the asymmetrical relationship between mothers and daughters. Suffocation is another side effect. In Corpo a corpo, Buzzati and Salvo draw on Helen Deutsch, Anna Freud and, in particular, Melanie Klein to illustrate that the mother-daughter relationship is 'il nodo esistenziale e teorico in cui convergono tutti gli altri problemi' (1995: 4). They explain that the infant's internal dimension is 'il luogo della sedimentazione e della elaborazione delle immagini, dei fantasmi infantili più arcaici' (1995: 9). It is in this...
place that ‘il bambino apprende a contenere ed integrare l’odio e l’amore per la madre, le spinte distruttive e i desideri fusionali, la necessità della separazione, l’invidia e la gratitudine’ (1995: 9, my italics). In a few words, the mother is the source of passion as well as sufferance. The attachment to the mother enacts not only object relations but also fantazied projections of conflicting drives, introjections and externalizations involving love and hatred as well as attraction and fear. If we consider that Examples 12h and 12j are taken from the paragraph devoted to Fiammarosa’s adolescence (the post-Oedipal), we may well raise Irigaray’s question: ‘isn’t this bodily encounter [corps-à-corps] with the mother – and it is probably not without its difficulties – fantasized post-Oedipally, reprojected after the Oedipus?’ (1991a: 38). In various publications, Irigaray claims that the urge to resolve conflicting drives towards the mother could lead to retrieve illusorily that sense of narcissistic omnipotence that epitomizes ‘undifferentiation’, namely the antenatal state.

Despite the sense of oneness that characterizes the pre-Oedipal phase, other drives and fears therefore emerge. In ‘Luce Irigaray: Da Speculum ad Etica della differenza sessuale’, Zamboni (1987: 74) draws on Irigaray to warn women against foetal regression and the dangers of fusion which lead to undifferentiation, suppression of diversification, identity homologation and/or cloning. In this light, if we assume that the Italian translators are the bearers of a culture imbued with Diotima’s re-elaboration of Irigaray’s theories of sexual difference, we can also infer that they do not favour fusion. As a result, it can be inferred that the Italian text displays adjectival cohesion and attributive differentiation to cast light on the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship whose contradictory aspects discourage any nostalgic celebration of or return to an impossible pre-Oedipal/pre-patriarchal dimension of oneness. On a textual level ‘morbido’ is not sufficient to depict the complexities of the mother-daughter bond. Its positive nuances convey only positive aspects which, consequently, depict only partially its dual reality. The adjective ‘morbido’, loaded with positive connotations, represents the sexed woman’s body in maternal terms of care, nurture and disclosure of the world. It also emphasizes what Elisabetta
Zamarchi defines as ‘erotizzazione della conoscenza e quindi [...] una rielaborazione del rapporto col mondo’ (1987: 99). The adjective ‘soffice’, loaded with negative connotations, completes the partial picture elaborated by ‘morbido’ by adding more colour to it. ‘Soffice’ is used only twice in the Italian text to anticipate the danger of fusion, attraction and engulfment (dramatized by the digging of Fiammarosa’s feet into the snow), thus alerting both Fiammarosa and the Italian reader to the fact that fusion is only an illusion and that regression to a pre-Oedipal state is dangerous.

In addition to snow, ice, milk and blankets, there is another underlying metaphor, which, while enhancing the Italian text’s female realism and sensory perception, underpins her intentions to uncover the negative side of the mother-daughter bond. It is the metaphor of glass, which, in Byatt’s text as well as in another essay by Irigaray, ‘Volume without contours’ (1991b), carries negative connotations: opacity, illusion and threats. Along with ‘the repellence of matter, the horror of blood, the ambivalence of milk’ (Irigaray 1991b: 54), the ‘wall of glass’ and the ‘immaculate white spaces’ (Irigaray 1991b: 54) have, for Irigaray, an ambivalent meaning. Their beauty represents female difference but their opacity signifies illusion and threats. Opacity and illusion pervade the Italian text in a more extensive way in Example 12k. In English, only the windowpane, covered in breath condensation, acquires illusory connotations. In Italian, first the windowpane and then the immaculate white spaces beyond Fiammarosa’s window are charged with illusory meanings. The omission of the specification that closes the last sentence in Example 12k, namely ‘of the glass’, renders the Italian text highly ambivalent and its original metaphorical implications highly pervasive. By avoiding translating ‘of the glass’, its attraction and illusion are not attributed to the windowpane, like in Example 12h, but to the snow crystals, which in the Italian text’s female realism represents the mother.

It is therefore clear that the Italian text deploys textual strategies capable of suggesting the dangers of fusion with the mother: lethal attraction on the one hand, and false illusions of pleasure and differentiation on the other. Example 12k, moreover, exhibits other textual manoeuvres that help to understand how the text
rearranges focalization in Italian. In English, the danger of the snow blanket is filtered through layers of ideological preconceptions, which, as Irigaray underlines, makes the mother-daughter dyad problematic. Despite the attraction that the snow exerts on her, Fiammarosa is unwilling to go outside and play with it. She seems instead to have internalized her family’s rules and regulations which, in order to provide protection and good manners, have prevented her from becoming familiar with her unique source of pleasure, the snow. Within this traditional symbolic framework, the snow is threatening and dangerous, and therefore it has to be avoided.

In English this explanation is not overtly verbalized, but it is inferable from the missing link between the two matrices, namely between ‘the whole of her short, cosseted history was against her’ and ‘she drew back from the glass’. These two clauses are only apparently syntactically independent, because logically the second depends on the first one, the real matrix, to which it should be linked by such metonymic connectives as ‘therefore’, which is normally placed after the cause of an action and before its related consequence. This explains why the two clauses are separated only by a comma. Commas, Bice Mortara Garavelli (2003) argues, usually signify phrasal delimitation which does not produce semantic disconnection. The metonymic link is, therefore, implicit in English but not erased. In Italian the replacement of the English comma with a semicolon not only strengthens phrasal delimitation and semantic disconnection between the two clauses but also enhances perspective shifts. As the elliptic connection is replaced by a stronger punctuation marker, the syntactic and semantic link between the two clauses becomes much weaker. Even if Fiammarosa’s ‘cosseted history’ is evoked in Italian, this might not be the reason why Fiammarosa decides to move away from the window. As a result, Fiammarosa is given more agency as a young woman and more responsibility as a character. She decides to withdraw from the window not because of any ideological bias but because her own body fears the snow’s twofold magnetism. Her position in

---

15 Shifts in textual cohesion and in punctuation will also be illustrated in Chapter Six.

16 My use of position here echoes Ian Mason’s preference for ‘position’ rather than ‘role’. In his paper given at a symposium in Translation Studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, 4-5 February
the Italian text is empowered: she turns from an object of evaluation into a subject of evaluation and engages in a dialogue with her emotional and sensory world.

Thanks to all these shifts, the Italian text’s attempt to reinforce such metaphorical images as the blanket, the snow, the ice and the milk which implement Muraro’s ‘female realism’ and, at the same time, show its benefits. In other words, by empowering such symbols, the Italian text puts into practice what Zamboni advocates: ‘un simbolico femminile che permetta di rappresentare le mediazioni e le alterità, e dia la possibilità alle donne di parlarsi a distanza evitando il totale assorbimento nella fusionalità’ (1987: 74). There is no conflict between Irigaray’s theories and Diotima’s thought, nor is there any incongruity between the latter and the Italian textualizations. Fiammarosa’s paradoxical attraction to fusion mechanisms with her mother are verbalized by two different adjectives that give voice to the dichotomous side of the maternal. In addition, by shifting the perceptive point of view in favour of Fiammarosa’s, the Italian text underlines her maturity and her awareness of its dangers. Moreover, the numerical imbalance between ‘soffice’, loaded with negative connotations and used only twice, and ‘morbido’, loaded with positive connotations and used eleven times, testifies to the Italian translators’ ideological preferences. Through translating, they promote substitution, metaphorization and communication between women, practices which are advocated by Diotima and Irigaray as positive ways of avoiding the risks of fusion without eliminating female contacts and relationships.

In ‘Volume without contours’, Irigaray claims that metaphors ‘have the efficacy of a non-violating distance’ (1991b: 57). For the contributors of the volume Il filo di Arianna (1987) and for Muraro in L’ordine simbolico della madre (1991), mediations of interposed objects (represented by the windowpane in ‘Cold’) between women and their immediate reality (the snow or the mother) as well as substitutions of real mothers with other sources of maternal authority (metaphors or objects such as the

---

2006, he claimed that position and positioning convey ideas of dynamism and interactivity as opposed to immobility embedded in the term ‘role’.

Eliana Maestri  Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
blanket) are positive means to escape fixation and to open to the world. Muraro explains hysterical fixation as ‘un attaccamento alla madre che non sopporta sostituti’ (1991: 61). Drawing on Freud, she also explains that fixation is negative because it represents the first step towards repression. Mediation and substitution, on the contrary, do not enact these mechanisms and their interactions are beneficial to women, including Muraro, Fiammarosa and Anna Nadotti. To cast light on women’s advantageous interdependence, Muraro claims that

quello che in noi resta di fissato alla madre funziona come un immediato che ha bisogno di mediazione (di sostituti) per esserci presente, e che, al tempo stesso, ci fa riconoscere i buoni sostituti, secondo una struttura circolare propria di ogni mediazione, prima fra tutte la lingua. (1991: 57)

The circular structure that Muraro mentions resembles more a dynamic spiral than a closed circle. It is a circuit that leads women to self-consciousness via the bodily encounter with the mother. It also leads to mature achievements via the ‘rappresentazione della verticalità mutando la compenetrazione di fantasmi di amore e di odio con le altre in un riconoscimento della necessità per sè dell’altra’ (Zanardo 1987: 80).

The leitmotif of gratitude represents the logo of the Italian thought of sexual difference. The symbolism emphasized in ‘Freddo’ then puts into practice Diotima’s teaching, namely gratitude, recognition and mediation and, at the same time, foregrounds the realist quality of Byatt’s style in Italian. The combined use of adjectives, loaded with positive and negative connotations, brings out what Villa calls ‘il paradossale realismo delle donne’, that is ‘il bisogno di negoziare la propria differenza nella tensione di un rapporto di autonomia-dipendenza dal modello materno’ (1990: 71).

3.10 Princesses and Goddesses: Their Gendered Symbolism in Italian

In the essay ‘Ice, Snow, Glass’ (1998), Byatt looks at classical tales constructed around these elements and uncovers their paradoxical and private uses, which also shed light on ‘Cold’ and ‘Freddo’. Byatt refers to some of the fairy tales that she read or listened to when she was a child, among which the Grimms’ *Snow White* and *The Glass Coffin* and Andersen’s *Snow Queen*. In the first part of her essay, Byatt indirectly reveals the symbology that she redeploys in ‘Cold’.18 She starts by recalling Snow White’s mother’s words: ‘if I were to have a child, white as snow, red as blood, and black as the ebony frame...’ (1998: 65). These words, pronounced when the mother pricks her finger while embroidering and sitting next to a window covered in snow, have an impact on Byatt’s literary imagination and creativity. Byatt confesses that ‘even as a child I was entranced by the patterning of this, the weaving of the three colours, the framing in glass of faces and stages of lives’ (1998: 66). However, she does not comment explicitly on how she sees the combinations of colours and stages of life (which, as I have pointed out, is extensively organized in ‘Cold’ and reorganized in ‘Freddo’). Nor does she appear to be aware of the connection between Snow White’s mother’s bleeding on the snow and Snow White’s colours, red and white. The only aspects that Byatt sees in the aforementioned fairy tales are symbolic oppositions around sensory perceptions of the ice princess’s world and interpretative meanings of ice. ‘Red and white, ice and fire, snow and blood, life and death-in-life’ (Byatt 1998: 69-70) characterize the ice princess’s world, an almost ‘virginal state’ (1998: 69) recalling Fiammarosa’s primitive world where is ‘more life in coldness. In solitude’ (‘Cold’: 133). Ice is at times loaded with negative connotations when in a story a ‘cold woman takes the young man away into her ice palace where she keeps him from the ordinary cycle of life and affection’ (Byatt 1998: 70). It is, on other occasions, loaded with positive connotations when it (ice or glass irrespectively) embraces ‘the drowsiness and lethargy of girls at puberty’ (Byatt 1998: 70).
What Byatt is sure about is that since she was a child she has been intrigued by ‘the conflict between a female destiny, the kiss, the marriage, the childbearing, the death and the frightening loneliness of cleverness, the cold distance of seeing the world through art, of putting a frame around things’ (Byatt 1998: 71-72). This conflict is clear and familiar to the feminists of the first wave when women saw marriage as coffins and obstacles to their aspirations. Nevertheless, Byatt does not try to turn her reading of fairy tales into political criticism. In the following section of her essay, she sounds more interested in stressing the value of aesthetic perception and artistic symbolism attached to glass and ice, claiming that ‘artists recognize the distancing of glass and ice as an ambivalent matter, both chilling and life-giving’ (Byatt 1998: 72). Fiammarosa’s story does not contradict this essay. It recycles such images as ice, glass and blood, especially because the princess becomes an artist (‘Cold’: 134), thus reinforcing the connection between her artistic vein and coldness. Fiammarosa appreciates handmade glass masterpieces that resemble colourful snow-crystals. She even falls in love with a prince in whom she recognizes artistic qualities connected with ice, cold and snow.

What remains unseen in Byatt’s essay as well as in her fairy tale ‘Cold’ is the link between something ‘secretly good’, ice and the mother to which she refers in her essay: ‘I think I knew, even then [as a child], that there was something secretly good, illicitly desirable, about the ice hill and glass barriers. Snow White’s mother died, and no one appears to have minded’ (Byatt 1998: 71). There does not seem to be any explicit connection between these two sentences, namely between what is secretly good about ice and the mother. It is not clear why at this point Byatt recalls her, especially because she moves on, in the following sentences, to praise the intelligence of Andersen’s Snow Queen. English readers find a similar dissonance in ‘Cold’ because there does not appear to be any explicit link between Fiammarosa’s passion for ice and the maternal. The only clue comes from the fact that Fiammarosa is the descendant of an icewoman. According to Hugh, the princess’s private tutor, an

---

18 The collection Mirror, Mirror on the Wall (which contains ‘Ice, Snow, Glass’) was published in the same year as Elementals, namely in 1998.

Eliana Maestri Ph.D. Thesis, October 2011
icewoman had a child with King Beriman and then left him to go back to her cold land. The chronicles maintain that their son, who reigned after his father’s heart attack, was a balanced king as he inherited his father’s warm-heartedness and his mother’s frozen lymph. This oxymoron revolving around ice and the maternal is never explained in the fairy tale. Nor is it overtly elucidated whether Fiammarosa’s passion for ice comes from her own foremother’s frozen lymph. The reader can only assume that the icewoman’s frozen lymph symbolizes Fiammarosa’s original nourishment and source of life which are now inscribed in her genes. In view of this legacy, one would also expect the figure of the icewoman to be given importance in the fairy tale. This is not the case, as this character is mentioned indirectly only once by Fiammarosa’s tutor. Fiammarosa’s mother is not given prominence either in the story. She is a marginal character that appears on the scene only on two occasions: at the beginning, when Fiammarosa is born, and in the middle, when Fiammarosa has to choose her future husband on the basis of some handmade presents. In a few words, in the English text the value of the maternal and the mother remains unseen. The mother is simply depicted in traditional terms as a container or as man’s shadow, to use Irigaray’s terminology. The connection between the maternal and ice is not explored in gendered terms, it is only fictionalized and fantasized upon in artistic terms by Byatt’s imagination. In this light, can it be maintained that Byatt’s view of the world in ‘Cold’ is far from Irigaray’s and Diotima’s ideas of sexual difference and that this standpoint is overthrown by the Italian translators in ‘Freddo’?

Byatt might not have been aware of Diotima’s political agenda when she wrote ‘Cold’. Her words in ‘Ice, Snow, Glass’ do not really reflect Irigaray’s vision of the nature of woman. Byatt states that ‘the eternity of the beautiful snow-crystals is a false infinity’ (Byatt 1998: 71): if the snow-crystals are a metaphor of woman, their beauty is deceptive because the idea of infinity attached to her is only illusory and artificial. Irigaray on the contrary associates infinity with woman. She stresses that woman is neither one unit nor a single object of a sensible world (Whitford 1991b). The female incompleteness allows woman to become ‘the expansion that she is not, never will be at any moment, as a definable universe’ (Irigaray 1991b: 55). Such
irreducibility brings Irigaray’s woman closer to the ‘indefinite, unfinished/in-finite’ (Irigaray 1991b: 55, my italics) than to the finite, illusory and deceitful characterizing Byatt’s thought. Hence, Byatt’s conceptual vision of the world might not necessarily or deliberately contemplate gender issues, but her stories disclose, if in embryonic form, the value of female genealogy and the meaning of female mediation in women’s quest for identity.

The Italian translation of ‘Freddo’ unearths these issues and celebrates the potential of the maternal, female genealogies and perceptive skills. Italian readers and scholars are therefore more helped than English readers and scholars as they can see more clearly that behind Fiammarosa’s attraction to ice and snow there is her ‘furious attachment’ to the mother (Buzzati and Salvo 1995: 15), and her eternal admiration for her. The differential use of some adjectives of visual and sensory perception does not only reveal the Italian translators’ endorsement of Diotima’s thought of sexual difference and female realism, but also their desire to unveil gender issues and celebrate female subjectivities. Moreover, thanks to contextual elements exclusively specific to the Italian culture, ‘Freddo’ appears to have made explicit Byatt’s affinity with Diotima’s thought of sexual difference and female realism. Unlike English readers, Italian readers could for example associate its fairy tale’s ending and Fiammarosa’s attachment to the mother with Cavarero’s rereading of Demeter. In Nonostante Platone (1990), Cavarero, an eminent Italian feminist philosopher of sexual difference, sees the myth of Demeter and Persephone as a way to enhance the ever-lasting mother-daughter bond. According to Greek mythology, Demeter is the wife of Zeus and the mother of Persephone, who one day is abducted by Hades. Broken-hearted, Demeter, goddess of the harvest, decides to withdraw in silence and, as a consequence, the earth ceases to be fertile. Zeus manages to give back the daughter ‘strappata allo sguardo materno’ (Donadi 2000: 66), but on one condition. Persephone will spend four months a year in the underworld and the rest of the year with her mother. At this point nature blossoms again. For centuries the myth has been interpreted solely as a symbol for the cyclical budding and dying of nature. However, Cavarero sees in Demeter’s desperation for the loss of her daughter and natural
Chapter Three

desertion in loneliness and grief a clear sign of the impossibility of keeping mothers and daughters apart. While traditional psychology postulates that a daughter can become an individual only when she abandons the mother, Cavarero’s interpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone states that maturity is not reached by abandoning the mother, but by oscillating between her and the external world.

In a way this is what happens to Fiammarosa, a destiny which is made clearer in Italian by such cultural echoes. The fairy tale ends with a beautiful description of Fiammarosa’s dance on the snow. Once she becomes a young woman, Fiammarosa is encouraged to choose a husband. Sasan, the dark-skinned prince of the South, happens to be the one. Even though she is aware that he lives in the hottest desert in the world, she decides to leave her father and mother to follow him. Unlike in Demeter’s myth, the mother’s desperation is not dramatized. It is Fiammarosa who suffers physical pain. After a while, she realizes that life is almost impossible. The weather is far too hot for her cold soul. She even has a miscarriage. However, as she is in love with Sasan, she does not want to disappoint him and decides against abandoning his kingdom. Like in Demeter’s myth, men help to facilitate the mother-daughter re-encounter. Sasan, in fact, understands his wife’s difficulties and builds a glass castle on a mountain in the coldest part of his kingdom. Once Fiammarosa arrives there, she is ecstatic. She runs to the mountain top covered in snow and dances while enjoying tactile pleasure and sheer bliss. Sasan decides that Fiammarosa can stay in the glass castle all year round, while he will commute back and forth to the hottest part of the kingdom to deal with his public commitments. Therefore if we continue to consider snow as a metaphor for the mother, we can see that the fairy tale tries to achieve a similar conclusion as the myth of Demeter according to Cavarero. Both the fairy tale and the myth celebrate the fruitfulness of the mother-daughter bond and the daughter’s attempt to recuperate their bond despite her maturity. In Villa’s words, Fiammarosa’s realism (Byatt’s own realism) is

il segno del suo indugiare presso il cadavere della madre, della sua volontà di riportarlo in vita, ovvero appunto definire, nella tensione di differenza/somiglianza da/con lei, un proprio modello di autonomia. (1990: 66)
Chapter Three

The difference introduced by Byatt is that it is the man who travels and pays respect to his wife’s needs. Byatt also reveals that the snow loses its suffocating qualities at the end and this is because a balance between Fiammarosa’s husband, her mother and her own needs is achieved.

As I have noted, the reading of what is secretly good about icy hills is only possible if interpreted against contemporary Italian feminist culture. My comparative analysis of ‘Freddo’ thus aims to demonstrate that the Italian translators take upon themselves the task of accompanying their readers along the path of a clearer understanding of the fairy tale by adding specific textual clues. Furthermore, it could be argued that, considering that the Italian translation ‘Zucchero’ enhances the significance of the mother, one is led to believe that the Italian translation ‘Zucchero’ has been added to the Italian collection Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato because of a political choice. The choice is indicative of the ideological position of the translators and, perhaps, of the publishing house and Byatt herself. Both of them wanted more or less clearly to capitalize on both ‘Zucchero’ and ‘Freddo’ to draw the Italian readership’s attention to the theme of the beneficial impact of the mother-daughter relationship upon the female quest for sexual and artistic identity.

3.11 Conclusion

The patterns of lexical references linking some of Diotima’s texts, Irigaray’s works and the Italian translations of Byatt’s short stories bring to the surface and consequently explore female legacies. On the one hand they uncover the Italian translators’ practice grounded in Diotima’s idea of sexual difference, on the other they unveil and clarify the mother’s realist approach to storytelling and life. Mirroring Diotima’s ‘realismo femminile’, the mother’s realism is an attempt to place women’s lives in the centre and to valorise female experiences, mediation, intuition and perceptive skills. The careful mediation of the Italian translators renders more visible and more audible her attempts to voice her concerns, her frustrations and her desires. Her desires also act as an encouragement to invent new forms of discourse, new ‘racconti’, to represent and overcome women’s a-topicality. ‘Zucchero’ ends
with a promising image, the skein that, while reinforcing maternal legacies, invites the readers to explore their impact on Byatt’s writing. The cross-cultural reading of ‘Cold’ and ‘Freddo’ therefore appears to reconfirm the same dynamics and interconnections encountered in ‘Zucchero’. Whereas it proves the far-reaching circulation of feminist theories in Italy to the extent that they have infiltrated Byatt’s translators’ practices, it also inscribes the collection *Zucchero ghiaccio vetro filato* into an Italian culture that appreciates maternal potential.\(^ {19} \) The translational shifts I have analyzed cast light upon Byatt’s gendered approach to perception, language and self-conscious realism. They give voice to Byatt’s unconscious, or glacial unconscious. They bridge a missing link in Byatt’s critical writing between the mother’s body and Byatt’s practices of thought and writing grounded in the feminine. ‘Freddo’ therefore empowers Byatt’s study of perception. It reproduces a sexually marked text that gives body and voice to sensory experience and ‘thinking minds as well as feeling bodies’ (Byatt 1991: 4). ‘Freddo’ represents reality and the female body in such a way as to reconnect ‘what has been so cruelly disorganized — our great mental capacities, hardly used; our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation; our complicated, pain-enduring, multipleasure physicality’ (Rich 1976: 284). ‘Zucchero’ and ‘Freddo’ mirror and integrate one another harmoniously. They both celebrate women’s wisdom and creativity, their intimate conversations and co-operative efforts to select and confect truthful fictions. The next chapter will explore the mother’s approach to storytelling and the literary dialogue between the French version of ‘Sugar’ and French cultural output, as a useful context for comparative assessment and an invaluable corpus of analysis. In so doing, my reading of the French mother’s realism will cast light on other crucial aspects of the maternal bond: the space between mother and daughter and the daughter’s geographical sense of self.

---

\(^ {19} \) For an overview of this culture, see Adalgisa Giorgio 2002b.