



«WATER IS OUR ELEMENT» METAPHORS OF THE SEA AND WATER IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE PENELOPIAD*

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Nell'antichità occidentale la vita era dominata dalla presenza del mare, come dimostrato dai numerosi racconti della mitologia greca in cui gli umani lo combattono, soccorsi – oppure ostacolati – da dee o donne mortali. *The Penelopiad* (2005) di Margaret Atwood è una delle recenti riscritture del mito greco che, allontanandosi dalla prospettiva maschile, racconta l'epica di Omero dal punto di vista di Penelope. Questo contributo esaminerà le rappresentazioni letterarie dell'acqua e del mare e le relazioni con i personaggi femminili attraverso un'analisi stilistica delle metafore concettuali legate al mare e all'acqua in *The Penelopiad* e nella sua traduzione italiana (Margherita Crepax, 2018). Atwood mantiene alcune contraddizioni del simbolismo classico, per il quale il mare è sia l'emblema materno della creazione sia il confine tra la vita e la morte, ma allo stesso tempo lo rinnova. Atwood ricorre infatti all'antropomorfismo e rende l'acqua una metafora post-femminista tramite la quale denunciare lo stato della donna nella società contemporanea.

The sea was omnipresent in many parts of ancient Western life, and Greek mythology is rich in tales of female gods or mortals assisting—or hindering—humans in their struggle with the sea. Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) is one of the most recent rewrites of Greek mythology to depart from a male-oriented perspective, as it tells the story of Homer's epic from the perspective of Penelope. This article will analyse the literary representations of sea and water, as well as the relationship between women and the sea, through a stylistic analysis of sea- and water-related conceptual metaphors in *The Penelopiad* and its Italian translation by Margherita Crepax (2018). Atwood shares some of the contradictory view of classic symbolism, in which the sea is both a maternal symbol of creation and the boundary between life and death. However, she also redefines the traditional perspective through the use of anthropomorphism, which transforms water into a postfeminist metaphor that, rather than being empowering, critically highlights women's current situation in society.

In loving memory of Giulia Pissarello,
whose metaphors were stronger
and more empowering than Penelope's.

I INTRODUCTION

«The story as told in *The Odyssey* doesn't hold water: there are too many inconsistencies». ² Since water is irreplaceable and necessary for all living creatures, «our bond with water is literal and organic». ³ According to Cirlot, ⁴ water is the most transitional of all symbols, as it stands between the ethereal elements of fire and air and the solid element of earth. This versatility allows

¹ While both authors are responsible for the article's design and have co-revised the article, Eleonora Fois is responsible for Sections 1, 2, 5 and 6, and Daniela Francesca Virdis for Sections 3 and 4.

² MARGARET ATWOOD, *The Penelopiad*, Edinburgh, Canongate Books, 2005, p. xv (henceforth: TP).

³ PAMELA J. MITTFELDELDT, *Writing the Waves, Sounding the Depths: Water as Metaphor and Muse*, in «Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment», X, 1 (2003), pp. 137-142, p. 138.

⁴ JUAN CARLOS CIRLOT, *Dictionary of symbols*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 99.

water to act as a bridge between opposite dimensions such as life and death, carrying both creative and destructive meanings. Today, these deeply cultural and symbolic associations of water are joined by an additional layer of environmental concerns. Human relationships with water are being examined in light of climate change (droughts, floods, water pollution, water scarcity) to demonstrate that global water issues affect local communities around the world and intersect with sociocultural aspects such as health, citizenship, class, and gender.⁵

Since many cultures believed life began in the sea, water has come to symbolize «the fluid powering creation mythology in all cultures».⁶ Water has a natural allure in cultures where it represents a physical and imaginative frontier, a liminal space in both geographical and metaphorical terms; water can represent the border between nations and continents as well as the limit between human and divine, life and death.⁷ As a result, Greece, a country surrounded by water, developed a complex mythology in which water plays a significant part.⁸ Water is important to many gods, including Oceanus, Poseidon, Aphrodite, as well as nymphs, Nereids and Naiads.⁹ Female goddesses aided—or hampered—humans in their adventures: for instance, Thetis, Achilles' divine mother, appears from the sea to assist her son; and the monster Scylla devours even the most expert sailor. As a result of the above-mentioned transitional ambivalence, female representations of the sea in Greek mythology may symbolize either maternal reassurance or deadly danger.¹⁰

The relationship between women and the sea is improved with new meanings in a significant number of contemporary rewritings of Greek myths by and from the perspective of women. Critically acclaimed rewritings include Fran Ross's *Oreo*, (1974); Christa Wolf's *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* (1983); Natalie Haynes's *The Children of Jocasta* (2017) and *A Thousand Ships* (2019); Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018). In Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018), sea and water convey a number of meanings. The sea is a metaphorical symbol of self-awareness: «All this while, I have been a weaver without wool, a ship without the sea. Yet now look where I sail». Water is the target domain of metaphors connected to emotions: «My anger spilled its banks»; «Sickness flooded my throat». Water is also anthropomorphized («The waves were busy washing away their footprints») and displays human emotions («seas around me lifted wrathful heads».¹¹ The sea thus has slowly

⁵ PAULA ANCA FARCA, *Make Waves: Water in Contemporary Literature and Film*, Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2019, electronic version.

⁶ PATRICIA STOCKOWSKI, *Symbolic aspects of Water*, in *Water and people: Challenges at the interface of symbolic and utilitarian values*, STEPHEN F. MCCOOL, ROGER N. CLARK, and GEORGE H. STANKEY (eds.), Portland, US Department of Agriculture, 2008, pp. 19-60, p. 25.

⁷ GIULIA GORGOGLIONE, *Watery Existence: immaginari dell'acqua tra arte e letteratura*, in «Between», I, 1 (2011), pp. 1-15, p. 1.

⁸ FELICE RAMORINO, *Mitologia classica*, Milano, Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 2018, p. 120.

⁹ P. STOCKOWSKI, *Symbolic aspects of Water*, cit., p.26.

¹⁰ BEAULIEU MARIE-CLAIRE, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

¹¹ MADELINE MILLER, *Circe*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 2018, pp. 69-120 and *passim*.

crystallized into an archetypal metaphor¹² whose meanings have endured and been expressed by the emotional association of concepts, objects, or situations, and whose analogies are susceptible of being reinvented.¹³

Among the re-inventors of Greek mythology is the feminist writer Margaret Atwood: *The Penelopiad* (2005), set in modern-day Hades, retells Homer's epic from Penelope's perspective, as a retrospective account of her life in ancient Greece while awaiting Odysseus' return. The adaptations of *The Odyssey* based on Penelope range from the play *Penelope* (2010) by Irish dramatist Enda Walsh to the poems *Meadowlands* (1996) by American poet Louise Glück and *Variazioni sul tema di Penelope* (1989) by Italian poet Bianca Tarozzi. An exception to the rule of women writers dealing with female mythological characters is Luigi Malerba's novel *Itaca per sempre* (1997).

In *The Penelopiad*, Atwood gives a voice also to the Maids, who had hitherto been only secondary characters. The fact that Penelope is the daughter of a Naiad reiterates the literary bond between women and water. While studies on *The Penelopiad* have primarily focused on its postfeminist imprint,¹⁴ there has been no research into the modern interpretations of sea and water. Through a stylistic analysis of sea-related metaphors in *The Penelopiad* and its Italian translation (2018), this contribution will thus investigate Atwood's literary representations of sea and water, as well as her vision of the relationship between women and the sea. The research purpose is threefold:

(1) to emphasize the variety of meanings conveyed by Atwood's use of sea-related metaphors, and to see if they vary depending on the different narrative techniques used by Penelope and the Maids;

(2) to verify whether those meanings are consistent with the archetypal visions of the sea, or if they have been updated to support Atwood's postfeminist rewriting;

(3) to investigate whether those meanings are conceptualized in different ways in the Italian translation.

Conceptual Metaphor theory¹⁵ will provide the theoretical framework for the stylistic and translational analysis of metaphor. The latter will also draw on Schäffner's classification of metaphor translation.¹⁶ Section 2 will introduce *The Penelopiad* and its postfeminist imprint; Sections 3 to 6 will define

¹² MICHAEL OSBORN, *The evolution of the archetypal sea in rhetoric and poetic*, in «Quarterly Journal of Speech», LXIII, 4 (1977), pp. 347-363, p. 347.

¹³ EARL R. MACCORMAC, *Metaphor and Literature*, in «The Journal of Aesthetic Education», VI, 3 (1972), pp. 57-70, p. 65.

¹⁴ REINGARD M. NISCHIK, *Myth and Intersections of Myth and Gender in Canadian Culture: Margaret Atwood's Revision of the Odyssey in The Penelopiad*, in «Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik», LXVIII, 3 (2020), pp. 251-272; MASSOURA KIRIAKI, *Space, Time, and the Female Body: Homer's Penelope in Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad (2005)*, in «Contemporary Women's Writing», XI, 3 (2017), pp. 391-411; SUSANNE JUNG, *A Chorus Line: Margaret Atwood's Penelopiad at the Crossroads of Narrative, Poetic and Dramatic Genres*, in «Connotations», XXIV, 1 (2014/2015), pp. 41-62.

¹⁵ GEORGE LAKOFF and MARK JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By: With a New Afterword* (1980), Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003; GEORGE LAKOFF and MARK TURNER, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.

¹⁶ CHRISTINA SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, in *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, ELENA SEMINO and ZSOFIA DEMJEN (eds.), London-New York, Routledge, 2017, pp. 247-262.

metaphor and discuss it from a cognitive and stylistic standpoint; and Section 7 will feature the stylistic analysis of water and sea-related metaphors in Atwood's source text and its Italian translation.

2 THE PENELOPIAD

Margaret Atwood is a prolific author who has published poetry, novels, short stories, comics, screenplays, and literary criticism over the years, and her stage adaptation of *The Penelopiad* marked her debut as a playwright as well. Atwood's works are distinguished by her gender-conscious writing about the representation of women and men and a rigorous analysis of gender hierarchies.¹⁷ From *Alias Grace* (1996) onwards, she has repeatedly explored historical periods in which women were considered inferior, thus the myth is a logical choice. In fact, the idea that a man should be active and aggressive, and a woman, whether virgin goddess or mortal, was subject to men is one of the archetypes of every Greek myth (even those in which women seek to gain control of their own lives).¹⁸ Atwood knows that the gender patterns established in Homer's epics (i.e. «the women are static, the hero dynamic») are still «very much with us»,¹⁹ thus aligning herself with Frye's idea of myth as «the structural principles behind familiar literary facts».²⁰ However, she demonstrates that the archetypal grammar of literature also allows for the myth to be rewritten: «Demystification is the only way to eliminate its negative influence on mentality».²¹ Following Hutcheon's idea that adaptation repeats without replicating,²² *The Penelopiad* deconstructs the traditional myth and its potential as a promoter of a retrograde mentality²³ by no longer being about Odysseus.

The function of the title in introducing this concept appears to have been overlooked in the Italian translation. *The Penelopiad - The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* becomes *Il canto di Penelope - Il mito del ritorno di Odisseo* ('Penelope's song - the myth of Odysseus' return'). The word 'canto' reduces Penelope's account to one part of a larger story rather than conveying the idea that the story is solely about Penelope. Furthermore, the English subtitle clearly places Penelope before Odysseus, whereas the Italian subtitle only focuses on Odysseus, contradicting and subverting the original message. Not-

¹⁷ REINGARD M. NISCHIK, *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2009, p. 3.

¹⁸ MARY R. LEFKOWITZ, *Women in Greek Myth*, in «*The American Scholar*», LIV, 2 (1985), pp. 207-219, p. 207.

¹⁹ MARGARET ATWOOD, *The Curse of Eve—Or, What I Learned in School*, in «*Canadian Woman Studies*», I, 3 (1979), pp. 30-33, p. 32.

²⁰ NORTHROP FRYE, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four essays*, Princeton-London, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 205.

²¹ IOANA-GIANINA HANEȘ, *Margaret Atwood: The Penelopiad—Rewriting in Postmodern Feminine Literature*, in «*Journal of Humanistic and Social Studies*», X, 2 (2019), pp. 9-20, p. 20.

²² LINDA HUTCHEON, and SIOBHAN O'FLYNN, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 7.

²³ REINGARD M. NISCHIK, *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*, Rochester, Camden House, 2000, p. 247.

withstanding, two factors of the book industry must be considered when deciphering the logic behind the Italian title. Firstly, titles, like all the other paratextual features, are the initial point of contact with the prospective reader²⁴ and thus will be moulded around the references that are most likely to appeal to the target culture. «Unfortunately, a title is an interpretative key in itself»,²⁵ as Eco put it, and in this case Odysseus was thought to appeal to the audience more than Penelope. Secondly, as translators are rarely involved in the title of translated works (which may seem counterintuitive, given their knowledge of the source text), Margherita Crepax, the Italian translator of *The Penelopiad*, can hardly be held responsible for the alteration.

In *The Penelopiad*, the ancient patriarchal world is dominated by superficiality and elevates physical beauty, which Atwood ridicules through the grotesque conversation between Penelope and Helena about the men who have died for them as indicative of the most beautiful. Another reflection of patriarchal thinking is Euryclea's clichéd belief that women should perpetuate their husbands' needs. Atwood employs the myth to underline the striking parallel with today's society, emphasizing the fact that women's roles have remained marginal.

The other significant voices of *The Penelopiad* are the Maids, Penelope's youngest, most beautiful, and most devoted servants, instructed by her to be pleasant to the suitors in order to spy on their secrets for her. The Maids allow Atwood to expose and address gender and class issues that go unchallenged in *The Odyssey* and that tend to recur in her other works as well: the physical and sexual exploitation of servant girls (also found in *Alias Grace*); male violence against women (*The Handmaid's Tale*); and, finally, women's betrayals of other women (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Robber Bride*, and *The Blind Assassin*). The Maids demonstrate the frailty of sisterhood in the patriarchal kingdom of Ithaca, where someone must pay for Penelope's lustful thoughts. Atwood's perspective is resolute: «much as she demonstrates that men dominate and abuse women, she will not discount the fact that women are occasionally even worse in their abuse of each other».²⁶ The pivotal role of the Maids is also confirmed by their role at the end of the novel: «it is the maids and not Penelope who have the last word, defaming the Homeric monument to male heroism and female fidelity».²⁷

The characters of Penelope and the Maids, with their equal weight and importance, are emphasized by the use of distinct narrative genres. Penelope's chapters are marked by prose whereas the Chorus of the Maids is marked by lyrical interludes ranging from nursery rhyme and sea shanty to ballad and idyll;²⁸ in fact, *The Penelopiad* is at the same time a contemporary novella

²⁴ VALENTINA NOTARBERARDINO, *Fuori di testo. Titoli, copertine, fascette e altre diavolerie*, Milano, Adriano Salani Editore, 2020, p. 50.

²⁵ UMBERTO ECO, *Postille a Il nome della rosa*, in ID., *Il Nome della Rosa*, Milano, Bompiani, 2001, p. 507. Our translation.

²⁶ EARL G. INGERSOLL, *Flirting with Tragedy: Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad, and the Play of the Text*, in «Intertexts», XII, 1-2 (2008), pp. 111-28, p. 118.

²⁷ CORAL ANN HOWELLS, «We Can't Help but Be Modern»: The Penelopiad, in *Once Upon a Time: Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writing*, SARAH APPLETON (ed.), Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp. 57-72, p. 12.

²⁸ S. JUNG, *A Chorus Line*, cit., p. 41.

and a classic Greek tragedy.²⁹ Therefore, the range of meanings conveyed by Atwood's use of sea-related metaphors for each narrative genre and character or group of characters may be susceptible to changes.

3 METAPHOR: WORKING DEFINITION AND CONVENTIONAL VIEWS

As Wales³⁰ reminds the readers of *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, metaphor is a very frequent rhetorical figure or trope whose name originates from the Greek verb *metapherein* ('carry over'). What is metaphorically carried over is a field or domain of reference, which is transferred to or associated with another perceived as different from, but analogous to, that field or domain: this results in a proposition of the form "X is Y". Hence, in Hamlet's lines about this world being «an unweeded garden | That grows to seed» (*Hamlet*, L.ii.135-136), the characteristics of gardens are "carried over" to the world by means of the proposition "the world is a garden".

In his *Poetics* (Section 3, Part XXI) and *Rhetoric* (Book III, Part 4), Aristotle defined metaphor as a trope founded on similitude and pointed out its connection with simile, namely a proposition of the form "X is like Y"; simile, resulting in a longer phrase than metaphor, is therefore of less interest and appeal. Wales³¹ observes that simile ("X is like Y") seems less striking and effective than metaphor ("X is Y") because, when the latter is utilised, at first the proposition "X is Y" may actually be considered to be true and read not figuratively but literally. Furthermore, according to Davidson,³² while all similes are banally true, most metaphors are obviously false and, as a result, flout the Gricean maxim of Quality.³³

Wales also furnishes a «practical stylistic»³⁴ or «steam stylistic»³⁵ example of metaphor analysis. Given Romeo's words depicting the morning sky «Night's candles are burnt out» (*Romeo and Juliet*, III.v.9), both Juliet and the audience recognise that the underlying proposition is "stars are candles", that the pertinent aspect of these entities is their being sources of light, and that such other aspects as their material or shape are not pertinent to the metaphor and its explanation. This example demonstrates that a clear understanding of metaphor relies not only on the meaning of individual words, but also on the contextual lexemes and syntax. The example also proves that

²⁹ E. G. INGERSOLL, *Flirting with Tragedy*, cit. p. 112.

³⁰ KATIE WALES, *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, London, Longman, 2001, pp. 250-251.

³¹ Ivi, p. 250.

³² DONALD DAVIDSON, *What metaphors mean*, in «Critical Inquiry», V, 1 (1978), pp. 31-47.

³³ See also PAUL GRICE, *Logic and conversation*, in COLE, PETER and JERRY L. MORGAN (eds.), *Speech Acts*, New York, Academic Press, 1975, pp. 41-58, p. 53; for a stylistic discussion of the difference between metaphor and simile, see GERARD STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre, with illustrations from Carol Ann Duffy's Rapture*, in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stylistics*, VIOLETA SOTIROVA (ed.), London, Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 308-324, pp. 316-317.

³⁴ K. WALES, *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, cit. pp. 250-251.

³⁵ RONALD CARTER, *Methodologies for stylistic analysis*, in *Language and Style: In Honour of Mick Short*, DAN MCINTYRE and BEATRIX BUSSE (eds.), Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, pp. 55-68, pp. 58-61.

X must be partly similar to Y in order for the analogy to be successful; nevertheless, X must also be partly *dissimilar* to Y for the analogy to be original and impressive. This dissimilarity may sometimes lead to ambiguity and indeterminacy, which make metaphor a forceful source of multiple meaning. Romeo's lines continue as follows: «and jocund day | Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops» (*Romeo and Juliet*, III.v.9-10). Contrary to the Shakespeare cases above, here the metaphorical word is not a noun but the verbal expression “stands tiptoe on”, which triggers the proposition “day is a human being” and thereby the figure of personification. This verbal expression usually collocates with nouns referring to human or animate entities; accordingly, in stylistic and generative grammatical terms, the collocation in the example violates the selection restrictions of subject and verb and constitutes a semantic deviation. Metaphor is hence a stylistic foregrounding device.

The nature of metaphor and other stylistic foregrounding practices, like figures of speech and tropes, has been repeatedly scrutinised by philosophers, linguists and, more recently, stylisticians. In particular, the area of metaphor research has changed substantially since when these scholars first tried to offer a definition of such figures. Up to the 1980s, metaphor and metonymy were regarded as main rhetorical, i.e. linguistic, means especially exploited and foregrounded in literary language. In her introduction to metaphor from a stylistic perspective, Csábi³⁶ treats metaphor from a historical standpoint — discussing the work of Aristotle, John Locke, Giambattista Vico, I. A. Richards, Max Black, Roman Jakobson, Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, John Searle, Paul Grice, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur — and identifies the seven most usual conventional views of this figure:

- 1) “metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, a property of words”. Hence, the fact that the noun “angel” can be employed metaphorically in a sentence like “Sue is an angel” is a linguistic quality of this noun.
- 2) “metaphor is based on a resemblance, a pre-existing similarity between the two entities that are compared and identified; it is a shortened comparison”. In “Sue is an angel”, the entity “Sue” must have a number of elements in common with the entity “angel” in order for “angel” to be utilised as a metaphor for “Sue”.
- 3) “metaphor is used for some artistic and rhetorical purpose, primarily in literary works”.
- 4) “metaphor is a conscious and deliberate use of words”. A specific skill is therefore required to deploy it effectively: this is why metaphor prevails only in literary language.
- 5) “metaphor can be used for special effects”, as a result it does not take a vital role in the common way humans think, reason or communicate.
- 6) “metaphor is often seen as the deviant, improper use of words”, given that it is used to replace literal words or phrases.
- 7) In “the dead metaphor view”, dead metaphors are stated not to be reckoned to be metaphors anymore, since they have been conventionalised over time.

³⁶ SZILVIA CSÁBI, *Metaphor and stylistics*, in *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, MICHAEL BURKE (ed.), London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 206-221, p. 207.

These conventional views of metaphor imply that metaphorical meaning is formed afresh and does not mirror the ways notions and actions are normally conceptualised by means of pre-existing metaphorical schemes. On the contrary, the current principal interest in the fields of cognitive linguistics, philosophy and psychology is to show that the nature of language, thought, and experience is essentially metaphorical.

4 A NOVEL VIEW OF METAPHOR: THE COGNITIVE TURN

In the 1980s, the linguistic turn was superseded by the cognitive turn, a movement in the humanities and social sciences giving prominence to the interaction between texts and their readers; in literary criticism, the objective of the movement is to analyse the textual signals for literary reading and, later on, to also examine matters of readerly effects. The cognitive turn moved away from the traditional belief in philosophy, rhetoric and poetics that metaphor was an ornamental tool and a matter of literary style, and disclosed that it is neither created with aesthetic intentions only nor exclusive to literature. It is instead widely deployed in everyday language by everyday speakers, so much so that we often use metaphors no longer aware that they entail figurative meaning, and so much so that such metaphorical meaning is listed in general dictionaries: see, for instance, “the pound recovers”, “the war against inflation”, “black hole”.³⁷

Indeed, metaphors are mental and cultural phenomena “we live by”, not simply rhetorical strategies. This is contended by such cognitive linguists as Lakoff and Johnson (see their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, 1980; second edition 2003) and Lakoff and Turner,³⁸ as well as the most recent work in cognitive linguistics.³⁹ These scholars regard metaphor not as an attribute of words, but as an attribute of concepts; therefore, they employ the term “conceptual metaphor” to refer to it. A conceptual metaphor consists of an idea, domain or experience from a certain semantic field, which is defined as “source domain” or CONCEPT B (for instance, MOTHER). The source domain is utilised to conceptualise an idea, domain or experience from a different semantic field, which is defined as “target domain” or CONCEPT A (for example, THE EARTH). The target is thus represented in terms of the source in the conceptual metaphor CONCEPT A IS CONCEPT B, in this case THE EARTH IS A MOTHER (see also Lakoff and Johnson’s idea of mapping).⁴⁰ Underpinning a conceptual metaphor is the theoretical assumption that the various meanings of the source domain are not shared by those of the target domain: they <function as lexical points of entry to distinct

³⁷ S. CSÁBI, *Metaphor and stylistics*, cit., pp. 213-214; GERARD STEEN, *Metaphor and style*, in *The Cambridge Handbook of Stylistics*, PETER STOCKWELL and SARA WHITELEY (eds.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 315-328, p. 315.

³⁸ G. LAKOFF and M. TURNER, *More than Cool Reason*, cit.

³⁹ RAYMOND W. GIBBS (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008; ZOLTÁN KÖVECSES, *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020; GERARD J. STEEN et al., *A Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification: From MIP to MIPVU*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2010.

⁴⁰ G. LAKOFF and M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By*, cit.

conceptual source domains from which an indirect, metaphorical meaning is derived by means of a cross-domain mapping to the target domain».⁴¹

Cognitivists have an embodied view of language and the human conceptual system, based on empirically grounded results. The body cannot be independent from the mind, and plays an active role in everyday situated aspects of cognition: the body, bodily action and felt sensations closely interact with the mind, language and thought. The conceptual metaphor theory Lakoff and Johnson elaborated tries to systematically classify conventional metaphors in a taxonomy of actual or imaginary bodily experiences. These experiences are biologically- and culturally-situated: in several languages, “up” and connected terms normally represent what is good and positive (“in high spirits”, “on cloud nine”, “on a high”), and “down” what is bad and negative (“down in the dumps”, “under the weather”, “inferiority complex”). Culturally-situated are also such metaphors, recurrent in everyday language and literature alike, as *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* and *LOVE IS A DISEASE*.

A notion which has proven to be fruitful in exploring metaphor in both literary and non-literary texts and discourses is that of deliberate metaphor. Taking Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18 “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” as a starting point, Steen defined deliberate metaphor as follows: «Deliberate metaphor is the intentional use of metaphor *as* metaphor, and its function is to offer an ‘alien’ perspective (a summer’s day) on some target domain (the addressee in the poem as lover)».⁴² Metaphor is not frequently deployed in a deliberate manner; when this is the case, this figure becomes a foregrounded stylistic device openly highlighting the meanings of the source domain and of the target domain. However, most metaphors are non-deliberate manifestations of our human use of language and of our human thought, of the ways we express ourselves and conceptualise reality. That is to say, non-deliberate metaphors are already present in our linguistic and conceptual systems; consequently, they are not particularly noteworthy from a stylistic perspective when examining text and discourse.⁴³

As a result, deliberate metaphors and non-deliberate metaphors are employed in distinct registers with distinct effects. This implies that, when investigating this figure, the analyst must take into account the diverse genres and discourse events metaphor appears in. The literary and poetic registers abound in a deliberate use of metaphor; they exploit the resources offered by this figure to relay more than one basic conventional meaning at the same time. Hence, literary and poetic metaphors and their different meaning levels should be re-read, re-visited and re-enjoyed. The discourses of advertising, the news and politics are also rich in deliberate metaphors; their linguistic and conceptual complexity and many-sided meanings leave a lasting stylistic effect on their addressee.⁴⁴

5 ANALYSIS: THE MAIDS’ WATER METAPHORS

⁴¹ G. STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre*, cit., p. 315.

⁴² Ivi, p. 316.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 318.

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 317-319, 320, 324.

The upcoming analysis discusses water- and sea-related metaphors (underlined in each example) in Atwood's text and their rendition in the Italian translation, which will be referred to as TT (Target Text), with italics signalling the shifts from the English source text. The cognitive view of metaphor (see Section 4) applied to translation links metaphor translatability to the conceptualization that underpins a given metaphorical expression, which is now seen as a part of the source and target culture's conceptual systems rather than a separate linguistic manifestation. Thus, translating metaphors exploiting a cognitive domain different from that of the equivalent target language expression will be challenging. Schäffner⁴⁵ schematises the possible alternatives for the translator: (1) direct translation; (2) substitution of the ST metaphor with a TT metaphor with same or similar sense; (3) translation of metaphor into sense. The analysis will highlight not only Atwood's conceptual system involving water metaphors, but also whether it is shared by the Italian translator and thus preserved in the target text. The analysis will begin with examples that adhere to the archetypal meanings and progress to the most innovative ones.

In Example 1, Atwood frequently uses sea-related imagery to give voice to the Maids, for whom the sea represents a dimension apart from reality («And when we sleep we like to dream;| We dream we are at sea') in which they are not subjected to men's abuse («[...] chased around the hall| And tumbled in the dirt| By every dimwit nobleman| Who wants a slice of skirt». TP, p. 73). The flow of the sea serves as a filter through which humans seek to understand their own existence in the wide traditional repertory of sailing as a metaphor for life (from Lucretius to Voltaire).⁴⁶ With the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A SEA, Atwood reprises this literary tradition; with the idea of sinking as dying, she reinterprets it in a darker perspective:

Chorus: Then sail, my fine lady, on the billowing wave| The water below is as dark as the grave,| And maybe you'll sink in your little blue boat| It's hope, and hope only, that keeps us afloat. (TP, p. 36)

Following Steen's classification (see Section 4), LIFE IS A SEA is a non-deliberate metaphor, as it belongs to a stable repertoire and provides a familiar perspective. The same metaphor also features in the Italian translation by Margherita Crepax. However, the substitution⁴⁷ of the clause «you'll sink in your little blue boat» with the interrogative «ma di galleggiare tu sei proprio sicura?» fails to convey the explicit feeling of danger.

TT: Veleggia, veleggia, mia bella signora| sull'onda che increspa nel ritmo dell'ora.| Il fondo del mare ha l'acqua più scura| *ma di galleggiare tu sei proprio sicura?* O è la speme che a galla ti tiene?⁴⁸ (back translation:

⁴⁵ C. SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, cit.

⁴⁶ HANS BLUMENBERG, *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer: Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1979, Italian transl. FRANCESCA RIGOTTI, *Naufragio con Spettatore: Paradigma di una metafora dell'esistenza*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1985.

⁴⁷ C. SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, cit.

⁴⁸ MARGARET ATWOOD, *The Penelopiad*, Edinburgh, Canongate Books, 2005, Italian transl. MARGHERITA CREPAX, *Il Canto di Penelope*, Milano, Ponte alle Grazie, 2018, p. 42 (henceforth: ICDF).

‘sail, sail, my fine lady, on the sea that gets rough as the hours go by| the bottom of the sea has the blackest water|but are you really sure you’re floating?| or is it hope that keeps you afloat?’)

In terms of translation techniques (which are usually limited to translation analysis at word or phrase level),⁴⁹ we have modulation,⁵⁰ which entails looking upon the same situation from a different point of view (in this case, from sinking to floating): modulation thus applies to categories of thought, not grammar.⁵¹ The most important reason for using modulation is that «[translators] believe that in a particular context, a span of text would be more naturally formulated in a different way in the TT from the way it appears in the ST».⁵² Therefore, we can assume that here the dominant (in Jakobson’s terms, the leading formal component of a work of art)⁵³ was preserving both situation and rhyme (‘scura’ – ‘sicura’).

In Example 2, Atwood refers once more to a classic water-related metaphor to compare the Maids’ birth to that of their future killer and royal prince, Telemachus.

Nine months he sailed the wine-red seas of his mother’s blood| Out of the cave of dreaded Night, of sleep,| Of troubling dreams he sailed| In his frail dark boat, the boat of himself,| Through the dangerous ocean of his vast mother he sailed. [...]

He saw us as rightfully his, for whatever purpose| He chose, to tend him and feed him, to wash him, amuse him,| Rock him to sleep in the dangerous boats of ourselves [...]. (TP, p. 43)

The metaphor LIFE IS A SEA is thus enriched by the extended metaphor BIRTH AND PREGNANCY ARE A SEA VOYAGE («Through the dangerous ocean of his vast mother he sailed»); by conceptualizing the maternal womb as the sea, Atwood reprises the well-established psychoanalytic connection between motherhood and water⁵⁴ that spans from Spencer’s *The Fairie Queene* («Marinell’s descent to his mother’s bower at the bottom of the sea

⁴⁹ PETER FAWCETT, *Linguistic approaches*, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, MONA BAKER, KIRSTEN MALMKJÆR, and GABRIELA SALDANHA (eds.), London, Routledge, 1998, pp. 120-126, p. 123.

⁵⁰ HENRI VAN HOOF, *Traduire l’anglais*, Paris-Louvain-la-neuve, Duculot, 1989, p. 126; JEAN PAUL VINAY and JEAN DARBELNET, *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l’Anglais: Méthode de Traduction*, Paris, Didier, 1958, English transl. J.C. SAGER and M.-J. HAMEL, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1995, p. 36.

⁵¹ H. VAN HOOF, *Traduire l’anglais*, cit. p.126.

⁵² RAPHAEL SALKIE, *A new Look at Modulation*, in *Translation and Meaning - part 5*, MARCEL THELEN (ed.) Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 433-441, p. 437.

⁵³ ROMAN JAKOBSON, *The Dominant*, in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, K.M. NEWTON (ed.), Palgrave, London, 1997, pp. 6-9, p. 6.

⁵⁴ GASTON BACHELARD, *L’Eau et les rêves*, Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1942, p. 91.

suggests a return to the womb, to the maternal, as a creative source»⁵⁵ to Woolf's *The Waves* («Many mothers [...] Like one wave, succeeding to another. Wave after wave, endlessly sinking and falling as far as the eye can stretch»⁵⁶).

Furthermore, the Maids introduce the HUMAN IS A BOAT metaphor to conceptualize themselves and Telemachus as boats (this metaphor also features in Madeline Miller's *Circe*: see Section 1).

And we, the twelve who were later to die by his hand| At his father's
relentless command,| Sailed as well, in the dark frail boats of ourselves
Through the turbulent seas of our swollen and sore-footed mothers
[...]After the nine-month voyage we came to shore,| Beached at the same
time as he was. (TP, p. 43)

Atwood's lexical choices, conveying vigour and materiality when referring to Penelope («the wine-red seas»), turn to roughness when referring to the Maids («the turbulent seas of our swollen and sore-footed mothers»), thus reflecting their social inferiority. The interpretation of the maternal womb as a site of danger («turbulent») respects the ambivalence of the interpretations concerning water.

In the Italian translation, Crepax uses direct translation⁵⁷ for the metaphor BIRTH AND PREGNANCY ARE A SEA VOYAGE but erases the idea of Penelope's threatening womb by omitting the premodifier «dangerous»:

TT: nel sangue rosso-vino di sua madre|durante nove mesi ha
navigato, |piccola, scura barca di sé stesso| dall'antro della Notte era
salpato,| per *l'oceano vasto* di sua madre. (ICDP, p. 57)

This omission is not motivated by stylistic constraints of verse or rhyme, therefore it may be an act of (in)voluntary aversion to associating negative connotations with the main character. This hypothesis is apparently supported by the fact that the negatively connotated premodifier referring to the Maids' mothers (turbulent seas, 'agitati mari') is instead kept, reiterating the class difference:

TT: Noi dodici, morte di sua mano| al comando feroce di suo padre,
come lui avevamo navigato,| piccole scure barche di noi stesse| negli
agitati mari delle madri| dai doloranti e lacerati piedi. (ICDP, p. 57)

Substitution is instead used to preserve the same meaning of the HUMAN IS A BOAT metaphor by using the expression «tratte a secco», conventionally associated to boats.

⁵⁵ JONATHAN GOLDBERG, *The Mothers in Book III of The Faerie Queene*, in «*Texas Studies in Literature and Language*», XVII, 1 (1975), pp. 5-26, p.10.

⁵⁶ VIRGINIA WOOLF, *The Waves*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 7.

⁵⁷ C. SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, cit.

TT: Nove mesi di viaggio, giunte a riva| e alla stessa ora tratte a secco. (ICDP, p. 58)

The Maids' metaphors thus follow the archetypal representation of water and sea as a potentially threatening physical and imaginary frontier; therefore, they are used in a non-deliberate way⁵⁸ and are conventionalized and lexicalized⁵⁹ (See Section 4). However, the sea is also represented as a safe mental haven in which they can finally rest their bodies and souls. Therefore, the sea is shown as both deadly and safe.

5.1 PENELOPE'S WATER METAPHORS

From the beginning of the novel, water is one of Penelope's constant source domains, as demonstrated by the premodifiers used to describe her mother in Example 3:

My mother, like all Naiads, was beautiful, but chilly at heart. She had waving hair and dimples, and rippling laughter [...]. (TP, p. 14)

According to the British National Corpus,⁶⁰ in literary prose 'water' is the most frequent collocate for the premodifier 'rippling' with the meaning – also figurative – of «characterized by rippling; flowing or moving in a rippling manner; proceeding in short rises and falls, undulating». ⁶¹ As 'ripple' may be used to indicate «a sound or feeling that spreads through a person or group of people, gradually increasing and then becoming smaller», the noun phrase «rippling laughter» contains a conventionalised and lexicalised metaphor⁶² that does not challenge the readers' conceptual system, thus representing a non-deliberate use of metaphor⁶³ (See Section 6). Crepax could not preserve these layers of meaning without compromising the idiomaticity of the language. Therefore, rather than opting for a direct translation of the metaphor, she used 'argentina', an Italian collocate for laughter.

TT: Aveva i capelli ondulati, le fossette, una risata *argentina*. (ICDP, p. 19)

⁵⁸ G. STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre*, cit.

⁵⁹ ANDREW GOATLY and LLE PROJECT, *Metalude*, Hong Kong, Lingnan University, 2002-2005, url <http://www.ln.edu.hk/lle/cwd/project01/web/home.html> (consulted on 25/10/2022).

⁶⁰ 'Water', in *British National Corpus*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, url <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/> (consulted on 25/10/2022).

⁶¹ 'Rippling' in *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, url <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166258?rskey=7HSuSy&result=6&isAdvanced=false#eid> (consulted on 25/10/2022).

⁶² A. GOATLY and LLE PROJECT, *Metalude*, cit.

⁶³ G. STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre*, cit.

While the English adjective ‘rippling’ evokes images of space, the Italian adjective ‘argentina’, which means ‘that sounds like silver’,⁶⁴ is rather related to sound. However, another Italian collocate, ‘risata limpida’, would have allowed Crepax to preserve the water-related metaphor via substitution:⁶⁵ ‘limpida’ means ‘clear’⁶⁶ and is commonly used for both air and water.

In Example 4, Penelope’s connection with water is also built via the images related to tears. In both cases, Crepax preserved this recurring feature by choosing a direct translation:

I cried so much I thought I would turn into a river or a fountain [...] After I’ve done as much weeping as possible without turning myself into a pond [...]. (TP, p. 71)

TT: Piangevo tanto che pensavo mi sarei trasformata in un fiume o in una fontana [...] dopo aver pianto fin quasi a trasformarmi in un lago. (ICDP, p. 95)

In Example 5, Penelope is one of the voices of the Maid’s chorus. In her verses, water intertwines with sexual desire:

And now, dear Nurse, [...] | He’ll chop me up for tending my desire! | While he was pleasuring every nymph and beauty, | *Did he think I’d do nothing but my duty?* | While every girl and goddess he was praising, | *Did he assume I’d dry up like a raisin?* (TP, p. 85)

The deliberate metaphor⁶⁷ (see Section 4) HUMAN IS A PLANT reiterates the idea of water as the element essential to life, representing Penelope’s right to sexual desires. This may also be an intertextual homage to *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry, the first black woman to have her play performed on Broadway. The metaphor HUMAN IS A PLANT is preserved in the Italian translation; however, the prevalence of substitution⁶⁸ («a me restava soltanto il dovere»; «mentre restavo a casa ad avvizzire») in translating the rhetorical questions in Penelope’s sequence erases this critical affirmation of women’s sexuality. The Italian translation shows Penelope’s compliance to patriarchal laws (women may live a full life and satisfy sexual urges only with a spouse beside them), whereas Atwood makes it clear that Penelope disregarded those rules.

⁶⁴ ‘Argentina’ in *Il Vocabolario Treccani*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997, url <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/argentino1/> (consulted on 25/10/2022).

⁶⁵ C. SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, cit.

⁶⁶ ‘Limpido’ in *Il Vocabolario Treccani*, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997, url <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/limpido/> (consulted on 25/10/2022).

⁶⁷ G. STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre*, cit.

⁶⁸ JOSEPH L. MALONE, *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2016 (1988), p. 21.

TT: Lui dalle ninfe traeva il piacere, *a me restava soltanto il dovere.* |
 Quante donne avrà fatto gioire | *mentre restavo in casa ad avvizzire?*
 (ICDP, p. 116. Back translation: ‘the nymphs gave him pleasure, while all I was left with was duty. How many women will he have pleased while I was at home drying up?’)

In Example 6, from a postfeminist viewpoint, the most conceptually interesting water metaphor is found when Penelope says that «Water is our element, it is our birthright» (TP, p. 13. Miller’s *Circe* contains echoes of this association, albeit with a different connotation, when she states «[...] water was not my element and it knew it [...]»⁶⁹. Penelope identifies with water and claims it as her right, which prepares the ground for her mother’s life lesson:

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall, it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. [...] Remember you are half water. If you can’t go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does. (TP, p. 32)

In Atwood, water is conceptualized as a human being thanks to the adjectives («patient»), verbs («resist», «want»), and nouns («caress»). The «liquescence»⁷⁰ of the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS LIQUID describes both physical and spiritual malleability; the ability to take various forms was an essential feature of all water divinities,⁷¹ but Atwood modernizes this classic reference. ‘Liquescence’ is here used to mirror Penelope’s strategy to avoid her suitors: «Behave like water, I told myself. Don’t try to oppose them. When they try to grasp you, slip through their fingers. Flow around them» (TP, p. 63). By extension, it is also what women do in a society that discourages their agency. Therefore, Atwood uses water for her postfeminist metaphor, calling attention to women’s current situation in society. The importance of this deliberate metaphor⁷² (see Section 4) is proved by the fact that direct translation⁷³ was used to preserve the same range of meanings in the Italian text:

TT: L’acqua non oppone resistenza. L’acqua scorre. Quando immergi una mano nell’acqua senti solo una carezza. L’acqua non è un muro, non può fermarti. Va dove vuole andare e niente le si può opporre. L’acqua è paziente. L’acqua che gocciola consuma una pietra. [...] Ricordati che

⁶⁹ M. MILLER, *Circe*, cit., p. 230.

⁷⁰ ANASTASIA KOSTETSKAYA, *Symbolism in Flux: The Conceptual Metaphor of "World Liquescence" across Media, Genres and Realities*, in «The Slavic and East European Journal», LIX, 3 (2015), pp. 413-430, p. 413.

⁷¹ F. RAMORINO, *Mitologia classica*, cit., p. 121.

⁷² G. STEEN, *Metaphor: Metaphor and style through genre*, cit.

⁷³ C. SCHÄFFNER, *Metaphor in Translation*, cit.

per metà tu sei acqua. Se non puoi superare un ostacolo, giragli intorno.
Come fa l'acqua. (ICDP, p. 42)

6 CONCLUSIONS

This analysis assessed the presence of metaphors relating to sea and water imagery exploited by the Maids and Penelope, with interesting conceptual differences. In their Choruses, the Maids often refer to the metaphor LIFE IS A SEA and conceptualize themselves as boats, with the sea representing either the dangers of life or the limbo preceding life. Reprising and reinterpreting another classic association, the metaphor BIRTH AND PREGNANCY ARE A SEA conceptualizes the figure of the mother as the sea, introducing associations to vigour and materiality as well as roughness.

In Penelope's narrative chapters, water continues to provide interesting reflections. Water as a vital element is involved in the metaphor HUMAN IS A PLANT, which connects water to sexual desire. Water is anthropomorphized, which will also be seen years later in *Circe* by Madeline Miller (see Section 1); the metaphor HUMAN IS LIQUID connects the silent power of water with women's marginality. Since water serves to establish an 'alien' perspective on women, HUMAN IS LIQUID is a deliberate metaphor (see Section 4).

The majority of these metaphors are preserved in the Italian translation. With the exception of collocates, for which a connotated translation might be counterproductive, Crepax has understood the narrative and ideological function of sea- and water-related metaphors, opting for direct translation. This reveals that, as far as the metaphors explored here are concerned, English and Italian share the same conceptual repertoire.⁷⁴ However, the omission of clauses or premodifiers expressing danger in connection to the female body softens the Maids' rancour against their oppressors (and the intended impact of Atwood's work).

The analysis has shown that Atwood exploits sea metaphors to define women, and the Italian translation manages to preserve her intention. Atwood partially adheres to the ambivalent vision inherited by classic symbology, according to which the sea is both a maternal symbol of creation (BIRTH AND PREGNANCY ARE A SEA VOYAGE) and the border between life and death (through the danger portrayed via the metaphor HUMAN IS A BOAT). However, she also redefines the classic vision through anthropomorphism and the metaphor HUMAN IS LIQUID, turning water into a post-feminist metaphor that, far from being empowering, critically draws attention to women's actual condition in today's society.

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⁷⁴ MICHELE PRANDI, *Une typologie des métaphores en vue de la traduction*, in *Metaphor and Translation*, RICHARD TRIM and DOROTA ŚLIWA (eds.), Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, pp. 24-39, p. 34.

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PAROLE CHIAVE

Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Water and sea metaphors; Margaret Atwood; *The Penelopiad* (2005); Italian translation



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