V.

La collana intende investigare la centralità del concetto di interculturalità nei paesi di lingua inglese offrendo una prospettiva interdisciplinare tra lingue, letterature, culture e media. Il termine "traduzione" è dunque inteso nella sua accezione più ampia che prende in considerazione non solo gli studi di traduzione interlinguistica ma anche intersemiotica e si apre ad un discorso sulla traduzione come trasposizione, adattamento e ibridazione tra generi e arti. Il discorso sull'interculturalità, sempre più centrale anche in un'Europa multietnica e multilinguistica, è fondamentale nelle aree anglofone dove il processo di decolonizzazione poi globalizzazione ha portato ad un ripensamento dei concetti di lingua, identità, nazione e cultura. La collana intende proporre strumenti di analisi per approfondire competenze linguistiche e culturali muovendosi tra diverse aree di studio come gli studi di traduzione, gli studi postcoloniali e di genere, gli studi culturali, la sociolinguistica (in particolare le varietà della lingua inglese), la critical discourse analysis e i linguaggi specialistici. Se come afferma Adrienne Rich "negli interstizi delle lingue si nascondono significativi segreti della cultura" è proprio dallo studio di diverse tipologie testuali che può iniziare un percorso critico verso un approfondimento di ciò che viene definito come interculturalità.

THE BODY METAPHOR

CULTURAL IMAGES, LITERARY PERCEPTIONS, LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS

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Speaking Bodies: Ursula K. Le Guin's Linguistic Revision of Gender

[*Eleonora Federici*]

1. Le Guin's Narrative Worlds: a Gendered Perspective

Ursula Le Guin is a major name in American science fiction, she is a polyedric writer and has written novels, short stories, poetry, collections of essays, books for children, screenplays; she has edited science fiction anthologies and even translated some works.[1] In her career she has received many literary prizes and a vast critical reception of her work. Many studies have been dedicated to her novels and she has been included, by Harold Bloom (1986), in the American canon.[2] Acclaimed as one of the most important speculative science fiction writers exploring gender issues in this genre Le Guin's works condemn gender oppression and inequality, envision futures where

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1. For biographical and bibliographical references see Ursula Le Guin's website: http://www.ursulakleguin.com/UKL_info.html. See also Cummins (1983). While this essay has been written Ursula Le Guin has died leaving her voice in innumerable and wonderful texts that readers will read again and again in the future.

2. The bibliography on Le Guin's works is a very rich one. See for example, Bernardo and Murphy (2006); Bucknall (1981); Cadden (2005); Cummins (1990); Freedman (2008); Selinger (1988); Spivack (1984); Wayne (1995); White 1998.

gender differences are taken into account and creates new languages for gender-aware individuals. In order to expose the patriarchal thought and the subsequent hierarchal stances and social/political/economical inequalities of our contemporary world, Le Guin envisions in some of her novels specific languages for her gender-aware societies that the reader discovers turning page after page with fascination and interest. The use of a gender-sensitive language together with a gender-aware utilization of science fiction topics enables the author to present contradictory and divergent value systems that force the SF reader to question gender issues in his/her contemporary society.

Le Guin is known for her ability to create perfectly arranged narrative worlds hold together by a strong internal coherence; some of her stories are echoed from one book to another and present a well crafted science fiction universe.[3] Moreover, Le Guin's science fiction has always expressed her political commitment clearly visible in her utopias where ideology is brought to the fore and permits us to reflect fruitfully on how it creates its effects on societies. Not only Le Guin is a wonderful craftswoman of narrative worlds but she is an author who speaks to the reader emotionally and metaphorically. Her parents were Alfred Kroeber, the well known anthropologist, and Theodora Kroeber, who wrote children books. Both anthropology and children's fiction have influenced her works, as it is clear in between the lines of many LeGuinian societies of the future both in the content and form.

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3. Le Guin's novels have been analyzed from a gender perspective by many scholars among which Barr and Piercy (1993); Cranny Francis (1990); Keulen (1991); Little (2007) and Roberts (1993).

For Le Guin science fiction and utopias are metaphors of our current world where truth can be based on imagination. As she outlines in *The Language of the Night*, in these genres we find truth exploring new interior worlds, re-creating and re-combining what we know. In this essay I will analyse how bodily representations in Le Guin's fiction are strictly correlated both to her innovative use of language and to her critique of gender differences. In order to do so, I will focus on three novels which are touchstones in her literary career: *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Disspossessed* (1974) and *Always Coming Home* (1985).

2. A New Body, a New Society, a New Language

In feminist science fiction the female body as iconographic, esthetic and symbolic code of cultural and social discourses is analysed as a symbolic construct and related to an alternative linguistic code able to project a different notion of female subjectivity and identity. Feminist science fiction writers use cultural archetypes, science fiction themes and structures to make the reader aware of gender issues, for example, the debate nature vs technology is central, feminist utopias are deeply influenced by social and scientific discourses of the 70s about the female body, sexuality and reproduction.[4] From this perspective, feminist science fiction becomes a discursive practice for a deconstruction of patriarchal social and symbolic systems. The female body and the discourses around it are put under discussion by scholars and writers dealing with utopian and

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4. The discussion on technology and the woman's body was central in those years, see S. Firestone (1971) and A. Rich (1977).

science fiction writings, like for example, Anne Balsamo (1996). As Vita Fortunati has asserted analyzing utopian writings, "women have come up with a strong criticism of the Cartesian notion of the writing subject which permitted a clear distinction between body and mind, to give rise to a new concept of the body as a place of interaction between maternal and symbolic forces: the body as threshold, a surface area which is inherited with many codes of power and knowledge" (Fortunati in Ramos 2006:3). The body, always a central topic in SF, is used by women writers to decode gender issues and to re-code a new way of thinking beyond binary oppositions (Federici 2015).

Le Guin enacts a re-appropriation of SF themes, among which representations of the body, from a feminist perspective which often revolves around a revision of the notion of motherhood and family care. Le Guin, like many of her SF colleagues, aims at: 1) a revision of the cultural and social imaginary through a re-appropriation of the female body and a deconstruction of gender stereotypes; 2) a problematization of the issues of motherhood, sexuality, family care and reproduction; 3) a re-thinking about the redistribution of social roles in society. This is partly done through the deconstruction of patriarchal language and the invention of new ones which can 'speak' the feminine.

The problematic intersection among language, thought and actions has always been at the centre of utopian and science fiction novels. In his seminal study *Aliens and Linguistics: Language Study and Science Fiction* (1980)[5] Walter Meyers affirms there is a long tradition in utopian fiction that, on the one hand, involves elements of an ideal

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5. On this topic see also M. Barnes Edwards (1975). More recent studies are: D. W. Sisk (1997); R. Cheyne (2008) and S. Mandala (2010).

language (eutopia) – a language that serves for a perfect human communication – and, on the other hand, focuses on the abuse of language (dystopia). Language, thought and reality perceptions are strictly interconnected and as Dunja Mohr asserts,

> Starting from a Judaeo-Christian background, early utopias speculated about the retrieval of the imaginary and idealized protolanguage, envisioning a perfect language everyone can understand. In contrast, modern science fiction (SF) novels foreground alien languages or modes of non-verbal communication and the inherent problems of translation (Mohr 2009: 225).

Some novelists, drawing on the Sapir Whorf hypothesis, use linguistics as a major plot device. According to Sapir Whorf's theory language functions as a linguistic filter of what we perceive of reality, and as language organizes our thoughts and speech, all verbal communication depends on our linguistic concepts and is limited by the available vocabulary and its contained cultural codes. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been much debated, and also criticized for its notion of linguistic determinism and relativism. For linguistic determinism language constitutes our reality and for linguistic relativism it encodes a different worldview, that is to say, language is not neutral but exposes one encoded vision of reality. Starting from this theory George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) underlined that we are able to shift our frames of reference; this means that if we are able to analyse how our linguistic training and our cultural schema influence our thoughts then we are able to adapt and transform these frameworks. The misuses and abuses of language which emerge in twentieth century

dystopias like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's *Ninety-Eighty-Four* (1949) are clear: the central plot respond to propaganda and totalitarism, certain words are forbidden and declared taboo, men control language and manipulate it to maintain an absolute power, communication is denied, reading is forbidden, writing and history are hidden. Another example which incorporates language thematically is Samuel Delany's *Babel-17* (1966), a novel where emblematically, the first person pronoun 'I' has been totally eliminated. If in her book *Linguistics and Languages in Science Fiction-Fantasy* (1971), Myra Barnes was among the first to identify a focus on language as the instrument of both thought control and of resistance in dystopia,[6] in her analysis of women's dystopia Ildney Cavalcanti underlined how many female dystopias reflect the long history of women's exclusion from official historiography and the effective silencing of women in public discourse. Dystopias are often characterized by formulaic speech and the prohibition of a public voice for women; examples of this are Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) where linguistic normativity stands for social and political control or Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) where women's tongues are cut off. A relevant case in point for an analysis of language and gender in utopia/dystopia/science fiction is Suzette Haden Elgin's trilogy *Native Tongue* (1984), *The Judas Rose* (1987) and *Earthsong: Native Language III* (1993). Elgin's texts are engaging examples of language-laboratories and the use of language as a thematic issue in dystopia. The author, who is a linguist, invented a language, Láadan, aimed at the deconstruction of patriarchal

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6. For a discussion on this issue see also R. Baccolini and T. Moylan (2003) and P. Stockwell (2000 and 2003).

discourses and a revision of gender roles. In Elgin's novels language reflects a male-dominated society where standard language is biased and the new language can function as a mirror for cultural and social changes.[7]

Language and communication are at the centre of feminist utopias/dystopias of the 70s. Two are the aims of women writers: to disrupt patriarchal language (and our gendered vision of society), and to use language in order to develop their own discourses. If, as Cavalcanti affirms, "contemporary feminist dystopias overtly thematize the linguistic construction of gender domination by telling stories about language as instrument of both (men's) domination and (women's) liberation" (Cavalcanti 2000: 152), language becomes a critical instrument for a revision of our gendered culture. Women writers carry on a linguistic deconstruction of gender stereotypes at grammatical and lexical level. English, built on patriarchal assumptions, results to be inadequate to express women's thoughts and experiences and a new language which can translate women's experience of the world, a 'feminine speech', becomes a central topic in feminist utopias. These new languages incarnate a different perception of femininity and are a means of empowerment; they expose the limits of patriarchal language and way of thinking and show how the creation of new social and gender concepts is strictly connected to the creation of new forms of expression. Le Guin's languages represent the other, women, ethnic minorities, misrepresented communities; they have a persuasive effect and represent an alternative world, a new

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7. For an analysis on language in Elgin's novels see C. Kramarae (1987), L. Armitt, (1991) and K. Bruce (2008).

way of thinking embodied in physical, cultural and social difference.[8]

3. *Androgynous Bodies, Genderless Language: The Left Hand of Darkness*

One of the first experiments about new bodies and new languages can be found in the well-known novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), a touchstone of American SF. The story tells the friendship between Genly Ai, the black Terran Ekumen envoy, and Estraven, the planet's politician who brings the mission to success through his personal sacrifice. In this novel Le Guin develops the theme of cultural diversity through the use of an outsider traveler who is also the narrator of the story; most of it in fact, is told in first person by Genly Ai, the envoy of the Ekumen, and reflects his evolving consciousness. The explorer-scientist Genly Ai intends to convince Gethenians to join the Ekumen but this is not an easy task. Through the discovery of his errors in judgment and the long journey he undertakes with Estraven on the ice landscape (a Frankensteinian memory),[9] the novel appears as a *bildungsroman* showing the character's growth process. Added to Genly Ai's narration is Estraven's point of view in his journal but, however, Genly Ai's remains the editor of the story who arranges and organizes what is told by others. Not by chance he is portrayed as a story-teller: "I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that truth is a matter of imagination" (Le Guin 2000: xv). The action of

8. For a discussion on Le Guin's use of persuasion see Peel (2002).
9. For an analysis of this intertextual reference see Ketterer (1974).

the plot is enriched by myths, legends and reports on the planet Gethen that create a cultural imaginary world, in fact, interpolated into Genly Ai's narrative are extracts from Estraven's journals, ethnological field notes, documentary notes, an appendix, all elements that aim at giving an idea of precision and accuracy to the reader. This broad range of narrative typologies (autobiography, documentary, myth, report, journal entries, tales) creates a vision of the whole Gethenian society.

The central theme of the novel is androgyny, delineated through the particular sexuality of the Gethenians. Chapter 7 well explains to the reader the 'Question of Sex' in this planet. Their sexual cycle averages twenty-six days, during the first three weeks the individual is in 'somer' sexually inactive, then he enters the phase of 'kemmer' where he assumes the feminine or masculine sex. Descent is reckoned from the mother, defined as "the parent in the flesh" (Le Guin 2000: 118). The author suggests a strong connection between the ambisexual population and its implications for social customs. Anything here from commerce to industry, culture, even food, is shaped to fit the 'somer-kemmer' cycle. In this planet war and rape do not occur because they cannot exist in a culture that does not divide femininity from masculinity. If in "Is Gender Necessary?" (1979) Le Guin explains that the female principle has been historically anarchic while the male principle has always enforced order and construct power structures, on Gethen she has tried to put these two principles on balance embodying them in the androgynous population. The novel is permeated by the concept of duality into unity, the oppositions come out in terms of imagery, settings, characters and action. Le Guin's lesson seems to be a call for androgyny that is part

of ourselves, not all male or female, but fully human; as she says, "there is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves" (Le Guin 2000: 94). Moreover, as Barbara Brown outlines, Le Guin encompasses the original archetype of the androgynous and uses dualism and opposed images in order to portray all her fictional world so that the reader perceives the story through a continuous reference to polarity, "the merging pattern of dualities on these levels of setting and action" (Brown 1980: 229). This brings to an acceptance of ambiguities, to the recognition of the many possible facets of truth. Le Guin's idea of the androgynous in fact, is a very clear one: they "are not neuters. They are potentials, or integrals" (Le Guin 2000: 70).

Le Guin, who asserted that this story was a thought experiment, says Gethenians are questions about our way of thinking. If gender is a construct of society, androgynous beings are symbols of a new way of thinking as it is clear from her own words:

> I was not recommending the Gethenian sexual set-up: I was using it. It was a heuristic device, a thought experiment. […] my Gethenians are simply a way of thinking. They are questions, not answers; process, not stasis. One of the essential functions of science fiction, I think is precisely this kind of question-asking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination (Le Guin 1989: 158).

At the time of the publication Le Guin was addressing a mainly male audience who read science fiction and she really represented the genre's themes and structure in an innovative way. This novel was a social, cultural and linguistic experiment of the imagination. She utilized

science fiction devices in order to represent an individual who is transformed by the relationship with the other, the alien, while, at the same time, outlining how the reader's language did not possess the right words for a different society and a disruptive way of thinking. The 70s were years of deep changes in American society, the belonging to ethnic groups and gender was questioned and brought to the fore. In "Is Gender Necessary?" Le Guin refers to Simone de Beauvoir's e Betty Friedan's books which strongly permeated women's imagination and life of the end of the 60s/70s. American feminism and the influence of De Beauvoir's translated works in the American context of those years can certainly be read in-between the lines of this novel. The book was born, as she states, as "the record of my consciousness, the process of my thinking" (Le Guin 1989: 162). Linguistic and rhetorical invention was a reflection of social change and of political and civil battles of the end of the 60s.

As a matter of fact, androgyny is difficult to understand for Genly Ai, who cannot escape gender based categories, and cannot accept Estraven's body and inability to communicate. Genly Ai's dialogues with Estraven demonstrate his inability to differentiate between innate and socialized gender roles and characteristics, his associations with femininity and masculinity (Pennington 2000). As Genly Ai asserts, "the heaviest single factor in one's life, is whether one's born male or female. In most societies it determines one's expectations, activities, outlook, ethics, manners, almost everything. Vocabulary. Semiotic usages. Clothing. Even food" (Le Guin 2000: 115). Genly Ai's distrust of women is evident in his use of language and his association between Estraven and femininity; Estraven

is perceived as not having a man's voice but possessing a
'soft supple femininity'. The first negative perception of
Estraven in fact is due to the fact that he does not fit in his
stereotypical view of masculinity and Genly Ai's language
records his uneasiness in this androgynous world. The
protagonist identifies with what is familiar for him, as Le
Fanu asserts, "Genly's selection of pronouns is consistent
with his tendency to masculinize the world around him. For
him to have used neutral pronouns would have implied a
level of awareness which he achieves only towards the end"
(Le Fanu 1988: 323). Sexuality gives Gethenians a mode
of consciousness profoundly alien to Genly Ai. However,
the protagonist, whose name recalls both the first person
pronoun 'I' than the word 'eye' will be able to look at
things differently at the end of the novel. The friendship
between him and Estraven demonstrates the possibility
of crossing borders, intellectual, social, cultural and sexual
barriers. After Estraven's social exclusion as a traitor and
the inevitable death Genly Ai will go to visit his friend's
family in order to tell the story of their journey and honour
Estraven's memory.

According to Meyers, Le Guin aims at "establishing
the otherness of the language" and achieve "a sense of
gradual growth and enlightment in overcoming the barriers
of communication" (Meyers 1980: 306). The different
linguistic code makes the reader aware of the problems
in communication between the two characters belonging
to totally different cultures. Communicative barriers are
dismantled bit by bit through the knowledge of the other.
Genly Ai's quest to find a language in order to understand
Estraven's culture and ideas is a difficult one. Le Guin
utilizes a common device of feminist science fiction, that

is 'mindspeech', in order to make Genly Ai and Estraven communicate during the winter journey on the Gobrin ice. The author uses also another device, that is, story-telling; an androgynous being, Estraven, tells stories belonging to his/her own culture so that Genly Ai can understand it. Orality becomes a way to open up a new world, to pass on traditions and to envision another side of the official story. Listening Genly Ai will be able at the end to understand the psychology of a "manwoman", a human being whose body rejects any gender difference. Caring and listening, two major factors in feminist SF, are the tools to understand and accept differences: "Alone I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen as well as speak" (Le Guin 2000: xviii). Accepting Estraven's androgyny and difference, Genly Ai can accept also his own duality and shadows. At the end of the story Genly Ai is profoundly changed to the point that he perceive anything around him through a Gethenian eye; the archetypal androgyny is finally accepted, "transcending male, transcending female, we can become fully human" (Brown 1980: 234). The novel closes with a protagonist who does not recognize Terrans as his own species and defines them as: "a troupe of great, strange animals of two different species, great apes with intelligent eyes, all of them in a rut, in kemmer" (Le Guin 2000: 302) while the scientist who is a Gethenian is portrayed as "a young serious face, not a man's face and not a woman's, a human face, these were a relief to me, familiar, right" (Le Guin 2000: 303). As in other novels Le Guin demonstrates that experience cannot be linear but we learn from many different experiences. Society evolves and changes and so our way of thinking, especially through the encounter with the other, someone culturally distant from us. Cultural

diversity makes us reflect about our customs and norms. In the dialogue between Genly Ai and King Argaven, Le Guin portrays the protagonist as a devil, a sexual freak, an artificial monster from the perspective of the monarch, and our society as "a permanent kemmer, a society of perverts" (Le Guin 2000: 302).

Notwithstanding the strong critique of patriarchy and gender divisions, the novel has been criticized by feminist writers and scholars. Joanna Russ (1972), for example, blames the author for the use of a male protagonist and the fact that Estraven is represented primarily as masculine. In her experimentation of new behavioral models Le Guin actually uses the masculine pronoun, so defining the androgynous being with the masculine. As Genly Ai affirms, the use of language makes us identify with gender and gender roles people around us:

> I must say 'he' for the same reason as we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god. It is less defined, less specific than the neuter or the feminine. But the use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man but a manwoman (Le Guin 2000: 50).

Replying to this critique Le Guin affirmed:

> I call Gethenians he because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for he/she. This utter refusal of 1968 restated in 1976 collapsed […] I still dislike invented pronouns, but I know dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse; and which was an invention of male grammarians […] In a screenplay of *The Left Hand of Darkness* written in 1985 I referred to Gethenians not pregnant or in

kemmer by the invented pronoun a/un/a's modeled on a British dialect…[…] (Le Guin 1989: 159).[10]

However, she recognizes that:

The pronouns wouldn't matter at all if I had been cleverer at showing the female component of the Gethenian characters in action […] Unfortunately the plot and structure that arose as I worked the book out cast the Gethenian protagonist, Estraven, almost exclusively in roles that we are culturally conditioned to perceive as 'male' – a prime minister […] A political schemer, a fugitive, a prison-breaker […] for a reader I left out too much. One does not see Estraven as a mother, with his children […] in any role that we automatically perceive as female (Le Guin 1989: 170).

In this novel words mirror bisexual bodies which represent a society different from ours, Gethenians's bodies speak for themselves and their androgynous world and in creating disrupting bodies Le Guin also invents a new language, a language made of neologisms (Rankin 1979) and a new rhetorics.[11] To conclude my analysis of this touchstone novel, I would like to refer to a short story Le Guin published in 1995 entitled "Coming of Age in Karhide" which revisions *The Left Hand of Darkness*. This story portrays the planet of Gethen through the eyes of a native and a genderless tongue. Masculine and feminine have no meaning; an androgynous humanity is explained through a non-sexist language.

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10. Annas (1978) is an interesting starting point for an analysis of this issue.

11. An analysis of LHD as a seminal feminist work can be found in Lothian (2006).

4. Of Bodies and Languages: 'The Dispossessed'

Linguistic inventiveness unveils gender categories also in *The Dispossessed* (1974), which revisions the concept of utopia through anarchic, pacifist and feminist values.[12] The novel reflects the US political debates of the 70s through the depiction of two very different worlds, Urras, a wealthy but repressive society marked by gender and class inequality, and Anarres, a free and equal place but where an invisible social control takes place.[13] Many have been the studies on this novel and Le Guin's social anarchism.[14] In the "Afterword" to Lawrence Davis and Peter Stilman's volume on Le Guin's utopian politics the SF author affirms that this novel is "an embodiment of idea, a revolutionary artifact, a work containing a potential permanent source of renewal of thoughts and perception" (Le Guin 2005: 36). The story is about Shevek's visit to Urras and return to his homeland Annares. The protagonist is a physicist attempting to develop a General Temporal Theory which anyone would like to possess.[15] As in LHD the protagonist's travel to another world is a journey of self-discovery and dismantling of prejudices and certainties. Politics and ethics are at the centre of this novel together with a rediscussion of science and its role in contemporary society. Moreover, as Salvatore Proietti (2012) underlines, communication is at the centre of the connective tissue of utopia.

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12. A very interesting publication on the novel is Davis and Stillman (2005).

13. For an analysis on the image of the wall in this novel see Lindow (2011).

14. On this topic see: Brennan and Downs (1979); Burns (2008); Sargent (1983) and Urbanowitcz (1978).

15. For a discussion on science and scientists in Le Guin's works see Donawerth (1997).

Many have been the studies on this award winning novel, especially on the depiction of an 'ambiguous' utopia as the subtitle suggests, the representation of a possible anarchist society and Le Guin's Taoist and pacifist beliefs (Moylan 1986). However, what makes the difference in this novel is, according to me, once again language; a language that shapes culture. Like on the LHD Le Guin creates a language that fits its society and makes it believable (see Bruhn 2014). The reader's awareness in a language that expresses a different society is mirrored by the protagonist, Shevek, who experiences a cultural shock in Urras where he discovers that some words do not exist (sexist) tell the reader about stereotypes and mysoginistic use of language. In Anarres people speak Pravic, a language which expresses the society's ideology and social practices; in Urras people speak Iotic. When Odonians settle in Anarres they inherit Pravic, a language in which we do not find possessive pronouns, a data that reflects the concept of mutual ownership at the basis of this society. Moreover, the conventions (or lack of) for greetings and titles are also significant for Pravic lack of address forms. This makes clear to the reader that the concepts of status or class in the Anarresti society are very different from our own. Odonians have two syllable computer assigned names and children area raised in communal schools because cooperation is a central concept in this world. The way people speak reveals this idea of cooperation and lack of hierarchies. The vocabulary itself highlights how certain ideas are completely extraneous to this world, words like slave or prison do not exist, even swear words cannot be translated into Pravic. The idea of sex and love relationships is so different that our bias and stereotypes cannot be translated into this language and

culture. Pravic lacks also taboo words, people speak freely and no topic is to be hidden. Cooperation and sharing are part of Le Guin's Taoist philosophy which comes out in many of her novels, here as in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Cummins 1979). Like in The LHD, in this novel Le Guin is influenced by American feminism and its topics, such as for example, Adrienne Rich's idea of "revision",[16] which the science fiction author adapted creating languages which reflect societies with a different gender awareness. Unveiling gender construction Le Guin enables a new way of thinking about human relationships and roles in society and neologisms render concepts which are not existent in our world.

Shevek is a translator figure, an individual who through a voyage into difference, re-thinks his own culture, understands another one and functions as a bridge between the two worlds (Cheyne 2006). Le Guin demonstrates how any language is strictly connected to culture and to a specific mindset. The novel is full to references to languages, the protagonist struggles to learn Iotic in order to publish his scientific work; many descriptions deal with differences in alien languages and abilities/inabilities to speak and translate; an emphasis is given to the difficulty in understanding each other when belonging to different worlds, languages and cultures. Sometimes, language seems to betray the characters, unable to speak clearly, to make themselves understood; but if language lacks something, the body reveals thoughts, beliefs and values. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding linguistic and genre innovation, the representation of gender and bodies in *The Dispossessed*

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16. I am referring to Rich's famous essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1972).

is very much stereotyped. On one planet women are wives and sexual objects with no intellectual freedom, on the other planet they are either equal to men but still depicted as motherly (like Takver the perfect mother and companion), or totally lacking motherhood (like Rulag, Shevek's absent mother). Bodies reflect our conceptions of gender roles, for example, the description of the typical Urras woman, Vea, is a clear reference to a patriarchal ideal of femininity: she is described as a "body-profiteer" with everything about her, clothes, jewels, voice and gestures asserting provocation. She does not eat but "picks and pecks" according to a feminine ideal beauty and behavior. Her vision of Annaresti women is very much stereotyped, in her view they have muscles, wear shabby clothes and do not shave; from her perspective they clearly are the antithesis of beauty and femininity. In Shevek's eyes Vea acts as a professional actress pretending to be someone she has to be; she performs her role, while thinking she is not a passive inhabitant of the planet but a woman, ruler of her life and of her husband's existence. Differing so much from the idea of femininity that Shevek possesses she is perceived by him only as a body, scarcely as a human being, he does not know what exactly she is. However, the opposition between Takver, Rulag and Vea permits Le Guin to deconstruct femininity ideals and roles and to demonstrate that bodies act according to culture.

5. *Return to the Past: a Feminine World and Language in 'Always Coming Home'*

Always Coming Home (1985) demonstrates a rich linguistic inventiveness and a powerful cultural syncretism. Le Guin

invents a linguistic and anthropological utopia settled in California; she creates an entire literary and cultural world. This linguistic utopia is born from an anthropological project, a search for a disappeared civilization. If Le Guin has always been interested in the culture of First Nation people and their languages connected to sound and music, in this utopian project she re-discovers a native culture which has been lost. Looking for a change in a possible future Le Guin goes back to the past. In fact, if we read the novel through her criticism we can find a useful reference in her essay included in the anthology *Dancing at the Edge of the World* entitled "A Non Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be" (1989) where she criticizes the European notion of utopia and the results of European imperialism with the 'discovery of America'. In the LeGuinian world the return often signifies rebirth, in this novel it is the protagonist's return to a pacific 'feminine' community opposed to a masculine aggressive one where she escapes in search of her father. The author's Taoist vision which deeply influences all her writing here is a starting point for questioning the hegemonic notion of a West which is the centre of the entire world. Actually, the search for a balanced society is central in all her works where the journey is always circular, a going back to the beginning enriched by the travel experience. As Elizabeth Cummins (1990a) underlines, for Le Guin journeying is an analogy for living. Also here, in fact, the protagonist, a woman, is a traveler who visits the different possible societies of this imaginary world but her travel is circular, she goes back home, as the title of the novel suggests. All the story is about travels, departures and returns which symbolize change and re birth. After a period of stay in a foreign place/space - the Condor society

of men - the protagonist, Stone Telling, goes back to the pacific feminine community she belongs to. Her story is an autobiography structured through a non-linear reading (Clarke 2010). Stone Telling is an elderly woman of the 'Blue Clay Lodge' who tells the reader the story of the Kesh population where women are considered equal to men and where motherhood is given a primary role. Motherhood, identity and language are strictly interconnected and in fact, naming is a bond with the matrilineal union, the name is chosen by the person at a certain moment of her life. Kesh society is a utopian place where there are no hierarchies between classes, a pacifist and democratic society that the author opposes to the Condor's society, highly hierarchical, militaristic and misogynist. The other society portrayed, the Condor society, is on the contrary, violent and full of hatred. The pacifism of the Valley is linked to their relation with the natural world and its inhabitants while for Condors knowledge, as government, and as part of power, is the domain of men. Only warriors are allowed to write, writing is considered as sacred, a thing for elected people; if women are caught reading they are blinded or lose a hand.

The structure of the novel, with many beginnings and a plurality of narrative voices, gives a choral voice to the reader. The picture of the 'home' is literally constructed by those who inhabit it; the multivocality and multiplicity of voices is the result of a literary pastiche that the author creates constructing this novel. Breaking the borders between genres the author inscribes in the text an autobiography, fables, poetry, an excerpt from a novel, plays, a glossary, a dictionary, recipes, drawings and maps. All these texts are part of the cultural encyclopedia of the Kesh population which is given authenticity also through

a tape of Kesh songs and poetry sold with the book. The author gives to the reader information about Kesh syntax and vocabulary and she presents a utopian language where there is no distinction between the self and the other, a language which does not mirror power relationships among members of the same society. Kesh is a language of relation, of connection more than a medium of communication. It is a language that epitomizes Le Guin's idea about language: "a potential bridge between different life-forms, societies, and sexes" (Cummins 1990a: 158). The utopian language unites and erases differences. Furthermore, Kesh people translate unconscious thought and the language of the body. Le Guin's creates 'a mother tongue', a feminine language in the French Feminist perspective, a language that embrace all stories, an oral and musical language. As a matter of fact, Kesh people do not distinguish between oral and written communication, and in doing so clearly recall Native American oral performances and spirituality. As for First Nation people, for the Kesh poetry and music are ordinary activities.

The author introduces in the plot another feminine voice, another narrator called Pandora, who is an anthropologist travelling to the utopian future from a dystopian present. Pandora's role as 'translator' between worlds and cultures functions as a bridge between the reader and the world of Stone Telling. However, Pandora is also the editor of the whole story, which she shapes and presents from her own point of view. In her sections the author records her process in learning Kesh language and culture. As Anderson underlines,

Both Pandora's and Stone Telling's experiences of culture shock serve to foreground the contrasts between worlds in

which women can express themselves and worlds in which they are oppressed. These experiences of culture shock are often conveyed to the reader as translation problems (Anderson 1992:21).

As a matter of fact, the notion of translation often comes up through the novel, as an act of communication and as a metaphor. First of all readers have to remember that we are reading two translations of two languages: Tok (a computer language, a sort of lingua franca) and Dayao (Stone Telling's father's people language). Kesh language is here translated into English; their whole culture is transposed into English in order to be read and known. As readers we know we are told we are reading a translation of a non-existent language which we can read looking at the glossary and at the examples given in the text. Le Guin's reference to her own idea of translation in the Preface is clear:

> the difficulty of translation from a language that doesn't yet exist is considerable, but there's no need to exaggerate it […] The ancient Chinese book called *Tao the ching* has been translated into English dozens of times, and indeed the Chinese have kept retranslating it into Chinese at every cycle of Cathay, but no translation can give us the book that Lao Tze (who may not have existed) wrote ("A First Note" in Le Guin 1985).

Translation, starting from its etymological root, is also a movement from one place to another, a physical translation which brings in a cultural one. Stone Telling translates herself moving from one culture to another, two opposed worlds (name change). Furthermore, in her Preface to the novel, Le Guin refers to her writing activity as translation; her narrative world is a form of translation of past cultures.

Translation is visualized as a means of communication between men and women, as the tool for communicating and exchanging ideas, for understanding each other.

6. Conclusions

Le Guin's novels demonstrate how bodily representation are strictly correlated to gender ideologies and practices and how it is possible to deconstruct them through a feminist cultural and linguistic revision. These examples highlight Le Guin's practice of revision of gender categories through time and through different narrative worlds. Furthermore, they exemplify the author's interest in public debates and complex issues over those years, an interest always connected to a feminist critique. In these novels it is perfectly clear that bodily representations are for Le Guin the essence of her own writing, bodies tells a story that character translate through their voices, and it is always a critical voice who stands as a hope for a better future.

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