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TRANSLATING INTO ITALIAN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S *HERLAND* (1915)

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Abstract – Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) setting is considered the first feminist literary utopia centred on a land inhabited and governed by women. During the geographical and metaphorical journey of three male characters through fictional locations in South America, they gradually question the working mechanism of the patriarchal order, discussing the hegemonic discourse, binary opposition, and the culturally embedded assumptions about gender. In the following essay I will analyse some passages from the Italian translation *Terradilei* (1980) by Angela Campana and *Terra di lei* (2011) by Anna Scacchi, with a short reference to Franco Venturi's version, published in 2015, in order to discuss the complex concepts of the active presence and creativity of the translator in the text, a self-sufficient node in a dynamic web, connected with the principle of fidelity in translation.

Keywords: female utopia/dystopia; professionalization of women; depression; independence; poietic encounter.

> *As I learned more and more to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I was of what we, with all our manhood, had done. You see, they had had no wars. They had had no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together – not by competition, but by united action.*
>
> (C. Perkins Gilman, *Herland,* 1915, p. 202).

1. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her struggle for women's rights

Charlotte Perkins Gilman has been often defined as the most original feminist that the United States of America has ever had. In 1993 she was named the sixth most influential woman of the twentieth century. In Charlotte's biography, Cynthia Davis recalls that the American realist novelist, literary critic, and playwright William Dean Howells regarded Perkins Gilman's profile and her mind as "the best" of all American women (Davis 2010, p.

XII; see also Ann 1997, p. 7); Rebecca West declared her the greatest woman in the world of her period, and H. G. Wells' first request upon visiting the States was to meet her (Davis 2010, p. XII). Nonetheless, Perkins Gilman reputation declined in the years before her death; thereafter, she dropped out of the public consciousness for several decades: "By the time of her death in 1935, none of her numerous works remained in print, and several decades passed before their gradual reappearance. In her final years, her once-radical views and her oft-reiterated message of public service had, by her own estimate, come to seem dated" (Davis 2010, p. XII).

On the public stage she was both famous and infamous, a circumstance that may explain why she wrote her autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. An Autobiography* (1935), to correct constant misunderstandings regarding her life and legacy. However, the text has often been judged as unreliable, and opaque, considering the most controversial questions that saw her as a protagonist, such as her ideas on marriage, motherhood, the professionalization of women, and, above all, the mental illness she was suffering from that defined her as the voice of depression and madness. In 1991, Joanne B. Karpinski observed that:

> Written at a time when Gilman felt her public reputation to be in eclipse and in the knowledge that a fatal illness would soon bring her public usefulness to an end, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* is an apologia pro vita sua. On one hand, Gilman sees her calling to be a 'world server' in the tradition of her Beecher forebears as a justification for the unconventional aspects of her personal life that scandalized her contemporaries; on the other, she sees the chronic bouts of physical debilitation and mental depression that plagued her lifelong after a postpartum breakdown at the age of twenty-four as extenuating what she regards as a failure to accomplish all she hoped. (Karpinski 1991, p. 157)

Gilman is renowned for fighting for female economic independence and the rights of wage-earning women, and helped found the National Household Economics Association, a nineteenth-century American women's organization which promoted the new field of home economics (see Stage 1997, pp. 17-33). She embraced Edward Bellamy's vision of peaceful and co-operative humanity and supported his call for state-supported domestic services as a way to restructure society. *Women and Economics. A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898) was her first book, one that gave her great fame. It was translated into seven languages and Gilman was immediately hailed as the leading intellectual in the women's movement. As a matter of fact, the suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt insisted that Charlotte deserved the top spot. It is essential to note that her book resonates deeply with today's continuing debate about gender difference and inequality.

Starting from her own experience, Gilman wrote a true treatise

concerning the economy of gender, in which she prefigured that the one and only necessary revolution would have been the freedom of women from the prison of the domestic sphere and their success in the public one. In *Love and Economics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman on 'The Woman Question'* (2005), Cynthia J. Davis wrote:

> Gilman's 'whole argument' in *Women and Economics* is fairly straightforward: as a result of middle-class women's economic dependence on men, they had become more feminine and less human, thwarting what Gilman took to be evolution's plan. The process would only reverse itself once these women learned to stand on their own two feet. And once they did, both they and the men, also stunted by current inequities, would finally fulfill their human potential, to the world's great benefit. Though others had made similar arguments, few had stated the case so succinctly or persuasively. (Davis 2005, p. 243)

At that time the suffragette movement was determined to obtain the right to vote for women. Charlotte recognized the importance of such an essential right of citizenship, but she deemed it insufficient. For her, it was extremely important the female involvement into the labour market as well as into the organization of society, and the refusal of the 'natural' gender division of roles. On the other hand, as Davis observed, "knowledge of her life and work reveal that, for her, woman was a question – and her own life a challenge – because female identity was still wrapped up in the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker, and because the process of disentanglement remained so difficult" (Davis 2005, p. 256). Perkins Gilman's own experiences taught her how difficult it was for a woman to decide which role should have prevailed, and how to realize such a goal. In fact, while she was writing *Women and Economics*, she was also working on how much space love and work should have occupied in her own and other women's lives. As Davis observes, "although *Women and Economics* maps life as capacious enough for both marriage and career, her papers suggest more friction and competition. It was typical of Gilman to parade her ideals before her public and to save her doubts for backstage" (2005, p. 256).

Moreover, she perfectly foresaw that many 'psychic disturbances' that, during that period, were associated with femininity – such as hysteria, that in the nineteenth century was considered 'the woman's disease' – were actually the dramatic result of male supremacy and the associative imprisonment and subjection of women in the domestic sphere. It is known that Gilman wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) after suffering from severe and continuous nervous breakdowns; for this reason she was advised by medical authorities to live a domestic life as far as possible, but such a regime sent her near the borderline of utter mental ruin. In this sense, in the story, she seemed to symbolically memorialize the insecurities and despair of her first marriage. In

the short story she discloses as a secret diary the record of the depression of the imaginative woman narrator and unveils the pain and conflicts existing between her and her husband, trying to reply to the stereotype of the mad or hysterical woman so attentively sketched by the society of her times. Totally misunderstood and unappreciated by her life companion, the protagonist identifies herself as the trapped woman behind the wallpaper (see Edelstein 2011, pp. 180-199; Kimura 2005, pp. 13-26).

2. *Herland*, a feminist/female/amazonian utopia without men

Herland was first published in 1915, the year after the outbreak of the First World War I, and deeply influenced the relationship between man and woman. It is considered a female/feminist/maternal utopia. Fátima Vieira observed in *The Concept of Utopia* (2010):

> Utopia, as a neologism, is an interesting case: it began its life as a lexical neologism, but over the centuries, after the process of deneologization, its meaning changed many times, and it has been adopted by authors and researchers from different fields of study, with divergent interests and conflicting aims. Its history can be seen as a collection of moments when a clear semantic renewal of the word occurred. The word utopia has itself often been used as the root for the formation of new words. These include words such as eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia, alotopia, euchronia, heterotopia, ecotopia and hyperutopia, which are, in fact, derivation neologisms. And with the creation of every new associated word the concept of utopia took on a more precise meaning. (Vieira 2010, p. 3)

Utopianism seeks perfectibility, but such an impulse is itself dystopic as perfection continually changes over time and with society. In the Introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility* (2010) the editors Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash assert that "Every utopia always comes with its implied dystopia" (Gordin *et al.* 2010, p. 2). Thus, utopia and dystopia are the two sides of the same coin. Moreover, the utopia of one person can be the dystopia of someone else. In fact, Gilman's utopia is also the site of such a cultural clash; as a matter of fact, it represents a lucid, persuasive, ironic analysis of modern life as she knew it. Michael R. Hill wrote: "*Herland* is the first half of a witty, sociologically astute critique of life in the United States" (Hill 1996, p. 251).

Gilman's ideal world is an isolated society composed entirely of women who reproduce by parthenogenesis (namely, asexually), through the force of a supreme desire for maternity. Hence, this tale rewrites the origin myths of this female society, as well as the stereotypes and the gender roles of the hetero-patriarchal society. In this utopic land there are no longer

untouchable distinctions between the public and the private spheres. Every activity is realized through cooperation. There are mothers, but no families or men at all. Friendship and sisterhood contain essential values, such as access to education, the prevention of conflicts, and their continual search for improved living conditions. Therefore, in this utopia, where there is no space for men because of an historical event that happened in their distant past, women are civilized, wise, logical, athletic, sensitive, pacific, fearless, independent.

The power these women exercise is far from being an instrument of dominion; after all, the women of *Herland* derive from one family, as they "all descended from one mother" (p. 192), who was the Queen-Priestess-Mother of them all (p. 194). The three men who discover this "land of women" during an expedition (Terry O. Nicholson, Jeff Margrave and Vandyck Jennings, who is the narrator) perceive Feminisia – which is how Terry, the most chauvinist character, refers to it – as a "(m)ighty lucky piece of land" (p. 52). Everything is beautiful, orderly, clean, perfectly looked after by extraordinary 'wonder-women', or ultra-women, or New Women who seem to recall the myth of the Amazons; but they are even a reflection of the new ideal of femininity that emerged in the late 19th century and challenged conventional gender roles, expressing autonomy and individuality.

The first description of the Herlanders is expressed by the narrator, Vandyck, a sociologist – like Gilman herself – who is open to understanding new ways of living. He observes that "they all wore short hair, some few inches at most, some curly, some not; all light and clean and fresh-looking" (p. 110). Their garments are simple in the extreme, and absolutely comfortable:

> There was a one-piece cotton undergarment, thin and soft, that reached over the knees and shoulders, something like the one-piece pajamas some fellows wear, and a kind of half-hose, that came up to just under the knee and stayed there – half elastic tops of their own, and covered the edges of the first.
> Then there was a thicker variety of union suit […] of varying weights and somewhat sturdier material […] Then there were tunics, knee-length, and some long robes. (*Herland* p. 96)

These women represent alterity par excellence and are constantly compared with the idea of femininity from the society the three male characters come from, so they are clearly characterized beyond any defined notion of gender. As a matter of fact, on their arrival the three men mistake the young girls for boys, and this kind of reference appears more than once during the narration. As there are no men, Herlanders do not follow the traditional patriarchal ideal of femininity, showing that gender is a social construction. Obviously, this utopian society the three men are experiencing and "studying" is constantly

compared to the one they come from. And this comparison is far from being flattering. As Van, the narrator, observes:

> As I learned more and more to appreciate what these women had accomplished, the less proud I was of what we, with all our manhood, had done. You see, they had had no wars. They had had no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies. They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together – not by competition, but by united action. (*Herland* p. 202)

Even if this new race of women is ready to encompass, without any reservations, the newness represented by love between men and women, opening their own society to the miracle of sexual reproduction, the care of children, the knowledge of other lands and populations, the women of Herland are not inclined to accept a worldview so deeply different from their own. So, even if they accept the new idea that two of them would have married two male visitors, not even the deep and intense love they have learned to feel for their husbands can push them to renounce their own rights:

> When in our pre-marital discussions one of those dear girls had said 'We understand it thus and thus' or 'We hold such and such to be true' we men, in our deep-seated convictions of the power of love, and our easy views about beliefs and principles, fondly imagined that we could convince them otherwise. What we imagined, before marriage, did not matter anymore than what an average innocent young girl imagines. We found the facts to be different. (p. 396)

In this female utopia, the first step towards their model of perfection rests on a shared form of knowledge, and a rational educational operation. Furthermore, their concept of love is a universal one that implies deep and eternal friendship, and the wealth of their own land, without resulting in any form of arrogant or aggressive patriotism. As a consequence of such an education, according to the three men, the beautiful women of Herland do not know the art of seduction, associated with the concept of femininity conceived through an essentially patriarchal perspective: "The thing that Terry had so complained of when we first came – that they weren't 'feminine' they lacked 'charm' now became a great comfort. Their vigorous beauty was an aesthetic pleasure, not an irritant. Their dress and ornaments had not a touch of the 'come-and-find-me' element" (p. 416). As a matter of fact, even their dresses are conceived exclusively in order to be comfortable and suit with a wide range of situations. Nowadays, we would call them 'unisex' or 'agender'.

But is Herland really the perfect place in which to live? As we know, in that land there is no theatre as we know it, or the engaging stories imbued with passion, jealousy, ambition, social and political conflicts, dispute between nations, the clash between good and evil. If Herland is the paradise

of beauty, well-being, and rights, in which independent, strong, and willful women have been able to develop their potential in a harmonious way, it is also a land without eros, passion, sensuality, in which Maternity is envisioned as the ultimate, supreme purpose of everything, reproposing a kind of eugenic reproductive policy. Obviously, for many of us today such a land could represent a dystopia. After all, is it 'utopic' that only the women who can give birth can be considered Ultra-women, or Wonder-women? How does their model of perfection appear to us, given that it does not admit anomalies, fragilities, obstacles?

Regarding this, Vittoria Franco has observed that, instead of imagining a "desirable" space, Gilman's aim could have been to imagine a different relationship between men and women – a relationship without dominion, freed from the idea(l) of possession and male superiority; the challenge is to build a communal world centred on respect and rights for everyone, in which women could shine in the public sphere. For Gilman, economics, education, clothing, prisons, parenting, male-female relationships, human evolution, social organization, and literature in particular, could help to transform the harsh realities and crushing inequalities of everyday life found pervasively in male-dominated societies, not only in her time. Hill writes:

> As a pedagogical device […], *Herland* is an engaging, persuasive, and highly effective effort. The novel's light, patient, sympathetic voice is a worked example of the tolerant, noncoercive instructional mode employed by Herland's exemplary tutors: Somel, Moadine, and Zava. Sociological instruction through fiction is one of Gilman's literary strengths, and it is difficult to find a more straightforward instance of this genre than Gilman's own *First Class in Sociology* (1897-1898), a short novel of hypothetical classroom dialogue serialized in the American Fabian. (Hill 1996, p. 253)

3. Translating *Herland* into Italian

The first Italian translation of *Herland* was realized by Angela Campana, and published in 1980 by La Tartaruga, Milano. The name of the translator does not appear on the book cover, nor on the title page. The title of the novel is translated as *Terradilei*, combining two words as in the English original. The narration is preceded by the translation of an Introduction signed by Anne J. Lane and written in 1978. The second translation, by Anna Scacchi, was published in 2011 by Donzelli in the series *Saggi* (*Essays*). The title of the volume is *La terra delle donne.* Herland *e altri racconti* (1891-1916), because it gathers together the translation of *Terra di lei* (in this case, the words of the title are not agglutinated, and the text was published singularly in 1980) with a selection of eleven short stories and essays by Gilman herself. A preface by the historian of philosophy Vittoria Franco entitled *Una donna*

alla ricerca della libertà (*A Woman Looking for Freedom*) opens the volume, followed up by another introduction by Scacchi, entitled *Una donna vittoriana a Utopia* (*A Victorian Woman in Utopia*). Scacchi, both translator and essayist, is a renowned expert in American Studies at the University of Padua, and has written extensively on Gilman.

Scacchi's translation is very meticulous and raises many issues concerning the difficulties of translating from English into Italian. For example, when the female translator converts her source text, written by an American feminist writer like Gilman, into Italian using the 'masculine plural' as a neutral 'inclusive' form for groups that include exclusively female people, it is clear that she is trying to present the narrator's point of view. The narrator, Vandyck Jennings' view is a patriarchal one, even if this character is very receptive to the new world he is describing and will eventually alter his own mindset in favour of that new society. Moreover, Scacchi wrote about the first translation by Campana, lamenting that one of the most uncanny passages in the text, from the point of view of a feminist genealogy, does not appear in the publication. This is the missing sentence, from chapter V: "There was literally no one left on this beautiful high garden land but a bunch of hysterical girls and some older slave women" (Gilman 1998, p. 47).

In the considered passage, Van is reporting the history of Herland in his own words and how it became a place without men. This is Scacchi's own translation: "Non c'era rimasto letteralmente più nessuno in questo paradiso di montagna, se non un gruppo di ragazze isteriche e alcune schiave più anziane" (Gilman 2011, p. 55). In this example, "beautiful high garden land" is transformed into a "mountain paradise", but – above all – the translator does not sidestep the term "hysterical" which is important if we consider that it is used by Van at the beginning of the narration; without mentioning the question of the "female malady" which is fundamental in Gilman's writing and could not be simply erased.

The third Italian translation is *Terradilei* by Franco Venturi (where all the words of the Italian title are again fused together), with parallel text, and published in 2015 by La Vita Felice. Venturi translates the previous passage as follows: "Non c'era letteralmente nessuno in questa località di montagna con bei giardini, ma solo un gruppo di ragazze isteriche e alcune donne schiave più anziane" (Gilman 2015, p. 168). His Italian translation of "this beautiful high garden land" misses the term 'high' and, in the following part of the sentence, uses a truncated structuring that eliminates the article 'dei' (i.e. 'con *dei* bei giardini'). The result is an inelegant and unnatural version of Perkins Gilman's text that does not reflect her refined and meticulous phrasing. Franco Venturi has been described as an internationally known famous historian of the second part of the twentieth century. His Introduction to the text is very short, yet brilliant. On the other hand, Scacchi's appears

more elegant. Her translation reveals a deep knowledge of Gilman's narrative, in addition to Gilman's attempt to transform the world through literature. In fact, in her Introduction she writes:

> Lo scopo di Gilman è […] quello di trasformare il mondo, e la letteratura ne è uno dei mezzi, anzi un mezzo tra i più potenti, grazie alla sua capacità di rendere le idee astratte carne, di produrre nuove possibili trame per le vite dei lettori, di liberare le donne dalle trappole narrative che confinano il loro essere nel mondo. (Gilman 2011, p. XXXI; introduction by Scacchi A.)

Obviously, the translation of a literary text can also free women from such 'narrative traps', if the translator aims at contributing to help his/her readers to destroy the chains of preconceived notions and ideals; after all, that should be the purpose of any utopian text too: to free people from their identification with codes of behaviour imposed by a particular society. In particular, Gilman's writing represents a powerful act of agency for women, that is characterized by both a humorous and satirical vein which the translator should not fail to repropose in his/her target text. Despite that – incidentally – translating a forgotten and metaphorically "silenced text" (because of the gender of its author, as in Gilman's case) is, more than ever, a cultural empowering act.

In this sense, there seems to be little doubt over the translator's visibility, as postulated by Laurence Venuti. Every translation choice in the target text declares his/her presence and creativity. Moreover, Enrico Terrinoni's analysis, in his *Oltre abita il silenzio. Tradurre la letteratura* (2019), shows that the équipe's presence (proof-readers, revisors, editors, publishers, and so on) are part of the translation process, often working in disguise under the name of the author himself/herself. The target text is a re-creation, with the translator as an active node in a complex and dynamic web – we could say paraphrasing Céline Frigau Manning (Cordingley, Manning 2017, p. 260). Good examples of that seem to be the choices made in the three different translations of *Herland* that I have analysed. If we consider the following passage from the source text, it is interesting to note the two different approaches to its translation.[1]

Source text	**Trans 1**	**Trans 2**
Never, anywhere before, had I seen women of **precisely** this quality. **Fishwives and market women** might show	**Non avevo mai visto** donne così. **Avevo visto pescivendole, venditrici ambulanti** con quella forza fisica; ma erano poi	**Mai prima di allora avevo visto** donne del genere. **Le pescivendole e le venditrici dei mercati** a volta mostrano

[1] In the following table, the bold lettering is meant to signal the parallel translations of the same portion of text that will be discussed in the ensuing pages. Indeed, the underlined expression is the most problematic case of mistranslation by Angela Campana's version.

similar strength, but it was coarse and heavy. These were **merely athletic - light and powerful**. **College professors, teachers, writers - many women** showed similar intelligence but **often wore a strained nervous look**, while these were **as calm as cows**, for all their evident intellect. We **observed pretty closely** just then, **for all of us felt that** it was a crucial moment. **The leader** gave some word of command and beckoned us on, and the surrounding mass moved a step nearer. (Gilman, p. 86)	donne corpulente e sgraziate, mentre queste erano **semplicemente atletiche, vigorose e leggere**. E avevo visto **scrittrici, professoresse d'università** con quella luce d'intelligenza nello sguardo, **ma avevano poi spesso facce tirate e ansiose.** Mentre queste erano serene, **placide come la luna**. Le **spiavamo molto attenti** anche noi, in quei momenti cruciali. E poi **la capobanda** diede un ordine e ci fece segno di muoversi, e allora **tutte quante attorno a noi** avanzarono d'un passo. (Campana, Gilman 1980, p. 46)	una forza fisica simile, ma di un tipo volgare e rude. Loro erano **semplicemente atletiche**, **agili e vigorose**. Molte **donne, professoresse universitarie, insegnanti, scrittrici,** hanno un aspetto altrettanto intelligente, **ma è spesso accompagnato da uno sguardo affaticato e nervoso.** Loro invece, anche se erano chiaramente dotate di un intelletto vivace, sembravano **placide come giumente al pascolo**. Le **osservammo attentamente**, a quel punto, **perché avevamo tutti la sensazione che** si trattasse di un momento cruciale. **La donna che era a capo del gruppo** pronunciò delle parole con tono di comando e ci fece cenno di proseguire, mentre **la massa che ci circondava** si fece più vicina. (Scacchi, Gilman 2011, pp. 24-25)

At first glance, it is clear that Scacchi's translation of *Herland*, published in 2011, possesses a stricter consonance with the source text. In fact, even if her volume is not a parallel text version, Scacchi's version does not censor or change any part of the original version; rather, whenever it is possible, she tries to clarify in order to comply with Gilman's text. For example, when Gilman describes women of Herland "as calm as cows", the troublesome comparison is translated by Scacchi with "placide come giumente al pascolo" (Gilman 2011, p. 24),[2] while, on the contrary, Campana opts for an uncommon "placide come la luna" (Gilman 1980, p. 46).[3] As Dana Seitler

[2] "(A)s placid as grazing mares", my translation.
[3] "(A)s placid as the moon", my translation.

(2003) demonstrates, Gilman uses livestock analogies to establish distinctions between nature and culture and to expose the crude economic underpinnings of patriarchal protectionism. In particular, she equates the excessive emphasis on women's sexual difference with the over-sexing of milk cows perceived as walking milk-machines. From this perspective, the reference to cows does not appear to be a degrading comparison, as it could seem, but rather it is a strong connection with Gilman's point of view; thus, it should not be transformed, as Campana does, because it is a characteristic image of Gilman's narrative.

Moreover, the sentence "Fishwives and market women might show similar strength, but it was coarse and heavy" (Gilman 1998, p. 46) is translated by Scacchi with: "Le pescivendole e le venditrici dei mercati a volta mostrano una forza fisica simile, ma di un tipo volgare e rude" (Gilman 2011, p. 24). Here each translation choice seems to be wary in lauding the Wonder-Women of Herland, without any intention to degrade, mortify, and humiliate the ordinary women working in the markets. Campana completely transforms the sentence structure: "Avevo visto pescivendole, venditrici ambulanti con quella forza fisica; ma erano poi donne corpulente e sgraziate, mentre queste erano semplicemente atletiche, vigorose e leggere" (Gilman 1980, p. 46). In this version the sentence opens with "avevo visto" ("had I seen"), used by Gilman only in the very first sentence of the passage, while in Campana's translation it is repeated three times over a few lines. Moreover, the sequence after the semicolon clearly contrasts the fishwives and the market women (who are defined as "corpulent" and "ungraceful") with the ideal women of the utopian land ("athletic", "strong", and "light"). It is a physical humiliation Gilman would have never realized or imagined.

Another similar example seems to be "the leader" of the last paragraph of quotations. Scacchi translates "la donna che era a capo del gruppo" (Gilman 2011, p. 25) in order to underline the female leadership. The same term is translated to "la capobanda" by Campana, infusing a sense of irony ("capobanda" as "band conductor") or of danger ("capobanda" as "ringleader"). From this perspective, Scacchi underlines the female authorship as an extra-ordinary form of female empowerment and agency without any sense of inappropriateness which seems a perfect fit with Gilman's narrative.

Obviously, translations sometimes reveal declared and undeclared references to previous translations. This seems to be the case for Franco Venturi's version. For example, when he translates:

> **Non avevo mai visto donne così.** Avevo visto **pescivendole, venditrici ambulanti** con quella forza fisica; ma erano poi donne corpulente e sgraziate, mentre queste erano **semplicemente atletiche, vigorose e leggere**. E avevo visto scrittrici, professoresse d'università con quella luce di intelligenza nello sguardo, ma avevano poi spesso facce tirate e ansiose. Mentre queste erano **serene, placide come la luna**.

> Le spiavamo molto attenti anche noi, in quei momenti cruciali.
> E poi **la capobanda** diede un ordine e ci fece segno di muoversi, e allora tutte quante attorno a noi avanzarono di un passo.[4] (Gilman 2015, p. 87)

As observed before, Venturi was primarily an historian; perhaps that is why his translation seems to over-rely on Campana's version. Sometimes there are minor translation choices undertaken, presumably by Venturi himself, because there is no clear indication of who did them; anyway, the text is substantially the same. In the previous short excerpt, for example, the evidence of such a connection is highlighted by the repetition of "avevo visto" and, in particular, the choices of "la capobanda" and "serene, placide come la luna" that unveil Campana's hand.

When we talk of the visible presence of the translator within the target text, we are discussing a real occupancy and ownership, as shown earlier. In fact, in Venturi's text it is easy enough to recognize Campana's version. On the other hand, there are many points in which Campana's target text seems to drift dangerously from the original text, losing the depiction of the female characters who have originality and strength that Gilman seems to provide for them. This is the case where "the leader" is translated as "la capobanda", and with the complete removal of the sentence containing the H-word.

4. Nodes in a web: the long-standing question of fidelity

Enrico Terrinoni observes that each translation becomes a substantial part of future readings concerning the author(s) of the source texts in other languages: "un nuovo testo che verrà riscritto, ritradotto e rimesso in circolo attraverso letture future. Queste genereranno altri testi (mentali, mnemonici se vogliamo), che una volta esplicati, ovvero ancora una volta tradotti, ne produrranno di altri. E così via, ad infinitum" (Terrinoni 2019, p. 124). In this sense, the re-use of Campana's translation realized by Venturi in his own version looks paradigmatic. On the contrary, there is the question of fidelity to the source text written by Gilman. In fact, many references, terms, and discourses peculiar to the author seem to be eluded or – even worse – misunderstood by both Campana and Venturi; for example, the livestock analogies, the use of a social-Darwinian vocabulary concerning "sex-attributes", the vision for progressive gender relations, the fight for women's rights to enter the public sphere and the world of work.

Is it fair if the translator's creativeness allows him/her to slip away completely from perspectives and concepts that are peculiar to Gilman

[4] From now on the lettering in bold font signals the sections from the quotation discussed immediately after. The underlined expression is the major problematic case of mistranslation by Angela Campana's version.

herself? In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, which came out in 1992, André Lefevere affirmed that:

> All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever-increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (Lefevere 2004, p. VII)

It is also necessary to consider how precisely a translated text or document has to conform to its source. It is known that one of the main issues distressing every translator (even the non-literary ones, dealing with their certified translations) is the much-debated question of fidelity. Evidently, literary translation has always served a special purpose or many purposes at the same time, and each time it has been shaped by a certain force, power, ideology, and political perspective. In *Translation as Rewriting: The Concept and Its Implications on the Emergence of a National Literature* (2001) Berrin Aksoy observes that:

> […] translation takes the form of rewriting an original text, since it is performed under certain constraints and for certain purposes. The original text is chosen for a certain purpose and the guidelines of translation are defined to serve this purpose by the translator and/or by those who initiate the translation activity. In this case, rewriting in order to fit that purpose, along with fidelity to the original, become the main issues for the translator. (Aksoy 2001, unpaginated)

Even if not simply derivative and servile, as it was considered traditionally (Shuping 2013, p. 59), translation has a number of constraints: first of all, the lexical, morphological, syntactical, and semantic ones, but also the rules of genres, the adherence to particular traits and tropes, and not least, the poetics of the translated author and text. In short, translation seems to be a "poietic encounter" – as Franco Buffoni defined it – between the translator and the original text, in which a momentary 'betrayal' has been made in order to be 'loyal' to the author's loftiness. In *Franco Buffoni: The Poietic Encounter* (2011), Jacob Blakesley asserts that:

> […] the poietic encounter is, at heart, the standpoint from which Buffoni analyzes others' translations, it is also the standard by which his own versions ask to be interpreted. […] It is not, then, a question of 'fidelity': the famous dichotomies (from Cicero's *ut orator/ut interpres*, brutta fedele/bella infedele,

> and target-oriented/source-oriented, to Lawrence Venuti's invisibility/visibility, and Mounin's *traductions des professeurs/traductions des poetes*) are no longer valuable concepts, as Buffoni argues. (Blakesley 2011, pp. 286, 293)

The autonomy of the translation does not become unmoored from its source text, nevertheless, retains artistic independence through an intense poietic dialogue with the original author and text. For Buffoni, translation is envisioned as an existential experience intended to relive the creative act that inspired the original. From this perspective, it seems clear that a literary translator should work exclusively on texts and authors he/she respects and is deeply acquainted with. In other words, he/she should know and understand the context, the aims, the undertones, the style, even the understatements and the silences of the text in translation, in order to give it a new life in a different language and in a different context.

4.1. Autonomy and fidelity in translation: Herland versus USA

In a crucial passage of Gilman's novel concerning the comparison between Herland and the United States of America (where the three male characters come from), many exemplary issues show up clearly; in particular, there is a harsh critique of the androcentric society associated with a teasing condemnation of the sexual division of labour that relegated women to a 'disabled', subaltern, passive existence, totally enclosed within roles as wives and mothers. During an intense dialogue between the American male visitors and the new women, Gilman juxtaposes the concept of education (the real innovation of Herland), a society keen on any inclination towards diversity and improvement, with the manifest narrow-mindedness of the three men. In fact, the utopic land described by Gilman is always geared towards newness, learning, curiosity, open-mindedness, while the three explorers exhibit a clear inclination to intolerance, sexism, racism, fanaticism, typical of the colonialist strategy of domination and oppression.

In *A Unique Story*, the fifth chapter, the author introduces the two contrasting groups of speakers: the visitors, who try to convince their listeners about the perfection of their world, even if they know they are repeating the usual propaganda techniques, and some women of Herland, who are eager to learn and ameliorate ideas in their own society without any bias:

> We tried to put in a good word for competition, and they were keenly interested. Indeed, we soon found from their earnest questions of us that they were prepared to believe our world must be better than theirs. They were not sure; they wanted to know; but there was no such arrogance about them as might have been expected.
> We rather spread ourselves, telling of the advantages of competition: how it

> developed fine qualities; that without it there would be "no stimulus to industry." Terry was very strong on that point.
> "No stimulus to industry," they repeated, with that puzzled look we had learned to know so well. "STIMULUS? TO INDUSTRY? But don't you LIKE to work?"
> "No man would work unless he had to," Terry declared.
> "Oh, no MAN! You mean that is one of your sex distinctions?"
> "No, indeed!" he said hastily. "No one, I mean, man or woman, would work without incentive. Competition is the – the motor power, you see." (Gilman 1998, p. 60)

Terry represents the conventional male chauvinist, nationalist, colonialist, and classist attitude. He is a wealthy and privileged womanizer as well as an icon of the capitalistic spirit. For this reason, he feels completely out of context and lost in Gilman's paradise. Scacchi's translation perfectly renders any suggestion and ironic allusion that the implied author conveys through the narrator's point of view:

> Cercammo di **mostrar loro** i privilegi della competizione e quelle donne mostrarono un **vivo interesse.** In effetti presto ci accorgemmo che erano pronte a credere che il nostro mondo fosse di gran lunga migliore del loro. Non ne erano sicure, volevano sapere, ma non avevano l'arroganza che ci si sarebbe potuti aspettare.
> Ci dilungammo ampiamente a parlare dei vantaggi della competizione, di come sviluppasse eccellenti qualità e del fatto che senza di essa non ci sarebbe "l'incentivo a lavorare". Terry insistette molto su questo punto.
> "Non ci sarebbe l'incentivo a lavorare", ripeterono con quello sguardo perplesso che avevamo imparato a conoscere bene. "*Incentivo*? A *lavorare*? Ma non vi *piace* lavorare?".
> "Nessun uomo lavorerebbe se non vi fosse costretto", dichiarò Terry.
> "Ah, nessun *uomo*! Volete dire che questa è una delle vostre caratteristiche sessuali?".
> "Assolutamente no!", si affrettò a replicare lui. "Nessuno, voglio dire nessun uomo né donna, lavorerebbe senza un incentive. La competizione, sapete, è […] la forza mortice". (Gilman 2011, pp. 60-61; transl. Scacchi)

Scacchi's translation appears refined and pleasantly antiquated (see the use of "mostrar loro",[5] and "vivo interesse",[6] for example), and succeeds in reestablishing the style and the tone used by Gilman, even if something has to be sacrificed in order to obtain a smooth reading act; for instance, "from their earnest questions of us" turns out to be implicit. On the other hand, on this occasion, Campana translates every single word (followed closely by Venturi, whose translation is identical – see Gilman 2015, p. 203) even if the result is less elegant, to say; as in "ma non avevano quell'arroganza che

[5] "(T)o show them", my translation.
[6] "(K)een interest", my translation.

avrebbero anche potuto avere", in which there is an useless and redundant repetition of the verb "avere" / "to have"; or, again, in "e chiedevano", set soon after the comma, that sounds vague and inadequate, in order to translate "they wanted to know" from the source text:

> Tentammo una difesa della competizione, e loro ci ascoltarono con interesse. Devo dire che ci accorgemmo presto, **dalle loro assidue domande**, che erano pronte a credere che il nostro mondo fosse migliore del loro. Non ne erano sicure, **e chiedevano**; **ma non avevano quell'arroganza che avrebbero anche potuto avere**.
> Ci diffondemmo a illustrare i pregi della competizione: affinava la capacità, dicemmo, e davano il necessario stimolo a lavorare. Terry batté molto su questo punto.
> – Stimolo a lavorare – ripeterono loro, con quel fare perplesso che ormai conoscevamo bene. – *Stimolo*? Ma non vi *piace* lavorare?
> – Nessun uomo lavorerebbe se non ci fosse costretto – dichiarò Terry.
> – Ah, nessun uomo! È un'altra delle vostre distinzioni fra i sessi.
> – No, no! – s'affrettò a spiegare lui. – Volevo dire nessuno, né uomo né donna. Nessuno lavorerebbe **se non fosse spinto a farlo**. La competizione è […] la forza motrice, ecco. (Gilman 1980, pp. 89-90)

On careful analyses, the sentence "se non fosse spinto a farlo" ("if he was not pushed to do it") also seems insufficient to translate "(no one) would work without incentive", because it seems clear that the author had the intention to insist once again on the necessity of an economic stimulus to push the Western citizens to participate in social welfare. Thus, the capitalist society ends up undermining the development of any sense of community obligation and commitment. In this regard, Jeanne M. Connell writes that "Gilman's purpose in *Herland* is to highlight the problems inherent in the individualistic tendencies in American society and to suggest remedies" (Connell 1995, p. 23). Obviously, in Gilman's novel, Terry's presumptuous claims are easily dismantled by a couple of unsophisticated but precise comments made by a small group of female individuals who live in a society where there is no poverty, no crime, no pollution, no war, no disease, and who have learned to grow together by united action, mutual respect, and shared goals.

4.2. The question of female spaces: "What is 'the home'?"

Another influential topic addressed in this Section of the novel is the question of maternity and the so-called 'woman question'. Soon after the previous quoted passage, Gilman gives space and voice to the quintessential misogynist, Terry Nicholson, who has to confront the young and beautiful Somel, who is assigned to teach Van how to read, write, and speak the Herlandian language as well as to learn English herself, and Zava, one of the older women who tutors the three men in the ways of Herland:

> "It is not with us" they explained gently, "so it is hard for us to understand. Do you mean, for instance, that with you no mother would work for her children without the stimulus of competition?"
> No, he (Terry) admitted that he did not mean that. Mothers, he supposed, would of course work for their children in the home; but the world's work was different – that had to be done by men, and required the competitive element.
> All our teachers were eagerly interested. […] "Tell us – what is the work of the world, that men do – which we have not here?"
> "Oh, everything," Terry said grandly. "The men do everything, with us." He squared his broad shoulders and lifted his chest. "We do not allow our women to work. Women are loved – idolized – honored – kept in the home to care for the children."
> "What is 'the home'?" asked Somel a little wistfully.
> But Zava begged: "Tell me first, do NO women work, really?"
> "Why, yes," Terry admitted. "Some have to, of the poorer sort."
> "About how many – in your country?"
> "About seven or eight million," said Jeff, as mischievous as ever. (Gilman 1998, p 60-1)

Once again, the total opposition between the two cultures is clear in analysis, especially in connection with the space(s) occupied by women in society. The country Terry and the other male visitors come from is envisaged as an individualistic society. Connell observes that in the story the sense of community and solidarity displayed by the fictional Herlanders is compared to the isolation of real American family life. Gilman suggests that isolation also serves to separate women from public life, enclosing them within the 'domestic sphere':

> Nature relegates women to the roles of wife and mother. In Victorian society the ideal woman managed the household servants and devoted her life to her children and husband. The romantic ideal was that these women were loved, idolized, and honored by their husbands.
> But actual family life in Victorian America fell far short of these ideals. […] The undemocratic nature of social relations in the home also impacts negatively on the public sphere. The inequalities between men and women in the private sphere that existed under liberalism at the turn of the century, led Gilman to conclude that Victorian domestic life was not a good training ground for democracy. (Connell 1995, p. 27)

In short, Gilman redesigns public and private spaces in order to allow women the opportunity to participate in all aspects of public life; especially, in the workplace. In this respect, once again Scacchi renders Terry's perspective properly through Van's eyes and the stunned reaction of his female listeners that seems to embarrass both Van and Jeff:

> Le madri, pensava lui (Terry), avrebbero sicuramente lavorato per i propri figli, a casa. Ma gli affari del mondo erano una cosa diversa… dovevano essere svolti dagli uomini e richiedevano l'elemento della competizione.

> Le nostre insegnanti erano tutte vivamente interessate.
> "Desideriamo così tanto imparare […] Diteci […] che cosa sono questi affari del mondo che fanno gli uomini, che noi qui non abbiamo?"
> "Oh, di tutto", disse Terry con tono di importanza. "Da noi gli uomini si occupano di tutto". Drizzò le ampie spalle e gonfiò il petto. "Non permettiamo alle nostre donne di lavorare. Le donne sono amate […] idolatrate […] onorate […] e vengono tenute in casa, a prendersi cura dei bambini".
> "Che cos'è la 'casa'?", chiese Somel, con un'aria pensosa.
> Ma Zara chiese: "Prima, però, ditemi, davvero non c'è alcuna donna che lavori?"
> "Be', sì", ammise Terry. "Qualcuna delle più povere è costretta a farlo".
> "Circa sette o otto milioni", disse Jeff, con la solita malignità. (Gilman 2011, p. 61)

In this respect, Campana's version appears again less flowing and accurate regarding the choice of words and the exact tone of the narration. Just think of the definition "lavoro nel mondo", so abstract and blurry that becomes difficult to understand in Italian; or "curare i bambini" that appears limiting and imprecise in relation to the source text, as "curare" – differently from "prendersi cura di", used by Scacchi in her translation – means 'to nurse'.

> Le madri, in casa, naturalmente lavoravano per i loro figli. Ma il lavoro nel mondo era diverso: quello dovevano farlo gli uomini, e lì ci voleva la competizione.
> Loro ascoltavano attente.
> − Siamo così curiose di sapere. […] Il vostro dev'essere un mondo vario e meraviglioso. Diteci cos'è questo lavoro nel mondo che devono fare gli uomini, che noi qui non abbiamo?
> − Oh, tutto – disse grandiosamente Terry.− Da noi fanno tutto gli uomini…− Drizzò le spalle e gonfiò il petto. − Noi non permettiamo alle nostre donne di lavorare. Noi le donne le amiamo, le onoriamo, le idolatriamo. Le teniamo in casa, nel **santuario domestico**, a curare i bambini.
> − Che cos'è il santuario domestico? − chiese Somel.
> Ma Zava s'intromise: −No, **per favore,** ditemi prima: davvero nessuna donna lavora?
> − Be', qualcuna sì, per forza − disse Terry.− Le più povere.
> − E quante sono, nel vostro paese?
> − Sette o otto milioni − disse Jeff, il malign. (Gilman 1980, p. 90)

Moreover, in the quoted passage, Campana inserts additional terms that risk betraying Gilman's source text. Such is the case with "nel santuario domestico" / "into the domestic sanctuary", that the translator uses as if "home" / "casa" could not be accurate enough. Another good example is Rava's reply to Terry: "No, per favore, ditemi prima: davvero nessuna donna lavora?". The addition of the adverb "per favore" / "please" completely transforms the tone of the sentence, which appears imploring and suppliant instead of parenthetical and elucidative. Naturally, Franco Venturi's version follows Campana's in every respect. In the opening of the following chapter,

even if the character of Van had always been proud of his country, he has to admit that "these women, without the slightest appearance of malice or satire, continually bring up points of discussion which we spent our best efforts in evading" (Gilman 1996, p. 62). For Gilman, this awareness represents the first step toward a radical transformation of society. In *With Her in Ourland*, the sequel to *Herland* published in 1916, Gilman presents the second half of the so-called Herland chronicle. In it the narration dissects the patriarchal and technological madness of World War I, and points constructively to an alternative future based on the pragmatic application of feminist values (Hill 1996, p. 251). Unfortunately, the text is still waiting for an Italian translation.

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