

# GENDER IDENTITY IN TRANSLATION: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF TRANSPOSING NON-BINARY CHARACTERS INTO ROMANIAN



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## Abstract

The created world of Ada Palmer's *Terra Ignota* series depicts a future society where gender identity has undergone a process of uniformisation, resulting in the erasure of gendered language. The novels take the form of a confessional (a recounting of the events of the past) which are published in the future society without the express consent of the other characters taking part in the depicted course of events. The narrator, in a motivated show of rebellion against their society's current ideology (discussed both at the beginning of the series and as they progress with the narration), reinscribes gendered pronouns onto the unknowing characters; however, this is done on an arbitrary basis, which the narrator does not always discuss. The present paper aims to emphasize the growing number of LGBTQ+ novels published and the impossibility of transposing them into Romanian due to the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun that does not default to the masculine. The paper analyses *Too Like the Lightning* by Ada Palmer in order to specify the various nuances that would be lost in the cultural adaptation and translation of the novel into Romanian, a translation which has yet to occur, given the complexity and constraints of the novel and the depicted ideology behind it.

## Key words

LGBTQ+, queer, translation, LGBTQ+ translation, gender-neutral in translation, cultural translation

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## Introduction: Gender, translation, and the society of the future

Romanian is viewed as a three-gender Romance language, with its grammatical gender split into feminine, masculine, and neuter, all accompanied by syntactic agreement. These syntactic agreements present in the singular and plural forms as such: (for feminine: weird girl [fată *ciudată*], weird girls [fete *ciudate*]; for masculine: weird boy [băiat *ciudat*], weird boys [băieți *ciudați*], and for the neuter gender, which only distinguishes itself as neuter in the plural form: weird accent [accent (M) *ciudat* (M)], weird accents [accente (F) *ciudate* (F)] (Dinu et al. 2012, 120).

The same issue is illustrated by Croitor and Giurgea in their paper, “On the so-called Romanian ‘neuter’”, wherein they discuss the lack of a distinctive neuter gender marker in syntactic agreement and thus concluding that the feminine plural form for neuter agreement in adjectives is merely a “morphological default” which does not take into consideration gender (37).

Romanian has three nominal agreement classes, but only a binary gender opposition between masculine and feminine on targets of agreement (adjectives, participles, determiners and other nominal functional items) and pronouns. The three nominal agreement classes are masculine, feminine and the so-called “neuter”, which triggers masculine agreement in the singular and feminine agreement in the plural (Croitor and Giurgea 2009, 21).

The neuter in Romanian invariably follows the pattern of masculine-singular, feminine-plural in terms of noun form and agreement. Thereby what is created is a situation in which a neuter gender is present, as it is categorized and upheld as such, but this neuter is present with noun and agreement endings pertaining to the feminine and masculine grammatical genders.

Taking into consideration the present situation in which new media containing nonbinary or agender characters is created in the Anglophone world, the present paper aims to discuss the difficulties imposed by the translation of such content into Romanian, wherein the three genders present in the grammar force the translator to inadvertently gender queer characters, or to devise other methods of translation which would avoid the use of any syntactic agreement displaying gender (such as in adjectives and in pronouns).

The novel used to give a case study on the possible solution for non-gendered language is *Too like the Lightning* by Ada Palmer, pertaining to the Terra Ignota series, published in 2016 by Head of Zeus. The society of the *Terra Ignota* series (*Too like the Lightning* being the first installment) has abolished all genders, and all inhabitants go by the gender-neutral ‘they’. However, as it is shown in the novel, the mandatory disregard of gender (and religion) has issued a reactionary movement within the ruling class endowed with the possibility of eschewing the law. The text of the *Terra Ignota* series invites the reader, in the first volume, not to perform gender, but to challenge what exactly it is besides biology that dictates the performance of gender as such. The main plot of the series in which it is shown that the pretense of peace was upheld with the aid of calculated assassinations (disguised as car accidents among others) is aided by the discussion of gender-neutrality and its imposition onto the global society as a means of creating equality (and, consequently, censorship in what regards discussing the prevailing gender inequality within the society).

The novel is intended as a reflection of a future society in which this gender-neutral identity has become the norm, with any mention of gender identity being

outlawed. As such, it is an exaggeration of the American society in which “the current trend which views the gender pronouns conventionally referring to men and women (like the personal pronoun he/she in English) [are seen] as inadequate, because [they are] unable to refer to those who don’t identify with this gender binary. In English the use of the singular they has been offered as an alternative gender neutral and/or gender inclusive pronoun (also defined as “unisex they,” “common-gender,” or “epicene” pronoun).” (Di Sabato and Perri 2020, 367).

Mycroft Canner, the implied narrator, begins his narration not with an apology, as the chapter is titled *An apology to the reader*, but with a challenge: in a world where it is not the biological features which determine the gender, what other aspects could determine the gender used for characters by the narrator to grant them the gendered pronouns?

## **Methodology**

In the elaboration of the paper, a combination of literary analysis and comparative analysis has been used. These two were aided by sociolinguistic considerations so as to motivate certain conclusions and postulations. Specific linguistic and grammatical features in the Target language are analyzed before an exercise in translation is conducted, discussing the resulted forms of the TT.

Existing research in the field of translation and queer theory are also analyzed, putting into perspective the challenges encountered by translators in recreating gender ambiguity or understanding gender ambiguity before its transposition into the TL. Extant sociocultural features of the target culture are also emphasized in an effort to contextualize the grammatical choices translators must make and to explore the challenges and implications of translating gender identity, particularly non-binary characters, into Romanian.

Machine translation has not yet been taken into account, as there is a limitation imposed on the scope of the paper, however future papers on the matter of translation aim to showcase the inherent biases of AI used for translation where there is a machine-learning component, and the bias behind the mentality of the machine, namely of the programmers and specialists involved in its development.

Instead of there being a specific conclusion in mind, where only one answer is correct, and given that the field of translation is not an exact science, but a matter of creativity on the part of the translator, which can result in multiple valid target texts, the analysis herein aims to highlight the many approaches created in the act of translation in Romanian for the purpose of accommodating nonbinary or agender people and characters. An overarching question that will remain even at the conclusion of the study is whether Romanian not as a language, but as a culture, can grow (both linguistically and culturally) to accept queer identities.

This SF novel, for any other genre would not fit it as well, raises a question about gender and fiction: it is easy to attribute the gender neutral to alien races, and to allow them to perform androgyny. However, when the gender is erased from a decidedly human society, whose tradition is still heavily influenced by gender, to what extent is it a feasible action, and what purpose does it have? As the narrative evolves to shift around the various hives of the future society, we find an all-encompassing and pervasive obsession with not only gender but also religion among the ruling hives.

The narrative thus questions the stability of a system that abolishes gender in a setting which would find ways to monitor for the use thereof with the exception of the places under the aegis of the hives. The gender attribution as such is challenged by Mycroft not as being dated, but as being arbitrary, motivating that biological sex is not the standard by which gender should be attributed, but by the features and demeanor of the person in question. Nevertheless, Mycroft themselves seem, at certain points, to attribute gender to people merely on the basis of outward appearance.

These musings of Mycroft, present in the narrative of the first two novels – *Too Like the Lightning* and *Seven Surrenders* –, anticipating the complaints of the reader, give us a glimpse inside the functioning of this society. The implication that Mycroft would choose to switch the gender of Carlyle so that the abuse by Dominic's hands should follow the stereotypical and prevalent scenario in which the female is the victim, determines a reconsideration of homosexuality in the Terra Ignota society. Given that, once with the abolishing of gender, so are the labels placed on relationships abolished themselves, and with their resurgence so do old prejudices resurge. However, Mycroft himself, were the resurgence of sexuality and the labels thereof to happen, would fall within the category of a minority, as a man in a homosexual relationship. As such, it is difficult to say if this would point towards an internalized homophobia or simply an upholding of old prejudices, not his own.

As such, Carlyle, while not a prototypical female, is burdened with the internalized prejudice of society, be it cloaked, as all Cousins are 'she', according to Mycroft, through their choice of profession.

It is then understood that the gender dynamic in the *Terra Ignota* society with neuter genders is not upheld by the biological sex, but by the perceived gender of each individual. However the stereotypes and prejudices of sexism still exist, and follow each individual with respect to the choice of gender and gender expression they have made.

These questions raised in the SF novel are difficult to reconcile with the status quo of the present, which is the main aim of the SF device of defamiliarization, the shift in focus and perception in order to make the reader question what part they play in the status quo of their own society.

However, in translation, more difficulties occur when a translation must be performed in such a way to create the same defamiliarizing effect in the reader. And, as Čudová states:

The relatively recent development of many identity labels and the lack of empirical research into minority genders and orientations pose certain problems for many LGBTQ+ people, especially those belonging to more underrepresented groups within the LGBTQ+ minority. While for example the concept of homosexuality has been named and described over a hundred years ago, other orientations such as bisexuality or a sexuality have a relatively short history, dating barely several decades back. Consequently, the society is less informed and therefore less likely to understand the unique issues these minority groups are facing in their relationships and daily lives. A [sic!] similar lack of information in the general society impacts the lives of people whose experience of gender is somehow outside the socially perceived norms (Čudová 2021, 46).

While homosexuality is readily understood within most societies, the shift in gender identity and other, less discussed and mediatized, orientations pose issues when a translator must accurately portray them in the target text of a different culture. Moreover, this is not the only issue with translation, as Baer and Kaindl state that:

[T]ranslation and interpreting studies scholars have reacted to queer theory with some delay, and research focusing on queer aspects of translation and interpreting have, until only recently, been rare, rather uncoordinated, and often marred by conceptual confusion—so that not all works dealing with issues of sexuality and specifically homosexuality can be considered queer (Baer and Kaindl 2017, 1).

It is then the case that we do not have the perfect translator from this beginning hypothesis. A translator which knows the concepts in the source language and what is lacking in the expression of the target language in order to perform the transposition of the message within the novel, and create meaning into the target language is impossible to have when the source culture is an invented and restricted to the source media. Instead, we are given the imperfect translator, who is, in turn, faced with confusion upon meeting concepts they do not understand. This misapprehension of source concepts leads, oftentimes, not to an incursion into the source culture, but to a mechanical translation of the text into the target language, largely due to the time constraint present in translation. A question can be asked regarding “How do we understand translation not as a flawless bridge or as total impossibility but as a mode of analysis that opens up ways of seeing the very conditions under which it unfolds?” (Savci 2020, 59).

The ideal circumstance of translation, in which the translator is knowledgeable of both cultures perfectly, will still produce a work which will

defamiliarize the reader, because “translation – by infusing target language with otherness - disrupts both the source and the target language”. (Baldo 2017, 193).

When it comes to the very gender identity of the characters involved in the novel being translated, it cannot be ignored, or avoided. However, there are certain issues stemming from the attempt to translate gender-neutral characters into a language that is high in syntactic gender agreement (i.e. between the nouns, which are gendered, and the adjectives), yet does not possess a way of referring to something in a truly gender-neutral way, as the neuter gender in Romanian is, as exemplified above, either masculine or feminine, depending on the form of the noun: in the singular or in the plural. For example, the maintaining of a method of reference to the person without there being any gendered language involved, a process which is hard to recreate in a way that sounds natural. Moreover, the avoidance of any gendered language in relation to nonbinary characters would create – instead of an inclusive environment – an erasure of identity conducted through the removal of any possible indicators of the person’s gender non-conformity.

For a translator, the question of gender ambiguity cannot be ignored. Avoiding gender marking may be difficult in English, but it becomes even more difficult in a language with gender agreement; for instance, gendered participles and adjectives in Italian definitively disambiguate the gender of the narrator unless specific translation solutions are sought out. The incipit of Poe’s story and the renowned Italian translation by Elio Vittorini and Delfino Cinelli (1937), which genderizes the narrator, is enough to elicit this point: “TRUE! nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why WILL you say that I am mad?”/“Sul serio! Io sono nervoso, molto nervoso, e lo sono sempre stato. Ma perché pretendete che io sia pazzo?” “Nervoso” (“nervous”), “stato” (“been”), “pazzo” (“mad”) all carry the masculine inflection, which implies that the narrator is male (Di Sabato and Perri 2020, 368).

The above quote is a very apt representation of the difficulty encountered by translators in the transposition of texts. The same matter is present within Romanian, as well, which will be the language showcased in the present paper. The prevalence of gender agreement in participles and adjectives in Romanian, at the same time as the lack of a neutral non-gendered root of the words (the root thereof being the male form of the word, e.g. “frumos”-”frumos”-”frumoasă” being the root-masculine-feminine forms of the adjective) brings about the issue of being unable to maintain an ambiguity of gender of characters with the constraints of the grammar of the language involved, in this case Romanian.

As in many other languages, nouns categorized as masculine in English have conventionally been used as “generic,” thus referring both to men and women, as in “The relationship between man and his dog”, where man stands generically for “human being” thus comprising women as well. Such generic or unmarked uses of masculine

forms are present in many languages, and have been increasingly considered forms of sexist language. Alternatives like neutral nouns (for instance, in English humans instead of mankind, people instead of men), or reference to both pronouns as in the spelling s/he or to the unmarked plural they are increasingly preferred (Di Sabato and Perri 2020, 363).

Such an approach will be present in the translations attempted below, in the creation of a new pronoun in Romanian to encompass both genders and thus signify none. The ethics of creating such a pronoun, however, lie in a gray area, as dictating what a marginalized community can use to express themselves in a language could be construed as an act of oppression. Ideally, the translation would be done with consultation from or by a person pertaining to the LGBT+ community, wherein the pronouns and ways of addressing characters can be descriptions from within the target language and culture, instead of prescriptions of language to use.

[T]he standard communication model proposed by information theorists (Sender, Message, Addressee – in which the message is decoded on the basis of a Code shared by both the virtual poles of the chain) does not describe the actual functioning of communicative intercourses. The existence of various codes and subcodes, the variety of sociocultural circumstances in which a message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender), and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions result in making a message (insofar as it is received and transformed into the *content* of an *expression*) an empty form to which various possible senses can be attributed (Eco 1979, 5).

Then, taking into account the above quote, we are given the issue that translation in itself is not just words and a low range of meaning attributed to them, but also the valances attributed to them in various sociolinguistic circumstances, which the translator must be aware of, in order to properly transpose the text into a different language and undergo another process of reception, namely by the reader. As it stands,

[t]he author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them (Eco 1979, 7).

As Eco states on the matter of the Model Reader, as there is a Model Translator there has to be, at a basic level at least, a model of the targeted audience, which is reflected in the

“(i) of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of specific specialization-indices (a text beginning with /According to the last developments of

the TeSWeST .../ immediately excludes any reader who does not know the technical jargon of text semiotics) (Eco 1979, 7).

As such, if we were to apply this specific theory to the *Terra Ignota* series, the reader envisioned is first and foremost a contemporary or a historian looking back on the events, moreover it is a person who is more or less familiarized with the societal reformation, if not directly then made familiarized through research into that time period.

This identity of the reader is, of course, fabricated, for in the science-fictional genre the reader is never a contemporary of the author, but a contemporary of the narrator, and given the state of *unreal* that are the fictional worlds, the actual readers of the novel become impostors almost illegally involved, as time-jumping voyeurs, into the plot of the work of Science Fiction, generating the estranging effect of the work of SF.

This assumed level of competence of the reader again plays a part in the reception of the novel, and within the paper one can draw a parallel between the translations and conclude that the identity of the reader, especially of the reader-mediator (the translator) whose job it is to first receive the message of the writer as intended, with the purpose of retelling it to the other readers within a specific culture. As Umberto Eco states:

pragmatically speaking, this situation [of the Model Reader] is a very abstract and optimal one. In the process of communication, a text is frequently interpreted against the background of codes different from those intended by the author (Eco 1979, 8).

The situation he presents is one in which this interpretation of the code is unwittingly done, lacking intention, whereas when it comes to Science Fiction, this effect, this process of interpretation is done with intention behind it.

The Reader/Translator of the text of SF is not always the Model Reader/Translator, and this is not unintentional on the part of the author. As with the given languages of the novels we see alterations which are open to interpretation with respect to not only their origin but the origin of their change, the model reader is also subjected to questioning when it comes to their purpose as an element in the analysis of the text of fiction. The issues arising from the end of the translator with respect to queer visibility in novels is that

the process of translation can also lead to an erasure of the queerness of both texts and authors, sometimes due to direct censorship and sometimes to the queerphobic biases of a particular translator (Palekar 2017, 12).



In analyzing the code of a specific created language, one cannot possibly leave out of the analysis both the sender of the message and the recipient, as they are integral parts in the parsing and processing of information. Close reading offers not only information regarding the text and its self-standing analysis, but also, in the context of science fiction works, of the intended backdrop of knowledge shared by both participants in the act of relaying this message that is the novel, as an unanchored message lacks the coherency needed to analyze it completely.

As such, the actual reader of the sf works is not just made privy to this information, we are made known of what we should be, so as impostors, we can attempt to mold ourselves, our reception thereof and our horizons of expectations to the expectations of the narrator. As illicit observers of an assumed authentic recounting, the reader themselves becomes part of the action.

Whether directly, as Mycroft Canner's reader, who routinely becomes involved and critiques the way in which the narrative progresses, or not, the reader is an integral part of the story.

Unfortunately, the only one not to have been 'inflexibly' planned is the reader. These texts are potentially speaking to everyone. Better, they presuppose an average reader resulting from a merely intuitive sociological speculation — in the same way in which an advertisement chooses its possible audience. It is enough for these texts to be interpreted by readers referring to other conventions or oriented by other presuppositions, and the result is incredibly disappointing (or exciting — it depends on the point of view) (Eco 1979, 8).

However, in a digression from Eco's statement, a reader of SF is almost anyone *but* the intended reader. This model reader and the actual readers of the novel are both, to a certain degree, planned for. The actual model reader of the novel can never hope to become the presupposed model reader of the novel, because they are an impossibility. As such, the actual reader assumes this role of an impostor model reader for the conducting of the message-relaying act. Moreover, the impostor model reader of utmost importance is the translator, a person working under the presumption that they understand a language and its culture. However, in the case of the SF society of the creation of the author, there is only one person familiarized with that society, and as such a divide in levels of understanding is created for all others interacting with the work of fiction.

Difficulties of translation and comprehension do not only occur when a text is translated from one language to another. In a way that is precisely analogous to the intersectionality of queer, translation between languages can serve as a paradigm for all those processes of bungled appropriation, barely acknowledged plagiarism, exploitation and distortion which together constitute the habitus of the colonizer

towards the colonized, the adult towards children, the imitator and the adaptor towards the alleged original (Epstein and Gilett 2017, 2).

Translation will inevitably become erasure in the present case of transposing queer identities, where English as a culture has had an increase in awareness of marginalized identities of people, which has led to the creation of mainstream works of SF which the reader readily understands from the outset, and has the ability not to only understand the identities as quasi-familiar, but can also progress to discussing the complexities of a society where any other identity other than the one marginalized is lawful.

Cultures and languages which are passive consumers of Anglophone media have yet to evolve to include such terms and concepts in the vernacular, and are as such at an impasse when faced with the issue of familiarizing the reader and using a language which is grammatical. Moreover, the minority identities represented and translated from a language to another might not perfectly align, as identities are not immutable and can differ in ideology and way of expression from culture to culture.

are the very terms used for gender and sexual identities in one language necessarily reducible to equivalents in other languages, particularly when one works across historical periods and/or across cultures? Attention to these very transgressions, these slippages of signification, these differences, when we work across languages and cultures is, in effect, a comparatively queer praxis (Spurlin 2017, 173).

## Analysis

All present matters taken into account, the present analysis will attempt to create three translations of selected short fragments from the novel *Too Like the Lightning* by Ada Palmer, and proceed to outline the differences, with the aim of showcasing the various approaches which can be attempted in translation and what devices could be used to eschew the limitations imposed by the target language itself. As the paper is subject to limitations in terms of dimension, an in-depth analysis of the novel is not currently possible. As such, a full picture will not be made of the novel for the purpose of the readership to become acquainted with the source culture of the SF novel.

Firstly, we must showcase the chosen fragments for the purpose of motivating their choice.

1. Your **mother** was brave enough, Kohaku Mardi, when **he** felt the agonies of my poisons setting in, **he** slit **his** belly with a calm to make his ancestors proud, and, **woman** of iron, even wrote the message in **his** own blood (Palmer 2016, 434-435).
2. Confess, reader, you too rush to the window to see when **they** walk by, and point them out to eager friends, "Look at **the Utopian!**" (Palmer 2016, 182).

3. Seventeen people, Thisbe! **They** hacked pieces off of Luther Mardigras for five days before **they** burned **them** alive in a wicker man! Burned what was left of **them**! [...] ‘Mycroft Canner forced the last Deputy Censor to disembowel **themselves** with a piece of bamboo!’ (Palmer 2016, 305).
4. this **madamed**’arouet is almost invisible too, **they** haven’t used a car in years and years. **they’re** on the wish list, though [...] (Palmer 2016, 429-430).

The above fragments show enough digression from grammatical binary genders to pose issues to the translator not due to the ideology of them, but due to the fact that the translator cannot rephrase the sentences in the target language in order to remove all connotation of the gender-neutral gender identity. As such the variation present in them will prove, despite their apparent simplicity, difficult to mediate in translation.

The following fragments, though they qualify for occurrence of gender-neutral pronouns used in dialogue, do not qualify as apt fragments for the present exercise in types of translation operated on queer texts due to the ease with which the pronouns can be eschewed in Romanian, thus eliminating the issue at hand of showcasing the difficulty of translation:

1. ‘Has J.E.D.D. Mason ever told you what religion **they** believe in? Have **they** tried to get you to convert?’ [...] ‘**They’ve** already crossed a lot of lines’, Carlyle pushed (Palmer 2016, 288).
2. Dominic Seneschal is a maniac, but at least they picked a law they’ll follow (Palmer 2016, 364).
3. No, I don’t mean the Emperor, uh... Mycroft said **they’d** be...’ ‘Mycroft?’ [...] Oh! Bless me! You want the Young Master, Jehovah Mason! I’m sorry, I’m not used to hearing **Him** called by **his** last name (Palmer 2016, 365).
4. **they’re** actually your **child**, aren’t they, Director? (Palmer 2016, 396).

The pronouns could very well be avoided in translation and the gender neutral term for offspring in Romanian would negate the gender-neutral writing of the source text, as well as the possibility of writing a perfectly grammatical sentence in the Romanian language while avoiding the Subject of the sentence completely, allowing for the subject of the sentence to be a general third person singular, without disclosing the gender or biological sex of the character.

The following translations are the hybrid translation, an attempt which aims to create an effect of confusion within the reader in regards to gender by purposefully using syntactic disagreement by using a feminine-gendered noun with a masculine-gendered adjective: the domesticating translation, which attempts to avoid all mention of the gender-neutral pronouns and way or making reference to people, and the foreignizing approach, which will showcase a defamiliarizing universe though

employing a created pronoun and a gender-neutral suffix added to adjectives and participles.

The parameters used in attempting the translations rested on the framework of gender and queer theory with regards to creating an understanding of the characters and their perception within the source culture of the country in which the novel was initially published, as well the source culture of the SF work and the contrast between the two, in order to create a multi-faceted understanding of the concept of queerness within and without the novel. Comparative linguistics and Translation Ethics are also used in the elaboration of the translations, as a cultural adaptation facet is present in the source text, namely the queer identity which cannot be wholly transposed into Romanian.

### Hybrid approach

1.

<b>ST</b>	“Your <b>mother</b> was brave enough, Kohaku Mardi, when <b>he</b> felt the agonies of my poisons setting in, <b>he</b> slit <b>his</b> belly with a calm to make his ancestors proud, and, <b>woman</b> of iron, even wrote the message in <b>his</b> own blood” (Palmer 2016, 434-435).
<b>TT</b>	<b>Mama</b> ta a fost tare <b>curajos</b> , Kohaku Mardi, când a simțit agonia otrăvii în corp, și-a despiciat burta cu un calm care i-ar fi făcut pe strămoșii <b>lui</b> mândri, și, <b>femeie</b> de fier, a scris mesajul în propriul <b>lui</b> sânge.

2.

<b>ST</b>	“Confess, reader, you too rush to the window to see when <b>they</b> walk by, and point them out to eager friends, ‘Look at <b>the Utopian!</b> ’” (Palmer 2016, 182).
<b>TT</b>	Recunoaște, cititorule, că și tu te repezi la geam când îi vezi pe ai de-ai lor, și le arăți și prietenilor tăi entuziasmați „Uite unul de-al Utopienilor!”

3.

<b>ST</b>	“Seventeen people, Thisbe! <b>They</b> hacked pieces off of Luther Mardigras for five days before <b>they</b> burned <b>them</b> alive in a wicker man! Burned what was left of <b>them!</b> ” [...] “Mycroft Canner forced the last Deputy Censor to disembowel <b>themselves</b> with a piece of bamboo!” (Palmer 2016, 305).
<b>TT</b>	„Șaptesprezece oameni, Thisbe!” Luther Martin a fost tranșat strategic timp de cinci zile înainte să ardă de viu în omul de răchită! Toate rămășițele au fost arse!” [...] „Obligat/ă de MC, și ultimul/a Vice-Cenzor s-a despiciat cu o bucată de bambus în dreptul burții!”

4.

<b>ST</b>	“<this <b>madamed</b> ’arouet is almost invisible too, <b>they</b> haven’t used a car in years and years. <b>they’re</b> on the wish list, though [...]” (Palmer 2016, 429-430).
<b>TT</b>	Doamna d’arouet ăsta, e aproape de nesesizat, n-a mai mers cu masina de ani de zile. Are numele pe listă, totuși [...]

### Domesticating

1.

<b>ST</b>	“Your <b>mother</b> was brave enough, Kohaku Mardi, when <b>he</b> felt the agonies of my poisons setting in, <b>he</b> slit <b>his</b> belly with a calm to make his ancestors proud, and, <b>woman</b> of iron, even wrote the message in <b>his</b> own blood” (Palmer 2016, 434-435).
<b>TT</b>	“ <b>Maică-ta a avut destul curaj</b> , când a simțit agoniile otrăvii, încât să-și despice burta cu un calm care i-ar fi făcut pe strămoșii tăi mândri, și ca o <b>femeie</b> cu un caracter de fier, a și scris mesajul în propriul sânge”.

2.

<b>ST</b>	“Confess, reader, you too rush to the window to see when <b>they</b> walk by, and point them out to eager friends, ‘Look at <b>the Utopian!</b> ’” (Palmer 2016, 182).
<b>TT</b>	“Recunoaște, cititorule, și tu te repezi la geam să îi vezi când trec pe acolo, și îi arăți cu degetul prietenilor tăi entuziasmați, ”Uite Utopienii!””

3.

<b>ST</b>	““Seventeen people, Thisbe! <b>They</b> hacked pieces off of Luther Mardigras for five days before <b>they</b> burned <b>them</b> alive in a wicker man! Burned what was left of <b>them!</b> ” [...] “Mycroft Canner forced the last Deputy Censor to disembowel <b>themselves</b> with a piece of bamboo!” (Palmer 2016, 305).
<b>TT</b>	“Șapțișpe oameni, Thisbe! A hăcuit bucăți din Luther Martin timp de cinci zile înainte să ardă de viu în omul de răchită! A ars toate rămășițele” [...] Ultimul Vice-cenzon s-a tăiat pe burtă cu o bucată de bambus la ordinele date de Mycroft Canner!”

4.

<b>ST</b>	“<this <b>madamed</b> ’arouet is almost invisible too, <b>they</b> haven’t used a car in years and years. <b>they’re</b> on the wish list, though [...]” (Palmer 2016, 429-430).
<b>TT</b>	“Nici Madame d’arouet nu prea are vizibilitate, n-a mai mers cu mașina de ani și ani. E pe listă, totuși [...]”

## Foreignized

1.

<b>ST</b>	“Your <b>mother</b> was brave enough, Kohaku Mardi, when <b>he</b> felt the agonies of my poisons setting in, <b>he</b> slit <b>his</b> belly with a calm to make his ancestors proud, and, <b>woman</b> of iron, even wrote the message in <b>his</b> own blood” (Palmer 2016, 434-435).
<b>TT</b>	<b>Mamul tău</b> a fost destul de <b>curajosx</b> , când a simțit agonia otrăvii instalându-i-se în corp, să-și despice burta cu un calm care i-ar fi făcut strămoșii mândri, și, [ <b>femeix</b> ] cu caracter de fier, a scris mesajul în propriul său sânge.

2.

<b>ST</b>	“Confess, reader, you too rush to the window to see when <b>they</b> walk by, and point them out to eager friends, ‘Look at <b>the Utopian!</b> ’ ” (Palmer 2016, 182).
<b>TT</b>	“[...] și tu te grăbești la fereastră să vezi când apare <b>vreunx</b> , și-i arăți cu degetul prietenilor tăi “Uite un Utopianx”.

3.

<b>ST</b>	““Seventeen people, Thisbe! <b>They</b> hacked pieces off of Luther Mardigras for five days before <b>they</b> burned <b>them</b> alive in a wicker man! Burned what was left of <b>them!</b> ” [...] “Mycroft Canner forced the last Deputy Censor to disembowel <b>themselves</b> with a piece of bamboo!” (Palmer 2016, 305).
<b>TT</b>	“Șapțișpe oameni, Thisbe! <b>Ela</b> a hăcuit bucăți din Luther Mardigras timp de cinci zile, înainte să <b>flo</b> ardă în omul de răchită! A ars ce mai rămăsese din <b>ela!</b> [...] Mycroft Canner l-a obligat pe <b>ultimx</b> Vice-Cenzor să se spintece pe abdomen cu o bucată de bambus!”

4.

<b>ST</b>	“<this <b>madamed</b> ’arouet is almost invisible too, <b>they</b> haven’t used a car in years and years. <b>they’re</b> on the wish list, though [...]” (Palmer 2016, 429-430)
<b>TT</b>	“și madam d’arouet <b>axta</b> e aproape <b>invizibilx</b> , <b>ela</b> n-a folosit o mașină de ani și ani. E pe listă, totuși [...]

## Discussion

As we can notice from the above, the three approaches, the hybridised, the domesticating, and the foreignizing, all present different iterations of a possible translation of the novel.

The hybridised form aims to create an effect of a disjointed understanding of gender, with the mixing of, for example, female-subjects such as mother, with

adjectives forming an agreement with an opposite-sex subject, in order to attempt to maintain this idea of gender-neutrality, which could be continued throughout the novel either by alternating the perceived gender of the subject with an opposite-gender agreement of the other syntactic parts, or by maintaining the masculine syntactic agreement, regardless of the gender with which agreement would naturally be created.

The second translation, the foreignizing one, attempted to create neopronouns that would accurately represent the society of the Terra Ignota future, that is, one that has eliminated all discussion of gender and has as such replaced them with something neutral, that would combine both forms of the pronoun, so that there is an underlying sense of equality behind the choice in pronouns. The adjectives, however, were created by having the word in its root form and adding an “-x” suffix to it, to signify the deletion of a morphologic gender marker on the specific word.

An interesting approach we can see is in the translation done in 3.1 (Foreignized, the first example) we can see that the Source Text (ST) “your mother” is translated with a variant of *mama* (f.), where the definite enclitic article for the female gender (“-a”) is replaced with the masculine enclitic definite article (“-ul”), thus creating the disjointed understanding of gender that the novel is attempting to create. However, the method of achieving it is less than optimal as there is still gender present in language, though it is mixed enough to not definitely point toward one or another in terms of identity. The approach aims to deconstruct this genderization, as “Genderization, in particular, poses challenges to finding or creating translation equivalents between gendered and non-gendered languages, i.e., languages with and without morphologically marked grammatical gender” (Nossem 2017, 183).

The very crux of the matter in the translation eschewing gender to one’s best ability is that there is an inherent erasure enacted on the gender non-conforming characters, thus tacitly sustaining a bias against the LGBTQIA+ minority present in the text. As such, while these translations are viable from a grammatical standpoint, culturally and ethically they become an instrument of erasure that cannot be dispelled without the intervention of the translator within the text to add specific information regarding the person’s gender or lack thereof, thus reducing the effect of immersion of the reader.

Moreover, neither the translation containing the “-x” gender neutral marker on the adjectives, nor the usage of Romanian neopronouns are currently approved by any Romanian language institution, and as such that translation would transgress the grammatical norms of the language, leaving the translator at an impasse: does one translate and erase identity, or does one produce an ‘ungrammatical’ work, which could be rejected by the editor?

## Conclusion

The many facets of translation are always subject to the whims of the translator and their inherent bias towards one extreme or the other. There is no uniform understanding of how a translation should be conducted, though there is great debate on the matter and great desire to uphold the ethics of translation, though a perfect translation is rather impossible to achieve, especially given the structural constraints existing in language.

When it comes to the translation operated on unknown cultures, however, the matters are just as complex, as the translator, while recognizing the language of the source text, does not recognize the culture of the SF society, and must thus operate the translation and become the liaison of the foreign culture with the very few means they have of acquainting themselves with the source text, be it by consulting online resources on the novel, if any, or by contacting the writer of the source text. This is not to say that these two methods of acquainting oneself with the source text will necessarily yield answers in terms of what the translation will look like.

As Epstein and Gilett state:

Those who translate must necessarily be acquainted with two languages. Like Teiresias in the field of gender and sexuality, they are archetypally bi; this conveys on them both privileged insights and a particular form of blindness. Working within duality, they must also be aware of the essential doubleness of language itself, of the arbitrary correlation between sign and signification, of the duplication that is made possible by the existence of the metaphorical dimension as well as the literal one, and of the complexities of cultural interpellation (Epstein and Gilett 2017, 3).

Yet the matter of SF translation is rarely, if ever, broached when it comes to queer futures not rooted in the status quo.

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