



Translators as Agents of Intertextual Change: Hekmat's Intertextual Appropriation and Domestication of Shakespeare for Iranian Nationalism

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Abstract: This article examines the intersection of translation, intertextuality, and identity construction through the lens of Ali Asghar Hekmat's domesticating translations of Shakespeare during the nationalist Pahlavi era in Iran. Drawing on theorizations of intertextuality, the study analyzes how Hekmat strategically severed Shakespeare's English textual connections and wove the plays into a new Persian intertextual fabric to advance ideological narratives of ancient Iranian identity. Contextualizing Hekmat's works within the prevailing ancientist discourse reveals his radical efforts to thoroughly recast genre, rhetoric, and discourse to align Shakespeare with Iranian literary tradition. This instrumental domestication served to legitimize Pahlavi nationalism by appropriating foreign cultural capital. However, Hekmat's extensive rewriting problematically erases Shakespeare's essence to promote ideological motives, raising vital ethical questions about the limits of translation. The analysis illuminates the profound impact of sociocultural context on intertextual mediation in translation and its entanglement with identity construction.

Keywords: Domestication, Intertextuality, Iran, Nationalism, Translation.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the rich cultural history of Iran, language, literature, and various cultural productions have consistently functioned as powerful tools employed by cultural authorities to engage in identity construction. Within this multifaceted cultural tapestry, the domain of literary translation has emerged as a pivotal stronghold for shaping national identity, particularly since the Qajar era (1789-1925). This transformative period, marked by the introduction of translations from the West, saw a significant evolution in the cultural landscape. The encounter of Iranians with Western culture during the Qajar period and beyond gave rise to a distinctive "other," separate from the established Islamic identities, prompting a reevaluation of the Irano-Islamic self. This encounter led intellectuals and statesmen of the time to recognize the imperative of redefining what constituted the "authentic Iranian self".

The subsequent Pahlavi I era witnessed a deliberate effort by statesmen and intellectuals to construct Iranian identity by not only invoking the grandeur of ancient Iran but also strategically distancing themselves from Arab culture while embracing closer ties with Western culture. The ambitious project of national identity construction, particularly evident during the Pahlavi I era, effectively harnessed a myriad of cultural resources, both domestic and foreign. Among these influential resources were the cultural and literary products of the West. Notably, the modernists, statesmen, and intellectuals of this period strategically leveraged Western cultural elements, including literary works like Shakespeare's plays, to reshape and redefine the narrative of Iran and Iranian identity.

A standout figure in this transformative period was Ali Asghar Hekmat, a prominent intellectual during the Pahlavi I era. Concurrent with the expansion of nationalistic and ancientist discourse, Hekmat actively contributed to the ongoing project of identity construction, drawing inspiration from the concept of "ancient Iran". An in-depth exploration of Hekmat's professional endeavors, encompassing his authored works, translations, and the historical context of his life, illuminates a deliberate alignment of his translations of Shakespeare's plays with the overarching objectives of identity construction. Rather than a mere introduction of Shakespeare and his plays, Hekmat's literary contributions were deeply entwined with the broader mission of reshaping and

reinforcing Iranian identity. This alignment is particularly evident in Hekmat's strategic utilization of intertextuality, weaving Persian poetry into the fabric of Shakespeare's texts, thereby establishing cultural resonances that played a crucial role in the nuanced process of identity-making during this dynamic period.

Throughout this article, we will embark on an exploration of the intricate relationship between identity construction, translation, and intertextuality, focusing on Ali Asghar Hekmat's domestication of Shakespeare during the Pahlavi I era. Domestication, as proposed by Venuti (2017), refers to the strategy in which a translator renders a foreign text into a more familiar or conventional style, conforming to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language and audience. Domestication involves making the foreign text more accessible to the target readership, often at the expense of the linguistic and cultural nuances of the source text. Hekmat's domesticating approaches, driven by prevalent ancientist discourse, involved strategies like transforming Shakespearean tragedies into Persian prose tales, altering titles and terminology, and integrating verses from classical Iranian poets. While making Shakespeare more accessible to Iranian audiences, these methods problematically erased or obscured the original linguistic and rhetorical nuances integral to the source texts. For example, the complex poetic wordplay and layered metaphors of Shakespeare's writing were often flattened into straightforward prose, sacrificing linguistic artistry for ideological motives.

Against this background, we will first provide a comprehensive exploration and explanation of the concept of intertextuality in Section 2, establishing its theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis. Then, in Section 3, we will delve into the historical and cultural backdrop of the Pahlavi I era, providing a contextual foundation for understanding the socio-political dynamics that influenced identity construction in Iran during this period. Subsequently, in Section 4, we will scrutinize Hekmat's translations and adaptations of Shakespearean plays, examining his intentional integration of Persian poetry and his distinctive domestication approach. This examination will be guided by the concept of intertextuality in section 5, unraveling the layers of meaning and cultural resonance embedded in Hekmat's choices. By contextualizing Hekmat's works within the prevalent ancientist

discourse, we aim to shed light on how his translations functioned as agents of identity-making, bridging the gap between Western and Iranian literary traditions. The central research question is: How did Hekmat employ strategies of domestication and intertextual appropriation in his translations of Shakespeare to advance Iranian nationalist discourse and narratives of ancient identity during the Pahlavi era?

1. Unpacking the Web of Textual Relations: An Exploration of Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a field of literary criticism that explores the relationships between texts. It examines how one text references or alludes to another text, helping us understand a text's deeper meaning and its place within the broader literary landscape (Mashayekh, Seyyed Sadeqi, & Hamidi, 2020, p. 416). It explores how earlier works influence and shape the creation and meaning of later works through the incorporation, reference, or allusion to themes, tropes, styles, and ideas from those prior texts (Edalatpour, 2019, p. 343). This "reliance on previously encountered texts" (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, p. 10) creates a web of connections, enriching the reading experience. In the view of modern theorists, both literary and non-literary texts lack independent meaning and are inherently intertextual (Allen, 2011, p.1). This perspective shifts the focus from traditional source and influence studies to a broader consideration of dialogics within the text. A text is now perceived as an intertextual space where cultural references are combined, absorbed, or transformed, necessitating the reader's activation of meaning through recognized codes (Cascallana, 2006, p.98).

The process of intertextuality entails infusing a text with echoes from various sources, fostering a dialogue with other texts that only readers familiar with them can fully engage in (Desmet, 2007, p.126). Examining texts intertextually involves searching for traces and borrowed elements that writers combine to construct new discourse. While explicit citation is a common manifestation, intertextuality pervades all discourse and extends beyond mere citation (Porter, 1986, p.34).

Kristeva coined the term "intertextuality" in 1966, and its interpretations have varied widely. She synthesized elements from Saussurean linguistics and Bakhtin's literary theory, which was then unfamiliar to Western Europe (Irwin, 2004, p.228). This synthesis

reflects a post-structuralist stance, rejecting the idea of a 'transcendental signified' and emphasizing the interplay of signifiers within a system. While Saussurean structuralism tends to treat individual texts as isolated entities, poststructuralist theorists, associated with Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, emphasize the interconnectedness of texts (Irwin, 2004, P. 228). Kristeva (1980) introduces two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader and a vertical axis linking the text to other texts, united by shared codes. Drawing on Kristeva's work, Allen argues that texts do not present clear and stable meanings but embody society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of words. In this context, intertextuality involves a text's emergence from the 'social text' and its continuous existence within society and history (Allen, 2011, p.36).

2.1 Severing Ties, Forging New Bonds: Intertextuality in the Translation Process

The concept of intertextuality challenges traditional notions of translation such as text autonomy, equivalence, and faithfulness. The relationship between a source text and a target text cannot be explained in terms of equivalence, as this implies the source and target languages are identical, which is impossible. Instead, the relationship can be explained through intertextuality. The source and target texts occur in different languages and therefore belong to different local intertextual contexts. However, they relate to one another because they belong to the same global intertextual context. For example, Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat repeats some concepts from the original Persian poems but also develops new intertextual relationships within the context of English literature (Farahzad, 2009).

Translators often endeavor to reshape the original work in alignment with the poetics of their own culture, aiming to captivate the new audience and ensure the translated piece is actually read (Lefevere, 2002, p. 26). The receiving context exerts an impact on the translator's decisions and strategies, primarily because the translator interprets intertextual references based on their own literary, historical, and cultural repository—their personal baggage (Federici, 2007, p.155). Essentially, the translator embarks as a traveler into an unfamiliar realm, equipped with a substantial literary and cultural background. Consequently, mediation with the

new cultural context becomes unavoidable. The translator inherently interprets the textual map through their historical, social, and cultural lens, *which is an integral part of their personal baggage*. Thus, the translator's personal baggage and cultural mediation fundamentally shape the intertextual interpretations and choices made throughout the translation process.

As Hatim (1997, p.30) discusses, various typologies of intertextual relations have been proposed. However, these typologies are deemed less useful in translation practice unless linked to the intricate decision-making involved in translation activities. Hatim (1997, p.31) proposes an intertextuality approach, emphasizing the close association between text and context. Intertextual reference, according to Hatim, involves two fundamental strata: socio-cultural practice and socio-textual practice. Socio-cultural practices encompass single words or phrases with specific cultural significance in a linguistic community at a given time, referred to as "socio-cultural objects." Examples include nomenclature for institutions, habits, customs, and labels for different aspects of cultures or societies (Hatim & Mason, 2005, p.18). Hatim illustrates that terms like 'honor' carry different socio-cultural meanings for an Arab compared to an Englishman. In terms of intertextual potential, sociocultural practices exhibit manifest intertextuality, posing minimal challenges for translators (Hatim, 1997, p.33).

Intertextuality can involve more complex aspects than socio-cultural practices, extending to entire sets of rhetorical conventions governing texts, genres, and discourses (Hatim, 1997, p. 35). Hatim and Munday (2019, P. 88) examine socio-textual practices in the context of the genre-text-discourse triad, emphasizing their significance, especially when they vary between languages. Genre is defined as a conventionalized form associated with specific communicative events, where participants have set goals and strict norms. Text, as a unit of communication and translation, serves as a vehicle for expressing conventionalized goals and functions, tied to specific rhetorical modes like arguing and narrating. Discourse, following the Foucauldian sense of institutionalized modes of speaking and writing, is the medium through which attitudes toward socio-cultural knowledge or socio-textual activity are communicated, involving the negotiation of attitudinal meaning and

the endorsement or rejection of a particular ideology (Hatim & Munday, 2019, pp. 89-90). Socio-textual practices represent a more intriguing and challenging aspect of the intertextual potential of utterances, where culture is defined not only by socio-cultural objects but also by how its members "think" through the texts, they naturally use or have access to (Hatim, 1997, p. 30).

The act of translation inevitably disrupts the intertextual web surrounding a source text, as described by Hatim (1997). As the translator decodes meaning from the source language and culture, many of the manifest and complex intertextual relations are severed. Manifest intertextual references, such as allusions to specific socio-cultural objects, may be obscured or lost entirely in translation. Likewise, the complex vertical intertextuality connecting the text to conventions of genre, discourse, and meaning-making in the source context is separated as the text crosses cultural boundaries. As argued by Federici (2007, p. 155), the translator's own cultural 'baggage' or 'lens' shapes their interpretation and reencoding of the text's intertextual potential. Their choices determine which new textual relations are forged, how the work engages with target language literary traditions, what genres and discourses it participates in, and ultimately how it signifies for the new audience. While traces of the source context persist, the translator primarily weaves the translated text into the fabric of the target culture by creatively bridging gaps between divergent intertextual worlds. In this way, the continuous process of fracturing and remaking intertextual ties enables texts to travel across languages, reinventing their cultural resonance in each new sociolinguistic setting encountered.

2.2 Intertextuality Appropriated: Domesticating Foreign Texts to Serve Dominant Ideologies

In certain socio-cultural contexts, translators may thoroughly recast source texts by severing the source texts' intertextual ties and situating them within a completely different intertextual network, engaging in an extreme form of domestication. The practice of radical domestication often serves ideological ends, allowing translators to strategically rewrite texts to promote particular perspectives. As examined by Lefevere (2002), translation and rewriting become tools for manipulating a text to fit the dominant poetics and ideology of the target culture. Severing ties with the

original intertextual environment enables the translator to fully reconstruct the text's significance by situating it within a new web of references that resonate with the desired ideology. For instance, a translator may thoroughly rewrite a text to bolster nationalistic narratives, align with religious dogma, endorse a political faction, or reinforce normative social values. This excessive domestication distorts the source text, obscuring its original form to propagate the preferred ideological stance. However, it can be an effective tactic for appropriating cultural capital from foreign sources to authorize specific power structures. The translator's visibility is minimized, as the thoroughly domesticated text appears to organically emerge from the native literary tradition. Yet despite this guise, the translator's choices ultimately rewrite the text's identity and significance. This underscores how total recasting of intertextual relations, when aligned with dominant ideologies, can be a powerful tool for the social control wielded through translation. However, it also raises vital ethical questions about representation, authorization, and the extent to which rewriting under the pretext of translation can be justified.

The concept of appropriation is closely tied to this extreme form of domestication. As defined by Saglia, appropriation involves "the inclusion and adoption of foreign, other signs into one's own cultural environment in order to aggrandize, enlarge and reinforce it" while retaining the appropriated material's "other status" (Saglia 2002: 98). Through radical domestication and assimilation of the source text, the translator engages in appropriation by harnessing the text's cultural capital to expand the literary and ideological boundaries of the target culture. Yet traces of its foreign origins are maintained to lend authority.

Furthermore, this appropriative domestication often coincides with the "cultural domination" of less powerful groups (Munday 2009: 169). The act of appropriation allows the dominant culture to exert its economic and political power over marginalized cultures by seizing and reframing their cultural productions. As Venuti argues, domesticating translation "enlists the foreign text in the maintenance or revision of literary canons in the target-language culture," aligning translated texts with prevailing discourses and power structures (Venuti, 1993, P. 209). The rewritten and thoroughly domesticated text becomes assimilated into the

dominant culture as its radical foreignness is suppressed. This enables the controlling groups to expand their cultural influence through appropriation while containing the threat the foreign text may pose to their authority. Therefore, radical domestication and appropriation allow those in power to strategically absorb and reshape foreign texts to serve their ideological agenda and cultural hegemony.

As discussed before, Ali Asghar Hekmat exemplifies radical domestication in both his translation work and original writing during the Pahlavi I era in Iran. In this article, we will explore how Hekmat implemented radical domestication to serve the dominant nationalist discourse of his time.

2. The Rise of Nationalist Discourse in Early Pahlavi Iran

The first Pahlavi dynasty which ruled Iran from 1925 to 1941 was marked by a strong emphasis on nationalism, and the promotion of a unified Iranian national identity was central to its modernization efforts. This nationalist agenda carried over into the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who continued to promote Iranian nationalism and identity as a unifying force during the Pahlavi II era from 1941 to 1979. Although the Constitutional Movement in late 19th and early 20th century Iran advocated for nationalist ideas in pursuing a constitutional monarchy and parliament, nationalism did not serve as the prevailing discourse driving the movement overall (Abrahamian, 1982). The prevailing ideology during the Constitutional Movement was primarily focused on the establishment of "political democracy." However, the post-constitutional period faced numerous challenges, such as the Russian occupation of northern Iran, sabotage by opponents of constitutionalism, internal conflicts among constitutionalists, and the division of Iran's foreign policy into Russian and British spheres of influence. These challenges weakened the central government and brought the country to the brink of collapse. In response, many Iranian thinkers began advocating for the necessity of a strong and centralized government, with Iranian nationalism seen as the foundational support for this central authority (Bigdeloo, 2002, pp. 238-240). The dominance of Iranian nationalistic discourse was a crucial factor in Reza Shah's rise to power and the 1921 coup, overshadowing even external influences such as Britain's policies (Bigdeloo, 2002, p. 244).

As Pahlavi I ascended to power, various discourses emerged, drawing on roots from the Constitutional period. These included nationalist, ancientist, West-centric, and modernist perspectives. Notably, one of the most significant discourses was the nationalist and ancientist discourse, which found prevalence in both state and non-state domains. This discourse aimed to define Iranian identity based on pre-Islamic history, specifically emphasizing Iran's ancient heritage before the arrival of Arabs and Islam (Azarang, 2017, p. 268). The quest for a pre-Islamic Iranian identity sought to underscore Iran's ancient glory compared to its Islamic history, reflecting a perspective that attributed Iran's current challenges to Arab domination.

The nationalistic discourse of this period, to some extent, was rooted in anti-Arab sentiments, a deliberate avoidance of Islam, and the glorification of ancient Iran. It sought to revive the historical past and became the dominant discourse in the first Pahlavi era. This discourse aimed to present an idealized image of pre-Islamic Iran during the Achaemenid and Sassanid empires before the Arab invasion. The archaeological discoveries and extensive information about various aspects of pre-Islamic Iranian civilization significantly contributed to the expansion of this discourse. Overall, the ancientist discourse intended to establish kinship ties with Westerners/Europeans and distance Iran from Arabs and Islam, emphasizing historical, racial, and civilizational affinity between Iranians and Europeans.

The state's ancient-lauding outlook during Pahlavi I's era led to the translation, compilation, and publication of numerous works by various state-affiliated institutions. This ancientist discourse influenced various spheres, including publishing, the Persian language, architecture, urban planning, theater, national anthems, public celebrations, and numerous institutions across administrative, executive, scientific, cultural, and socio-political domains (Azarang, 2017, pp. 271-273).

3. Hekmat's social authority and nationalist agenda in assimilating Shakespeare

Ali Asghar Hekmat (1892–1980) played a pivotal role in advancing the nationalist and ancientist discourse, not only through state-sponsored initiatives and institutions but also through his contributions to writing and translation. His advocacy for these

discourses was evident both independently and within the institutional framework of Pahlavi I. Hekmat's life, both personal and professional, was intricately woven with an unwavering affection for Iran and a steadfast commitment to nationalist aspirations (Milani, 2003). Hekmat played a significant role in modernizing education in Iran. Joining the Ministry of Education in 1918, he ascended to higher positions. In 1925, he initiated the publication of an educational magazine featuring contributions from influential intellectuals of his era. Serving as the Minister of Education from 1933 to 1938, he spearheaded the modernization of the education system, leaving an enduring legacy. Hekmat's contributions extended to the establishment of the University of Tehran and the creation of modern schools and institutions, including the National Library and the National Museum of Archaeology. Throughout his career, he remained dedicated to advancing Iran's cultural and educational landscape (Milani, 2003). Having held various governmental roles such as Minister of Health, Minister of Interior, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hekmat continued contributing to Persian literature and culture even after retiring from public service through his writings, translations, and scholarly endeavors. His life and work, as Milani (2003) notes, exemplify a deep love for Iran and relentless efforts to modernize the country's educational and cultural institutions.

Hekmat's prestigious position in Iranian society empowered him to strategically appropriate and assimilate foreign literary works like Shakespeare's plays. As a highly influential government official and intellectual, Hekmat had the authority and means to selectively introduce and adapt Western literary works in order to advance nationalist and modernization goals. In fact, Hekmat strategically leveraged his social position to advance the nationalist agenda through cultural assimilation. Furthermore, his ideological stance as a staunch nationalist reveals the underlying motivation behind his appropriation of Shakespeare's works. By translating the revered playwright into Persian, Hekmat aimed to showcase the richness of the Persian language and its literary heritage. His social standing enabled this act of cultural translation and appropriation, while his nationalist ideology shaped the agenda behind it.

4. Genre, Text, and Discourse: Layers of Hekmat's Intertextual Domestication of Shakespeare

Hekmat was a prolific writer, editor, and translator who produced valuable scholarly works. Among his translation endeavors was Ernst Herzfeld's *Archaeological History of Iran* (1935). However, Hekmat's translations went beyond transferring texts - they became a tool to actively promote nationalist discourse. A prime example is his translation and appropriation of Western literary works like Shakespeare's plays. In his work *Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare: A Comparison with Layli and Majnun by Nizami Ganjavi* (1938), Hekmat leverages the translation and literary criticism of Shakespeare not just to introduce the work to Iranian audiences, but to advance his nationalist agenda through recasting it in a totally Persian intertextual web. An analysis of Hekmat's translation approach and paratexts underscores how translation became a means of Iranian identity construction. This is further evidenced in his broader efforts to translate and adapt Shakespearean plays in *Five Tales from the Works of William Shakespeare (Volume I)* (1941), and *Five Tales from the Works of William Shakespeare (Volume II)* (1954).

Hekmat radically reshapes Shakespeare through intertextuality, as seen most clearly in his strategic recasting of genre, text, and discourse. Operating on the multiple socio-textual levels proposed by Hatim (1997), Hekmat's intertextual reconstitution goes beyond just socio-cultural practices to reshape entire rhetorical conventions governing texts, genres, and discourses. As Hatim and Munday (2019) discuss, examining socio-textual practices within the triad of genre-text discourse is especially relevant when these conventions differ across languages, as is the case with Hekmat's Persian translations of Shakespeare's English plays. In the remainder of this article, we will delve deeper into Hekmat's radical intertextual reconstitution of Shakespeare, examining how it operates on the three socio-textual levels of genre, text, and discourse to realign them with Iranian literary conventions.

5.1 Reconstituting Dramatic Forms: Hekmat's Intertextual Transformation of Shakespearean Genre Conventions

When examining Hekmat's intertextual transformation of Shakespeare's works at the genre level, one encounters a deliberate and strategic effort to adapt these plays to align with Persian literary traditions. Shakespeare's tragedies, in particular, presented a challenge as the genre of tragedy held no direct equivalent within

the established traditions of Persian narrative. Hekmat's response to this challenge involves a series of interventions aimed at reconceptualizing the genre conventions of Shakespearean tragedy within a Persian context.

A crucial aspect of Hekmat's strategy involved a deliberate omission and reframing of the genre itself. By excluding the term "tragedy" from his paratexts and presenting the works as prose "tales" (*hekayat*), he effectively grafted Shakespeare's plays onto a more familiar narrative genre for Iranian readers. Hekmat's transformation of genre extended beyond mere omission. He employed a series of deliberate strategies to reshape the intertextual relationship between the source material and his adaptations:

- **Prose Summarization and Condensation:** Hekmat presented the plays in a condensed prose format, summarizing key plot points and character interactions. This approach facilitated accessibility for readers unfamiliar with the intricacies of Shakespearean drama but also inevitably resulted in the loss of nuances and complexities inherent in the original plays.

- **Shifting Titles and Terminology:** A notable aspect of Hekmat's approach involved altering the titles. For instance, he translated *Othello*, *the Moor of Venice*, and *Hamlet*, the Prince of Denmark respectively into *شہزادہ دانمارک*, *غمنامہ ہاملت*, and *غمنامہ اتللو*. Opting for the term "*Ghamnameh*" (signifying "lament" or "elegy") in the titles of these two plays, rather than "tragedy," suggests a more melancholic tone while potentially downplaying the tragic elements.

- **Altering the Internal Structures of the Plays:** In addition to transforming tragic drama into melancholic prose tales, Hekmat's intertextual approach also fundamentally alters the structural conventions of Shakespeare's plays. The original works follow the standard five-act structure common to Elizabethan theater, divided into scenes to facilitate staging and dramatic pacing. Hekmat's adaptations abandon this formal structure entirely, instead dividing the narratives into chapters (*Fasl*). This shift complements the overall genre transformation into prose fiction, aligning the structure with Persian storytelling. While the five-act division advanced the dramatic arc in Shakespeare's plays, the use of chapters places more emphasis on textual progression in Hekmat's tales. Additionally, the lack of scene divisions and specifics of

staging directions contributes to a less performative, more novelistic framework. By converting "dramatis personae" into "Ashkhas Hekayat" (characters of the tale) and using chapter divisions rather than acts, Hekmat thoroughly transforms the structural composition of Shakespeare's dramatic works. In essence, his adaptations forge an intertextual connection through their narrative content, while fundamentally altering the underlying structural and genre conventions of the original plays.

Through these strategies, Hekmat transforms Shakespeare's dramatic tragedies into Persian prose tales, making the works intelligible and engaging for Iranian readers while obscuring their origins in English theater. His genre level transformations thoroughly integrate Shakespeare into familiar literary forms. This intertextual severing, however, had significant consequences. Removing the explicit framing of "tragedy" meant sacrificing vital contextual information about the plays' intended purpose and established conventions. In essence, Hekmat's approach "domesticated" the works, aligning them with Iranian expectations of storytelling but potentially obscuring Shakespeare's intended dramatic impact.

5.2 Translating Rhetorical Modes: Hekmat's Intertextual Shift into Persian Literary Prose

Textually, Hekmat transforms Shakespeare's rhetorical complexity through an intertextual shift into Persian literary prose. The original plays exhibit Shakespeare's mastery of the English dramatic language through techniques like wordplay, metaphor, and poetic devices. Hekmat renders these in a high-register Persian prose style, drawing intertextually on the ornate linguistic traditions of classical Persian poets like Saadi. The insertion of verses into prose also echoes the stylistic approach found in Saadi's *Golestan*. This intertextual dialogue not only served as an homage to the rich heritage of Persian literature but also potentially resonated with the cultural sensibilities of his audience, creating a sense of familiarity and connection. On nearly every page of the translated plays, a few lines from renowned Persian poets are included. Here's an instance of integrating verses from Hafez into the translation of *As You Like It*, a pastoral comedy by Shakespeare (Hekmat, 1956, p. 35):

در آن روضه زیبا که اشجار آسمان‌سایش راه را بر سموم هموم‌بسته،
و انهار روح افزایش از هر سو کوثر و سلسبیل روان کرده بود نزهتگاهی
لطیف و عشرت‌کنده خرم فراهم ساخت - حشمت و شکوه پادشاهی که آلوده
به درد سر و محنت بود در آنجا بآرامش و سکون مبدل فرمود، تواضع و
فروتنی دهقانی را، که با امن خاطر و طیب نفس آمیخته بود بگرفت، و
از جاه و جلال سلطنت که بخون دل و سوز روان همراه بود چشم فرو پوشید -
مانند مردان عصر زرین سعادت بصلح و صفا و امن و امان روزگاری بشادی
و خرسندی بسر میبرد و میگفت :

از زبان سوسن آزاده ام آمد بگوش
کاندرین دیر کهن کار سبکباران خوشی است
حافظا ترك جهان گفتن طریق خوشدلی است
تانهنداری که احوال جهانداران خوش است

However, to maintain a connection to the source material, Hekmat incorporated select words and phrases from the original Shakespearean text, placing them within fitting contexts of the prose narrative. This strategy served as a subtle reminder of the plays' origins while simultaneously ensuring their coherence within the new genre framework. This intertextual grafting results in the simplification and filtering of Shakespeare's rhetorical vehicles. Intricacies like puns, double entendres, and ironic wordplay are often omitted entirely. Furthermore, the meter, rhyme schemes, and rhythms integral to Shakespeare's verse structure are rendered into free-flowing unrhymed Persian prose. While certainly more comprehensible, this results in the loss of Shakespeare's poetic artistry. For example, in the original Shakespearean text, Romeo and Juliet's first encounter at the Capulets' ball takes the form of a shared sonnet - an unusual stylistic choice that sets their love apart through poetic eloquence. The sonnet they speak is in the English Renaissance style, with three alternating rhyming quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet. It utilizes iambic pentameter and an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme (Rampone Jr, 2023, p. 2):

ROMEO.

[To JULIET.]

If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this,
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
JULIET.

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO.

Have not saints' lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET.

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO.

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;
They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET.

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO.

Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

(Shakespeare, 2005, pp. 38-39)

Here is an analysis of some of the poetic intricacies in the original Shakespearean sonnet spoken between Romeo and Juliet during their first meeting:

Puns:

- "pilgrim/palmer" - Romeo plays on the double meaning of pilgrim as both a religious worshiper and their lips coming together in a kiss. Juliet builds on this in her response using "palmer" which also means pilgrim.
- "saints" – Romeo extends the religious conceit by talking about Juliet's lips as a "saint" to be prayed to. But also contains sexual connotations of physical intimacy/kissing.
- "hands"/"lips" - Both refer to body parts but also the act of praying, playing into the conceit of their romance being like worship.

Double entendres:

- "smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss" - Romeo's lips will "smooth" and make more pleasurable the "rough" touch of hands meeting. But also means kiss will make this awkward initial meeting more intimate.
- "For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch" - On one level, Juliet says saints allow their hands to be touched by pilgrims as a blessing. But also hints she will allow Romeo to intimately "touch" her hand.

Ironic wordplay:

- "palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss" - Ironically, Juliet goes along with the exaggerated religious metaphor, even though they just met. She pretends their hands meeting is like a "holy" kiss between pilgrims.
- Romeo seeing the brief meeting of lips as "prayer" that will purge his "sin" - Ironically portrays the kiss as far more meaningful and transformative than it would plausibly be at this early stage.

همینکه دور رقص و نشاط بیایان آمد رومئو خود را بنزدیک
ژولیت رسانیده بر فراز روی پوشش روپوشی دیگر از حیا و وقار برچهره
نهاد و با روشی شایسته و با ادب او را ستوده گفت: «ای

- ۱۴ -

سر دفتر آیت نکوئی شاهنشه ملک خوبروئی
چه شود که باین زائر دردمند اجازت دهی تا برای آمرزش گناهان
دست مقدس ترا که برای او قبله دل و کعبه جانست ببوسد
بنواز بلطف یک سلامم جان تازه نما بیک پیامم
دوشیزه خوبرو بوی پاسخ داد:
ای سرو جوانه جوانمرد وی بادل گرم و بادم سرد
ای زائر نیکوکار از عبادت تو بوی ریا و سالوس نمی آید لیکن بوسیدن
دست اولیاء شایسته نیست همان بهتر که بمعافحه اکتفا کنی.
رومئو باز گفت مگر نیکوکاران را دهان نیست و زائرین را
لب نباشد؟
ژولیت گفت: آری دارند ولی برای آنکه بعبادت و نماز خداوند
بکشایند.
رومئو گفت: اینک نماز مرا که از روی نیاز بدرگاهت میآورم
بپذیر و بنواز مکن و این بنده مستمند که ترا پرستش می کند
نومید مساز.

In Hekmat's Persian translation, this highly structured poetic form is rendered into prose, interspersed with some lines of Persian verse (Hekmat, n.d., p. 14):

The quatrains, couplet structure, rhyme scheme, and metrical rhythm are all lost in translation. However, Hekmat aims to retain some literary flair by incorporating excerpts from classical Persian poets. The ornate vehicle of the sonnet becomes straightforward prose and verse more typical of Persian romantic fables.

Upon examining Hekmat's Persian translation, it appears he does eliminate the crucial "palmer/pilgrim" pun that Shakespeare uses in the original English sonnet.

In the lines:

"Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;
For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

The pun works because "palmer" has the double meaning of both "pilgrim" and "palm of the hand." So, Juliet is able to extend Romeo's metaphor and use the multiple meanings of "palmer" to refer to both pilgrims kissing and their hands touching palm to palm.

However, in Hekmat's translation, the corresponding lines are (Hekmat, n.d., p. 14):

وی با دل گرم و با دم سرد/ «ای سرو جوانه جوانمرد
ای زائر نیکوکار از عبادت تو بوی ریا و سالوس نمی‌آید. لیکن بوسیدن دست اولیاء
شایسته نیست. همان بهتر که بمصاحفه اکتفا کنی».

While Hekmat aims to preserve the religious imagery overall, the intricate wordplay enabled by the dual meaning of "palmer" disappears. Here, Hekmat uses the Persian word for "pilgrim" (zaayar) but there is no equivalent for the polysemic "palmer." So, the clever pun is lost in translation. This demonstrates how Hekmat is forced to simplify some of Shakespeare's rhetorical complexity to make it intelligible in Persian. The ambiguities and poetic resonances of words like "palmer," central to Shakespeare's mastery of language, are filtered out. This further supports the argument that Hekmat's intertextual approach sacrifices rhetorical intricacies to transform Shakespeare for Iranian readers. The loss of a complex pun like "palmer/pilgrim" illustrates the tradeoffs involved in Hekmat's domesticating translation strategies.

The intertextual shift into Persian literary prose transforms the texts into straightforward prose tales rather than the rhetorically complex dramatic feasts of the originals. Coupled with Hekmat's genre-level interventions, this textual simplification thoroughly repositions Shakespeare intertextually. In rendering Shakespeare accessible to Iranian readers, Hekmat filters away the very rhetorical vehicles that characterize Bard's inimitable style. The texts are understandable in Persian but have lost the essence of Shakespeare.

5.3 Renegotiating Literary Ideology: Hekmat's Intertextual Realignment of Shakespearean Discursive Attitudes

At the discourse level, Hekmat's interpolated Persian verses don't just localize but fully politicize the translations. By weaving nationalist poets into Shakespeare's texts, Hekmat intertextually merges the foreign with ideologically useful domestic references. This interpolated discourse subordinates Shakespeare to the ancient Iranian identity project, recasting the Bard as a mouthpiece for nationalist discourse.

As part of the nationalist and ancientist discourse, there was a concerted effort to foster a sense of kinship with the West and an alignment with the West as a global leader in civilization. In *Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare: A Comparison with Layli and Majnun by Nizami Ganjavi*, a pioneering work in comparative literature, Hekmat (n.d., PP.الف.ب) sought to highlight Iran's parallels with the West. In the preface to this book, Hekmat explicitly articulates his intention, stating:

The style employed in crafting this story aligns with my previous approach when translating excerpts from "The Merchant of Venice," "As you like it" and "Macbeth, King of Scotland". Specifically, I have condensed the play into the form of a prose fable, drawing inspiration from the tales written by Charles and Mary Lamb. In this process, I have integrated select words from the original masterfully, placing them in fitting contexts. Additionally, my enduring inclination to incorporate Persian poems in a manner reminiscent of earlier poets led me to include suitable verses from Nezami Ganjavi's epic, "Layli and Majnun." Engaging with the poetry of "Layli and Majnun" heightened my awareness of the striking parallels between the two tales of love, captivating and inspiring me to delve further. Consequently, I decided to compose a chapter that explores both the similarities and differences between

these poignant tales. This reflective chapter was seamlessly integrated into the translation. The profound impact of Layli and Majnun's passionate narrative, characterized by enchanting poetry that tugs at the reader's heart, prompted me to embark on a broader investigation. I delved into the history of this legendary tale, tracing its origins in Eastern lands and its evolution within Persian literature. The names of Layli and Majnun have come to symbolize absolute devotion on the path of love. In response, I penned another chapter delving into the rich history and symbolism associated with this timeless narrative.

In this work, Hekmat commences with a concise historical overview of the narrative of *Romeo and Juliet*, subsequently presenting a summarization of the play in prose. Throughout this rendition, he seamlessly incorporates verses from classical Persian poets. In the second chapter, titled "Layli and Majnun According to Nizami," Hekmat elucidates the narrative of Layli and Majnun in the words of Nizami. Moving to the third chapter, designated as "Comparison of the Two Poets' Works," Hekmat undertakes a comparative analysis between Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and Nizami Ganjavi's epic "Layli and Majnun." He articulates, "Shakespeare and Nizami are highly sensitive poets and eloquent storytellers who represent the civilizations of East and West" (Hekmat, n.d.: 105). Additionally, he underscores the commonality within the characters of these literary masterpieces, stating, "Romeo and Juliet and Layli and Majnun both belong to the great human family. Both possess the same emotions, at the same time telling the story of two great human civilizations" (Hekmat, n.d., p.105).

By highlighting parallels between the Layli and Majnun narrative and the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, Hekmat posits that Iran's literary legacy stands on par with the pinnacle of Western literature. Beyond merely emphasizing the similarities between Iranian and Western literary traditions in this work, Hekmat's translation approach for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* further underscores this perspective. Notably, Hekmat has not offered a precise translation of Shakespeare's play. Instead, by condensing the play or presenting an abbreviated rendition, and interspersing verses from Persian poets into the translated text, he adopts a form of radical domestication.

Hekmat applies a similar approach in another translation of Shakespeare's works titled *Five Tales from the Works of William Shakespeare*. In the introductory remarks of the second edition (1956) of this translation, he extols Shakespeare before delving into an explanation of his translation methodology:

This humble author, immersed in the extensive study and appreciation of the renowned author's works, and harboring a genuine passion for deciphering the true essence of his words, has persistently endeavored to extract valuable gems from that treasure trove of eloquence for Persian-speaking audiences. The objective has always been to convey as many tales and narratives as possible in our **national** language. Thus, with considerable dedication and enduring challenges over nearly four decades (1915-1953), I gradually translated ten stories from the esteemed author's works. I adopted a distinct approach to this translation, opting to distill and articulate the essence and summary of each narrative in a straightforward and eloquent prose reminiscent of ancient prose writers and epistolary authors. Additionally, I judiciously incorporated select words from the master's oeuvre, akin to common sayings and comprehensive expressions, seamlessly embedding them within my text. Furthermore, for contextual relevance, I interspersed verses from renowned Persian poetry books as a form of testimony and exemplification in those stories. The selected poetic works included Saadi's Divan, Hafez's Divan, Nizami's Khusrow and Shirin, Bahram-nameh, Jami's Yusuf and Zulaykha, Jami's Salaman and Absal, Nizami's Layli and Majnun, Saadi's Boustani, and Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. This method was chosen as it resonated more harmoniously with the **preferences of Persian speakers in storytelling**.

(Hekmat, 1956, p.6, our emphasis)

The choice of the term "national language" rather than the Persian language in this preface is indicative. Implicitly, Hekmat perceives all Iranian audiences, encompassing both Persian-speaking and non-Persian-speaking individuals, as sharing a unified national language, namely Persian. This subtle emphasis on the national character of the Persian language aligns with the foundations of Iranian nationalism prevalent during this era. The inclusion of the names of Iranian poets in the preface suggests that Hekmat's primary concern lies in associating Iranian poets with a

"master" whom he consistently depicts as a representative of Western civilization, rather than solely introducing Shakespeare accurately to Persian speakers. In essence, Hekmat's translation approach imparts a distinctly Persian essence to Shakespeare's works. As he openly acknowledges, he aims to enhance the accessibility of the plays for Iranian audiences. Through this methodology, he implicitly encourages readers to perceive these dramas as integral to their cultural heritage, transcending the categorization of Western literature. Hekmat, by integrating the rich tradition of Persian poetry into his translations, subtly conveys to Persian readers that the Western playwright's oeuvre has been enriched by Iran's literary history. In essence, this approach underscores Hekmat's demonstration of Iran's cultural adaptability and capacity to assimilate foreign works while preserving its unique identity. The domestication of Shakespeare's works to align with Iranian tastes and aesthetics not only reflects Hekmat's confidence in the literary and cultural prowess of Iran and the Persian language but also underscores the cultural and literary commonalities shared between Iran and the West.

In essence, Hekmat's chosen translation method seamlessly aligned with the prevailing discourse—an approach geared towards identity construction. This discourse sought to construct identity by evoking a glorious past, emphasizing parallels with Western civilization, and presenting Iran's own cultural achievements on equal footing with those of the West. Hekmat's domestication method, in reality, was grounded in a profound national confidence and pride deeply rooted in the prevalent ancientist discourse. He firmly asserted the equivalence of Iranian civilization to Western civilization and viewed Iranian literature as equivalent to its Western counterpart. Consequently, he felt justified in employing terms like حکایت (tale) in lieu of "tragedy," altering character names within the play and integrating verses from classical poets into Shakespeare's text.

While theories of domestication like Venuti's offer valuable insights, applying them wholesale to evaluate Hekmat's translation methodology risks overlooking the particular cultural and historical context at play. Venuti portrays domestication as an ideological strategy that reflects an imperialist denial of cultural difference, with the target culture positioning itself as the standard against which

foreign texts are neutered (Venuti, 2017). Robbins aligns with this view, stating that the transformation of alterity indicates an imperialist stance in the target culture (Robbins 1996, p. 408). However, the Iranian society of Hekmat's era fundamentally differs from the sites of Western cultural dominance that Venuti and Robbins critique. Despite Hekmat's extensive domestication, his motivations cannot be reduced to a self-aggrandizing imperialist ideology. Iran held no cultural hegemony over the West during the Pahlavi dynasty. Rather, Hekmat's rewriting of Shakespeare's intertextual ties aimed to assert Iran's literary parity with the West, not subordinate Shakespeare's texts. He strategically appropriated and domesticated Shakespeare to showcase the sophistication of Persian poetic traditions, while forging ideological and aesthetic links with Western culture. This form of bidirectional cultural bridging contrasts with the unidirectional imposition of standards that typifies imperialist domestication and appropriation. Fundamentally, Hekmat appropriated Shakespeare not from a stance of cultural dominance, but to foster mutuality and assert Iran's worth on an international stage. His domestication methodology arose from a resistant counter-hegemonic posture that used strategic appropriation of foreign masterpieces to elevate Iranian literature. Therefore, while Hekmat undeniably engaged in domestication and appropriation, understanding his approach requires looking beyond the frameworks of Venuti, Robbins, and other theorists who examined domestication within imperialist Western paradigms. The Iranian historical and cultural setting problematizes the notion of his translations as an ideologically imperialist project.

Hekmat's ability to strategically appropriate and domesticate Shakespeare must also be understood within the context of his prestigious status in Iranian society. As an influential statesman and intellectual, Hekmat possessed the cultural capital to engage extensively with foreign literary works from a position of authority, rather than subordination. His illustrious career in advancing Iran's educational and cultural institutions, as Milani (2003) highlights, exemplified a steadfast nationalism and modernization agenda. Having held senior governmental roles and spearheaded reforms in areas like public education, Hekmat's contributions left an enduring mark on Iran's national progress. His identity was interwoven with

serving the nation through modernization and the promotion of the Persian language and heritage. Thus, Hekmat's translation of Shakespeare did not stem from an inferior positioning vis-à-vis Western culture. Instead, his cultural prominence and nationalistic motivations lent him the legitimacy to strategically appropriate Shakespearean texts.

5. Conclusion

This examination of Ali Asghar Hekmat's domesticating translations of Shakespeare illuminates the complex interplay between translation, intertextuality, and identity construction in early 20th century Iran. Hekmat's strategic assimilation of Shakespeare demonstrates how radical domestication can be leveraged as an ideological tool, yet also underscores the ethical perils of excessive rewriting that erases the essence of source texts. The analysis reveals how Hekmat's social authority and nationalist agenda shaped his appropriation of Shakespeare to advance dominant ancientist discourse. His prestige as an influential statesman and intellectual enabled this act of cultural translation and authorized the underlying ideological motives. Further, Hekmat's textual interventions across multiple socio-textual levels, encompassing genre, rhetorical style, and discourse, underscore a deliberate realignment of Shakespeare's works with Persian literary conventions. This radical intertextual reconstitution thoroughly severs Shakespeare's English ties, instead situating the plays within classical Persian poetry to resonate with Iranian sensibilities.

While Hekmat's approach reflects the exigencies of his particular historical context, it problematically erases Shakespeare's original essence to promote Iranian nationalism. The ethical stakes of appropriation surface in the tension between Hekmat's bid for cultural equity and his instrumental treatment of source materials. Ultimately, the intrinsic value of faithfully conveying Shakespeare's artistry is sacrificed for ideological expediency through radical assimilation.

Nevertheless, Hekmat's work provides valuable insights into translation's identity-making power, especially regarding marginalized cultures' resistance to hegemonic impositions. His domestication methodology, arising from counter-hegemonic nationalism, contrasts with the unidirectional dominance critiqued in Venuti's framework. The analysis emphasizes the need for a

nuanced evaluation of domestication that carefully weighs historical particularities against universal ethics. A further cross-cultural examination of how intertextual mediation enables strategic identity construction through translation would enrich our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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