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Derrida, Deconstruction, and Translation: Revisiting the Debate on Hafez in English

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ABSTRACT

This article critically reconsiders the discourse on translation plurality through Jacques Derrida's deconstructive philosophy, focusing on the English translations of Hafez, a revealing case given his canonical status in Persian literature, semantic ambivalence, and ideologically diverse translation history. Rather than analyzing specific translations, the study interrogates evaluative frameworks rooted in authenticity, fidelity, and cultural equivalence. Drawing on Derrida's notions of *différance*, iterability, the supplement, and hospitality, it argues that translation is not a secondary act of transfer but a constitutive process that generates new meanings through repetition and transformation. Revisiting critiques such as Parvin Loloi's and the opposing positions of Mohammad-Reza Shafi'i-Kadkani and Aria Fani, the article exposes their shared logocentric and metaphysical assumptions. A deconstructive perspective instead affirms translation plurality as an ethical and epistemological condition of language, calling for a reconfiguration of translation studies grounded in openness to difference and textual alterity.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, translation studies has undergone significant theoretical transformation, with poststructuralist and deconstructive perspectives challenging long-standing assumptions about language, meaning, and representation. Among these interventions, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction presents one of the most radical critiques of traditional translation theory. By challenging foundational binaries such as original/translation, presence/absence, and identity/difference, Derrida redefines translation as more than a derivative copy: it becomes a constitutive process of meaning-making through *différance*. (Derrida, 1976, 1985). Within this framework, meaning emerges not as a fixed, transferable content, but as a deferred effect of relational and contextual play, rendering translation not a secondary act of fidelity but a primary mode of textual and cultural production. Concepts such as iterability and the supplement further reveal why equivalence and fidelity which so often are used to judge English versions of Hafez, cannot rest on the illusion of stable presence (Derrida, 1976, 1981). This article develops a critical engagement with the implications of deconstruction for understanding translational multiplicity, with particular attention to the discourse surrounding English translations of Hafez's poetry. Rather than analyzing specific translations, the focus here is on the intellectual and ideological frameworks that govern their reception and evaluation. In particular, the article critiques Parvin Loloi's evaluative paradigm, which emphasizes aesthetic fidelity and implicitly upholds logocentric hierarchies; the essentialist position of Mohammad-Reza Shafi'i-Kadkani, who posits the untranslatability of Hafez based on cultural specificity; and Aria Fani's historicist response, which, while more nuanced, remains entangled in metaphysical binaries. In fact, this article addresses the following problem: how can deconstructive philosophy, especially the Derridean concepts of *différance*, iterability, and the supplement, reframe scholarly and critical discourse about English translations of Hafez? To make this explicit, the paper pursues three objectives. First, it critiques existing paradigms in translation studies that tend to treat multiple translations as symptomatic failures of fidelity or as nothing more than alternatives to a lost original. Second, it introduces and operationalizes Derrida's key terms to show how translational plurality can be theorized as constitutive of meaning. Third, it proposes an ethics of translation grounded in hospitality and singular responsibility, and links that ethics to concrete implications for critics, translators, and teachers.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Derrida's Deconstructive Philosophy

2.1 Logocentrism and the Critique of Western Metaphysics

Derrida's critique of logocentrism is central to his philosophy and underpins his view of translation. By *logocentrism* he means the longstanding Western tendency, from Plato onward, to privilege speech over writing. Speech is assumed to provide direct access to meaning and intention, while writing is treated as secondary, derivative, and prone to distortion. This opposition structures other key binaries—presence/absence, original/copy, nature/culture, and, importantly for translation studies, original/translation (Derrida, 1976).

Derrida shows that such binaries are hierarchical, consistently privileging one term as authentic and relegating the other as artificial or inferior. In translation theory, this has meant viewing translation as a lesser, mechanical act of transfer. Yet deconstruction does not simply invert the hierarchy: it reveals that the supposedly primary term depends on what it excludes. Writing, translation, and other “secondary” forms persistently unsettle the authority of the “original,” exposing its incompleteness (Derrida, 1976; 1978).

2.2 Différance: The Play of Difference and Deferral

Central to Derrida's alternative to logocentric thinking is the concept of *différance* (Derrida, 1976, 1982), a neologism playing on French words *différer* (to differ) and *différer* (to defer). This concept exemplifies Derrida's argument about writing's fundamental role in meaning constitution. *Différance* describes temporal and spatial movement through which meaning is produced, not as expression of pre-existing idea but as result of differential relationships between elements within a system (Mikics, 2009). Unlike Saussure's concept of difference, which assumes signs achieve determinate meaning through differential relationships within a synchronic system, *différance* emphasizes the temporal dimension of signification. Meaning is never fully present at any given moment but is always deferred, emerging through traces of other meanings and contexts that are simultaneously evoked and displaced. This temporal structure means meaning is always provisional, subject to recontextualization and transformation (Derrida, 1982; Saussure, 2011).

For translation studies, *différance* has revolutionary implications. If meaning is always already differential and deferred, then traditional notion of translation as transfer of stable meanings from one language to another becomes untenable. Instead, translation emerges as process participating in meaning's very constitution, creating new differential relationships and opening new possibilities for signification. This emphasis on multiple contexts and recontextualization movement reveals how translation constantly re-establishes connections between signifiers and signifieds, making translation not secondary activity but fundamental aspect of how language works.

Recent applications of poststructuralist semiotics to Persian literature demonstrate these implications concretely. Sajadi and Babaei (2024) employ Barthes's distinction between readerly and writerly texts to show how meaning emerges not from authorial intention but through "the five semiotic codes" that create "plural possibilities for signification" (p. 59). Their analysis reveals that texts traditionally deemed "closed" contain latent multiplicities activated through interpretive engagement, a finding that resonates with Derrida's insistence that translation participates in meaning's constitution rather than its mere transfer.

2.3 Iterability and the Structure of Repetition

Closely related to *différance* is Derrida's concept of iterability, describing the structure of repetition that makes meaning possible while simultaneously making it unstable. Every sign, to function as sign, must be repeatable across different contexts. However, this repetition never produces identical meaning

because each new context inevitably alters the sign's significance. This creates what Derrida calls "iterative structure" of language, a structure that is simultaneously conservative (preserving meaning) and transformative (altering meaning) (Derrida, 1988). Iterability has particular relevance for understanding translation. Traditional translation theory assumes meanings can be extracted from original contexts and reproduced in new linguistic and cultural environments. However, language's iterative structure suggests such reproduction is impossible—every repetition is also alteration. This does not mean translation is futile but rather that it should be understood as creative process generating new meanings rather than simply reproducing existing ones.

3. Derrida's Translation Theory: Key Texts and Concepts

3.1 "Des Tours de Babel": Deconstruction and Linguistic Multiplicity

Derrida's 1985 essay "Des Tours de Babel" represents his most sustained engagement with translation theory, providing deconstructive reading of both the biblical Babel myth and Walter Benjamin's influential "The Task of the Translator" (Derrida, 1985; Munday, Pinto, & Blakesley, 2022). The essay begins with characteristic Derridean move, questioning the very possibility of its own translation, thus highlighting paradoxes inhabiting all translation discussions. The Tower of Babel narrative, as Derrida (1985) interprets it, is not simply story about linguistic diversity but meditation on relationships between language, power, and identity. The Shemites' attempt to build tower to heaven represents desire for linguistic unity and cultural dominance, desire to impose their language and name on all peoples. God's intervention, creating linguistic multiplicity and making tower's completion impossible, can be read as both punishment and gift. While preventing Shemites from achieving imperial ambitions, it also creates conditions for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. Crucially, Derrida (1985) argues that God's intervention does not simply create need for translation but reveals that translation was always already necessary. Even before Babel, language was marked by difference and required translation. The myth thus reveals originary character of translation—it is not secondary activity becoming necessary due to linguistic diversity but fundamental aspect of how language works. This insight undermines traditional hierarchy privileging monolingual original texts over multilingual translated texts.

3.2 Benjamin, Translation, and Pure Language

Derrida's engagement with Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" reveals both convergences and tensions between deconstructive and messianic approaches to translation (Derrida, 1985). Benjamin's essay proposes that translation's primary function is not communication but revelation of "pure language" transcending particularities of individual languages (Benjamin, 2012). While Derrida appreciates Benjamin's anti-instrumental approach to translation and critique of communication-based theories, he questions Benjamin's investment in pure language concept. From deconstructive perspective, notion of pure language risks reproducing metaphysical gesture privileging unity over multiplicity and presence over difference. From a deconstructive perspective, the notion of "pure language" may risk reproducing a metaphysical gesture (Derrida, 1985). However, Derrida also finds in Benjamin's essay resources for

more radical understanding of translation. Benjamin's emphasis on "afterlife" (Überleben) of texts in translation suggests translation is not merely reproduction of pre-existing meanings but creation of new signification possibilities. Texts live on in translation, but this survival involves transformation rather than preservation (Benjamin, 2012; Gentzler, 2001).

3.3 "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?": The Critique of Instrumentalism

Derrida's 1998 lecture "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" provides sustained critique of instrumentalist approaches to translation prioritizing efficiency, transparency, and cultural assimilation (Derrida, 2021). The lecture was delivered to professional translators, and Derrida uses this context to explore institutional and economic pressures shaping contemporary translation practice. The concept of "relevance" that Derrida examines refers to translation strategies aiming to produce maximum comprehensibility with minimum reader effort. Relevant translation prioritizes fluency, domestication, and cultural adaptation over fidelity to source text's linguistic and cultural specificities. While such strategies may serve pragmatic purposes, Derrida (2021) argues they also enact "ethnocentric violence" reducing foreign to familiar and eliminating opportunities for intercultural learning.

Derrida's analysis of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* provides concrete example of how translation can serve as instrument of cultural domination. Portia's translation of Shylock's demand for justice into Christian discourse of mercy represents "relevant translation", translation achieving maximum cultural compatibility by transforming foreign into familiar terms. However, this translation also enacts violence against Shylock's cultural and religious identity, ultimately leading to forced conversion and economic dispossession (Derrida, 2021; Venuti, 2013).

4. Rethinking Translation Discourse: Deconstruction and the Reception of Hafez in English

The question of whether and how classical Persian poetry, especially that of Hafez, can be meaningfully rendered in English has long preoccupied scholars and translators alike. Central to this preoccupation is not simply the difficulty of the source texts, but the discursive frameworks through which translation is judged. Debates surrounding cultural integrity, aesthetic fidelity, and the possibility of cross-cultural understanding are shaped by persistent metaphysical assumptions about the relationship between language, meaning, and origin. These assumptions, often implicit, inform both scholarly dismissals of existing translations and theoretical claims about untranslatability. To assess these positions critically, this section turns first to the broader evaluative discourse exemplified by Parvin Loloi (2002), before examining the essentialist stance of Mohammad-Reza Shafi'i-Kadkani (2011) and the historicist critique of Aria Fani (2021). In engaging these perspectives through the lens of Derrida's deconstructive thought, we aim to unsettle the hierarchies of authenticity and adequacy that have long governed the reception of Hafez in English and to propose instead a more hospitable and ethically attuned model of translational plurality.

4.1 The Evaluative Paradigm: Parvin Loloi and the Metaphysics of Translational Adequacy

The two-century tradition of English translations of Hafez is often framed as a narrative of failure. Parvin Loloi's survey of English translations of Hafez exemplifies the logocentric assumptions that have governed translation discourse (Loloi, 2002). Her systematic categorization of translations (prose, verse, and imitation) reveals an evaluative framework grounded in hierarchical oppositions that privilege authenticity, fidelity, and cultural purity over the productive possibilities of translational difference. While ostensibly descriptive, Loloi's analysis consistently reinforces metaphysical hierarchies that consider original texts as self-present repositories of meaning and translations as more or less successful attempts at reproduction.

The binary logic structuring Loloi's critique becomes apparent in her treatment of literal versus free translation. She praises Edward Byles Cowell's prose translations as "amongst the best of Victorian translations" (Loloi, 2002, p. 498) precisely because they achieve literal fidelity while maintaining "smooth idiomatic English" (Loloi, 2002, p. 498). This judgment reveals the impossible standard that governs traditional translation evaluation: translations must be simultaneously faithful to the source and fluent in the target language, preserving original meaning while adapting to new linguistic contexts. The persistent search for this impossible synthesis reflects what Derrida (1976) identifies as logocentrism's commitment to full presence, the belief that meaning can be extracted from one context and reproduced intact in another.

Loloi's dismissal of Lieut.-Col. H. Wilberforce Clarke's complete translation as "particularly graceless and dogmatic" (Loloi, 2002, p. 498) illustrates the violence inherent in evaluative frameworks that prioritize aesthetic judgment over translational possibility. Clarke's version, despite its acknowledged literalness, is condemned for its "mass of unassimilated information" that "obfuscates all the poetic qualities of its original" (Loloi, 2002, p. 498). This critique assumes that poetic qualities exist as essential properties that can be either preserved or destroyed in translation, rather than as effects produced through differential relationships between textual elements. The metaphor of obfuscation implies that the original's clarity is naturally given and that translation's role is to maintain transparent access to this pre-existing illumination.

Similarly, Loloi's treatment of formal innovation reveals deep suspicion of translational creativity. Her description of attempts to reproduce Persian meter and rhyme as "literary acrobatics" dismisses formal experimentation as mere technical display divorced from genuine poetic achievement (Loloi, 2002, p. 498). Walter Leaf's versions are praised for avoiding a "fall," while John Payne and Paul Smith are said to have taken "very heavy tumbles" (Loloi, 2002, p. 498). This metaphorical language positions translation as a perilous performance in which success is measured by the translator's ability to avoid failure rather than by the new possibilities their work might open. The acrobatic metaphor reduces translation to a mechanical skill rather than recognizing it as a site of creative encounter between linguistic and cultural systems.

Most revealing is Loloi's ambivalent treatment of what she terms "imitation" or "creative translation" (Loloi, 2002, p. 499). While acknowledging that works by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, Elizabeth Bridges, and Basil Bunting "communicate much more of the nature of Hafez's greatness than is communicated by the more 'faithfully' literal translations" (Loloi, 2002, p. 499), she hesitates to call them translations at all. This hesitation exposes the rigid boundaries that traditional translation theory maintains between legitimate reproduction and illegitimate transformation. The scare quotes around "faithfully" signal Loloi's awareness that fidelity itself is problematic, yet she cannot abandon the evaluative framework that makes fidelity the ultimate criterion of translational success.

The survey's concluding judgment epitomizes the logocentric violence that Derrida (1976) identifies in Western approaches to linguistic difference. Loloi declares that English translations of Hafez "generally lack any great poetic merit" and "have rarely managed to allow the English reader even a glimpse of the rich clarity and vigorous beauty of a great medieval Persian poet" (Loloi, 2002, p. 500). This assessment assumes that Hafez's greatness exists as an essential property that skilled translators might capture and convey to English readers. The metaphor of "glimpsing" reduces translation to a transparent window through which original beauty might be perceived, ignoring the constitutive role that translation plays in producing the very "clarity" and "beauty" it purports to transmit.

From a deconstructive perspective, Loloi's framework reproduces the metaphysical gesture that privileges presence over difference, original over supplement, and authenticity over transformation. Her systematic dismissal of translation plurality as a series of more or less adequate attempts at reproduction forecloses the possibility that different translations might generate different aspects of Hafez's textual potential. By maintaining rigid distinctions between faithful translation and creative interpretation, literal rendering and free adaptation, successful communication and failed transmission, her analysis participates in the violent hierarchy that positions translation as eternally secondary to original composition.

Yet Loloi's own survey inadvertently demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining these hierarchical distinctions. Her acknowledgment that the most creative translations often communicate more of Hafez's "greatness" than literal versions suggests that fidelity and creativity are not simply opposed but complexly interrelated (Loloi, 2002, p. 499). Her recognition that formal constraints inevitably transform meaning, that cultural differences resist seamless translation, and that every translator must make interpretive choices reveals the iterative structure that makes translation both necessary and transformative. These insights, however, remain trapped within an evaluative framework that treats such complications as problems to be solved rather than as conditions that reveal the productive nature of translational difference.

4.2 The Essentialist Paradigm: Mohammad-Reza Shafi'i-Kadkani and the Metaphysics of Cultural Authenticity

Mohammad-Reza Shafi'i-Kadkani's influential position on Persian poetry translation represents a paradigmatic example of how traditional scholarly approaches can delegitimize entire traditions of cross-cultural literary engagement. Drawing upon a genealogy that extends from al-Jahiz's ninth-century pronouncement through Robert Frost's famous dictum that "poetry is what is lost in translation," Shafi'i-Kadkani argues that translation is primarily a function of cultural, and not linguistic, affinity and therefore concludes that Hāfez's poem is all but untranslatable in European languages (Shafi'i-Kadkani, 2011). This position stems from a theoretical framework that privileges cultural authenticity and assumes the existence of stable, recoverable meanings that can be definitively lost or preserved in translation.

4.2.1 The Architectural Metaphor and Its Metaphysical Foundations

Shafi'i-Kadkani's central metaphor, comparing poetic translation to the dismantling and reconstruction of architectural monuments, appears to offer a more flexible understanding of translational practice than crude fidelity-based models. He conceptualizes poetry as linguistic architecture, where translation resembles dismantling a building and reconstructing it elsewhere. While ordinary buildings can be rebuilt by any competent builder, architectural masterpieces like Isfahan's Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque require architects equal to the original creators. This leads him to distinguish between translatable and untranslatable poetry: contemporary Persian works, which he characterizes as derivative imitations of Western models, translate easily and may even improve in the process, while classical masterpieces by Hafez, Saadi, or modern innovators like Akhavan Sales require exceptionally creative translators to avoid producing "inferior and vulgar renditions" (Shafi'i-Kadkani, 2011).

However, this apparent flexibility masks a deeper commitment to essentialist thinking about cultural authenticity and linguistic property. The architectural metaphor embodies what Derrida identifies as metaphysics of presence, assuming poems contain stable, determinate meanings that translation either preserves or loses. This contradicts Derrida's insight that meaning is never fully present even in original texts but emerges through differential relationships and temporal deferral, what he terms *différance* (Derrida, 1982). The architectural analogy implies that poetic meaning has a stable, objective form that can be analyzed, dismantled, and potentially reconstructed, reproducing logocentrism's central illusion.

4.2.2 The Cultural Exclusion Argument and Its Implications

The implications of Shafi'i-Kadkani's metaphysical commitments become most apparent in his detailed analysis of cultural specificity. His extended exposition of a single hemistich from Hafez, "be mey sajjādeh rangīn kon" (stain the prayer rug with wine), reveals multiple layers of what he considers untranslatability. According to Shafi'i-Kadkani, fundamental Islamic concepts of "najis" (ritually impure) and "tāher" (ritually pure) remain foreign to Western Christian consciousness, where wine holds sacred rather than defiling significance. The prayer rug (sajjādeh) carries devotional associations requiring extensive Islamic theological background. Most crucially, Shafi'i-Kadkani argues that authentic aesthetic

appreciation requires cultural references to exist in the reader's unconscious mind. For Iranian readers, figures like Siyavash, Rostam, and Hallaj inhabit unconscious realms, enabling genuine aesthetic experience. Western readers, even with explanatory footnotes, can only access these references through conscious effort, missing deeper aesthetic layers (Shafi'i-Kadkani, 2011).

This analysis exemplifies what Derrida terms "ethnocentric violence", not through domesticating translation but through cultural exclusion (Derrida, 2021; Venuti, 2013, p. 71). By positioning Persian cultural knowledge as prerequisite for authentic literary experience, Shafi'i-Kadkani's approach creates barriers to intercultural dialogue and reinforces cultural boundaries. His dismissal of contemporary Persian poetry as derivative reveals another violence, privileging certain historical periods as authentically Persian while dismissing others as corrupted by foreign influence. This ignores cultural production's always already hybrid nature and the impossibility of pure cultural origins.

4.2.3 Deconstructive Challenges: Différance, Iterability, and the Supplement

Derrida's notion of *différance* offers a sharp alternative to Shafi'i-Kadkani's cultural authenticity model (Derrida, 1982). If meaning is always differential and deferred—produced through relations within systems rather than as fixed ideas—then translation cannot be reduced to transferring stable meanings. Instead, it participates in meaning's constitution, creating new relations and possibilities absent from the source. Hafez's poetry, therefore, does not lose "authenticity" in English but generates fresh meanings within new linguistic and cultural contexts.

Derrida's idea of *iterability* further complicates Shafi'i-Kadkani's emphasis on cultural context. Iterability means signs must be repeatable across contexts to function, but each repetition shifts meaning (Derrida, 1988). Shafi'i-Kadkani assumes terms like *najis* or *taher* are stable for Iranian readers but opaque to Westerners. Yet iterability shows that even within Islamic contexts these terms vary across textual, historical, and interpretive uses. Translation is thus not an exception but continuous with how language normally works: every reading and contextual shift, even within Persian, already constitutes translation.

Derrida's analysis of *supplementarity* undermines hierarchies between original and translation (Derrida, 1976). Translation functions as a supplement that both sustains and destabilizes the original. Shafi'i-Kadkani's architectural metaphor tries to contain this by treating translation as external imitation, but in fact the survival of Persian poetry already relies on ongoing acts of interpretation and transformation. Insisting on untranslatability risks endangering rather than safeguarding authenticity by denying this dynamic of renewal. Drawing on Benjamin's idea of textual "afterlife" (*Überleben*), Derrida (1985) suggests that texts live through transformation in translation. For Persian poetry, encounters with other languages can enrich rather than diminish its significance. From a deconstructive perspective, the issue is not whether translation reproduces original meanings but how it reveals the differential and iterative structures of meaning itself. Instead of guarding cultural boundaries, such an approach values cross-cultural encounters as sources of new significance. Translation, then, should be seen less as a threat

to authenticity and more as a productive force that reshapes both source and target cultures beyond fixed intentions or limits.

4.3 The Historicist Paradigm: A Corrective That Remains Constrained

In response to Shafi'i-Kadkani's absolutist position, Aria Fani offers a sophisticated historicist critique in his article "The Allure of Untranslatability: Shafi'i-Kadkani and (Not) Translating Persian Poetry" (2021) that attempts to rehabilitate translation by exposing the modern origins of untranslatability discourse. Fani argues that "untranslatability is not a useful conceptual framework for the analysis of linguistic and cultural difference" (Fani, 2021, p. 95), contending that this concept represents what he calls "the allure of untranslatability", a seductive but ultimately misleading framework rooted in romantic nationalism's obsession with cultural purity and linguistic boundaries (p. 96).

Fani's genealogical analysis demonstrates that untranslatability discourse emerged historically from specific ideological conditions rather than representing universal truths about language and culture. He traces how the monolingual paradigm that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe created artificial boundaries between languages and cultures that were previously understood as fluid and interconnected (Fani, 2021). His examination of premodern Perso-Arabic translation cultures reveals how translation functioned as "a never-ending mechanism of exegetical rewriting" rather than mechanical transfer of fixed meanings (p. 108). Through concrete analysis of medieval translation practices, Fani shows how figures like al-Jāhīz and al-Jurjānī operated within frameworks that emphasized creative transformation rather than anxious preservation of cultural authenticity.

Most significantly, Fani's historicist approach reveals how Shafi'i-Kadkani's architectural metaphor, positioning translation as either successful reconstruction or inevitable loss, reflects modern nationalist anxieties rather than timeless truths about linguistic difference. By demonstrating that classical Islamic literary culture viewed translation as creative rewriting, Fani effectively denaturalizes contemporary untranslatability claims and shows their contingent, ideological origins (Fani, 2021). His analysis of how premodern translators engaged in practices like "parody, allusion, and contra-faction (mu'aradah in Arabic, *esteqbāl* or 'welcoming' in Persian)" reveals alternative models for understanding cross-cultural textual engagement (p. 109).

However, while Fani's historicist position offers a more nuanced alternative to Shafi'i-Kadkani's cultural essentialism, his approach remains constrained by the very logocentric binary thinking that Derrida's deconstruction seeks to overcome. Despite his critique of romantic nationalism's cultural boundaries, Fani's analysis reproduces what Derrida would identify as a hierarchical opposition between authentic/inauthentic historical periods, privileging premodern "authenticity" over modern "distortion" (see Derrida, 1976). His argument establishes a temporal hierarchy that positions an idealized premodern period of multilingual fluidity against a modern era of nationalist monolingualism, suggesting that returning to classical practices represents more authentic modes of textual engagement.

From a Derridean perspective, Fani's historicist critique, while methodologically sophisticated, fails to recognize how his temporal binaries reproduce the same logocentric structure he seeks to overcome.

When Fani argues that premodern translation cultures were characterized by creative "welcoming" while modern approaches suffer from nationalist anxieties about loss, he establishes what Derrida would call a "metaphysical hierarchy" that privileges historical origin over contemporary derivation. The concept of *différance* reveals that even Fani's idealized premodern practices were already marked by the same differential and deferral processes that characterize all linguistic activity—meaning was never fully present or stable even in classical Judeo-Islamic contexts (Derrida, 1982).

Moreover, Fani's valorization of premodern "radical rewriting" (Fani, 2021. P. 118) as more authentic than contemporary translation depends on the same assumptions about textual boundaries and cultural purity that his critique of romantic nationalism attempts to expose. While Fani (2021) correctly identifies how nationalist discourse artificially reifies linguistic boundaries, his alternative solution, recovering supposedly more authentic historical practices, inadvertently reproduces what Derrida calls "the metaphysics of presence" by positing an ideal historical moment free from the contaminations of cultural nationalism (Derrida, 1976). Derrida's analysis of iterability demonstrates that all textual practices, whether premodern "welcoming" or contemporary "translation," participate in the same structure of repetition that makes meaning both possible and unstable (see Derrida, 1988).

This deconstructive insight reveals how Fani's historicist framework, despite its genealogical sophistication, remains trapped within binary oppositions between pure/distorted cultural practices and original/derivative textual relationships. Even his critique of untranslatability's "allure" reproduces temporal hierarchies that deconstruction would question. While Fani effectively demonstrates the historical contingency of untranslatability discourse, his prescription for returning to premodern authenticity fails to recognize that all historical periods, including his valorized medieval era, are marked by the same fundamental undecidability and temporal deferral that characterizes contemporary translation debates.

A truly deconstructive approach would recognize that neither premodern translation practices nor modern ones provide stable ground for understanding translation. Thus, while Fani's historicist critique represents significant theoretical progress beyond Shafi'i-Kadkani's cultural essentialism, it remains insufficient from a perspective that would embrace the endless play of *différance* constituting all acts of cultural and temporal boundary-crossing.

5. Toward a Deconstructive Ethics of Translation

Having demonstrated how traditional evaluative frameworks, whether aesthetic (Loloi), essentialist (Shafi'i-Kadkani), or historicist (Fani), remain constrained by logocentric assumptions, we now turn to articulating the positive implications of Derrida's deconstructive philosophy for translation theory and practice. A deconstructive ethics of translation does not simply negate existing approaches but opens alternative possibilities for understanding translational encounter as a site of ethical responsibility and creative transformation.

5.1 Hospitality and the Welcome of the Foreign

Derrida's concept of hospitality provides crucial framework for reconceptualizing translation's ethical dimensions. In *Of Hospitality* (2000), Derrida analyzes hospitality's aporetic structure, the impossible possibility of welcoming the other without conditions while simultaneously requiring conditions for any actual welcome to occur. This paradox illuminates translation's ethical complexity: genuine hospitality toward foreign texts requires openness to transformation, yet such openness can only occur within existing linguistic and cultural frameworks that inevitably shape reception.

Traditional translation theory, as exemplified in the scholars examined above, tends to resolve this aporia by prioritizing either complete fidelity (impossible welcome without conditions) or complete domestication (conditional welcome that eliminates foreignness). Loloi's search for translations that preserve "rich clarity and vigorous beauty" while achieving "smooth idiomatic English" exemplifies the impossible demand for unconditional preservation within conditional linguistic frameworks (Loloi, 2002, p. 500). Shafi'i-Kadkani's untranslatability thesis represents the opposite resolution—rejecting welcome entirely by declaring authentic encounter impossible across cultural boundaries (Shafi'i-Kadkani, 2011).

A deconstructive ethics embraces rather than resolves hospitality's aporetic structure. It recognizes that every translation enacts both welcome and violence, opening space for foreign meaning while necessarily transforming it through insertion into new contexts. This double movement does not represent translation's failure but its ethical condition. As Derrida argues, pure hospitality consists in opening one's home and giving it to the stranger, but pure hospitality is also impossible (Derrida, 2000). Translation similarly requires impossible purity, complete openness to alterity, while operating within possible conditions that make such purity structurally unattainable.

This insight transforms how we understand translation's relationship to the foreign. Rather than lamenting translation's inevitable domestication or celebrating its preservation of foreignness, deconstructive ethics recognizes each translation as singular event of hospitality that must be evaluated contextually rather than against universal standards. Lawrence Venuti's influential advocacy for "foreignizing" translation strategies, while valuable in resisting ethnocentric domestication, risks establishing new prescriptive norms that could foreclose other forms of ethical encounter (Venuti, 2017). A deconstructive approach would affirm both foreignizing and domesticating strategies as potentially ethical responses to specific contextual demands.

5.2 Responsibility and the Call of the Other

Derrida's analysis of responsibility in works like *The Gift of Death* (1995) provides additional resources for articulating translation's ethical dimensions. Responsibility, for Derrida, cannot be reduced to following rules or fulfilling duties but involves singular response to the call of the other, response that exceeds calculation and remains structurally undecidable. This understanding of responsibility as response (rather than mere application of principles) has profound implications for translation ethics.

While traditional approaches to translation ethics often appeal to principles such as fidelity, cultural authenticity, or historical accuracy, Derrida's conception of responsibility, especially as articulated in *The*

Gift of Death (1995), encourages us to see translation as an encounter requiring a singular response to the demands of the other. For Derrida, genuine responsibility resists codification; it is never a matter of mechanically applying predetermined criteria, but rather entails a unique and context-sensitive decision each time (Derrida, 1995). Thus, the evaluation of translations, whether through Loloi's attention to literalness and aesthetic merit, Shafi'i-Kadkani's concerns for cultural authenticity, or Fani's historicist models, can be reconceived less as the application of fixed standards and more as an ethical engagement that must always reckon with undecidability. In this sense, no set of rules or models can guarantee the ethical adequacy of a translation; each act of translation instead calls for a thoughtful, irreducibly singular response to the alterity of the source text.

Deconstructive responsibility requires translator and critic to respond to each text's singular call without relying on predetermined frameworks for evaluation. This does not mean abandoning all criteria but recognizing that ethical translation decisions emerge through encounter with specific textual and contextual demands rather than through application of universal principles. The translator becomes responsible for decisions that cannot be justified through appeal to higher authorities, whether aesthetic, cultural, or historical. This responsibility extends to translation criticism. Rather than evaluating translations against fixed standards of adequacy, deconstructive criticism would explore how each translation responds to its source text's alterity and how it opens or forecloses possibilities for intercultural dialogue. Such criticism would be attentive to translation's double movement, its simultaneous preservation and transformation of foreign meaning, without privileging either aspect as inherently superior.

5.3 The Supplement and Translation's Constitutive Role

Derrida's analysis of supplementarity in *Of Grammatology* (1976) provides crucial insight into translation's ontological status. Rather than viewing translation as external addition to self-sufficient original texts, deconstruction reveals translation as supplement that both completes and threatens original meaning. This supplementary logic dissolves traditional hierarchies between original and translation by showing how originals depend on their supplements for meaning and survival. Applied to Persian poetry's English translations, supplementary logic reveals how these translations do not simply reproduce pre-existing meanings but participate in constituting Hafez's contemporary significance. The persistent critical dismissal of English translations as failures misses their constitutive role in maintaining Hafez's literary afterlife and generating new interpretive possibilities. Even translations that scholars condemn as inadequate contribute to ongoing process of meaning production that keeps classical Persian poetry alive in contemporary global literary culture.

This insight challenges the preservationist logic underlying both essentialist untranslatability claims and historicist appeals to authentic premodern practices. Rather than protecting Persian poetry from translation's supposed corruptions, such positions may actually threaten its survival by limiting its capacity for transformation and renewal. Derrida's reading of Benjamin's concept of "afterlife" (*Überleben*) suggests that texts survive through translation's transformative repetition rather than through

preservation of original meaning (Derrida, 1985). A deconstructive understanding of translation's supplementary role would affirm plurality of English translations of Hafez not as competing attempts to capture authentic meaning but as contributions to ongoing textual life that exceeds any single translation or original. Each translation supplements others by opening different possibilities for encounter with Hafez's textual alterity. Even translations that appear to contradict each other contribute to productive multiplication of meaning that constitutes Hafez's contemporary literary existence.

6. Implications for Translation Studies

The deconstructive framework developed throughout this analysis has significant implications for how translation studies might reconceptualize its theoretical foundations, pedagogical practices, and critical methodologies. Rather than proposing wholesale abandonment of existing approaches, this section outlines how deconstructive insights might supplement and transform current practices while opening new avenues for research and teaching.

6.1 Theoretical Reconceptualization

Deconstruction's most fundamental contribution to translation studies lies in its challenge to instrumental and representational models of translation. Traditional theories, whether linguistic (focusing on equivalence) or cultural (emphasizing contextual appropriateness), tend to conceptualize translation as transfer of pre-existing content between stable linguistic systems. Derrida's emphasis on *différance* and iterability reveals such models' theoretical inadequacy by showing how meaning emerges through differential relationships rather than as expression of prior ideas (Derrida, 1982, 1988). A fully deconstructive approach would explore translation as site of ongoing negotiation between multiple, often conflicting demands (linguistic, cultural, aesthetic, ethical, and political) that cannot be synthesized into coherent theoretical program. Such exploration would focus on translation's productive aporias rather than seeking resolution through appeal to higher-order principles. This might involve case studies examining how specific translations navigate competing demands, analysis of how translation practices evolve through encounter with untranslatable elements, and investigation of how translation's temporal structure generates meaning through repetition and difference.

Contemporary applications of complexity science to translation further support this reconceptualization. Hassani and Malekshahi (in press) employ chaos theory to demonstrate that translation processes exhibit fundamental characteristics of non-linear dynamic systems, particularly sensitivity to initial conditions and emergent properties that cannot be reduced to predetermined equivalences. Their framework reveals how translation's inherent unpredictability stems not from translators' inadequacies but from the structural properties of language itself as a complex adaptive system. This complexity-based approach aligns with deconstructive critiques of representational models while providing additional analytical tools for understanding how *différance* operates across the multiple scales and temporalities of translational practice.

6.2 Pedagogical Transformation

Deconstructive insights have profound implications for translation pedagogy, particularly regarding how translation competence is conceptualized and developed. Traditional pedagogical approaches often emphasize development of skills (linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, technical proficiency) that enable students to produce translations meeting predetermined criteria of adequacy (PACTE Group, 2005). While such skills remain important, deconstructive perspective suggests need for pedagogical practices that cultivate sensitivity to translation's creative dimensions.

Translation pedagogy informed by deconstruction might emphasize development of what could be called "aporetic competence", ability to navigate translation's structural undecidability without premature closure. This would involve training students to recognize and work productively with tensions between competing translation demands rather than resolving such tensions through appeal to hierarchical principles. Students would learn to understand their translation decisions as responses to singular textual encounters rather than applications of general rules. Such pedagogy might include exercises comparing multiple translations of same source text, exploring how different translation strategies generate different meanings rather than evaluating translations against original text. Students could practice "reverse translation" exercises that examine how target texts function independently of source texts, developing appreciation for translation's constitutive rather than merely reproductive role. Discussion of translation ethics would emphasize contextual response and responsibility rather than abstract principles. Most importantly, deconstructive pedagogy would cultivate humility regarding translation's limits while affirming its creative possibilities. Students would learn to understand translation failures not as personal inadequacies but as structural conditions that reveal language's differential nature. This might reduce anxiety often associated with translation training while encouraging more experimental and creative approaches to translational challenges.

6.3 Critical Methodologies

The deconstructive framework developed in this article suggests need for new critical methodologies that move beyond traditional evaluation paradigms toward more exploratory and affirmative approaches to translation analysis. Rather than judging translations against standards of fidelity, fluency, or cultural appropriateness, deconstructive criticism would investigate how translations participate in ongoing processes of meaning production and cultural transformation. Such criticism might analyze translation series or traditions to explore how successive translations supplement and transform each other rather than competing for accuracy. Analysis of English translations of Hafez could examine how different historical periods, cultural contexts, and aesthetic movements generate different aspects of Hafez's textual potential rather than asking which translations best capture his "authentic" meaning. This approach would be attentive to how translations function within specific historical moments while contributing to texts' ongoing literary afterlife.

Deconstructive criticism would also explore translation's relationship to broader cultural and political processes. Rather than treating translation as neutral transfer of content, such analysis would examine

how translation participates in construction of cultural identities, formation of literary canons, and negotiation of power relationships between linguistic communities. This might involve investigation of how translation institutions shape translational possibilities, analysis of how market forces influence translation strategies, and exploration of how translation contributes to or resists cultural homogenization. Most significantly, deconstructive criticism would develop methodologies for affirmative analysis of translation plurality. Rather than seeking to identify "best" translations or eliminate "inadequate" ones, such criticism would explore how translational multiplicity generates interpretive possibilities unavailable to monolingual readers. This might involve comparative analysis examining how different translations open different aspects of source texts, investigation of how translation plurality contributes to literary interpretation, and exploration of how multilingual reading practices might inform translation criticism.

7. Conclusion

This article has sought to intervene in ongoing debates about the translatability of Hafez by shifting attention away from questions of authenticity, fidelity, or cultural equivalence toward a deconstructive understanding of translational plurality. Its contribution lies in showing how Derrida's concepts, *différance*, iterability, supplement, and hospitality, can reframe the very terms of the debate. Rather than treating multiple English versions of Hafez as signs of failure, this study positions them as constitutive events in the life of the text, each opening singular interpretive and ethical possibilities. By critically re-reading the evaluative model of Loloi, the essentialist untranslatability thesis of Shafi'i-Kadkani, and the historicist corrective of Fani, the article demonstrates that even the most sophisticated critiques remain entangled in logocentric hierarchies. The novelty of this study is to push beyond these frameworks and propose a translation ethics grounded not in fidelity or cultural recovery, but in openness to alterity, undecidability, and responsibility. In doing so, the article contributes to translation studies in three key ways: first, it displaces entrenched metaphysical assumptions that marginalize translation as secondary; second, it provides a theoretical vocabulary for affirming translational multiplicity as productive rather than problematic; and third, it outlines a model of deconstructive ethics that has concrete implications for criticism, pedagogy, and practice. Ultimately, this article calls for a reorientation of translation studies toward the affirmation of plurality and the recognition of translation as a creative, constitutive, and ethically charged practice.

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