

Echoes of Empowerment: Unraveling Feminine Agency in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath" and Sadegh Hedayat's "Alavieh Khanoum"

Studies in literature and Culture:
from Theory to Practice

2026, Vol. 1(1) 19-32

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

<https://slc.gom.ac.ir/>

[do 10.22091/slic.2025.14124.1008](https://doi.org/10.22091/slic.2025.14124.1008)
journals.gom.ac.ir

Ramzi, Melika¹



Abstract

The concepts of power, discipline, and resistance lie at the heart of Michel Foucault's philosophy and provide a productive framework for analyzing the complex portrayals of female agency in literature. The present comparative study examines Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath* from *The Canterbury Tales* (1476) and Sadegh Hedayat's "Alavieh Khanoum" (1950) through a Foucauldian lens, focusing on how both female protagonists navigate patriarchal structures in their respective socio-historical contexts. Unlike previous readings that analyze each character independently or within psychological and sociological frameworks, this research applies Foucault's concepts of disciplinary societies, bio-power, counter-conduct, and technologies of the self to explore how power operates through marriage, religion, superstition, and performance.

1. PhD Candidate, Department of English Literature and Language, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University (m_ramzi@sbu.ac.ir)

How to cite this article:

Ramzi, Melika. "Echoes of Empowerment: Unraveling Feminine Agency in Geoffrey Chaucer's 'The Wife of Bath' and Sadegh Hedayat's 'Alavieh Khanoum'". *Studies in Literature and Culture*, vol.1, no.1, 2026, pp 19-32.
<https://doi.org/10.22091/SLIC.2025.14124.1008>.

*Received 30 July 2025; Received in revised form 25 Sep 2025; Accepted 20 November 2025; Published online 2026

This paper analyzes whether these two characters can transcend dominant discourses or that they only reproduce them through tactical compliance. The findings reveal that the Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum have rebellious acts of resistance that lead to echoes of empowerment, as their agency remains entrapped by the patriarchal systems that they try to dismantle. Finally, their circular narratives show the inescapability of disciplinary power, where rebellion is simultaneously possible and limited by the mechanisms of discourse.

Keywords: Alavieh Khanoum; disciplinary societies; female agency; Foucauldian discourse; patriarchal power; the Wife of Bath

Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath," one of the main characters in his *The Canterbury Tales*, published in 1476, and Sadegh Hedayat's "Alavieh Khanoum," published as a short story in the collection entitled *Alavieh Khanoum and Dereliction* [= *Alavieh Khanoum va Velengar*] in 1950, tell stories of women negotiating patriarchal environments. This paper compares the distant realms of early twentieth-century Iran and medieval England by focusing on the stories of two female characters who, at first glance, seem unrelated to the reader. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath is one of the many pilgrims who are traveling to the city of Canterbury, and she narrates a tale which mirror her life experiences and norm-breaking beliefs. In her rather lengthy prologue, she openly talks about her previous five marriages and proudly describes how she used her wit, charm, and sexual power to gain control over her husbands, by paradoxically turning their authority against them. In "Alavieh Khanoum," Alavieh, the eponymous main character, is traveling with several others on a pilgrimage, and

whenever the carriages stop, she and her companions perform religious storytelling to earn money from the crowd. Through their dramatic shows of tragic religious moments, they emotionally move the audience to make generous donations. Meanwhile, she meticulously searches for men to enter a “temporary” marriage with her or the girls accompanying her.

Even though the Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum live in different times and countries, what similarities can be found between their experiences as pilgrims on the road? In what ways do these female characters defy and adhere to the social standards that their distinct patriarchal territories impose? Through a closer examination of these narratives, another key question can be raised: Do these two women win over male-dominated structures and, finally, gain authorizing female agency? Having these questions in mind, this paper uses a comparative perspective to explore the complexities of strength, obedience, and rebellion that these two women portray by analyzing their roles in terms of marriage, business, body, religion, superstition, narcissism, physical dominance, and their use of masculine discourse, adopting a Foucauldian reading, shedding light on how these women challenge societal expectations in their cultural settings.

To date, no study has undertaken a comparative analysis of The Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum, that is the two characters that mirror deep portrayals of women who challenge the gender norms and moral expectations of their respective societies. Previous studies on “Alavieh Khanoum” have approached the main character from diverse theoretical perspectives. Mahboobe Shahmoridi (2016) investigates how

Alavieh Khanoum's dark side and deviant behavior emerge as psychological responses to the oppressive structures of a patriarchal society. Parsa Yaghoobi Janbehsarayi and Marjan Kamyab (2020) read the grotesque dimensions of her body as symbolic of her moral and ideological formation, drawing on Louis Althusser's concept of gender interpellation. Raziye Jalili Sechegani and Seyed Mohammad Rastgoofar (2018) analyze the elements of hooliganism and social rebellion that define Alavieh Khanoum's conduct, while Mehdi Sharifian and Kiyomars Rahmani (2012) situate the novel within the features of Naturalism, emphasizing how deterministic forces such as environment, heredity, and social conditions shape Alavieh Khanoum's destiny.

Collectively, none of these previous readings of these texts have undertaken a comparative analysis to explore the analogy between these two similar women who experience comparable struggles within different cultural contexts or examined the deeper reasons behind Alavieh Khanoum's masculine behavior. Moreover, no study has yet addressed how she repeatedly marries and remarries as a strategy to preserve her power (financially, socially, and emotionally) nor how she ultimately fails to attain ultimate authority, as the dominant patriarchal discourse continually suppresses her attempts at self-determination. Consequently, as will be analyzed later, her narrative takes on a circular structure: her story ends where it began, and her suffering becomes an unending cycle of repetition of the same, similar to the Wife of Bath, who tells her wishes through her tale, which, unhappily, remains as a tale.

This study adopts a Foucauldian literary-critical approach to conduct a qualitative, library-based discourse analysis of Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath" (Prologue and Tale)

and Hedayat's "Alavieh Khanoum". Accordingly, rooted in Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) concepts of "disciplinary societies" and "dominant discourse," the analysis tracks how mechanisms power operates through micro-techniques (surveillance, normalization, confession, and the production of "docile bodies" [Foucault, 1995, p. 135]) and how these mentioned terms are articulated in gendered, economic, and religious registers in these texts. Moreover, methodologically, the reading takes in the following three steps: 1) Archaeology of discourse, mapping statements, enunciative modalities, and rules of formation around marriage, sexuality, commodification (body/faith/superstition), and spatial authority (posture/seat/visibility); 2) Genealogical inflection, tracing how these discursive formations function as disciplinary apparatuses (e.g., marital contracts, ecclesiastical and communal scrutiny, and ritual performance); 3) Comparative coding, which aligns recurrent motifs (unreliable narration, masculinized speech acts, strategic acts of weeping, and circular plotting) to test how dominant patriarchal discourse enables tactical agency and eternally recaptures it.

In their own ways, the Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum willfully use marriage in order to express their agency and take revenge on societal restrictions. The Wife of Bath deliberately "travels" through five marriages, transforming the patriarchal institution of marriage into a battlefield wherein she seizes authority and confronts conventional expectations. Likewise, Alavieh Khanoum uses a concubine as a subversive tactic, working her way through a culture that frequently wants to limit her ambitions. Interestingly, they are both seemingly single when they are going on a pilgrimage, which further raises questions about their intention to be there. Both skillfully manipulate the

concept of marriage, transforming it from a means of oppression into a means of self-actualization. Their manipulation of marriage can be read as an act of “counter-conduct” (Foucault, 2009, p. 196) within the disciplinary power network, an attempt to resist the mechanisms through which institutions like marriage regulate bodies, desires, and subjectivities. By performing within the system rather than entirely rejecting it, the Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum expose how power circulates and how resistance is itself produced by the same discourse that seeks to contain it.

The cases of early weddings are similar in these two texts, which emphasize the troublesome cultural conventions surrounding young marriages. The Wife of Bath exposes her awkward, early matrimonial union at the age of twelve, showing the standard societal norms and expectations regarding early marriage during the Middle Ages in England. Analogously, Alavieh Khanoum coordinated the matrimonial union of her so-called “daughter” when she was eleven years old, mirroring a parallel storyline that concern young brides that are compelled to conform to societal beliefs. The common struggles women go through because of patriarchal paradigms that dismiss the value of maturity and individual authority in marriage decisions are highlighted in these narratives. Additionally, when it comes to the concept of motherhood, it is never revealed whether the Wife of Bath has ever become a mother. In the same vein, even though a young woman and two children appear around Alavieh Khanoum, it remains ambiguous whether they are really her offspring, as the narrator observes that there is no resemblance among their faces and that Alavieh Khanoum treats them without any trace of mother-like affection or support. Regardless of whether if she is their biological

mother, a striking parallel between these two is their lack of maternal qualities. Both characters resist the conventional image of the admired nurturing, domestic, and obedient woman, asserting their roles as figures who exist outside traditional patriarchal understandings of femininity. In this regard, their rejection of motherhood challenges what Foucault (2009) terms “bio-power” (p. 369), that is the social investment in controlling and managing life through reproduction and, further, positions them as subjects who refuse to be instruments of demographic or moral governance.

The names “The Wife of Bath” and “Alavieh Khanoum” have critical roles to play in their marital life personas. The title “The Wife of Bath” foreground her reputation as a wife. It may be ironic in her case to emphasize that she has been a wife so many times that this title has become an inseparable part of her identity. The emphasis on her married status rather than her full name highlights the cultural restriction of women to domestic tasks. The name Alavieh plays an essential role in Hedayat’s story. The feminine version of the term Alavi, which denotes Shia Islam, is called Alavieh. Her name is a feminine form of Ali, Shia’s first Imam (Alizadeh, 2014). By virtue of this designation, the pilgrims pre-supposedly respected Alavieh Khanoum. No one, including herself, ever discloses her first name, allowing the spotlight to stay on her religious familial background, if that can ever be reliable. The reader never learns who Alavieh Khanoum really is. In each instance, the names play a crucial role in expressing more general societal criticisms, showing the limitations and demands made on women in the environments in which they were raised.

Both The Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum are also deeply engaged in businesses that, although not inherently profitable, develop into substantial components of their lives. The Wife of Bath, noted for her weaving ability in “The General Prologue” (Chaucer, 1977), may participate in this job as part of her household life, although it is not explicitly listed as a source of money. A comparable situation arises when Alavieh Khanoum oversees religious performances, which, as the storyline develops, does not appear to provide significant financial rewards. It calls to mind how she uses an Islamic ritual known as *pardeh dari* (which literally means “holding the curtain”) as a mask or shield to conceal her goals as a pilgrim. For them, marriage seems like the better option because it gives them emotional and physical satisfaction as well as a level of financial stability that their individual businesses may not be able to provide. This is a valid point since the Wife of Bath became affluent through her first three marriages, and Alavieh Khanoum had difficulty in making ends meet with her business. The thematic link exists in their adeptness at maneuvering through societal norms, in which matrimony is thought of as a practical and benevolent decision that provides emotional satisfaction and financial assistance amidst difficult economic conditions.

When Flesh and Faith Enter the Market

Interwoven with the financial structures of each society, their bodies function as marketable commodities. With an acute grasp of the marriage market, The Wife of Bath ensures economic stability through strategic alliances and discourse and opposes the conventional power dynamics that are part of the medieval monetary system.

Accordingly, the “instrumentalization of the body [...] is essential to the Wife’s ability to maintain a functional agenda (Miller, 2004, p. 206). Similarly, Alavieh Khanoum uses both her own body and the bodies of her so-called daughters to settle her financial state. As Mahboobe Shahimoridi (2016) has it, Alavieh Khanoum falls into the abyss of sin and deceit, and readily offers and surrenders herself to men, believing in vain that in this way she can reclaim her rights. In the context of patriarchal hierarchies, these relations exemplify the interconnectedness between sexual identity and economic power.

They deliberately interpret religious ideas to serve their own objectives, using religion as a tool for self-empowerment. The Wife of Bath cleverly employs biblical tales to legitimize and enforce her dominance over her various husbands: “Marriage would have been condemned for good / Had God enjoined us all to maidenhood,” the woman exclaims (Chaucer, 1977, p. 209). In this part, she offers an interpretation of the Bible that is quite consistent with her desire for marriage, which implies that God did not demand celibacy and, therefore, defended her own attitude to matrimony. The Wife of Bath intelligently establishes herself as an expert on marriage by twisting sacred scriptures to support her strength of will. Alavieh Khanoum, in a similar fashion, challenges religious convictions by proclaiming what a shameful guilt it is for the pilgrims to accuse a descendant of the Alavi family (Hedayat, 1950) when confronted with pressure. Both characters use religion wisely, bending its precepts to their own ends. As Foucault (1978) argues, discourse (particularly religious discourse) is never neutral but a form of power that both constrains and enables; by appropriating its

language, these women engage in a subtle “reverse discourse” (p. 101), using the mechanisms of authority to construct spaces of agency within systems that seek to subjugate them. Their reinterpretation of sacred narratives exemplifies how power and resistance are interwoven, where the subject’s speech becomes a strategic negotiation within dominant regimes of truth.

Beyond religion, they believe in superstitions in life, with their benefits. As stated in the prologue to her tale, *The Wife of Bath* has a tendency to mix the mystical with their own personal desires. This inclination is demonstrated by the fact that they both believe in superstition. Acclaimed for her vast understanding of folk remedies and superstitions, which is possibly learned from her fifth husband, *The Wife of Bath* declares that she believes in the efficacy of mystical rituals. She goes on to say, “For I [Dame Alison] belong to *Venus* in my feelings. / Yet have the heart of *Mars* in all my dealings. / From Venus come my lust and appetite” (Chaucer, 1977, p. 224; emphasis added). In these lines, she presents her astrological optimism by harmonizing with the planet Venus. She boldly asserts that Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty, has left a lasting impact on her moods and urges, and she credits or, to be more exact, excuses Venus for having inspired her romantic and passionate drives. Actually, she implies that everything is always and already predetermined by astrology and that she trusts in fate.

Interestingly, the *Wife of Bath* adds another layer of complication as she addresses Mars, the Roman god of war. The way she brings forward Mars in her words suggests that she is a strong, determined, and furious (which is covered in the following

paragraph) woman and that she has a combative side to her personality. Likewise, throughout her narrative, Alavieh Khanoum experiences instances of superstition while journeying through a world influenced by divine beliefs. For instance, retelling the story of how Esmat Sadat lost her child, she says: "Some people came to her [Esmat Sadat] in labor with spells, and the child, overcome by magic and incantations, died" (Hedayat, 1950, p. 21). The two protagonists are similar in embracing and representing superstitious components in their worldviews, implying a shared need to adopt the supernatural as part of their larger belief systems.

For the Wife of Bath, the act of storytelling, and for Alavieh Khanoum, the performance of religious dramas, serve as creative means through which each woman briefly accesses an alternative mode of being and a sense of liberation. Yet, both expressions remain confined within majoritarian artistic frameworks that ultimately reinforce patriarchal authority, as "[m]ajor art and majoritarian readings can constrain a body's potential, in contrast to minor art and minoritarian readings that affirm life and release a character and a text from the shackles of organisms and categorizations" (Ghaffary & Ramzi, 125).

In the Shadow of Death: Manipulation and Moral Uncertainty

What has been discussed so far makes the reader wonder how trustworthy these protagonists are. Alavieh Khanoum and the Wife of Bath both have unreliability in their stories, which adds another level of intricacy to their abusive characteristics. When it comes to the Wife of Bath, her prologue and tale show that her stories are occasionally

inconsistent or do not make sense. The statement “[b]y these devices, lords, as you perceive, / I got my three old husbands to believe / That in their cups they said things of this sort. / And all of it was false” (Chaucer, 217) is an explicit admission of her rewriting and altering of stories to fit her needs. The way she acknowledges the lies in her story demonstrates how willfully she has manipulated them to correspond with her ideal perception. Indeed, her unreliable narration enhances her persona and compels readers to doubt the credibility of what she recounts to further contemplate her narrative aims.

Regarding Alavieh Khanoum, the contradiction in her addresses to Mochoul, Esmat Sadat, and the little children highlights the untrustworthiness of her account. Alavieh Khanoum refers to Esmat Sadat as her daughter-in-law and daughter at different times. She sometimes refers to the man with her, Mochoul, as her stepbrother and other times as her son-in-law. Concerning the young children, Alavieh Khanoum refers to them as her grandchildren, her children, or youngsters that she has generously adopted. Her narrative suggests that her depictions of familial ties are not entirely accurate, as indicated by the varying titles and relationships. The contradictions observed in her narrative may be attributed to Alavieh Khanoum’s inclination to dictate how others perceive her and her relationships.

As the possibility that The Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum had participated in the deaths of their husbands is put forward, their accounts turn out to be less steady than before. As for the Wife of Bath, she talks about her former husbands and their tragic fates. She emphasizes that the first three spouses of hers were elderly for the sake of preventing her listeners from becoming interested in the cause of their passing.

However, when it comes to the last two husbands, she casually adds, "He [the fourth husband] died when I came home from Jerusalem" (Chaucer, 220), and "I pray the Lord who sits in majesty / To bless his [the fifth husband] soul for Christ's own mercy dear" (Chaucer, 229). The ambiguity surrounding these incidents lead to suspicions, despite her efforts to redirect her religious audience's focus away by constantly reaffirming her place as a morally upright spouse by either mentioning Jerusalem or Christ. Still, her lack of sympathy over the deaths of her husband makes her story less reliable and makes readers question the truth of what she says and, thus, think that she may have had something crucial to do with their "deaths". A significant similar air of mystery surrounds Alavieh Khanoum's spouses' destinies. For instance, she entered a temporary matrimonial union with Najaf Gholi during one of her prior pilgrimages. She recounts giving him a magic potion in the hopes that he would quit loving her excessively, but he died two months later, much to her astonishment. Questions persist about what exactly led up to this incident. Alavieh Khanoum's story is plotty and opaque, with deliberately untold or twisted parts. Since she may have had some role to play in the death, directly or indirectly, her account becomes even more inconstant, and readers are left to make sense of the intricate labyrinth of fact and fiction that she knits. The ambiguity in both scenarios takes into consideration and accounts for that their narratives are subjective.

Shades of narcissism, manipulation, and wrath are present in both *The Wife of Bath* and Alavieh Khanoum's narratives, giving their characters more depth. In "The Wife of Bath's Tale," the eponymous protagonist brags about her manipulating abilities,

declaring, “[e]xperience, though all authority / Was lacking in the world, confers on me / The right to speak of marriage, and unfold / Its woes” (Chaucer, 207). Narcissism is evident in her positioning herself as an authority on the subject by utilizing her experience to manipulate and control the narrative surrounding marriage. Similarly, Alavieh Khanoum’s anger is apparent in the way she acts and her “venomous look” (Hedayat, 13), especially when she goes against what society expects of her. She displays some anger with an air of disobedience. In the same regard, an additional similarity that exists between these two individuals is their indifference to the well-being of their life companions. In the same manner that the Wife travels on pilgrimages despite her husband’s illness, Alavieh Khanoum too shows little concern for the ill and starving conditions of those she is with. Their narcissism and manipulative behavior emerge as effects of power rather than pure personal flaws. By embodying the traits condemned by patriarchal discourse, they expose how the self is constructed through power’s internalization, performing “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 18) to reclaim limited autonomy within systems that define and judge them.

Borrowed Crowns: The Fragile Performance of Female Authority

In comparison to other pilgrims, the location and the manner in which they are seated give them authority. The Wife of Bath boldly stands amid the pilgrims. The Wife of Bath rests comfortably on her “ambling horse” (Chaucer, 1977, p. 65). Her advantageous position and self-assured and assertive demeanor indicate her high status among the pilgrims. The way that Alavieh Khanoum and her company are positioned among the

pilgrims is also essential. Though the specifics differ, Alavieh Khanoum and her associates are shown as having a distinct position among the travelers. They have the finest seats in the car, representing a position of power and independence, ironically gained by her being submissive to the car owner. Alavieh Khanoum shows her supremacy through her comfortable sitting arrangements, much like the Wife of Bath does with her prancing horse. Additionally, the manner in which they are physically portrayed asserts their dominance. The Wife of Bath wore a skirt that "swathed up her hips, and they were large" (Chaucer, 65), and Alavieh Khanoum was referred to twice as "the fat woman" (Hedayat, 13).

In order to assert dominance within the traditionally male-dominated cultures in which they live, both The Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum employ a deliberate strategy of employing masculine discourse. The Wife of Bath confidently declares, "A husband, though—I've not been thwarted yet— / Shall always be my debtor and my slave. / From tribulation he shall never save / His flesh, not for as long as I'm his wife! / I have the power, during all my life. / Over his very body, and not he" (Chaucer, 211). By affirming her experience's legitimacy as a source of authority, she challenges the traditional gender roles assigned to women in medieval society. Similarly, due to her aggressiveness and disobedience, Alavieh Khanoum adopts male rhetoric. For example, Alavieh Khanoum's intentional use of curses commonly designated for men violates gender conventions and emphasizes her defiance of conventional expectations. Her use of harsh swear words, which men often employ, is a linguistic tactic for confronting and resisting the constraints put on women's speech. Her refusal of a

passive position is apparent when she states that she was the one who organized her claimed daughter's marriage and divorced three times, as well as handled her own business (Hedayat, 1950). Alavieh Khanoum's position as a manager of religious performances also goes against the conventional realm that was connected to women in that era. The fact that she was in charge of making decisions and exercising power in this job was unusual in traditional societies, for managing was among the roles reserved for men. Both instances involve these women employing a subversive strategy by embracing a masculine discourse to contest the patriarchal norms that are enforced upon them. Even in their constant selection of pronouns, this narcissism is evident. The Wife of Bath frequently uses the subjective first-person pronouns "me" and "myn" when talking about her involvement in her past relationships. Similar to this, Alavieh Khanoum often remarks on how she is in charge of her "daughter's" marital life, saying things like "I married her" and "I took er divorce" (Hedayat, 1950, pp. 19–20).

In arguments, Alavieh Khanoum and the Wife of Bath only assume feminine personas when their masculine masks prove ineffective. When faced with challenges to their authority, they both have a similar pattern of expressing intense rage and then sobbing and taking on a more traditionally feminine posture as a defense mechanism: crying. For example, The Wife of Bath admits to using her tears to manipulate her husbands, saying, "[I]ies, tears, and needlework the Lord will give / In kindness to us women while we live." (Chaucer, 1977, p. 218). For the same reason, Alavieh Khanoum cries when she is under social pressure and is accused of sleeping with another woman's husband. This creates a temporary appearance of weakness that helps her deal with the

patriarchal structures around her that, unjustly, only accuse her, not the man with whom she has slept, as if he had not done anything unusual. This delicate interaction between fury and tears exemplifies the depth of their characters as well as the deliberate negotiation of gendered expectations that occurs inside their distinct narratives. Additionally, in the same way that the Wife of Bath is “not only combative herself but a cause of combat among others” (Patterson, 2006, p. 20), Alavieh Khanoum also engages in this behavior when, in the midst of being accused, she draws attention to another potential victim by invoking the dramas of those who, like Mochoul, have failed to stand by her.

However, despite their assertiveness and revolt against patriarchal restraints, The Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum only discover echoes of empowerment inside frameworks that adhere to established gender standards. As discussed above, they paradoxically gain a voice by using male discourse, manipulating language, and embracing methods often associated with men in order to establish their autonomy, all while defying cultural expectations. As it turns out, both characters get but an echo of empowerment from conforming to the patriarchal institution of marriage. The Wife of Bath's repeated weddings and Alavieh Khanoum's readiness to sleep with other pilgrims demonstrate that, despite their rebellion, compliance with cultural standards serves as a source of their empowerment. This paradox shows how hard it is to balance power, autonomy, and social standards within the authoritarian structures they manage. It fits with Foucault's (2002) theory of “discourse” and the idea that the only way to go past it is to use its dominant components to find a gap in the system, dismantle its conventional

hierarchical order (in the case of these two narratives to get over male dominance) and find a voice since, in the absence of surrendering to the disciplinary societies' prevailing power, one never has the opportunity to be heard.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this comparative research revealed commonalities between two seemingly unconnected female protagonists navigating patriarchal situations in different cultural contexts. Questioning the nature of the Wife of Bath's and Alavieh Khanoum's agency and their capacity to overthrow male-dominated systems, both characters, despite being separated in time and space, challenge and uphold societal norms within their patriarchal environments. Looking into their social roles has given us a deeper understanding of their complicated personalities and the tricks they use to deal with society's standards and achieve some freedom, which is hard to do in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the Foucauldian framework employed in this study clarified how both women are simultaneously, and paradoxically, products and agents of power. Their actions demonstrate that power does not simply repress but produces. Within these systems of power, both the Wife of Bath and Alavieh Khanoum negotiate their identities by performing resistance through compliance, embodying what Foucault identifies as "counter-conducts" that arise within, not outside, dominant discourses. This duality explains why their empowerment is never absolute: every act of rebellion is entangled in the institutions that make it possible.

It was also revealed that the circular nature of their narratives (ending where they started) reflects the irresistible return of patriarchal control. The two women's superficial authority collapses into the same hierarchical disciplinary order that had first walled them in, depicting that an absolute liberation remains inaccessible in cultural and historical boundaries. The analysis, thus, extends Foucault's discourse by showing how both, by the help of language, sexuality, and performance, reproduce and subvert the norms that define them. Upcoming comparative studies could examine how these dynamics shift in other figures of *The Canterbury Tales*, the Friar or the Prioress in particular, and how similar surveillance, confession, and normalization mechanisms manifest in other female characters of Hedayat's fiction. Such papers would deepen our understanding of how discursive power operates trans-culturally and how female voices persist as resonant negotiation sites within patriarchal histories, even when disciplined and punished, physically or/and mentally.

Works Cited

Alizadeh, Yass. *Tales That Tell All: A Political Analysis of Folktales of Iran*. 2014. U of Connecticut, PhD dissertation.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Portable Chaucer*. Edited and translated by Theodore Morrison, rev. ed., Penguin Books, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge, 2002.

---. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed., Vintage Books, 1995.

---. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978.

---. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*. Edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, translated by Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

---. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, U of Massachusetts P, 1988.

Ghaffary, Mohammad, and Melika Ramzi. "Art as Immanent Liberation: A Deleuzean Study of the Role of Art in Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.5817/BSE2023-1-6>.

Jalili Sechegani, Raziye, and Seyed Mohammad Rastgoofar. "The Study and Comparison of Lootis Culture in the Story of 'Lady Alawiyah' and 'Lahestaniha' Home." *Persian Prose & Poetry Studies*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2018, pp. 83-104, doi:10.22055/jrp.2020.32520.1015.

Miller, Mark. *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in The Canterbury Tales*. Cambridge UP, 2004.

Patterson, Lee. *Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in The Canterbury Tales*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Sharifian, Mehdi, and Kiyomars Rahmani. "A Survey of Naturalism in Fiction: Contemporary Literature of Iran (Sadegh Hedayat)." *Journal of Poetry Studies (Boostan Adab)*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2012, pp. 143-178, doi:10.22099/jba.2012.312.

Yaghoobi Janbehsarayi, Parsa, and Marjan Kamyab. "Gender Interpellation of Subjects in [Sadegh] Hedayat's Stories." *Literary Theory and Criticism*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 277-298, doi:10.22124/naqd.2020.15824.1950.

شاهی‌مریدی، محبوبه. زن دست نیافتنی در داستان های هدایت صادق هدایت. *گردهمایی سراسری انجمن ترویج زبان و*

ادب فارسی ایران، (۲۰۱۶) [۱۳۹۵]. SID. <https://sid.ir/paper/846652/fa>

هدایت، صادق. *علویه خانم*. امیرکبیر، (۱۹۵۰). [۱۳۴۲].

