

The Hypocrites of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Hafez's *Divan*

Kareem Lowaymi Mutlaq¹

Abstract:

Hypocrisy is described as the mother of evils in both Islam and Christianity. In scriptures of these religions, the hypocrites are described as those who apparently profess to the two faiths but in heart they are either antagonistic to them or exploit them as means for satisfying their worldly desires. However, the evil becomes menacing when the hypocrites claim a place in the political power structures. In the fourteenth-century societies of England and Fars (Shiraz,) due to the pervasive presence of hypocrite clerics and their significant influence both on the common people and in the power structure, the hypocrisy of these men was a major topic in literature of the time. In two masterpieces of English and Persian literatures of this century, that is *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1342/43- 1400), and the *Divan* of Khājeh Shams-Adīn Moḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī (1325- 1390), the hypocrite men of religion were prime target of ridicule and criticism. This article is an attempt to show that despite the difference in genre, the two works seem to focus on and highlight the same concern about hypocrisy and the hypocrites. Moreover, in their treatment of the theme of religious hypocrisy, the two poets seem to have adopted some similar methods of characterization and focused on identical and shared features of the hypocrite men of religion in the *Divan* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

Keywords: Hafez, Chaucer, Hypocrisy, *Divan*, *The Canterbury Tales*

1 Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, Department of English, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran
klmutlaq@scu.ac.ir

How to cite this article:

Kareem Lowaymi Mutlaq. "The Hypocrites of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Hafez's *Divan*". *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 1, 5, 2025, 157-180. doi: 10.22077/islsh.2024.7881.1481



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee Journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts & Humanities*. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Hypocrisy is a controversial topic in the theological discourses of both Christianity and Islam. There are several verses in the Koran and the Bible in which either hypocrisy or the hypocrite is explicitly portrayed. In Islam, there are two terms that denote hypocrisy: *re'āa* and *nifāq*. The word *re'āa* and its different derivations occur in the Koran in five verses: Baqara (The Cow): 264, An-Nissa (women): 38 and 143, Al-mā-ûn (Charity): 6, Al-anfāl (The Spoils):47. The other term, *nifaq* that is the topic of a whole chapter titled *Munafiqun* or *The Hypocrites*. In the Bible, the explicit treatment of the topic occurs in Matthew 23 where Christ denounces the hypocrite scribes and Pharisees and likens them to "whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all of filthiness" (Matthew 27). Indeed, it might be suggested that on no other sinner was Christ as tough as he was on the hypocrites; because, for him the hypocrites "shut the kingdom of heaven against men" (Matthew 13).

Based on these verses a tradition of commentaries has been developed which has frequently undergone some modifications in accordance with the religious temperament of the age. However, the gist of these commentaries is that hypocrisy and the hypocrites beget horrible consequences to both the believers and the believing community. Meanwhile, as history shows, this evil becomes disastrously pervasive when the church claims a share for religion in the power structure of a nation.

2. Objective and Methodology

In the fourteenth-century, societies of England and Fars (Shiraz), due to the pervasive presence of hypocrite clerics and their significant influence both on the common people and in the power structure hypocrisy of these men was a major topic in literature of the time. In two masterpieces of English and Persian literatures of this century, that is *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1342/43- 1400), and the *Divan* of Khājeh Shams-Adīn Moḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī (1325- 1390), the hypocrite men of religion were prime target of ridicule and criticism. This article is an attempt to show that despite the difference in genre, the two works seem to focus on and highlight the same concern about hypocrisy and the hypocrites. Moreover, in their treatment of the theme of religious hypocrisy, the two poets seem to have adopted some similar methods of characterization and focused on identical and shared features of the hypocrite men of religion in the *Divan* and *The Canterbury Tales*. This might be justified by what Siegbert Salomon Praver calls "common human experience". Accordingly, "two societies may have reached a similar stage of development or find themselves faced similar problems" and thus "the human mind has common ways of responding to this common experience" (1973: 124). Meanwhile, there are two reasons why the current research might be considered as following the American School of Comparative literature: first, it is interdisciplinary study in the sense that its overall scope is the study of literature and religion and, thus, encourages incorporating history, religious

studies, and cultural studies, to provide a holistic analysis of the two texts. Second, technically speaking, the study adopts parallel approach. It is a cross-country literary study seeking to find analogy in themes of works with no connection. In other words, it intends to highlight the similar literary response of Chaucer and Hafez to the theme of religious hypocrisy in two societies with almost similar historical context. Therefore, it contributes to comparative literature by demonstrating how thematic comparisons can be conducted across vastly different literary traditions.

3. Review of Literature

Many books and articles have been written on the corruption of the men of the church during the time of Chaucer. Prominent Chaucerian scholars have treated the topic of the hypocrisy of these men exhaustively. To draw on only few of these works, Arnold Williams (1953) argues that “Whenever Chaucer has occasion to mention friars, we get the same characterization of extenuated hypocritical villainy” (499). “Hypocrisy is, of course, the favorite charge against the friars” holding that during the fourteenth century, a “common form of the allegation was to call attention to the disparity between the boastful profession of absolute poverty and the riches of the friars’ clothing, diet, and buildings; their pleasure in the companionship of the rich and powerful; and their desire for worldly recognition and fame” (507).

Jill Mann (1973) argues that Chaucer’s criticism of the corruption of men of the church is continuation of satirical tradition of the three estates in the English Medieval society which will be drawn on later in the article. She too highlights the evil of the hypocrite clerics of *The Canterbury Tales* in the context of the estates satire.

Frederic Amory (1986) discusses three things about hypocrisy: its semantic contamination by classical iron, its associations with the ancient theater, and its embodiment in the character of Antichrist (5).

Alan J. Fletcher (1990) while insisting that “Chaucer’s Pardoner is undoubtedly a hypocrite” that the impact of other hypocritical pilgrims, like the Friar, is quite different from that of the Pardoner, even though in being hypocrites they ought technically to have a lot in common. The differences between the Pardoner and the rest are nevertheless unmistakable. I intend to argue that this is partly because there is a qualitative difference in the nature of the Pardoner’s hypocrisy which sets him apart” (Fletcher 110).

Fiona Somerset (2001) looks at the hypocrisy of the clerics in “The General Prologue” to the *Canterbury Tales* holding that when the narrator “points to the “farsed” “typet,” “fyr-reed face,” and voice “as smal as hath a goot” of the Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner, he is marking for his audience reliable indicators, written on the body for all to read of the past behavior and present dispositions of his three most hypocritical clerics”. She argues that the “bodies of the Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner advertise their habits quite openly-and not just for assiduous readers of

physiognomy treatises or experts in the clerical discourse of hypocrisy, but, through the combined weight of Chaucer's implications, for any reader who can take a hint" (315).

Hypocrisy of the religious men is one of the most conspicuous topics in Hafez's *Divan*; thus, it has been the topic of many scholarly books and articles in the research literature on the *divan*. Mohammad Moien (1990) in the eighth chapter of *Hafez Shirin Sokhan* (give us a horrible image of the moral degeneration of the rulers and the hypocrite clerics and subsequently the whole Iranian society and particular Shiraz of the time of Hafez in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion).

In a dismaying picture of the world of the time of Hafez, Abdul Hussein Zarinkub (1995) opens the reader's eyes to the beautiful city of Shiraz which at the same time tainted with crime, sins, corruption of the rulers and the hypocrisy of men of religion and albeit the poet's disillusionment with this world (38). Leonard Lewisohn (2010) in a chapter deals with Hafez's anticlericalism and argues, "Hāfiz's anti-clerical invectives to a large part assail the insidious invisible vice of hypocrisy. In the phenomenology of religious experience, hypocrisy is always portrayed as the most deeply hidden of the vices" (174). Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī in his *Dhihn u zabān-i Hāfiz*, quoted by Lewisohn, also gives a thorough treatment of the topic of hypocrisy dealt with in the *divan*.

However, no comparative academic research has been conducted on the topic of religious hypocrisy in the Hafez's *Divan* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Therefore, this study intends to examine religious hypocrisy as a universal theme across the two Iranian and English cultures in almost concurrent historical periods. By comparing the works of Chaucer and Hafez, scholars can gain insights into how different societies perceive and criticized the same human flaws. Moreover, the study hopes to add to the field of comparative literary studies by highlighting the value of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary studies. By studying both universal and culturally specific aspects of human behavior, it hopes to help gain a more subtle and comprehensive understanding of the role literature in human societies.

4. The Sociopolitical Condition of Iran and England

In England and Iran (particularly the city of Shiraz), the almost similar sociocultural and political conditions of the fourteenth century begot similar patterns of thought, art and literature. In England, the pervasive and conspicuous presence of men of the church in the daily lives of English people is quite noticeable from their presence in *The Canterbury Tales*. Imposing itself "as the sole medium for God's saving grace, as the absolutely authoritative pronouncer of the correct view on everything- from the nature of God to the most intimate details of sexual relations" (Aers 1986: 4) the church has left no other alternative to the common English man but to rely on it for regulating secular and spiritual life. Meanwhile, the despondent life condition of the time contributed to the dominance of the church. "Famine, war, pestilence,

and death were stalking medieval cities and villages by night and by day”, and “the depredations of the powerful in supplying themselves from the fruits of the toil of the poor, the fearful severity of laws combined with the failure to enforce them against the strong, and, especially after the middle of the fourteenth century, recurrent pestilence compounded by famine”, (Abrams 1986: 8) drove the poor to embrace the illusory heavenly picture that the church painted of the life which is to come.

The sociocultural condition of the Islamic Middle East was even more dismaying. The fourteenth-century Shiraz (Hafez’s city) and the rest of Iran were suffering from social and political decadence in the aftermath of the Mongol invasion. In the power structure the Mongol kings and princes, to quench their thirst for power, had no pity even on their kinsmen, slaying them in cold blood. In the meantime, the hypocrite sheiks, Sufis, and preachers, who for the sake of wealth and social status justified any evil, were the social guardians and moral authorities of the city. Moral and religious principles lost their values, turned into absurd clichés losing all their spiritual function. In a word, oppression, cruelty, bigotry and fake religious sentiments, hand in hand, had eradicated the moral and social foundations of the city. Of all these times, however, the time of Mubarez al-Din Muhammad ibn Muzaffar’s reign (1353-1357) was the most difficult. Due to the hypocritical character of the emir himself and the significant role of clerics in the socio-political context, and the prevalence of religious sentiments and passions among the common people, it can be marked as one of the several ages of the dominance of hypocrisy in the Iranian society and thus the presence of the theme in the literary works of the time (Anjavi Shirazi 1981: 79-80).

One of the consequences of the brutal invasion of Iran by the Mongols was the growth of a tendency toward introversion and solitude among many members of the society. Overwhelmed by the horrible impact of this devastating invasion and unable to justify it, some men turned to a life of seclusion, withdrawing from the world to find solace in contemplation and meditation. As a result, asceticism which as many scholars hold, was a strange phenomenon in Islam, became a popular doctrine or rather an accepted way of life for some Muslims. These ascetics spent their time in prayer and recitation of the Koran and since they posed no danger to the invaders, they were left unharmed by the political power structure. In the course of time, people began to venerate them and ask for their blessing. Even the invaders themselves, in the hope of gaining the hearts of their subjects, pretended to respect them. Some of these ascetics, however, showed no concern for this veneration, but in some, it caused a sense of vanity and self-importance. In the meantime, some charlatans who saw it profitable to simulate austerity began to join this group.

Like the case of England, the social condition of Iran and Fars of the time was miserable. The disastrous effect of the invasion on the society was all evident: plunder, massacre, oppression, poverty, hunger, and the fearful presence of the bloodthirsty rulers were the realities which drove the Iranian people into the depth of despair.

Like the men of church in England of the time, the hypocrite ascetics of the time of Hafez presented themselves as the spiritual refuge to these people.

5. The Hypocrites of the *Divan* and *The Canterbury Tales*

Prior to text analysis of the two works for discussing the issue in hand, there is an important point to make about the existence of an almost similar satirical tradition in the literatures of the two countries prior to the time of the two poets. In England, this literary tradition is part of literature termed as estates literature. As for the meaning of the word 'estate' Jill Mann quotes English Oxford Dictionary which defines the word as "A class of persons, especially a social or political class or group; also a member of a particular class or rank", and 'A person's position in society...social class', and for the whole phrase of 'estates literature' she defines it as type of literature which comprises "any literary treatments of social classes which allow or encourage a generalised application" (1973: 3). In other word, literature which expounds these classes' "duties or criticise their failings in a relatively direct way" sometimes in the form of satire" (3). Accordingly, she claims, "the *Prologue* is an example of a neglected medieval genre - that both its form and its content proclaim it to be part of the literature dealing with the 'estates' of society" (1). In this literature the "different ranks of the clergy are the estates most frequently and fully treated by satirists, and it is therefore significant that the clerical figures are also among the most fully described of the *Canterbury pilgrims*" (17).

In Iran, the idea of dividing society into classes or estates goes back to the mythic time of Jamshid, when as Ferdowsi, the great poet of Persian epic poetry, informs us that when he succeeded to his father's throne, he divided the society under his reign into four estates of warriors, worshipers, peasants, and craftsmen (Ferdowsi 1987:29-30). However, despite the fact that through the course of history, this classification underwent many changes, the three estates of those who rule, those who pray and those who work, unofficially continued to exist up to time of Hafez except that for many sociocultural and political reasons no established literary tradition was developed to criticize or satirize these estates. However, in many of the works of great poets, such as Sa'di (1213-1291), Obayd Zakani (probably before 1319-1370), Rumi (1201-1273) and others the clerical figures had always been target of criticism for deviating from the rules of their orders.

But one more important point to notice is where Mann indicates that "estates literature depends on and exploits the frameworks known as 'social stereotypes'- the traditional images that make us eager to" attribute some typical features to some certain groups of people (1973: 8). As for the clerical figures in this literature, and in the works of the Iranian poets, hypocrisy of these men becomes the most notorious attribute and because of its frequency, it can be considered as a motif. Raymon Trousson argues that in the course of their evolution, certain motifs are arrested at a stage and "which one might call that of the type: thus the motif of avarice produces the

type of the miser” (qtd. in Weisstein 1973: 141-142). For, Ulrich Weisstein these types are suitable cases for “comparatively oriented analogy studies” (142). Accordingly, the following analogy has been made with the aim of highlighting the significant similarities between the two poets’ hypocrites.

While Chaucer is considered as the father of English storytelling, Hafez is regarded as one of the best lyric poets and ghazal writers of Persian literature. However, it is in the hand of this great poet of love and wine that the ghazal turned into a vehicle for exposing and severely censuring the social and religious evils. Indeed, “driven by an inner urge, Hafez includes in his *ghazals* a theme which is totally unlyrical and alien to love poetry but, being passionately consumed by it that he cannot help broaching it—incongruous and ill-placed as it first may seem: he is out to expose the hypocrisy of all those who have set themselves up as guardians, judges, and examples of moral rectitude” (Baha-al-Din Khorramshahi and Elr 2012). Thus, in Hafez, more than any other Iranian classic lyric poet, the reader can feel the political and social spirit of the age.

In the *Divan* the most abhorrent and repulsive hypocrite character are the *zahid*, or the ascetic, and the Sufi. In the *Divan*, the word *zahid* is indeed an umbrella term for *wa’ez* or preacher, sheik, *faqih* or the religious jurisprudent, imam of the city, mufti, and *ghazi*, who all are depicted as false and arrogant and, thus, the most hateful and harmful characters of the *Divan*. These men are portrayed as ignorant of the love of God and faith. They are the trader of faith with worldly goods” (Khorramshahi 1999: 365-8). The *zahid* is, as the poet portrays him, self-interested, full of pride, and unsympathetic to the problems of others:

یا رب آن زاهد خودبین که بجز عیب ندید
دود آهیش در آییۀ ادراک انداز!

(p. 532)

The selfish *zahid* who sees nothing but flaws [in others]
Afflict him with a pain, O Lord! To make him see!

However, beside the many negative attributes of the *zahid* that Hafez counts out and condemns in the *Divan*, he is mainly portrayed as a hypocrite and of little faith:

به هیچ زاهد ظاهر پرست نگذشتم
که زیر خرقه نه زار داشت پنهانی

(p.1031)

Never have I passed by a pretentious *Zahid*
Who has not had a hidden zunnar under his khirqā

The *zahid* is a man who exploits the Koran as a trap to ensnare the common people:

حافظا می‌خور و رندی کن و خوش باش ولی
دام تزویر مکن چون دگران قرآن را

(p. 34)

Be gay; drink wine, and revel;
But not, like other, care,
O Hafiz, from the Koran
To weave a wily snare!
(Bicknell 146)

Hafiz's false *zahid* is the image of a man who hides all his vices, such as selfishness, ignorance, spiritual dryness, bitterness and in sum his vicious nature under the guise of virtuosity and religiosity.

می‌خور که شیخ و واعظ و مفتی و محتسب
چون نیک بنگری همه تزویر می‌کنند

(p. 440)

Drink wine! For Sheik, Preacher, Mufti, and *Muhtasib*,
When you look well, [you will see] are all hypocrites

In the *Divan* the most notorious of these characters who adopt zuhd or austerity as a way of life is the Sufi. Sufism evolved not as a mystical but as an ascetic movement and the bases of Islamic asceticism, like that of other religions, were abstinence from the world and its belongings, fear of God and the chastisement for sins. However, like the case of the mendicants in Christianity, Sufism, due to some internal and external causes, reached its point of decadence. Later generation of the Sufis, occupied and obsessed with the formalities of the rituals and the *khanqah* and its superficial rites, turned the whole tradition into a complicated and sophisticated order with an appealing appearance but nothing inside (Murtazavi 1964: 17). In a word, it might be argued that Sufism suffered from the same flaws for which the Sufis themselves condemned the *fuqaha*, the preachers, and the sheiks for: too much emphasis on formalities and hypocrisy. Ironically, out of the most significant principle of Sufism that is "poverty, self-sufficiency and abandoning everything but God, and inattention to the world and its creatures" there arose the most unforgivable defect and vice of Sufism, that is, "pride, self-conceit, selfishness" (21).

In the *Divan*, thus, the Sufis, described as devoid of love, wrathful, grumpy, and gaining (religiously) suspicious income, are mostly portrayed as hypocrites:

صوفی بیا که خرقة سالوس برکشیم
وین نقش زرق را خط بطلان به سرکشیم
نذر و فتوح صومعه در وجه می‌نهیم
دل‌ق ریا به آب خرابات برکشیم

(p.752)

Come, Sufi, let us from our limbs the dress that's worn for cheat
Let us blotting line right through this emblem of deceit
The convent's revenues and alms we'd sacrifice for wine awhile,
And through the vintry's fragrant flood this dervish-robe of guile
(Bicknell 122)

The occupation of preaching is not restricted to any definite order in the Islamic tradition. All aforementioned men of religion, ascetic sheik, *wa'ez*, *ghazi*, *mufti*, *imam* of the city and the Sufis who usually preached in private *majlis*, mosques and *khanqahs*, are generally portrayed as ignorant and unqualified men who through manipulative uses of language aimed at nothing but to deceive their audience:

حدیث عشق ز حافظ شنو نه از واعظ
اگرچه صنعت بسیار در عبارت دارد

(p. 270)

Hear the tale of love from Hafez and not from the preacher
Though he has much art in playing with words.

As preachers they are unaware of the secrets of love and know no God;

واعظ ما بوی حق نشنید بشنو کاین سخن
در حضورش نیز می گویم نه غیبت می کنم

(p. 704)

Perceived not truth's perfume our preacher. Hear thou; for this word,
In his presence, do I also utter: no calumny do
(Clarke p. 344)

They even commit sin in mosques and other holy places:

این تقوی ام تمام که با شاهدان شهر
ناز و کرشمه بر سر منبر نمی کنم

(p. 706)

Pious enough I am since at the beauties of the city
Like preachers make eyes not I from the top of the pulpit.

6. The Hypocrites of *The Canterbury Tales*

A glance at the social scene of fourteenth century England can easily reveal the heavy presence of men of religion in different layers of the society. However, the image that is left of these men to the modern reader is that of the hypocrite clergy who under the guise of religiosity wander from house to house aiming not to fill the head and heart of the common people with words of God but to empty their pockets. The most

notorious of these men are the monks, the friars, the summoners, and the pardoners who are the dominant figures in *The Canterbury Tales* and who are described as “religious professionals” and “are the object of Chaucer’s sharpest satirical criticisms (Lutton 2024: 301)

The Pardoner and the Friar of *The Canterbury Tales* as “examples of violation of the spiritual and social body” (Ruggiers 1965: 98), who in the General *Prologue* and in the *prologues* to their tales are explicitly introduced as dreadful hypocrites, will definitely never escape the reader’s memory. While they are in charge of a variety of duties in the society of the faithful, they usually function as preachers. However, the significant characteristic of Chaucer’s Pardoner, which is indeed the key to his success in making the parson and the common people his ape to earn ‘a hundred mark’, is hypocrisy:

For certes, many a predicacioun
Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;
Som for pleasance of folk and flaterye,
To been avaunced by ypocrisye,
(p. 195)

The man, who stands like a clerk in his pulpit, preaches “nothyng but for coveitise”. At the end of the *prologue* to his tale, the Pardoner deliberately emphasizes his hypocritical nature:

For though myself be a vicious man,
A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,
Which I am wont to preche for to wyne.
Now hoold youre pees! ...
(p. 196)

Moreover, hypocrisy is the favorite charge against the friars in the time of Chaucer. Friars, who were the most capable and knowledgeable preachers of the time, began their mission with the holy desire to act as Christ-types; poor apostles wandering from place to place endeavoring to guide the lay people to salvation (Leff 1961: 42). But gradually, through the penetration of vicious persons into the order and the resulting corruption of some of the members on the one hand, and their growing conflict with the regulars and the latter’s severe propaganda against them, on the other hand, they began to stand as false preachers. In the works of their many, instead of following Christ in their mission, they were depicted as Antichrist’s agents who, like their master, under the guise of holiness, strove to satisfy their worldly desires. In sum, in the literature of the time the friars had been attacked for abandoning the ideals of their founders, for cultivating the rich and the powerful, for captivating

weak, conscience-stricken women with their preaching, for their anti-apostolic begging, hypocrisy and worldly wealth, for their tendency to pride and anger instead of humility and forgiveness, for their willingness to encroach on the pastoral rights of the secular clergy, for their excessive rhetoric and ingenious glossing of texts, and for their lechery and scandalous contacts with women (Rigby 1996: 13).

Like the Sufi of the *Divan*, the Friar of *The Canterbury Tales* is also “depicted in operation as sanctimonious, greedy, self-indulgent, monstrously hypocritical and fraudulent, as a person who, in the story, becomes a compendium of the standard complaints against the begging orders” (Howard 1978: 275).

7. The Common Features of the Hypocrites in Hafez and Chaucer

The striking resemblances between Chaucer’s hypocrite Friar and Pardoner on the one hand, and Hafez’s hypocrite Sufi, preacher and ascetic on the other hand, are mostly explicit in terms of characterization. In both Islamic and Christian traditions, the hypocrite preacher is a person whose words do not correspond with his deeds, that is, he acts the opposite of what he preaches. Accordingly, the most conspicuous common characteristic of Chaucer’s and Hafez’s characters is that, while they are introduced as corrupt vicious and evil creatures, they all preach against the same sins they themselves commit: the Pardoner against the sin of avarice while it is indeed the moving force of his hypocrisy. The Friar preaches against wrath while at the end he proves to be a wrathful man himself. Hafez’s preachers, Sufis, and ascetics are greedy, selfish, womanizer, wine drinkers, and evildoers who hand in hand with the corrupt hypocrite religious constable (*Muhtasib*) apparently aspire to establish an Islamic utopia. They are all, as the poet calls them, *va’ezan bi’amal* or non-acting preachers, preachers who do not practice what they preach. The critical point that the two poets highlight in these hypocrites is that while they speak of the need for repentance and atonement to their congregations, it seems that they themselves are never willing to repent of their vicious way of life. Hafez poses the issue to his mentor asking:

مشکلی ز دانشمند مجلس باز پرس
توبه فرمایان چرا خود توبه کمتر می کنند

(p. 404)

A question I have, ask it from the learned of the majlis

Repentance-recommenders why themselves seldom repent?

In the *prologue* to his tale the Pardoner shamelessly refuses to abandon his current vicious life style and follow that of the Apostles’ and the Friar of *The Summoner’s Tale* is never moved to repent after what happened to him in Thomas’s house. However, one of the interesting points of resemblance is the emphasis by Chaucer and Hafez on the false preachers’ misuse of language to deceive the laity. Discussions on the feature of hypocrisy in theological discourses emphasize language as the main means for the

hypocrite to enact the sin of hypocrisy. In Chaucer both the Friar and the Pardoner are depicted as glib-tongued preachers who could even convince a poor widow to pay them charity. Chaucer repeatedly highlights the winning nature of his Friar's speech and manner. He is pre-eminently skilled in 'daliaunce' and 'fair langage', his absolution and his 'In principio' are intoned pleasantly and, as a final touch:

Somewhat he lipped, for his wantownesse,
To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge.
(p. 24)

In this regard Mann argues that "a similar 'gift of the gab' is one of the most prominent features of the mendicant stereotype. In Chaucer, too, as Mann tells us, the friar's fine tongue is often seen as an instrument of outright deception. Moreover, Mann argues that there is both unity and variety in the development of this feature of the mendicant stereotype. "The description of lying, flattering, 'glosing' and simple 'blarney' are inseparable from the central notion of the Friar as fine talker" (Mann 38), and Chaucer skillfully pictures the working of the Friar's hypocrisy through his language. The narrator tells us in the General *Prologue* that through the manipulative use of language, the friar reduces "spiritual ideals to their deformed earthly, or earthy, counterparts" (Cooper 1989: 179).

The Pardoner, likewise, is very skillful in the use of language and in his self-revelation in the *prologue* to his tale, he tells us how under an aura of holiness he subverts even the most basic principles of human and Christian morality. The Pardoner / most preche and wel affile his tonge/ To wynne silver, as ful wel koude (GP 712-14). He speaks "a wordes fewe" in Latin to saffron with his "prediccacioun" (The Pardoner's *Prologue* 344-45). He tells his congregation

.... ensamples many oon
Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.
For lewed peple loven tales olde;
(p. 195)

As for the *Divan*, manipulative use of language by the hypocrite men of religion for their evil purposes is exposed overtly. The preacher (the Sufi) in Hafez, likewise, is dexterous in the use of words and it seems that the poet has well read this charlatan's vicious intent hidden behind his beautiful words:

دور شو از برم ای واعظ و بیهوده مگوی
من نه آنم که دگر گوش به تزویر کنم

(p. 694)
O preacher! Avaunt my sight and utter no words of idle conceit

Never again shall I lend ear to thy falsity and deceit.

خیز تا خرقه صوفی به خرابات بریم
شطح و طامات به بازار خرافات بریم

(p.749)

Arise! So that to the tavern, the Sufi robe, we may take;
To the bazaar of idle tales, the ragged religious robe and idle talk, we may take.
(Clarke 366)

Hafez seems to have read the nature of the words of preacher and the Sufi, which were indeed a very effective means for swindling the common people out of their possessions. Thus, he advises the audience that if they want to learn the words of Love (that is God) they should hear them from him (the poet) and not from the preacher who is dexterous in the use of words and has no aim in mind but the satisfaction of his worldly desires. In a word, the poet is disgusted by the *wā'iz's* or the preacher's useless, ineffective, insincere, and hollow preaching- his hypocrisy:

واعظان کاین جلوه در محراب و منبر می کنند
چون به خلوت می روند آن کار دیگر می کنند

(p. 194)

On the pulpit, preachers, goodness display
Yet in private, they have a different way.

گرچه بر واعظ شهر این سخن آسان نشود
تا ریا ورزد و سالوس مسلمان نشود

(p. 528)

The preacher of the town will find my language hard, may-be:
While bent upon deceit and fraud, no Musulman is he.

The other interesting point of resemblance in the two poets' treatment of the hypocrite religious men is their references to the claims of these false preachers to have miraculous powers. The Pardoner has relics such as 'a pilwe-beer' of 'Oure Lady veyl', 'a gobet of seyl that Seint Peter hadde', 'acroys of latoun ful of stones', 'pigges bones', 'longe cristal stones', 'a sholder-boon which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep' and which, he claims, can work miracles. Friar John of in *The Summoner's Tale* did his best to convince the sick Thomas of the miraculous healing effects of the mendicants' prayers. Hafez, too, refers to the hypocritical claims of miraculous power by the preachers of the time (of any order such as Sufis, imams, or sheiks). The false Sufis claim that they can work miracles which Hafez rejects as fraud:

صوفی نهاد دام و سر حقه باز کرد

بنیاد مکر با فلک حقه باز کرد
بازی چرخ بشکندش بیضه در کلاه
زیرا که عرض شعبده با اهل راز کرد

(p. 274)

The Sufi has spread out his net, and lifted is his box's lid
He builds his structure of deceit, to cope with juggling Heaven unbid.

Accordingly, as regards the absurdity of such claims Hafez says:

چندان که زدم لافِ کرامات و مقامات
هیچم خبر از هیچ مقامی نفرستاد

(p. 226)

Though so much I bragged of miraculous power and mystical authorities
No one sent me any news and any of those authorities

One of the most interesting common points that the reader of the two poets might notice in the depiction of the hypocrite clerics is the reference in their works to the metaphor of 'snaring'. The hypocritical acts of the world-seeking religious men are all meant to snare the common people as referred to in the above (129, 1) and in the following lines Hafez warns that:

مرغ زیرک به در خانقه اکنون نپرد
که نهادست به هر مجلس وعظی دامی

(p.932)

Now to the khanqa-door flies not the wise bird
For at every preaching gathering is placed a snare.

The 'wise bird' refers to the poet and all those who are aware of the duplicity of the hypocrite preachers; the Khanqa, the Sufi's cloister, is the place where, from the point of the poet, deceptive words-grains are spread to snare the ignorant. The baits are usually relics, holy objects and the scriptures of the two religions. The rosary in both Christian and Muslim tradition is used as means for counting prayers; its main function, however, is to help the believers focus their attention on God, especially when they are in public places such as the bazar or mosque. Nonetheless, the rosary was turned into a means of deception in the hands of the preachers, sheiks, and Sufis. Thus, Hafez sharp-wittedly likens it to a snare that these charlatans put on the way of the common people. Hafez says:

ز رهم میفکن ای شیخ به دانه‌های تسبیح
که چو مرغ زیرک افتد نفتد به هیچ دامی

(p. 934)

O sheik! By the beads of the rosary, cast me not from the path;
For when the wise bird falleth, he falleth not into any snare.

The Koran is used as a trap for deceiving the common people by hypocrite preachers in Hafez's society as mentioned in lines translated by Bicknell above. In these lines, Hafez exposes another aspect of hypocritical nature men of religion; being 'gay' or happy and cheerful, drinking wine, and enjoying life are all abhorred and prohibited in the worldview of the stern orthodox men of religion; nonetheless, while apparently observing these ordinances, they exploit the Koran to reach their goals.

The Pardoner of *The Canterbury Tales*, on the other hand, uses the Bible and biblical quotations hypocritically as a means or rather traps for deceiving the "lewed peple". For example, he cites as the text for his sermon what appears to be complete sentence of biblical Latin, *radix malorum est cupiditas* (1 Tim. 6:10), 'avarice is the root of all evils', while through his self-revelation we learn that avarice itself is the moving engine of the Pardoner's hypocrisy.

Friar John of *The Summoner's Tale* also, quotes passages from Christian authorities in his sermon trying to fish Christian men's souls albeit not save them but to swindle them out of their money:

In shrift; in prechynig is my diligence,
And studie in Petres wordes and in Poules,
I walke, and fische Cristen mennes soules,
(p. 130)

Here, by fishing the Christian men's souls through Peter's words and Paul's the Friar is indeed trying to ensnare them.

Another interesting point of similarity in these hypocrites, highlighted in the works of the two poets, is their life of debauchery. In both the *Divan* and *The Canterbury Tales* the hypocrite men of religion are described as having eyes on the beauties of their towns. Both Friar Hubert of the General *Prologue* and Friar John of *The Summoner's Tale* are keen on the company of women. In the General *Prologue*, the narrator tells the reader that the wanton and merry Hubert had brought to pass the marrying of many girls whom he had seduced his that:

His typet was ay farsed ful knyves
And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves.
(p. 27)

And in the house of Thomas, despite the condemnation of any encounter with women

by the fraternal rules of all the "orders foure," when the wife comes to greet him Friar John

.... Ariseth up ful curteisly,
And hire embracest in his armes narwe,
\And kiste hire sweete, and chirketh as a sparwe
With his lyppes: ...
(p. 130)

The Pardoner, whose ambiguous sexuality has been a hot matter of debate, brags of having wenches in different cities.

Hafez accuses the hypocrite preachers of being womanizers:

این تقوی‌ام تمام، که با شاهدان شهر
ناز و کرشمه بر سرِ منبر نمی‌کنم

(p. 706)
Pious enough I am since at the beauties of the city
Like preachers make eyes not I from the top of the pulpit.

There are many other shared features which the hypocrites in the *Divan* and *The Canterbury Tales* have in common. The pride of these false preachers, for instance, is also a topic of censure in Hafez and Chaucer. In the General *Prologue*, the Pardoner is blatantly antagonistic to God through his pride and his defiance of the words of God when he superciliously refuses to pursue the rules of his order. All he cares about is the carnal pleasure of this world, which seems to compensate for the lack of spirituality in this creature. The Friar, on the other hand, boasts of being a Christ-like preacher who follows the way of the apostles. He also makes the brazen claim that the mendicants are superior in terms of their exclusive relationship with God. Thus, he says:

And therfore may ye se that oure preyes—
I speke of us, we mendynantz, we freres—
Been to the hye God moore acceptable
Than youre, with youre feestes at the table.
(p. 131)

Hafez censures the preacher who is proud of his liaison to the *Muhtasib* and the sheriff of the city, and asks him not to be so since his (Hafez's) heart is the residence of the Sultan (or God).

زاهد غرور داشت سلامت نبرد راه

رند از ره نیار به دارالسلام رفت

(p. 184)

The *zahid* had arrogance, took not the path to safety;
By the path of supplication, the '*rend*' reached Dari-Salam

یا رب آن زاهد خودبین که به جز عیب ندید
دود آهیش در آینه ادراک انداز

(p. 532)

O Lord I that *zahid*, self-beholding, who, save defect, saw naught,
Into the mirror of his understanding (so that he may, no longer, see defect) the
smoke of a great sigh- cast.
(Clarke p. 285)

Ignorance is a common shared feature of all hypocrite clerics in both *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Divan*. The preachers in the *Divan* are ignorant and unqualified men who, through manipulating language, intend to deceive their audiences; they are unaware of the secrets of love and know no God; they even commit sin in mosques and other holy places:

حدیثِ عشق ز حافظ شنو نه از واعظ
اگر چه صنعتِ بسیار در عبارت کرد

(p. 270)

Hear the tale of love from Hafez and not from the preacher
Though he has much art in playing with words.

واعظِ ما بوی حق نشنید بشنو کاین سخن
در حضورش نیز می گویم نه غیبت می کنم

(p. 74)

Perceived not truth's perfume, our preacher. Hear thou; for this word,
In his presence, do I also utter: no calumny, do I make
(Clarke 401)

The poet also asks his audience to hear the secrets of the divine and spiritual intoxication from Hafez and not the ignorant preacher. In Chaucer, the ignorance of Pardoner is hinted in the fact he always preaches the same sermon on the same theme by rote which, critics argue, indicates ignorance of other religious materials.

The most interesting point of resemblance in the treatment of hypocrisy and the hypocrite men of religion, is that since the two poets themselves, as has been evidenced by their works and the views of many literary history scholars, were true believers and practitioners of Christianity and Islam, in their battle against

religious hypocrisy, they present their own ideal men of religion. However, there is a significant difference in the type of characters posed as ideal by the two poets, though the two emphatically share integrity, honesty, humility and sincerity of character. In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer's concern for the harms that these charlatans and hypocrites have done to religion can be perceived in his creation of the ideal Parson. The Parson possesses all the attributes of an ideal Christian preacher who could seldom be found in the real world of Chaucer's contemporary England. However, there is in this ideal preacher an attribute which might distinguish him from the ideal parsons of estate satire tradition: the authority of this preacher will not come from the church or the pope but from the integrity of his character attained through emulating Christ himself and his character, whose main feature was the agreement between words and deeds, that is, he first did and then he taught.

The ideal character in Hafez is the '*rend*': a persona in Hafez's poetry who stands as the most complex and ethereal literary figure in Persian poetry. He is put in contrast to the hypocrite clergy and false Sufis in the *Divan*. The original meaning of the Persian word '*rend*' is rogue and knave. At the time of Hafez *renud* رنود (pl. of رند) were a bunch of rogues who were inattentive to name and fame and to reach their aim committed everything. They were occupied in villainy and roguery. However, it is in the poetry of Hafez that this model was adopted and turned into the most mysterious character, a multidimensional, round character who is created as an ideal against the hypocrite characters. He is there to reveal the hypocrisy of the false Sufi, ascetic, or preacher, sheiks and *fūqaha* (Zarrinkub 1984: 44-46).

Overall, it might be suggested that this difference in the way the two poets create these ideal characters which might be the result of their general method of criticism of hypocrisy. In Chaucer, as we saw before, there is the idea that readers do not see any explicit or implicit antagonism to religious values and dogma. What Chaucer is telling us is that the false men of religion have digressed from the ideals of their orders or that some of them are not religious and virtuous at all but find religion a good means for deluding the common people and pursuing their worldly desires. However, in creating his ideal character Hafez has adopted a quite different approach. Indeed, in all Persian literature his method of criticizing the religious hypocrites of his time is considered as radical and unprecedented, that is, no other great poet ever dared to take the same risk. As we saw above, in his criticism all the religious concepts such as virtue, piety, fasting, prayers, hajj, and religious figures such as imam, sheik, preacher, ascetic, Sufi, and the like are mocked and looked down on with contempt. On the contrary, we notice that all the apparently despised concepts in the religious tradition such as wine-drinking, having a lover, and the like are admired. Accordingly, and contrary to what we have in Chaucer, in Hafez the ideal character, the *rend*, is not the paragon of all the desired religious ideals and virtues as the Parson is but he is a compendium of all the negative features condemned by his opponents, the hypocritical men of religion. He boasted of having mocked and ignored many of

the rules of sharia. However, the rend and the Parson share a significant feature: they lived free from the love of the world, were all truthful, sincere, and as humanists care for other fellow human beings. For their life, they were not dependent on the religious and political authorities; thus, they were not hypocrites to earn their livings or to gain social status.

8. Conclusion

The age of Chaucer, as history informs us, was undergoing profound changes and is regarded as the early modern age. Chaucer, indeed, was among the first to show a sensibility to these changes and we see it in the way he treated his hypocrite characters. It is the time when the hypocrisy of the men of the church is crystal clear for the common people and their hypocrisy is no more working: the Pardoner at the end of his tale is rebuked by the Host and eventually laughed at by the pilgrims, the hypocrisy of the friar of the tale of the summoner could not function anymore to help attain his goals. In a broader perspective this might be attributed to “the tensions in the late fourteenth century between the Old Order—feudalism, a static rural economy, and the united and unchallenged Church—and the forces of plagues, urbanization, and entrepreneurship which were pushing forward fragmentation of the society and greater degree of individualism.” In the opening lines of *the Canterbury Tales*, we are given a portrait of the spring and the coming of a new life to the world and nature and in this new world these hypocrite characters seem to have lost their status and power and the poet seems to be excited of living in such a time.

In the case of Hafez, however, the time “was a turbulent and unstable age when foundations of power were shaking and trembling. In such times, hypocrisy, pretention, and social and religious corruption had deeply deteriorated every aspect of social and ethical life” (Anushirvani 2022: 81). Hafez “thought it his personal duty to struggle against it [hypocrisy] in all its varieties and shapes, whether cloaked in the robes of members of exoteric legalistic Islam [ahl-i sharī‘at] or concealed beneath the garments of Sufi piety [ahl-i ṭarīqat]. Ḥāfiz’s entire Dīvān is one long manifesto of opposition to religious hypocrisy” (qtd. in Lewisohn 2010: 147). Indeed, “It can be definitively affirmed that no one anywhere or any time throughout the history of Islamic civilization has ever gone to battle against hypocrisy [riyā’] with such pugnacity or laboured with such zealous determination to uproot this vice as has Ḥāfiz” (175).

However, the story is different in the case of the Iranian poet. While, the European man through the Humanist movement was releasing himself from the hegemony of church regaining his suspended status as human, the Iranian man continued to be the subject of backward ideology which with coming of Safavid dynasty at the beginning of fifteenth century reached its culmination. At time Hafez the lyrical persona is unhappy, sad, disgusted, disillusioned. Even in his apparently jolly and delighting poems we still can sense a deep sadness; we feel that this

happiness is transient and the sad mood will once more resume its prevalence. In a beautiful and heartbreaking ghazal, Hafez portrays the social condition of the time and his hopelessness about the future:

خدا زان خرقه بیزار است صد بار
که صد بت باشدش در آستینی

مروت گرچه نامی بی نشان است
نیازی عرضه کن بر نازنینی

ثوابت باشد ای دارای خرمن
اگر رحمی کنی بر خوشه چینی

نمی بینم نشاط عیش در کس
نه درمان دلی نه درد دینی

درون ها تیره شد باشد که از غیب
چراغی بر کند خلوت نشینی

(p. 964)

God abhors that Khirqa one hundred times,
In its sleeve there hidden one hundred idols

You will be rewarded O threshing owner!
If you would take pity on the reaper!

No zest for living I see in anyone!
Neither a remedy for the heart, nor a desire for faith!

The hearts have gone black, may it be from the unseen
That an enlightened one a light turn on

Funding Acknowledgments:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Endnotes

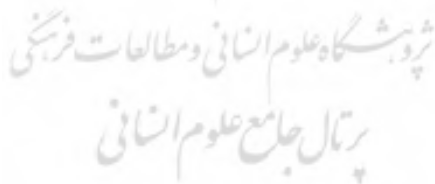
¹ The most prominent theologians of two religions, Imam Muhammad Al'ghazali in his *Alchemy of Happiness* and St. Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, explicated the feature in separate chapters.

² All lines from *Divan -e Hafez*, 2 Volumes Set. Edited by Parviz Natel Khanlari. English translation of Hafez with no reference are mine.

³ Zunnar (also spelled «zunar» or «zonar»; Arabic: زنار; zunār) was a distinctive belt or girdle, part of the clothing that Dhimmis (e.g. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians) were required to wear within the Islamic caliphate regions to distinguish them from Muslims. Though not always enforced, the zunnar served, together with a set of other rules, as a covert tool of discrimination. (Wikipedia)

⁴ All quotations are from Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by Larry D. Benson. Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

⁵ This is a precise transliteration of a word in Persian language which should not be confused with English verb meaning 'to tear'. The 'rend' is an ideal character—a persona in Hafez's poetry who stands as the most complex and ethereal literary creature in Persian poetry. He is put in contrast to the hypocrite clergy and false Sufis in the *Divan*. The original meaning of the Persian word 'rend' is rogue and knave. However, according to a standard dictionary, the word also means "cunning, crafty, daring, weird, feckless, cavalier people ... they are called so because they know no moral social and religious restraints and boundaries".



References

- Abrams, M. H. ed. (1986). *Norton Anthology of English Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Aers, David. (1986) *Chaucer*. Great Britain: The Harvest Press Limited.
- Anushirvani, Alireza. (2022). "Classical Persian Poetry and World Literature: The Case of Hafez." *The Routledge Handbook of Persian Literary Translation*, edited by Pouneh Shabani- Jadidi, Patricia J. Higgins and Michelle Quay, Routledge, 2022, pp. 69-84.
- Amory, Frederic. (1986) "Whited Sepulchres: The Semantic History of Hypocrisy to the High Middle Ages." *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale*, vol. 53, pp. 5–39. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26188893>. Accessed 9 July 2024.
- Anjavi Shirazi, Abulghasim, ed. (1981). *Diwan-E-Hafez (Diwan of Hafez)* 4th ed. Tehran: Javidan Publishing Organization.
- Bicknell, Herman. (1976) *Hafiz of Shiraz; a selection form his poems*. Tehran: Imperial Organization for Social Services.
- Cooper, Helen. (1989). *The Canterbury Tales*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Encyclopedia Iranica Online*, s.v. "Hafez" (by Ehsan Yarshater)
- Fletcher, Alan J. (1990). "The Topical Hypocrisy of Chaucer's Pardoner." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 110–26. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25094158>. Accessed 13 June 2024.
- Hafiz, (Reprint of 1891 ed.). *The Divan-i-hafiz*. Translated by H Wilberforce Clarke, Maryland: Ibex Publishers.
- Howard, R. (1978). *The Idea of Canterbury Tales*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Khorramshahi, Baha-odin. (1999). *Hafez-Nā'meh* Vol. II. Tehran: Shirkat-Intisharat Ilmi-Farhangi (Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company).
- Khorramshahi, Baha-odin. (2012). "Hafez," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition (accessed on 2 April 2024).
- Kris, Anton O. (2005). "The Lure of Hypocrisy." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, vol. 53, no. 1, Mar., pp. 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00030651050530011001>. Accessed 29 Mar. 2022.
- Leff, Gordon. (1967). *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The disputes within the Franciscan order*. United Kingdom, Manchester University Press.
- Lewisohn, Leonard. (2010) *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian*

Poetry. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mann, Jill. (1973) *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moein, Mohammad. (1990). *Hafez Shirin Sokhan*. Tehran: Sherkat Intisharat Moein

Murtazavi, Manuchehr. (1964). *Maktab-e-Hafez (The School of Hafez)*. Tehran: Intisharat-e-tus.

Prawer, Siegbert Salomon. (1973) *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Duckworth Books.

Rigby, H. S. (1996) *Chaucer in Context*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Ruggiers, Paul G. (1965) *The Art of the Canterbury Tales*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press,).

Somerset, Fiona. (2001). "“Mark Him Wel for He Is on of bo’: Training the ‘Lewed’ Gaze to Discern Hypocrisy.” *ELH*, vol. 68, no. 2, , pp. 315–34. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30031971>. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Weisstein, Ulrich and Riggan, William. (1988) *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory: Survey and Introduction*. Taipei, Bookman Books.

Williams, Arnold. (1953). "Chaucer and the Friars." *Speculum*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 499–513. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2847024>. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Zarrinkub, Abdulhussein. (1984). *Az Kuchey-E-Rindan (Through the Topper's Alley: On the Life and Poetry of Hafez)* 4th ed. Tehran: Amirkabir Publishing Institute.

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی



پرویشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی