

Myth As A Mechanism Of Othering And The Demonization Of Amir Timur In Early Modern English Literary Discourse

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Abstract

This article examines myth as a discursive mechanism that constructs “otherness” and contributes to the demonization of Amir Timur in Early Modern English literary discourse. Focusing primarily on Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe, the study explores how mythological and symbolic elements reshape historical reality into a narrative of fear, excess, and cultural opposition. Drawing on postcolonial theory, particularly Orientalism by Edward Said, as well as discourse analysis, the research demonstrates how Timur is represented not as a complex historical figure but as an embodiment of the “Eastern Other.” The article argues that myth functions as an ideological tool that reinforces binary oppositions between East and West, civilization and barbarism. Ultimately, the study reveals how literary myth-making contributes to enduring cultural stereotypes and influences the reception of historical figures within Western literary tradition.

Keywords: Amir Timur, myth, othering, demonization, Early Modern literature, discourse analysis, Orientalism, Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine, cultural representation

Introduction

The relationship between myth and historical narrative has long been a central concern in literary and cultural studies [4; p.15], particularly in examining how representations of historical figures are shaped by ideological and discursive forces. Within Early Modern English literature, the figure of Amir Timur emerges not merely as a historical conqueror but as a constructed symbol of alterity, excess, and cultural opposition. This transformation is especially evident in Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe [8; p.22], where the protagonist is depicted through a highly mythologized and dramatized lens.

The concept of “othering” provides a critical framework for understanding this process, as it explains how cultural identities are defined through contrast and exclusion [2; p.68; 7; p.45]. In this context, myth operates as a narrative mechanism that amplifies difference, often leading to the demonization of non-European figures. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Orientalism by Edward Said [11; p.34], this study situates the literary image of Timur within broader patterns of Western discourse that construct the East as exotic, threatening, and fundamentally “Other.”

The relevance of this topic lies in its intersection with contemporary approaches in comparative literary studies, discourse analysis, and postcolonial criticism. By analyzing how myth contributes to the construction of Timur’s image, the article seeks to reveal the underlying mechanisms through which literature shapes cultural memory and ideological perception.

The aim of this research is to investigate how myth functions as a mechanism of othering and supports the demonization of Amir Timur in Early Modern English literary discourse. To achieve this, the study focuses on the analysis of narrative strategies, symbolic structures, and rhetorical devices that transform historical reality into a mythologized literary representation.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology combining comparative literary analysis, discourse analysis, and elements of postcolonial criticism. The primary text selected for analysis is Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe [8; p.22], which serves as a representative example of Early

Modern English literary discourse constructing the image of Amir Timur. The research is grounded in the theoretical framework of Orientalism by Edward Said [11; p.34], supplemented by concepts of “otherness” and cultural representation.

The methodological procedure consists of several stages. First, a close reading of the primary text is conducted to identify mythological motifs, symbolic structures, and narrative strategies that contribute to the construction of Timur’s image. Second, discourse analysis is applied to examine how language, rhetoric, and imagery function to produce meanings associated with alterity, excess, and demonization. Particular attention is paid to lexical choices, metaphors, hyperbolic descriptions, and binary oppositions (e.g., East/West, civilized/barbaric).

Third, a contextual-historical approach is used to situate the text within the ideological and cultural framework of the Early Modern period, highlighting [9; p.88] the influence of emerging colonial and proto-orientalist perspectives. Finally, a comparative-interpretative step is introduced, in which the literary representation is implicitly contrasted with historical accounts of Amir Timur in order to reveal processes of myth-making and distortion.

The combination of these methods ensures a systematic analysis of how myth operates as a mechanism of “othering” and supports the demonization of a historical figure within English literary discourse.

Results

The analysis of *Tamburlaine the Great* by Christopher Marlowe reveals that myth functions as a central mechanism in constructing the image of Amir Timur as an embodiment of radical “otherness.” The findings demonstrate that the protagonist is systematically represented through exaggerated, hyperbolic, and symbolic language that elevates him [5; p.102] beyond historical reality into a mythologized figure associated with chaos, violence, and cosmic ambition. Such representation contributes directly to his demonization within Early Modern English literary discourse.

The results further indicate that Timur’s characterization is structured through persistent binary oppositions, particularly East versus West and civilization versus barbarism [11; p.60]. These oppositions are reinforced through rhetorical strategies, including metaphorical depictions of excess, divine challenge, and destructive power. Timur is frequently positioned as a transgressive force that disrupts established moral and political order, thereby intensifying his portrayal as a threatening “Other.”

In addition, the study finds that mythological elements—such as references to divine authority, superhuman strength, and apocalyptic imagery—serve to detach the literary figure from historical specificity. This process aligns with the theoretical framework of Orientalism by Edward Said [11; p.34], as the representation reflects broader ideological patterns that construct the East as exotic, dangerous, and inferior.

Overall, the results confirm that myth operates not merely as a narrative embellishment but as a powerful ideological tool that shapes the perception of Amir Timur, reinforcing cultural stereotypes and sustaining the discourse of “othering” in Early Modern English literature.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that myth operates as a key discursive strategy in shaping the literary image of Amir Timur within Early Modern English texts, particularly in *Tamburlaine the Great* by Christopher Marlowe. Interpreted through the theoretical lens of Orientalism by Edward Said [11; p.34], these results suggest that the demonization of Timur is not merely an artistic choice but a culturally embedded process reflecting broader ideological constructions of the “East” as the “Other.”

The discussion highlights that mythologization functions by transforming historical complexity into simplified symbolic binaries [4; p.90; 7; p.66], thereby facilitating ideological readability for Early Modern audiences. Timur’s portrayal as a figure of excess, transgression, and quasi-divine ambition reflects anxieties related to political power, religious difference, and emerging global awareness. In this sense, the literary image becomes less about historical Timur and more about the projection of Western fears and fantasies.

Moreover, the persistence of hyperbolic and apocalyptic imagery suggests that myth serves to legitimize the moral distancing of the “self” from the “Other.” This aligns with discourse-analytical perspectives, where language constructs reality rather than merely reflecting it [2; p.84]. The study also opens a comparative perspective: similar mechanisms of othering can be observed in later literary traditions, indicating the durability of such narrative patterns.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of focusing on a single primary text. While Tamburlaine the Great provides a rich case study, further research incorporating a broader corpus of Early Modern texts could deepen the understanding of how widespread and varied these myth-making strategies were.

Overall, the discussion reinforces the idea that myth is not a neutral narrative device but a powerful ideological instrument that contributes to the construction, transmission, and persistence of culturally conditioned representations of historical figures.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that myth functions as a powerful mechanism of “othering” and plays a central role in the demonization of Amir Timur within Early Modern English literary discourse. Through the analysis of Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe [8; p.22], it becomes evident that literary representation transforms a complex historical figure into a symbolic construct shaped by ideological, cultural, and rhetorical forces. Drawing on the theoretical framework of Orientalism by Edward Said [11; p.34], the research confirms that such portrayals are deeply embedded in broader patterns of Western discourse that construct the East as the “Other” [11; p.95].

The findings suggest that myth is not merely an aesthetic or narrative embellishment but an active instrument of cultural interpretation that simplifies, distorts, and recontextualizes historical reality. By reinforcing binary oppositions and employing hyperbolic imagery, Early Modern texts contribute to the formation of enduring stereotypes that influence both literary and cultural perceptions of Timur.

In conclusion, the article highlights the importance of critically reassessing literary representations of historical figures through interdisciplinary approaches. Such analysis not only deepens our understanding of Early Modern literature but also reveals the long-lasting impact of myth-making processes on cross-cultural representation and interpretation.

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