

HEROISM AND IDEALIZATION: AMERICAN AND UZBEK PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: This article undertakes a broad comparative analysis of the idealized representation of Native Americans in American literature and the heroic images of Spitamen, Shiroq, and Tomyris in Uzbek literature. Drawing on postcolonial theory, myth criticism, and cultural memory studies, the research explores how literature constructs symbolic figures to negotiate historical trauma, imperial encounters, and national identity. American literary portrayals frequently romanticize Native Americans as morally pure yet historically doomed figures, while Uzbek literature presents its heroes as active agents of resistance and continuity. By examining narrative strategies, ideological functions, and cultural contexts, this study demonstrates that idealization operates as a powerful literary mechanism for shaping collective memory and legitimizing cultural values.

Keywords: Idealization, Native American image, Uzbek heroic tradition, Spitamen, Shiroq, Tomyris, resistance literature, national identity, myth-making

Introduction

The idealization of historical and ethnic figures is a persistent phenomenon in world literature. Through idealization, literature elevates certain characters beyond historical fact, transforming them into symbols that embody collective values, ethical ideals, and national aspirations. In societies shaped by conquest, colonization, and cultural confrontation, such figures often become central to narratives of resistance and identity formation.

In American literature, Native Americans have occupied a paradoxical position. While often admired for their closeness to nature and moral integrity, they are frequently portrayed as relics of a disappearing world (Pearce, 1953). This idealized image emerged during the formation of American national identity and served to reconcile admiration for indigenous cultures with the realities of territorial expansion (Slotkin, 1973).

In Uzbek literature, figures such as Spitamen, Shiroq, and Tomyris play a markedly different role. Rooted in historical chronicles, folklore, and epic tradition, these heroes are depicted as defenders of the homeland who actively resist foreign domination. Their literary representation reinforces ideas of courage, sacrifice, unity, and sovereignty (Karimov, 2015).

This article aims to widen the comparative scope by examining not only the images themselves but also the ideological systems that produced them. It asks how idealization functions



differently in colonizing and colonized contexts and what these differences reveal about cultural memory and literary purpose.

Literature Review

The Native American Image in American Literary Criticism. The representation of Native Americans has been extensively studied within American literary scholarship. Early Romantic writers such as James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow portrayed Native Americans as noble, dignified, and spiritually connected to nature (Cooper, 1826; Longfellow, 1855). These portrayals contributed to the formation of the “noble savage” stereotype, a concept originating in European Enlightenment philosophy (Rousseau, 1755/2004).

Later critics challenged this idealization. Pearce (1953) argued that such representations functioned to erase real Native American voices, replacing them with symbolic constructs that served Euro-American ideology. D. H. Lawrence (1923) viewed the Indian figure as a projection of American guilt and longing for authenticity.

Postcolonial critics have further emphasized that idealization can be a subtle form of domination, masking historical violence beneath romantic imagery (Said, 1978).

Heroic Figures in Uzbek Literary Studies

Uzbek literary scholarship places significant emphasis on heroic narratives as carriers of national consciousness. Spitamen, known for leading resistance against Alexander the Great, is celebrated as a symbol of collective military resistance and political leadership (Askarov, 2008). Shiroq, whose self-sacrifice saved his people, embodies the moral ideal of patriotism above personal survival (Karimov, 2015).

Tomyris occupies a unique position as both a historical ruler and a literary symbol. Scholars note that her portrayal challenges patriarchal narratives by presenting a woman as a decisive military leader who defeats Cyrus the Great (Abdullaeva, 2018). Uzbek literature thus uses idealization not to escape history but to reinforce agency and continuity. Despite extensive national studies, comparative research between Uzbek and Western literary traditions remains scarce, underscoring the need for broader cross-cultural analysis.

Methods

This research adopts an interdisciplinary comparative approach combining:

Comparative textual analysis of primary literary texts from American and Uzbek traditions;

Historical-contextual analysis to examine the socio-political conditions influencing representation;

Myth and memory theory to analyze the transformation of historical figures into cultural symbols;

Postcolonial literary theory to interpret power relations embedded in idealization.

Texts are analyzed thematically, focusing on agency, resistance, temporality, and narrative voice.

Scholars continue to debate whether idealization serves as cultural preservation or ideological distortion. In American literature, idealization often coincides with narratives of disappearance. The Indian is admired precisely because he is perceived as belonging to the past, thus posing no



challenge to modern American expansion (Slotkin, 1973). In Uzbek literature, however, idealization operates as a form of cultural affirmation. Spitamen, Shiroq, and Tomyris are not figures of loss but of moral victory. Even when historically defeated, they triumph symbolically, remaining alive in collective memory as models of resistance (Askarov, 2008). This contrast highlights a crucial difference: American idealization tends toward elegy, while Uzbek idealization functions as instruction and mobilization.

Discussion

One of the most significant distinctions between the two traditions lies in the question of agency. Native Americans in American literature are often passive observers of their own decline, serving as moral contrasts to industrial society (Pearce, 1953). Their role is symbolic rather than political. Uzbek heroes, by contrast, are agents of historical change. Spitamen organizes military resistance, Shiroq consciously sacrifices himself, and Tomyris governs and leads armies. Their idealization strengthens a narrative of self-determination and sovereignty.

The figure of Tomyris introduces an additional dimension absent from most American Indian representations. As a female leader, she disrupts both ancient and modern assumptions about power and gender (Abdullaeva, 2018). Her literary image expands the heroic tradition to include women as central actors in national history.

Both traditions rely on myth-making, but with different outcomes. American literature mythologizes the Indian as a symbol of a lost world, while Uzbek literature mythologizes its heroes to sustain a living national identity. In this sense, Uzbek literature transforms history into a source of continuity rather than closure.

Conclusion

By widening the comparative lens, this study demonstrates that idealization is not a neutral literary strategy but a culturally and politically charged process. In American literature, the idealized Native American reflects nostalgia, guilt, and unresolved colonial tension. In Uzbek literature, the heroic figures of Spitamen, Shiroq, and Tomyris embody resistance, agency, and national endurance. The comparison reveals how literature responds differently to histories of conquest and survival. While both traditions elevate their subjects beyond historical reality, the ideological direction of that elevation diverges sharply. Future research may explore contemporary reinterpretations of these figures and their relevance in modern postcolonial discourse.

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