

THE ANALYZIS OF PROVERBS UTILIZED IN “TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT” BY CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND “ADOLAT FASLI” BY USMON AZIM

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Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of the use of proverbs in Christopher Marlowe’s Renaissance tragedy *Tamburlaine the Great* and Usmon Azim’s modern Uzbek historical drama *Adolat fasli*. Proverbs in both works function as carriers of moral, philosophical, and cultural meaning, yet they reflect distinct ideological and cultural orientations. In *Tamburlaine the Great*, aphoristic statements and proverb-like expressions emphasize individualism, personal ambition, and the humanist belief in the power of human will to shape destiny. In contrast, *Adolat fasli* incorporates traditional Uzbek proverbs that foreground justice, ethical governance, and communal harmony. The study examines specific examples of proverb use in each text, explains their semantic and dramaturgical functions, and highlights their role in shaping audience perception and reinforcing thematic concerns. The article concludes that proverbs serve as universal literary mechanisms for expressing moral and cultural values, while their content and orientation reveal significant cultural and historical differences between Renaissance English and modern Uzbek drama.

Keywords: Proverbs, aphorisms, Renaissance drama, Uzbek drama, Christopher Marlowe, Usmon Azim.

Proverbs represent one of the most ancient and stable forms of verbal expression through which societies preserve collective wisdom, moral principles, and cultural experience. In literary texts, especially in drama, proverbs function not merely as decorative linguistic elements but as powerful ideological tools that shape characterization, express philosophical views, and articulate ethical judgments. Because drama is designed for performance, proverbial expressions gain particular significance: when uttered by characters, they become instruments of persuasion, moral evaluation, and cultural transmission. This function is clearly observable in Christopher Marlowe’s Renaissance tragedy *Tamburlaine the Great* and Usmon Azim’s modern historical drama *Adolat fasli*, where proverbs and proverb-like expressions play a crucial role in conveying ideas of power, justice, ambition, and moral responsibility. In Renaissance English drama, proverbs often appear in

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transformed or elevated forms, functioning as aphorisms rather than fixed folk sayings. This tendency reflects the period's engagement with classical rhetoric and philosophical generalization, where traditional wisdom was reshaped to express humanist ideals rather than communal moral instruction (Mieder, 2004). Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* exemplifies this practice. Although the play contains few direct folk proverbs, it is rich in maxim-like statements that perform proverbial functions, offering generalized reflections on power, ambition, and human agency (Levin, 1961). These expressions reflect the intellectual climate of the Renaissance, particularly the rise of humanism and the growing belief in human potential and self-determination. Tamburlaine's language consistently elevates personal will above fate, divine order, and traditional moral constraints. His famous assertion that "Nature doth strive with Fortune and his stars" encapsulates a proverb-like philosophy according to which human strength and determination can overcome destiny. This expression functions as a dramatic proverb, summarizing Tamburlaine's worldview and legitimizing his relentless pursuit of power. In semantic terms, it conveys the idea that fate is not immutable and that man, through courage and action, can reshape his own destiny—an idea central to Renaissance conceptions of the self as an active shaper of history rather than a passive subject of providence (Marlowe, 2005).

Closely related to this principle is the implied saying "Fortune favours the bold," which, though not directly mentioned, underlies much of Tamburlaine's behaviour. His notion that daring leads to victory justifies his military expeditions, harsh acts, and disobedience of kings. Proverbial wisdom thus turns into an ideological tool that justifies conquest and violence. As Levin argues, Marlowe's heroes typically exemplify the concept of the "overreacher," whose ambition exceeds moral and societal limitations (Levin, 1961). Thus, proverbs in *Tamburlaine the Great* exalt ambition rather than curb it.

Instead of directly using proverbs, Marlowe uses latent proverbial logic to incorporate moral insight into *Tamburlaine the Great's* dramatic framework. Instead of defining old proverbs openly, he enables their ethical connotations to arise through story progression and dramatic consequence. The well recognised moral idea that overwhelming ambition leads to inevitable downfall is never publicly spoken; however, it remains a tacit organising element that determines the audience's understanding of Tamburlaine's rise and moral instability. Proverbial knowledge in literature can act as a "hidden ethical code shaping the semantic direction of the text," according to Uzbek literary historian T. Mirzayev, rather than always appearing in a set folkloric form (Mirzayev, 1990).

Tamburlaine's uncontrolled aspiration provides dramatic irony: as the protagonist continually declares his invincibility and confronts fate, divine

authority, and moral bounds, the spectator increasingly realises the inherent contradiction and ethical frailty of his worldview. This method is similar to what N. Karimov describes as the "dramatic activation of moral meaning through action rather than instruction," which is a characteristic shared by historical theatre from both the Renaissance and the present (Karimov, 2009). In this approach, Marlowe turns implicit proverbial knowledge from a didactic statement into a framework for interpretation.

Tamburlaine's proverbial statement that "kings are clouts that every man shoots at" is a prime example of how political observation may become generalised wisdom. The statement serves proverbially by universalising the notion that political authority invariably brings animosity, rivalry, and resistance, even though it is presented as a personal revelation. Such generalised statements function as "individualised proverbs" in theatrical speech, reflecting the author's ideological position while retaining universal relevance, according to A. Rasulov (Rasulov, 2010). These proverbs reinforce Renaissance ideas of individual authority and political reality in Marlowe's play by legitimising dominance and justifying ambition.

In contrast, Usmon Azim's *Adolat fasli* relies on traditional Uzbek proverbs drawn directly from oral culture and collective moral consciousness. Uzbek folklorists emphasize that proverbs in national literature serve not only as stylistic devices but also as carriers of communal ethics and historical memory (Jo'rayev, 2005). Azim deliberately integrates such proverbs into the dramatic dialogue to articulate the ideological foundation of the play.

One of the most significant proverbs in *Adolat fasli* is "Adolat bo'lmasa, davlat yemiriladi" ("Without justice, the state collapses"). This expression functions as a central moral axiom through which political authority, leadership, and ethical responsibility are evaluated. As B. Qosimov notes, Uzbek historical drama often employs proverbs as "criteria of legitimacy," allowing the audience to assess power through moral rather than military standards (Qosimov, 2003). Semantically, the proverb asserts that justice is not an abstract ideal but a structural necessity for social stability and governance.

Marlowe integrates moral and philosophical wisdom into the dramaturgical fabric of *Tamburlaine the Great* through an indirect, implicit use of proverbial logic rather than through the explicit citation of traditional folk proverbs. In Renaissance English drama, proverbs frequently appear in transformed or elevated forms, functioning as aphorisms or maxims that condense ideological meaning into memorable expressions. As Taylor (1931) observes, when proverbs enter literary discourse, they often lose their fixed folkloric form but retain their universalizing and didactic function. Marlowe exemplifies this tendency by embedding proverbial meanings within the actions, conflicts, and rhetorical structures of his play.

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One of the central implicit proverbs operating in *Tamburlaine the Great* is the moral principle that excessive ambition inevitably produces instability and downfall. Although this warning is never verbalized directly, it underlies the dramatic logic of Tamburlaine's rise and continuous escalation of power. Tamburlaine's repeated challenges to fate, divine order, and moral limitation create a complex form of dramatic irony: while he interprets his victories as proof of personal supremacy, the audience gradually perceives the ethical fragility and self-destructive potential of his worldview. Uzbek folklorist T. Mirzayev emphasizes that proverbial wisdom often functions as a "latent moral regulator," guiding interpretation even when it is not linguistically marked as a proverb (Mirzayev, 1990). In Marlowe's drama, this latent moral regulation allows the audience to engage critically with Tamburlaine's ideology without the need for overt moral commentary.

Tamburlaine's aphoristic statements further reinforce this implicit proverbial framework. His declaration that "kings are clouts that every man shoots at" exemplifies the transformation of political observation into generalized wisdom. Structurally, the sentence conforms to the pattern of a proverb by offering a metaphorical image and a universal claim. Semantically, it articulates a realist conception of power as inherently unstable and perpetually contested. This aligns with Renaissance political thought, in which authority was increasingly viewed as a product of human agency rather than divine sanction. A. Rasulov notes that in dramatic discourse, such generalized utterances function as "authorial wisdom spoken through character voice," allowing individual speech to carry collective philosophical meaning (Rasulov, 2010). In Marlowe's play, these aphorisms legitimize domination, conquest, and self-assertion, reinforcing Tamburlaine's belief that power is both desirable and perpetually vulnerable. In sharp contrast to Marlowe's individualized and philosophically elevated use of proverb-like language, Usmon Azim's *Adolat fasli* draws directly and consciously on traditional Uzbek proverbs rooted in oral culture, collective memory, and ethical instruction. Uzbek literary scholarship consistently emphasizes that proverbs occupy a central position in national aesthetic consciousness, serving as condensed expressions of historical experience and moral consensus (Jo'rayev, 2005). Azim's deliberate incorporation of such proverbs into the dramatic dialogue reflects his intention to ground the play's ideological message in culturally familiar forms of wisdom.

The proverb "Adolat bo'lmasa, davlat yemiriladi" ("Without justice, the state collapses") functions as the central moral and political axiom of *Adolat fasli*. Unlike Marlowe's implicit moral logic, this proverb is openly articulated and repeatedly referenced by different characters, transforming it into a normative standard against which political authority and personal behavior are

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measured. As Karimov (2009) observes, modern Uzbek historical drama often employs proverbs as ideological anchors, enabling complex political themes to be communicated through accessible and authoritative linguistic forms. Semantically, the proverb asserts a causal relationship between justice and stability, presenting justice not as an abstract ethical ideal but as a structural necessity for the survival of the state.

Another key proverb, “Haq so‘z – o‘tkir qilich” (“Truth is a sharp sword”), further enriches the ethical dimension of the drama. This expression highlights the ambivalent nature of truth as both a moral weapon and a source of danger. In the dramatic context, characters who speak the truth often face repression, punishment, or social exclusion, yet their honesty ultimately exposes corruption and moral decay. S. Sattorov (2018) argues that in contemporary Uzbek drama, truth is frequently portrayed as an ethical force that challenges unjust authority while demanding personal sacrifice from those who wield it. Through this proverb, Azim emphasizes moral courage as a prerequisite for justice, contrasting sharply with Tamburlaine’s instrumental use of language to justify domination.

The proverb “Elning duosi – eng katta kuch” (“The people’s blessing is the greatest power”) further underscores the collectivist orientation of *Adolat fasli*. Authority in Azim’s drama derives not from military conquest or individual will but from communal approval and ethical legitimacy. This perspective reflects traditional Uzbek political philosophy, in which leadership is evaluated through service to the people rather than personal ambition. O. Yusupov (2015) notes that such proverbs function as cultural reminders that power divorced from communal ethics is inherently unstable. In this respect, Azim’s drama positions justice as a collective responsibility rather than an individual achievement.

From a comparative perspective, the use of proverbs in *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Adolat fasli* reveals profound differences in cultural worldview and ideological orientation. Marlowe’s proverbial language reflects Renaissance individualism, human ambition, and a philosophy of power that privileges personal will over moral constraint. Proverbs and aphorisms in his play elevate the individual above society and tradition, reinforcing the image of the historical hero as a self-fashioned figure. By contrast, Azim’s reliance on traditional proverbs foregrounds justice, ethical governance, and communal harmony as foundational values. While Tamburlaine seeks to dominate history through force, Azim’s characters seek moral validation within it. Despite these differences, both dramatists employ proverbs as universalizing devices that link individual action to broader ethical frameworks. Proverbs in both texts mediate between historical reality and moral idealism, enabling audiences to interpret dramatic events through culturally familiar patterns of wisdom. By condensing

complex philosophical ideas into concise linguistic forms, proverbs ensure the enduring resonance of both plays across historical and cultural contexts.

At the same time, Marlowe embeds implicit moral proverbs into the structural logic of the play. The traditional warning that “the higher we climb, the greater our fall” is not explicitly stated, yet it operates as an underlying moral principle recognizable to the audience. Tamburlaine’s excessive ambition creates dramatic irony: while he believes himself invincible, the audience perceives the moral instability of his worldview. In this way, proverbial wisdom functions indirectly, shaping interpretation rather than dialogue. Tamburlaine’s aphoristic statement that “kings are clouts that every man shoots at” also carries proverbial weight. It expresses political realism, suggesting that power inevitably attracts hostility and challenge. Such expressions transform political observation into generalized wisdom, reinforcing Tamburlaine’s pragmatic and often cynical outlook on authority.

Beyond their ethical and ideological functions, proverbs in both *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Adolat fasli* operate as powerful rhetorical and cognitive instruments that shape audience perception and interpretive response. In dramatic discourse, proverbs serve not merely as moral statements but as cognitive shortcuts that condense complex historical, political, and philosophical ideas into recognizable linguistic patterns. As Mieder (2004) argues, proverbs gain rhetorical authority precisely because they appear to express collective wisdom rather than individual opinion. This quality is evident in both Marlowe’s aphoristic expressions and Azim’s direct use of traditional sayings. In *Tamburlaine the Great*, the rhetorical power of proverb-like aphorisms lies in their ability to legitimize Tamburlaine’s ideology of conquest. His maxims transform violent ambition into seemingly rational and inevitable principles of political life. For instance, statements that emphasize the instability of kingship or the triumph of will over fate function as cognitive frames through which the audience interprets Tamburlaine’s actions. According to Greenblatt (1980), Renaissance drama frequently employs such rhetorical strategies to naturalize power and ambition by embedding them in universal-sounding truths. In this context, Marlowe’s aphorisms function as “intellectualized proverbs” that align the audience temporarily with the protagonist’s worldview, even as the dramatic structure subtly undermines it.

Uzbek literary scholar A. Rasulov similarly notes that generalized utterances in drama possess a strong persuasive force because they appeal to shared cognitive patterns rather than individual logic (Rasulov, 2010). In Marlowe’s play, this persuasive function complicates moral judgment: the audience is drawn into Tamburlaine’s logic through the authority of proverbial language, despite recognizing its ethical dangers. Thus, proverbs function not

only as moral signposts but also as instruments of ideological influence. In *Adolat fasli*, proverbs perform a different cognitive role. Rather than persuading the audience to accept individual ambition, they reinforce collective moral norms already embedded in cultural consciousness. Uzbek proverbs such as “Adolat bo‘lmasa, davlat yemiriladi” operate as shared axioms that require no justification. As Jo‘rayev (2005) explains, in Uzbek oral tradition, proverbs function as “ready-made judgments” that regulate social behavior and ethical evaluation. When such proverbs are placed in dramatic dialogue, they activate the audience’s pre-existing moral frameworks, guiding interpretation toward justice, restraint, and accountability.

Another important dimension is audience reception. Renaissance audiences, familiar with classical rhetoric and humanist philosophy, would have recognized Marlowe’s aphorisms as intellectual statements rather than folk wisdom. This aligns with Levin’s (1961) observation that Marlowe’s heroes speak in a heightened rhetorical mode that reflects elite intellectual culture. By contrast, *Adolat fasli* addresses an audience deeply attuned to oral traditions, where proverbs function as everyday ethical references. As Karimov (2009) notes, modern Uzbek historical drama deliberately employs proverbs to establish an immediate emotional and moral connection with the audience, bridging the gap between historical narrative and contemporary ethical concerns. From a diachronic perspective, the transmission of proverbial wisdom also differs significantly between the two traditions. Marlowe’s aphorisms emerge from classical philosophy, Renaissance humanism, and political realism, representing a written, elite mode of cultural transmission. Azim’s proverbs, however, derive from centuries of oral circulation, embodying what Mirzayev (1990) defines as “*xalqning tarixiy tafakkuri*” (the historical thinking of the people). This distinction further explains why Marlowe’s proverbial language emphasizes individual agency, while Azim’s foregrounds collective responsibility.

Taken together, these observations demonstrate that proverbs in historical drama function on multiple levels: rhetorical, cognitive, cultural, and ideological. While Marlowe employs proverb-like aphorisms to explore the limits of individual power and ambition, Azim uses traditional proverbs to reaffirm justice as a communal and ethical imperative. In both cases, proverbial language enables dramatists to connect historical events with timeless moral questions, ensuring that their works remain intellectually and ethically resonant across cultures and periods.

In contrast to Marlowe’s elevated and philosophical use of proverb-like language, Usmon Azim’s *Adolat fasli* draws directly on traditional Uzbek proverbs rooted in oral culture and collective moral consciousness. Uzbek proverbs are historically associated with ethical instruction, social harmony,

and justice, and Azim consciously employs them to articulate the ideological core of his drama. One of the central proverbs in *Adolat fasli* is “Adolat bo‘lmasa, davlat yemiriladi,” meaning “Without justice, the state collapses.” This proverb functions as a moral axiom within the play. Characters invoke it to evaluate political authority and ethical behavior, and it serves as a guiding principle for governance. Semantically, the proverb asserts that justice is not merely a moral ideal but a practical necessity for social stability.

Another significant proverb used in the drama is “Haq so‘z – o‘tkir qilich,” translated as “Truth is a sharp sword.” This expression highlights the dual nature of truth: it possesses the power to defend justice while simultaneously endangering those who speak it. In the dramatic context, characters who voice the truth often face punishment or social exclusion, yet their honesty ultimately exposes corruption and moral decay. The proverb thus reinforces the ethical message that moral courage is essential for the restoration of justice. Unlike Tamburlaine’s aphorisms, which often justify domination, Azim’s proverbs emphasize moral accountability and restraint.

The proverb “Elning duosi – eng katta kuch,” meaning “The people’s blessing is the greatest power,” further illustrates the collectivist orientation of *Adolat fasli*. This expression contrasts sharply with Tamburlaine’s belief in individual strength and military might. In Azim’s drama, legitimate authority derives not from conquest but from the consent and moral approval of the people. The proverb functions as a cultural reminder that power divorced from communal ethics is ultimately unstable. Through such expressions, *Adolat fasli* presents justice as a collective responsibility rather than a personal achievement. From a comparative perspective, the use of proverbs in *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Adolat fasli* reveals fundamental differences in cultural and ideological orientation. Marlowe’s proverbial language reflects Renaissance individualism, human ambition, and the philosophy of power. Proverbs and aphorisms in his play elevate the individual above society and moral law. In contrast, Usmon Azim’s reliance on traditional proverbs underscores the primacy of justice, ethical governance, and communal harmony. While Marlowe’s Tamburlaine seeks to dominate history, Azim’s characters seek to be judged by it. Despite these differences, both dramatists employ proverbs as universalizing devices that connect individual actions to broader moral frameworks. Proverbs in both texts function as mediators between historical reality and ethical idealism, enabling the audience to interpret dramatic events through familiar patterns of wisdom. They condense complex philosophical ideas into accessible linguistic forms, ensuring their lasting impact across cultures and historical periods.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that proverbs and proverb-like expressions play a vital role in shaping the moral and ideological structure of *Tamburlaine*

the Great and *Adolat fasli*. In Marlowe's drama, proverbs serve to glorify ambition, challenge fate, and articulate Renaissance humanist ideals, while in Usmon Azim's play they function as ethical imperatives that emphasize justice, truth, and collective responsibility. Ultimately, the enduring presence of proverbs in both works confirms their universal function as carriers of cultural memory, moral judgment, and philosophical reflection in world dramaturgy.

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