



# The Figure of the Shaman in Contemporary British Poetry

*Shamsad Mortuza*

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## **The Figure of the Shaman in Contemporary British Poetry** Shamsad Mortuza

This genealogical study focuses on the work of five contemporary British poets in order to locate them in a counter cultural tradition that is informed by strategic responses to 'State terrorism.' It identifies some historical moments of ruptures such as the persecution of the Celtic druids by the Romans, the killing of the Welsh bards by Edward 1, the appropriation of the bardic materials by the Romantic poets writing in a post-French Revolution era, and the Beatnik response to a post-World War bi-polar world in order to contextualize and discuss the poets of British Poetry Revival writing under Thatcherism. Drawing on Mircea Eliade's notion of shamanism as 'archaic techniques of ecstasy,' these poets have transformed Eliade's version of the shaman's 'elective trauma' and enacted a critical rejection of totalitarian tools of the state and society. Categorized as the 'Technicians of the Sacred' and the 'Technicians of the Body' these shamanic poets include Iain Sinclair, Jeremy Prynne, Brian Catling, Barry MacSweeney, and Maggie O'Sullivan. Their poetic strategy is not a New Age fad; it rather investigates and inventories the 'hidden' energies of past and present to wrest spirituality away from the confines of religion and politics, while embodying it in textual praxis.

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