

Shamanism in English and Turkic Literature: A comparative exploration of spiritual journeys

Volha Korbut Salman*

Abstract: This article aims to investigate the perdurable presence of shamanic archetypes across world literatures with a particular emphasis on English and Turkic narrative traditions. As a manifestation of the primordial spiritual practice, shamanism provides a solid framework for understanding the tenacious engagement of humanity with transcendental experiences, healing rituals, the search for ultimate meaning, and cosmological order. In English literature, shamanic elements are instantiated through symbolic journeys, nature mysticism, as well as magical mediation, while core shamanic concepts of liminal passage and spiritual transformation are reflected in the recurrent motifs of a wise magician, sacred landscape, and heroic descent into supernatural realms. Although these elements oft appear transformed by the Western cultural lens, they, nevertheless, retain their fundamental connection to the original shamanic cosmology. Turkic literary traditions, in their turn, present a more direct embodiment of shamanic practice, especially in their epic narratives, in which the shaman appears as a central protagonist, personified by a healer/ seer/ guide of souls, whose rituals and spirit communications structure the narrative itself. Turkic literary works preserve all-inclusive accounts of ceremonial practices, spirit associations, and cosmic journeys, which reflect existing shamanic traditions of Central Asia. As a consequence, this article employs comparative analysis to reveal how shamanic consciousness persists as a vital literary force across varying cultures: English literature oft adapts shamanic motifs metaphorically, while Turkic traditions maintain their ritual authenticity. Both approaches validate the capacity of literature as a cultural construct to preserve and reinvent ancient spiritual paradigms that offer insights into the timeless search of humanity for meaning beyond material existence. At the same time, this article brings to the fore the enduring relevance of shamanism in the contemporary world as an indispensable element of cultural heritage and a universal symbolic language in world literature.

* Volha Korbut Salman (✉)

Department of Western Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts and Sciences,
Yozgat Bozok University, Türkiye
e-mail: volha.k.salman@bozok.edu.tr

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Introduction

Shamanism is one of the oldest spiritual traditions of humankind that transcends cultural boundaries and demonstrates itself in various forms across world literatures. Shamanistic practices have influenced both Western and non-Western literary traditions with their roots in animism, ancestor worship, and mediation between the physical and spiritual realms. Indeed, shamanism constitutes one of the most archaic and prevalent spiritual paradigms that shape humanity and is characterized by the ontological emphasis on mediation between quotidian and numinous realms. Operating as a liminal figure par excellence, the shaman, in his turn, often engages in ritualized transcendence of corporeal boundaries to facilitate healing, divination, as well as cosmological equilibrium. In his influential work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964, 33), Mircea Eliade characterises the shaman as a “technician of the sacred”, whose ecstatic voyages, often induced via recourse to rhythmic percussion, incantatory practices or psychotropic substances, enable navigation of tripartite cosmologies, incorporating celestial, terrestrial and chthonic domains. Thus, shamanism represents what Mircea Eliade classifies as an “archaic technique of ecstasy” (Ibid, 4), wherein the shaman serves as mediator between human and spirit realms through ritualized trance states, as “the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld” (Ibid, 5). Yet, this sacerdotal function extends beyond a mere voyage of the spirit to encompass a complex soteriological role wherein the shaman serves as theurgist and communal healer. This blissful journeying is not merely symbolic but, at the same time, constitutes what Åke Hultkrantz (1993, 34) terms “a real, albeit non-ordinary, state of consciousness”. Hence, the shaman’s role extends beyond spirit voyage to include healing, as in Siberian traditions where the shaman “recovers the patient’s lost soul by searching for it in the otherworld” (Vitebsky 2001, 52). At the same time, the animistic substratum of shamanistic practice is of equal importance and manifests itself in the sacralization of natural phenomena, including topographical features, flora, and fauna, all participating in an immanent spiritual ecology. Furthermore, the spiritual union of the shaman with ancestral spirits establishes an intergenerational

continuum of esoteric knowledge, thus positioning the practitioner as both a custodian and a conduit of archaic wisdom. These constitutive elements that comprise ecstatic liminality, spirit mediation, rituals, and therapeutics form the hermeneutic foundation for examining shamanistic resonances in literary traditions.

Even though English literature predominantly emerges from a Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage, it, nevertheless, incorporates shamanistic motifs, including spiritual quests, communion with nature, or encounters with the supernatural that reflect a universal human fascination with transcendence and problematize rigid secular/sacred dichotomies. The initiatory paradigm, presupposing the symbolic death and rebirth of the protagonist, constitutes a significant shamanistic trope. In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (c. 700-1000), for instance, *Beowulf's* combats against Grendel and the dragon surpass simple martial exploits, as they represent ontological struggles against chaotic forces that mirror the shaman's continuing battle against maleficent spirits. Accordingly, *Beowulf's* descent into Grendel's mere evokes shamanic underworld journeys, with the poet describing it as "a place unknown to men, / where mist-steams rise and the trees hang / hoar and rotten over the weir of the waters" (Heaney 2001, 1361-1363). In a similar manner, the conceptualization of the 'wyrd' in the epic as an inexorable cosmic force further associates with the shamanistic conception of a predestined spiritual path, while the archetype of the shamanic necromancer that finds expression in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623), where Prospero operates as a Renaissance magus whose hermetic arts in general, and his mastery over the aerial spirit Ariel in particular, parallel the shaman's spirit conjuration techniques, especially when he declares that "I have bedimm'd / The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds, / And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault / Set roaring war" (Shakespeare 2004, 5.1.41-44). A similar line of reasoning may be applied to the fictional universe of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium, comprising *The Hobbit* (1937) and the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), in which Gandalf embodies the Odinic wanderer archetype and with his vatic wisdom and capacity for astral travel, as demonstrated in his post-mortem transfiguration, recalls the shaman's role as a mediator between mortal and divine spheres. Indeed, Gandalf undergoes a shamanic death-and-rebirth, returning "as Gandalf the White" (Tolkien 2002, 98) after his battle with the Balrog - a motif paralleling "Siberian shamanic initiatory death" (Eliade 1964, 33). As

a result, Tolkien's world of theurgy, with its distinct cosmology and mythic narratives, offers a structured spiritual framework echoing the oral and written traditions of Central Asia and Siberia. The literary sacralization of landscape presents another significant point of convergence. From the oneiric forests of Arthurian romance to the enchanted topography of Romantic poetry, English literature persistently constructs nature as a sacred space, with Tolkien's sentient arboreal beings, such as Ents, and geomantic locations, such as Tom Bombadil's estate in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), constituting some of the most systematic literary instantiations of shamanistic animism within the Western canon.

Turkic shamanistic traditions, in their turn, present a more explicit and systematized integration of shamanic praxis into narrative structures, particularly within the oral epic tradition. The 'kam'/shaman emerges not merely as a supporting character but as an axial figure in works like the Kyrgyz medieval *Epic of Manas*, in which shamanic interventions frequently determine the course of heroic quests, while shaman's drum is oft described as "the horse that carries him to the upper world" (Dioszegi 1968, 214), thus emphasising the fact that "the shaman's ascent repeats the cosmic climb of the mythical First Shaman" (Campbell 1949, 257). This narrative centrality reflects the shaman's sociocultural role as a spiritual leader and a repository of ethnic memory, recorded in the explicit shamanic invocations of the following sort: "Oh, spirits of the ancestors, / Lend me your strength!" (Prior 1995, 112). At the same time, Turkic literary traditions contain vivid representations of the ritual praxis. The Altai *Maaday-Kara* epic, for instance, which attained its completed form by the fifth century BCE, meticulously documents shamanic healing ceremonies, spirit propitiation rites, as well as divinatory procedures, offering what amounts to an ethnopoetic transcription of lived spiritual experience. This ritual accuracy distinguishes Turkic shamanistic narratives from their more metaphorical Western counterparts, presenting scholars with invaluable texts for the study of Central Asian spiritual epistemologies that depict shamans as the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans" (Otto 1958, 12) and serve as literary conduits for humanity's perennial engagement with the numinous. In addition, the universal motif of the 'axis mundi' or the 'world tree' provides structural coherence to Turkic shamanistic narratives. This cosmogonic symbol, which parallels the Norse Yggdrasil and other Indo-European world trees, serves as a framework and a channel for the shaman's

inter-realm crossings via “climb[ing] the cosmic tree or pole, which is the axis mundi, connecting the earth with the sky” (Eliade 1964, 168), while zoomorphic tutelary spirits, particularly the wolf and eagle, function as guardians in these narratives, just like the she-wolf Asena, “revered as a totemic ancestor and guardian spirit guiding shamans and warriors alike” (Findley 2005, 38), or symbolize “the upper world and act as a messenger between the earthly realm and the heavens” (Smith 2019, 74), thus underscoring the deep totemic structures underlying Turkic spiritual consciousness.

Despite the presence of ostensible disparity between the two literary traditions, a comparative examination reveals profound isomorphic structures underlying these paradigms. For that reason, this article examines shamanistic tropes and ritual modalities extant in English literature by associating them with the foundational principles and themes characteristic of Turkic shamanism, comprising but not limited to the hero’s spiritual journey, the role of the shaman as a mediator, and the sacred connection to nature. Furthermore, the article examines archetypal similarities and unique cultural expressions of shamanism in English and Turkic literary traditions, aiming to demonstrate how ancient spiritual practices inspire universal narratives of transformation, healing, spiritual progress, and cosmic balance that exist beyond any culture and time.

Shamanic archetypes in English Literature: From medieval to postmodern ecstatic mediation

As has been mentioned in the previous section, the shaman functions as a “technician of the sacred” (Eliade 1964, 33), traversing spiritual realms through ecstatic trance to mediate between human and divine spheres. Being rooted in prehistoric animistic traditions, the shamanic archetype has demonstrated remarkable adaptability due to its capability to evolve across literary periods and cultures reflecting shifting epistemological and spiritual paradigms - English literature being no exception, as shamanic motifs, from the medieval period to postmodernism, comprising tropes of ecstatic journeying, ritual death/rebirth and nature communion, interrogate the metaphysical crises of its respective historical eras. From the initiatory trials of *Beowulf* (c. 700-1000) and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1375-1400) to the fragmented visionaries of postmodern fiction, shamanic consciousness persists as a literary preoccupation, even as its manifestations shift in response to cultural and religious transformations, comprising the

medieval and Renaissance assimilation of shamanic motifs into Christian frameworks, as well as the Enlightenment to postmodern reconfigurations of the shaman as a figure of spiritual authority, psychic crisis and ironic divinatory revival.

The Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, alongside its syncretism and apparent Christianization of medieval and Renaissance shamanism, manifests one of the most remarkable literary embodiments of shamanic initiation. The Green Knight's supernatural attributes, particularly his decapitation and revival, align with Eliade's (1964, 33) concept of "initiatory dismemberment" that serves as a core element of shamanic vocation narratives across Siberia and Central Asia. His challenge to Arthur's court establishes a ritual framework wherein Gawain undergoes a "liminal passage" (Turner 1969, 95), thus traversing a wilderness that functions as a "geography of the sacred" (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). The anonymous poet's depiction of the liminal landscape as "the werbelande wod that waches the water, / the rogh, rakel rokkes ther rennynges fall" (Tolkien & Gordon 1967, ll. 2166-2167) transforms the natural world into a spiritual testing ground, while Gawain's encounters with Bertilak's wife and the magical girdle replicate Siberian shamanic trials where a "candidate must resist spiritual corruption to prove his worth" (Vitebsky 2001, 89). Thus, the poem preserves shamanic structures while adapting them to Christian chivalric ideals.

Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1592) dramatizes early modern anxieties surrounding shamanic power in an increasingly rationalized world and, therefore, reflects the Renaissance crisis of shamanic authority. Faustus embodies what Wouter Hanegraaff (2012, 215) terms the "broken magus", or a figure who possesses shamanic techniques, as in "Now that I have obtain'd what I desire, / I'll live in speculation of this art" (Marlowe 2003, 1.1.79-80), but lacks the spiritual integrity that legitimizes traditional shamanic practice. The moral framework of the tragedy transforms Faustus into an anti-shaman, as where Siberian shamans journey to the underworld to retrieve lost souls (Eliade 1964, 210-215), Faustus descends into damnation to parody this redemptive function. Faustus's failed necromancy reflects the suspicion of the Reformation of mediatory figures, yet the enduring power of the play stems from its paradoxical nostalgia for precisely the kind of sacred mediation it condemns - a tension that, as Stephen Greenblatt (1980, 110) observes, reveals "the Renaissance simultaneous attraction to and

repulsion from magical thinking”, exposing a cultural ambivalence toward ecstatic mediation.

Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590) presents a more systematic exploration of shamanic archetypes through its contrasting magical figures of Merlin and Archimago. Merlin exemplifies the “benign shaman-seer” (Ginzburg 1991, 143), whose prophecies guide Britomart much as “Siberian shamans direct their communities through divination” (Vitebsky 2001, 52). Hence, his hermetic knowledge, being safely contained within Christian providentialism, represents an authorized form of shamanic mediation. Conversely, Archimago embodies demonized sorcery, while his illusions - “He fram’d a snowy substance in such wise / As Una’s shape to all appearance right” (Spenser 2001, I.i.45) - recall Eurasian narratives of malevolent spirit-workers. This dichotomy reflects the “crisis of differentiation” (Thomas 1971, 252) between legitimate and illegitimate supernatural practices typical of the period, illustrating how shamanism was fragmented in Reformation England, when certain ecstatic practices were absorbed into Protestant mysticism while others were condemned as diabolical.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the persistence of shamanic motifs in English literature, yet within the prism of the Enlightenment process of rationalist demystification. Accordingly, it was John Milton who in *Paradise Lost* (1667) presented Satan as a fallen shamanic mediator, whose soliloquy - “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (2005, IV.75) - captured the anguish of corrupted spiritual mobility, while his underworld descent parodied the shaman’s remedial journey. Where traditional shamans “heal through underworld journeys” (Eliade 1964, 5), Satan’s descent deconstructed this function, as his “dark materials” (Milton 2005, II.916) perverted sacred mediation into eternal rebellion. Yet the eighteenth century also produced counter-narratives reclaiming ecstatic vision, as William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), which explicitly positions the poet as the shaman: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite” (Blake 2008, 14). Hence, Blake’s esoterically illuminated books, with their mythic systems and contrarian “Proverbs of Hell”, constitute “a new kind of shamanic text” (Raine 1968, 112), resisting Enlightenment rationalism through deliberate esotericism.

The ensuing period of Romanticism succeeded in fully reclaiming the shamanic consciousness, particularly manifest in its reverence for

the animistic vitality of nature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) casts the mariner as a cursed shamanic figure, whose compulsive storytelling - "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns" (Coleridge 2004, ll. 582–583) - mirrors the shaman's communal role. In addition, the symbolic economy of the poem, with the slain albatross acting as a spirit guide, and the blessing of water snakes echoing animistic rituals, aligns with Siberian shamanic narratives, in which "the shaman recovers the patient's lost soul by searching for it in the otherworld" (Vitebsky 2001, 52). Similarly, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850) frames poetic inspiration as shamanic vision, in which the 'spots of time' passages - "There are in our existence spots of time... / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue" (1979, XI.258-262) - parallel the shaman's "non-ordinary state of consciousness" (Hultkrantz 1993, 34), thus turning the Romantic poet into a vessel for transcendent experience.

The shattered cosmologies of Modernism produced equally fragmented shamanic figures. Thus, T.S. Eliot's Tiresias in *The Waste Land* (1922) - "I Tiresias, though blind... / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest" (2001, ll. 228-229) - embodies the image of the modernist shaman, represented by a crippled seer amidst cultural ruins. The collage of Tarot, Hindu mantras, as well as Arthurian fragments utilized in the poem mimics broken shamanic rituals that reflect "the debris of outworn creeds" (Frazer 1922, vi). Similarly, even though D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) attempted a neo-shamanic revival through its protagonist's initiation into Aztec-inspired rites - "she felt her soul passing into the greater soul of the god" (Lawrence 1995, 312) - the novel revealed the modernist "yearning for what it cannot truly reclaim" (Torgovnick 1990, 132) and highlighted the paradox of seeking ecstatic unity in a disenchanting age.

The advent of Postmodernism led to a radical change in the literary treatment of shamanism, handling it with characteristic irony while preserving its core motifs. In this connection, Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), featuring Tyrone Slothrop, whose psychic disintegration parodies shamanic prophecy - "His dreams have been changing... They are no longer his" (Pynchon 2000, 26), and whose body mysteriously predicts V-2 rocket strikes, becomes "a shamanic map of the military-industrial unconscious" (Coward 1980, 97), rendering spiritual mediation absurd in a world ruled by paranoia and technology. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), in its turn, offers a

feminist and ecological reclamation of shamanic identity, in which the protagonist's visionary breakdown - "I am not an animal or a tree... I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow" (Atwood 1998, 192) - echoes Mircea Eliade's (1964, 168) description of shamans who "symbolically become the cosmic tree". In this way, Atwood transforms this archetype into an act of ecological resistance. As a result, from the Green Knight's medieval initiatory trials to Margaret Atwood's postmodern representation of the shaman as an eco-visionary, the shamanic archetype has been continually reconfigured to reflect the metaphysical anxieties of each period of English literature. For this reason, no matter whether a healer, a madman, or an ironic commentator, the literary shaman endures, but not as an anthropological relic, but as Joseph Campbell's (1949, 381) "living symbol of transcendence", which demonstrates the unbroken fascination of literature with liminality, ecstasy, and, above all, the human yearning to bridge the material and spiritual worlds.

Shamanic archetypes in Turkic Literature: From ancient epics to modern narratives

Shamanism constitutes a primordial and pervasive framework within Turkic spiritual systems, oft functioning as an ontological link between the human and spirit worlds, wherein the shaman, generally known as 'kam', 'baksı', or 'oyun' operates as a multivalent ritual expert, simultaneously carrying out the rites of a healer, a poet, and a mediator of cosmological forces. For this reason, this section employs a diachronic and hermeneutic approach to trace the metamorphosis of shamanic archetypes within Turkic literary production that ranges from pre-Islamic oral epics to contemporary narrative fiction, thus illuminating the adaptive resilience of these motifs amid shifting socio-religious paradigms. Turkic literary traditions provide a prominent corpus for the examination of shamanic epistemologies, owing to their deep structural overlapping with animistic and Tengriist cosmologies that existed before the advent of Islamization and subsequent syncretic transformations. A close textual analysis of early Turkic works, spanning *The Book of Dede Korkut* that encompasses a repository of Oghuz Turkic mytho-poetic consciousness to the modernist existential narratives of Chinghiz Aitmatov, elucidates the mechanisms by which shamanic consciousness has been both preserved and reconfigured within literary discourse. At the same time, the appropriation of theoretical frameworks from comparative religion, ethnopoetics, as

well as postcolonial historiography enables this study to demarcate the continuity of shamanic tropes and cross-examine their hermeneutic resignification in response to hegemonic religious and cultural shifts. This allows one to posit Turkic literature as an ever-evolving site of mnemonic and imaginative negotiation, in which shamanic archetypes function as stratified markers of cultural memory, despite their relentless subjection to aesthetic and ideological reinterpretation across temporal and geopolitical divides.

The Book of Dede Korkut, composed between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, comprises an important corpus of Oghuz Turkic oral literature and preserves “archaic techniques of ecstasy” (Eliade 1964, 5) through its numerous liminal figures. Although Dede Korkut operates primarily as an ‘aksakal’ or a wise elder, his capacity to “pronounce binding oracles that determine the fate of heroes” (Lewis 1974, 23) mirrors the role of the shaman as “a technician of the sacred” (Eliade 1964, 33). Thus, when the childless Dirse Han is granted a son, Dede Korkut performs a naming ritual that combines shamanic and Islamic elements: “Let this boy’s name be Boğaç... May his life be long, may his tree be tall, may his grey horse never stumble, may his sword never shatter!” (Lewis 1974, 57). Similarly, the narrative on Bamsı Beyrek exemplifies the classic shamanic initiation, as his symbolic death through imprisonment and subsequent rebirth through escape reenact what Vitebsky identifies as “the shaman’s underworld journey to rescue souls from Erlik Khan’s realm” (2001, 52), in this way “imitat[ing] the paradigmatic descent of the first shaman” (Eliade 1964, 112). At the same time, the animistic elements in the text, particularly the “sacred tree that bleeds when chopped” (Lewis 1974, 147), demonstrate “the Turkic shamanic habitus’ persistent substratum” (Basilov 1992, 78) lying beneath Islamicized narratives.

The Kyrgyz *Epic of Manas*, whose oral traditions were compiled over centuries, with written redactions emerging in the nineteenth century, contains pronounced shamanic elements, particularly in its depiction of heroes who obtain supernatural assistance, thus underlining the position that “the shaman’s role as an intermediary between the human and spirit worlds finds narrative expression in the epic’s heroes, who rely on omens and dreams for guidance” (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). Manas himself is frequently guided by visionary experiences, including his dream before the battle against the Kalmyks, in which “the spirits of his ancestors appeared, foretelling victory” (Prior 1995, 112). Similarly, his companion Bakai assumes a

divinatory role, which allows him to interpret signs and advise Manas, thus carrying out the function that might be compared to “the Siberian shaman’s advisory and prophetic duties” (Hultkrantz 1993, 47). The epic also incorporates ritualistic practices rooted in pre-Islamic Turkic shamanism, such as the invocation of ‘tülber’ or spirit horses, as well as prayers to Tengri, the sky god, which are reflective of “the shaman’s mastery of ecstatic journeying and communication with supernatural entities” (Eliade 1964, 5), while another passage describes Manas summoning his ‘tülber’ before battle and calling upon “the swift steeds of the ancestors, born of wind and fire” (Prior 1995, 156). These elements emphasise the syncretic blending of shamanic cosmology in the epic with later Islamic influences.

The Islamization of Turkic peoples led to the assimilation of shamanic archetypes into Sufi traditions, and it was Ahmad Yasawi, one of the founding fathers of Turkic Sufism of the twelfth century, who composed ‘hikmets’ or wisdom poems, which synthesized Islamic mysticism with shamanic ecstatic practices. His verses depict spiritual ascents or ‘mi‘raj’, which structurally resemble the shamanic soul journey that can be defined as “the shaman’s ability to transcend corporeal limitations and traverse cosmic realms” (Eliade 1964, 5). Hence, Yasawi’s (2021, 29) declaration of “I soared to the Divine Throne, my soul a falcon unleashed” emulates the celestial voyage of the shaman. Yasawi’s voluntary seclusion in an underground cell, known as ‘chilla-khāna’, replicates the shaman’s initiatory isolation, a process generally described as “a symbolic descent into the underworld, preceding spiritual rebirth” (Eliade 1964, 33). Yet, even though Yasawi retains the shaman’s communal healing role, he reorients it toward Islamic devotion, thus exemplifying “the Islamization of indigenous Turkic religiosity” (DeWeese 1994, 58), the syncretism of which is evident in his injunction: “Heal not with talismans, but with the Name of the Truth” (Yasawi 2021, 72).

The same line of reasoning may be applied to an influential thirteenth and fourteenth-century Sufi poet Yunus Emre, who integrated animistic motifs into his mystical work *Dîvân* (c. 1280-1320) to reflect shamanistic traditions prevalent in pre-Islamic Turkic culture, as exemplified in the following couplet: “I befriended the mountains / I became a companion of the clouds” (Emre 2009, 87). Hence, this animistic worldview echoes with an assertion that shamanistic elements persist in “folklorized remnants” (Hultkrantz 1993, 112) of ostensibly monotheistic frameworks, while the

personification of nature mirrors the “ritual engagement of the Turkic shaman with ecological entities as sentient, divine forces” (Basilov 1992, 45).

Chinghiz Aitmatov’s contemporary novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (1980) reconfigures shamanic tropes within a Soviet modernist framework, in which the protagonist Buranniy Yedigei, a Kazakh railway worker, performs the rite of ‘zhyrau’ or lamentation, standing for a ritualized mediation between “the living and the dead” (Aitmatov 1980, 87). At the same time, the cosmic allegory in the novel, wherein an interstellar empire enforces collective amnesia, mirrors the “battle of the shaman against historical erasure” (Clark 1999, 112), in which the ‘mankurt’ or a traumatized slave stripped of memory functions as an anti-shamanic figure, embodying the rupture of modernity with ancestral consciousness. Therefore, this trope inverts the traditional role of the shaman as the “custodian of collective memory” (Levin 1996, 54). In addition, contemporary Kazakh and Altai writers deploy shamanism as a counter-discourse to postcolonial modernity. Thus, Rollan Seisenbayev’s *The Dead Wander in the Desert* (2019) interrogates post-Soviet anomie through ‘aruaq’ or spirit symbolism, which frames shamanic revival as “a return to the dastan (oral epic) as historical testimony” (2020, 211). Similarly, Altai authors like Borongot Uzut-ool embed ‘kamlanie’ or shamanic chants into prose to “reassert pre-Islamic cosmologies” (Van Deusen 2004, 73). To conclude, Turkic literature demonstrates an unbroken fascination with shamanic archetypes. Whether as epic heroes, Sufi mystics, or modern anti-colonial symbols, the shaman persists as a literary figure who transcends time and ideology, and his literary afterlife continues to evolve.

Conclusion

The shamanic archetype is prevalent across English and Turkic literary traditions as a transhistorical mediator between material and spiritual realms. Comparative analysis reveals structural parallels in their exploitation of shamanic motifs destined to address initiation rites, spiritual mediation, as well as cultural preservation. Both medieval English literature and Turkic epics feature liminal figures undergoing symbolic death/ rebirth transformations and exhibiting remarkable adaptive capacity, in this way demonstrating the cross-cultural hermeneutic value of the archetype. English literature transmutes shamans into Renaissance necromancers and Romantic seers, while

Turkic traditions synthesize shamanic ecstasy with Sufi mysticism. This morphological flexibility draws attention to the semiotic potency of the shamanic archetype as an effective tool for metaphysical inquiry.

In modernity, both cultural and literary traditions employ the shaman as a diagnostic tool for cultural fragmentation. In this connection, English modernism employs fractured shamans reflecting spiritual alienation, while Turkic literature instrumentalizes shamanic memory against colonial eradication. Contemporary rearticulations further demonstrate the conceptual mobility of the archetype since postmodern English texts reconfigure shamans as eco-visionaries, while post-Soviet Turkic writers reclaim shamanism as a decolonial praxis. As a result, the enduring discursive hegemony of the shamanic archetype reaffirms its status as a diachronic and transcultural hermeneutic framework, the one that refracts ontological crises and, at the same time, reconstitutes itself as an epistemic site for negotiating the dialectics of tradition and modernity.

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