

86. Eighteenth century travel writing as proto-ecocritical literary efforts: Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" as an ecocritical travel writing example¹

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Abstract

Today, ecocritical theory challenges the logic which damages and exploits nature in the sake of technological developments, and which draws human beings to a more mechanised and alienated life. However, when ecocriticism had not arrived at the scene of literary history, there had been some poets who tried to do what today's ecocritical theory did through their accounts of travels in nature that they transfused into their poetry, by expressing their desires to become one with nature again, thus, moving away from the anthropocentric point of view which ecocriticism aims to undermine today. One of these poets was the prominent Romantic poet William Wordsworth, who lived between 1770 and 1850, and dealt with human-nature relationship in his poetry with a proto-eco-centric point of view as early as the eighteenth century. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate his poem titled "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud", which was written during a walking tour in nature that he had attended with his sister, with an ecocritical perspective so as to demonstrate the fact that Wordsworth realised what today's ecocritical theory tries to do more than two centuries earlier, which makes it possible to classify him as a proto-ecocritical poet.

Keywords: Travel writing, ecocriticism, William Wordsworth

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Bir Öncü-Ekokritik Edebi Çalışma Örneği Olarak 18. Yüzyıl Seyahat Yazını: Wordsworth'ün "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" Şiirinin Ekokritik Seyahat Yazını Örneği Bağlamında İncelenmesi³

Öz

Bilindiği üzere, günümüz ekokritik kuramı, teknolojik gelişme adı altında doğanın zarar görmesi ve sömürülmesi sonucu insanoğlunun daha mekanize ve doğaya yabancılaşmış bir hayata sürüklenmesine karşı çıkmaktadır. Ne var ki, ekokritik kuram edebiyat sahnesine çıkmadan çok zaman önce, bugün bu kuramın yapmaya çalıştığı aynısını seyahat notlarını şiirlerine aktarmak suretiyle doğa ile insanın bütün olması gerekliliği mesajını vererek ve insanı evrenin merkezi kabul eden dünya görüşünü reddederek gerçekleştiren şairler olmuştur. Bunlardan birinin de 1770-1880 yılları arasında yaşayan ve şiirlerini öncü-ekokritik denilebilecek bir bakış açısıyla yazan William Wordsworth olduğu söylenebilir. Nitekim bu çalışmanın amacı, romantik şiirin önde gelen isimlerinden olan William Wordsworth'ün kız kardeşiyle gerçekleştirdiği bir doğa turundan yola çıkarak yazdığı "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" başlıklı şiirini ekokritik kuram bağlamında inceleyerek kendisinin bugünkü ekokritik kuramın yapmaya çalıştığını bu kuramın ortaya çıkışından yaklaşık 200 yıl önce gerçekleştirdiğini ve bu nedenle öncü-ekokritik bir şair olarak sınıflandırılabilceği gerçeğini ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Seyahat yazını, ekokritik kuram, William Wordsworth

Introduction

Ecocritical studies gain more importance every day since the environmental problems have reached to a dangerous proportion of concern in today's modern world. Considering that these problems are mostly caused by the technological developments, it would be very appropriate to say that the turning point in the emergence of these environmental problems was the Industrial Revolution, which took place approximately between the years 1760 and 1840. With the further development of technology, nature has unfortunately become the target of humankind as a source that can be abused and recklessly damaged rather than being seen as a vital system to be protected. Hence, the relationship between individual and nature have constantly deteriorated, as the humankind started to get lost in the turmoil of the modern life and eventually turned out to be alienated from nature.

If we accept the fact that the turning point of the development of modern technology - which can be accepted to be the main reason of the rise of the anthropocentric point of view - was the Industrial Revolution, it makes sense to consider eighteenth century as a period in which people massively moved to cities and became alienated from nature day by day. Therefore, the dominance of travel writing, which involved vivid natural descriptions in it, as well as the reflection of the psychological effects of nature on

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the traveller, is not surprising since it can be accepted to be a reaction against this alienation. Hence, as Britain moved from an agricultural society to an industrial one beginning from the eighteenth century, travel writing gained momentum and popularity. Therefore, travel writing examples of therein century can be evaluated to be one of the closest disciplines to today's modern ecocritical theory, in its emphasis on the therapeutic effect of nature on human psychologies, which can particularly be observed in pieces of romantic poetry, many of which were written during travels in natural settings. Travel writing can basically be defined as a literary genre "in which the traveller describes the places she/he has visited and had different experiences while travelling" (Koseman 7). Although "the origins of travel writing can be grounded in the literary texts of ancient times", in fact it is "a specific and indigenous genre" which is a "relatively recent focus of interest among literary critics" (Ayan and Yılmaz 39), which is surprising since it involves a very apparent ecological consciousness in it which is similar to our contemporary ecological consciousness, which makes it possible to classify the genre as a proto-ecocritical one.

Ecological Consciousness in Literary Works Before the Romantic Period

Although the appearance of the technological developments and the emergence of humankind's dominion over nature is frequently misinterpreted to have begun with the Industrial Revolution, the anthropocentric worldview and human's alienation from nature had emerged quite earlier than the eighteenth century. Therefore, it would be meaningful to see people's perception of ecology before the Romantic period so that the developments which prepared the reactions of the travelling romantic poets – who can be labelled as "the poet-wanderer" (Koseman 9) – against the alienation of humankind from nature can clearly be understood.

As a matter of fact, humankind's exploitation of nature had already begun as early as in the first century A.D. Hence, Lyn White, in her essay titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" gives us detailed information about the western traditions of technology and science and says that even as early as A.D 1000, The Europeans had applied waterpower to industrial processes (8). By the latter part of the seventh century after Christ, in fact, peasants began using "a new kind of plow equipped with a vertical knife to cut the line of the furrow, a horizontal share to slice under the soil and a mold board to turn over it" (White 8). White, in the same article, upon examining various technological developments in farming comments: "Thus, (with these developments) distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family, but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been a part of nature; now he was the exploiter of it" (8). As it can be deduced from White's words, even with the invention of this new kind of plow human beings had already begun to dominate the land in the seventh century. However, this domination simultaneously initiated the separation process of humankind from nature and as the technology progressed in time, this separation sharpened.

In the late twelfth century, for instance, wind power came in use. Gradually, Europeans developed their "power machinery", "labour-saving devices", and "automation" (White 10). With the rediscovery of the New World and recognition of the new species, people were reminded of the fact that there was an immense and unexplored non-human nature and that they were only a small part of it. But as usual, rather than accepting this reality and respecting nature, they preferred to exploit the newly discovered areas as well for their own sake. This exploitation persevered for long centuries.

However, during the seventeenth century, which preceded the romantic era, human beings began to question man's dominion over everything, and this questioning also found its reflection in literature as

the "century poets preferred to go beyond traditional pastoral and georgic genres to make a reconsideration of the natural world in an ethical way" (10). With the first steps of globalization, they began to question the dominion of mankind over the non-human at a time when mechanistic and imperialistic attitudes towards nature had just begun. While the eighteenth century was approaching, theologians and philosophers had also been interrogating whether the natural world was given for temporal use or would be theirs in a maternal eternity. Therefore, untouched natural surroundings began to be chosen as popular routes for travel and concepts related to nature such as sublime and picturesque made their entrance to British literature, both of which found their places in the travel accounts of poets and authors.

Eighteenth Century Travel Writing, Sublime, and Picturesque

Eighteenth century was the "peak of nature writing" and not only the genre of travel writing but also some other prose works which favoured "the subjects of natural theology and natural history became popular" (Hitt 123). According to Christopher Hitt, the most important of the attitudes towards nature in the eighteenth century was the "natural sublime", which he describes as "an aesthetic of wildness which originated and developed alongside industrialization and agricultural capitalism" (127). This new aesthetic attitude which was directly connected with the eighteenth-century concept of travel, found its place in travel writing accounts in both prose and poetry since it awakened the curiosity of readers. Embodying both an admiration and a fear of nature in it, natural sublime as a new aesthetic attitude became the focus of many eighteenth century readers, which accelerated the popularity pace of travel writings. Hence, in her effort to exemplify this new aesthetic attitude toward "rugged, wild nature" (Hitt 127), Marjorie Hope Nicolson, preferred to explain natural sublime through a travel writing example written by John Dennis in which he describes his tour of the Alps in 1688 by stating that the glory of nature, the rocks and the cliffs he came across "all this produc'd different emotions in [him], a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy" while he simultaneously "trembled" (277). In parallel with today's ecocritical theory, Dennis's travel writing underlined humankind's respectful and impotent position against nature, which exhibits the fact that the concept of natural sublime, which is frequently presented to the reader as part of a travel story in romantic poetry too, can be accepted to be in tune with the ecocritical theory. Romantic poets in general and William Wordsworth in particular were closely related to the concept of sublime.

Another aesthetic tendency of eighteenth century about nature was the "picturesque". In *Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry*, J.R. Watson explained that "the created sensitivities against the exploitation of nature yielded a new consciousness towards the end of the eighteenth century" (qtd in Byerly 51). Alison Byerly, in "The Uses of the Landscape", emphasizes the fact that especially with the Romantic era "drastic changes" were seen about the concept of nature and states that the "English travellers who had seen Italy and the Alps while on the Grand Tour wanted to recapture their experience in Britain, and suddenly the Lake District, the Wye Valley, the West Country, and parts of Scotland became fashionable destinations" (55). In time, the act of picturesque, in Byerly's words, "saw domesticating the wild landscape" and it did this in two ways, first of which was the "travel" itself since "remote regions were made accessible and as a result of eco-tours they were physically altered" (60). As those travels which were executed in the framework of "ecotours" increased in number and frequency, nature was "tamed" and domesticated. John Barrel, in *The Idea of the Landscape and the Sense of Place* implies that although picturesque, in its essence, looked for an untouched, pure, and wild nature, the so-called "eco-tours" which were born out of the picturesque tendency, was in a way damaging nature (in Byerly 62).

Although both the concepts of natural sublime and picturesque were two aesthetic tendencies dominating the literary scene during the eighteenth century, they were only a small part of the bigger picture, which was the "travel writing" itself. Hence, as William C Horne underlines, when talking about the eighteenth century, it must be emphasized that it was "the age of travel writing" (76). Thomas Mc Curley gives detailed information about these travel writings and says that 8 encyclopaedic collections and 45 smaller collections were produced between the years 1660 and 1880, and in addition to the major works, there were "thousands of individual writings and miscellanies of local tours, distant expeditions and continent travels" (qtd in Horne 76). Horne also gives Imlac's view about an important detail and says that "all the appearances of nature" and every countryside were comprehensively and carefully noted by the authors of these travel writings (76). Hence, the popularity of travel writing was also in close relation with the natural curiosity of the eighteenth-century people who wanted to know the secrets of nature. Not only arts and literature but also science was very interested in nature in the eighteenth century. They mutually helped each other in their study and representations of nature. In "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", William Howarth gives us the information that "the biological names of species were quite haphazard until Carolus Linnaeus compiled his *System Nature in 1734*" and that "he used Latin inflections to classify organisms into a categorical taxonomy, or naming system" (72). He also asserts that beginning with 1750s "global exploration and colonization by Western powers promoted dynamic new ideas in the natural sciences in parallel with the major discoveries which enlarged known space and time. Scientists charted ocean currents and traced the ice ages" [...] (72). In Howarth's words, "these events prompted new ways to read the earth" (72). With all these developments and new discoveries, Western nations began to experience a rapid industrial growth and intense social changes. They saw the development of technology and urbanization as a prerequisite for prosperity and preferred not to think about what the adverse consequences would be. But soon, although not majority, a minority of people were to realize the destructive side of industrialization since it brought with it the alienation of people from nature, and through their travel accounts or memories they wrote about in their poems, they were to reflect the idea that the real home for the humankind was nature or the countryside rather than the urban cities. This minority of people were: "the Romantics".

Wordsworth's Travels to Natural Landscapes and his "Photographic Subjectivity"

A post-evaluation of the Romantic era poets naturally leads the reader to William Wordsworth, as one of the most prominent advocates of the period. Born on April 23rd, 1770, in Cocker mouth in the northwest of England, William Wordsworth spent most of his childhood in the Lake District, which, undoubtedly, "influenced him greatly because of the unique sense and appreciation for nature he got there" (William Wordsworth-Biography). Unfortunately, Wordsworth lost his mother in 1778, when he was just eight years of age, and his father in 1783. "As if these two were not enough traumatic experiences for a child, he also found himself separated from his sister, Dorothy, to whom he had become very attached to" (William Wordsworth-Biography) and which most probably resulted in his devoting himself to nature and choosing the environment as his best companion. Hence, in many of his poems in which he talks about his childhood memories, nature's perfect companionship for him can clearly be observed, whereas in many others, readers can witness this companionship through his accounts of his travels to natural landscapes which he realised in his adulthood.

Spending most of his life living in the middle of nature and travelling natural landscapes, Wordsworth was a man who found solace in it. This is obvious in most of his poetry and prose. In 1807 he published *Poems in Two Volumes*, which included poems entitled: "Resolution and Independence"; "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" (known also as "Daffodils"); "My Heart Leaps Up"; "Ode: Intimations of Immortality";

"Ode to Duty"; "The Solitary Reaper"; "Elegiac Stanzas"; "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802"; "London, 1802"; and "The World is Too Much with Us", each of which, except London 1802 included very successful nature descriptions he recorded while travelling natural landscapes. Some other important works related to nature are *Guide to the Lakes* (1810) and *The Excursion* (1814).

Eminent ecocritic Jonathan Bate, makes a bold but proper claim and states that "Wordsworth went before us in some of the steps we are now taking in our thinking about the environment" (5), implying that Wordsworth was aware what would be the disastrous consequences of technology and industrialization upon the humankind and the environment. Bate is also right when he suggests that "the time is right to allow Wordsworth to become once more what he imagined himself to be, what Shelley called him and what he was to the Victorians: The Poet of Nature" (9). Since one of the principles of ecocriticism is "trying to demonstrate the past efforts of those who in their time tried to speak for the earth" (Coupe 6), Wordsworth is very appropriate for ecocritical scrutiny since through his accounts of his travels in natural landscapes he gave in his poetry, he realised what today's ecocritical theory tries to do more than two centuries earlier.

While describing nature, probably the most "distinctive facility" Wordsworth possessed, and which differed him from the other Romantics was what Scott Hess called his "photographic subjectivity". Although connecting Wordsworth and the concept of photography may seem "contradictory at first glance", he was in a way "photographic" while recording the natural landscapes that he came across in his travels to his mind (283). Although he was influenced by the picturesque in his early career, Wordsworth in 1798 expressed that he had "matured beyond picturesque conventions" (Hess 284). Nevertheless, demonstrating that Wordsworth did not get away from the influence of the picturesque "as fully as he claimed", Hess expressed that "surprisingly he had a great deal in common with photography" (286). In his article titled "William Wordsworth and Photographic Subjectivity", Hess explained how Wordsworth stopped and recorded natural beauties as a nature lover traveller with the following words:

The stationed point of view of the observer, focusing the scene from a single visual location; the separation of that observer from the landscape that he or she observes; the tendency to reduce the multisensory, ambient experience of a lived environment to pure vision; and the resulting general embodiment of the observer all link Wordsworth's main structure of experience to the tradition of the picturesque and the technology of photography that emerged from it. While Wordsworth did not focus on mimetic detail in his natural landscapes, he did produce a visual subjectivity that complemented the objectivity of the photograph and may even have helped shape the terms for its appreciation. The apparent opposition between Wordsworth's photographic vision and his poetry disguises a deeper complementarity: what I call Wordsworth's photographic subjectivity (285-6).

With the help of this distinctive characteristic, Wordsworth geared his poetry with very detailed and vivid nature descriptions that he encountered in his eco-tours or nature trips, and foregrounding the beauty of nature, he imposed on the reader the idea that happiness and peace would be found in nature, and that in great contrast to ugliness of the city life, nature would open them the doors of a dreamlike world, away from all the mechanical and depressing chaos of the urbanized life.

This quality of Wordsworth, in which "the individual subjectivity of the poet and the pictorial objectivity of the landscape he was looking at constructed one another", undoubtedly is a clear demonstration of his relation to picturesque (Hess 287). This interrelation between "the power of the landscape and the sense of individuality" can be found in the entire tradition of landscape and is clearly emphasized by the eighteenth-century picturesque tradition (287). Hence, Heinrich Schwarz asserted that "in the

picturesque, as in the linear perspective landscape tradition, the viewer composed the scene from a single stationed point of view. This process usually involved some form of framing, using a prominent foreground and/or side screens, such as trees or hills, to outline and compose the scene (113). In most of Wordsworth's poems, we can see that the narrator observes the scene that he comes across while travelling in nature from a single stationed point of view just like the picturesque artist.

In Malcolm Andrews's words, "The picturesque artist appropriates natural scenery and processes it into a commodity. With the aid of his 'knick-knacks', he converts Nature's unmanageable bounty into a frameable position" (81). So did Wordsworth. He "converted Nature's beauty into the lines on a paper" (81). As a matter of fact, Wordsworth himself announced his desire to capture picturesque scenes during his 1790 walking tour of the Alps, writing to Dorothy: "Ten thousand times in the course of this tour have I regretted the inability of my memory to retain a more strong impression of the beautiful forms before me, and again and again, in quitting a fortunate station have I returned to it with the most eager avidity, with the hope of bearing away a more lively picture" (qtd in Hess 291). As it can be understood from Wordsworth's own words, he wished to carry away with him a more permanent and detailed picture of the natural landscapes to remember a more vivid scene of nature and find consolation in it when depressed. Wordsworth, in Hess's words, is speaking like a "quintessential modern tourist" in these words and clearly "wishing for the not-yet invented photographic camera to capture natural beauties" (287) during his travels.

W.J.T Mitchell, in "Critical Inquiry", comments on Wordsworth's concept of photographic subjectivity and says that "physical and spiritual vision intermingles in his poetry" (qtd in Hess 294). His words are as follows: "Wordsworth's conception of a deep imaginative subjectivity depends not only on sensible images, but more strongly, on a landscape mode of perception. Physical vision passes into spiritual vision, at least for the transcendental moment of illumination [...]" (qtd in Hess 295). Wordsworth passed into a more peaceful and relaxed mind as if he was hypnotised or mesmerised by the natural landscapes he encounters either in his walking tours in nature or in the eco-tours he was participating in, as we can see in most of his nature poems. In Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and we can observe this kind of photographic subjectivity since the poet records an image of the landscape in his memory, which he "plans to carry in his mind for future viewings" (Hess 295). Additionally, in both poems the poet is "stationed in a particular position similar to the picturesque in which viewers compose" the landscape (295). The poet does not enter or directly "interact with" the landscapes but instead is "stationed in a visual distance, unseen, composing the landscape and through this photographic relationship to landscape, the poet constructs his own photographic subjectivity" (295).

This concept, in fact, can be accepted to be a typical characteristic of Wordsworthian canon since most of his nature poems start when the traveller or wanderer stops his journey or esplanade and stands still as if hypnotized by the beauty of nature. This motif is also in accordance with the ecocritical theory since it enables the poet to demonstrate the therapeutic effect of nature on humankind. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" this is very apparent.

A host of dancing Daffodils;
Along the Lake, beneath the trees,
Ten thousand dancing the breeze.

Scott Hess calls the moment of the stopping of this "halted traveller motif" as the moment of "arrested vision" and says: "This moment of arrested vision, in which a halted traveller narrator records an image

of a momentarily fixed landscape that he can then carry away with him in memory for future imaginative acts, is closely analogous to taking a photograph" (291). Here the nature serves in the mind of the poet as a "retrospective source of solace and remedy" (291). On April 15, 1802, when William and Dorothy were returning from their friends' invitation who lived around Ulsswater Lake, they saw one of the "best sights that inspired the poem" (Scott 60). Dorothy wrote in her journal the following entry:

When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow park we saw a few daffodils close to the water side. We fancied that the lake had floated the seeds ashore and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more and at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about and about them, some rested their heads upon these stones, as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind they blew upon them over the lake, they looked so gay ever glancing ever changing (qtd in Scott 60).

At the beginning of the poem, we can see to what extent the poet identifies himself and becomes one with nature. By identifying himself with a cloud, who wanders the vales and hills of the Lake District; he is totally unified with nature and the daffodils are also clearly personified since they are "dancing in the breeze", demonstrating the music and the harmony of nature. Like a picturesque artist, Wordsworth in this poem, converts into his paper every detail of the landscape very successfully.

"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats high o'er vales and hills
When all at once I saw a crowd
A host of, golden, daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze (1-6)."

With the following lines, the poet clearly states what influence nature may have upon the soul of a poet. The beautiful images of nature stored in the memory of the poet are very apparent in these lines and with the last two lines of the stanza; he clearly states that he breaks away from all the materialist concerns and he doesn't think even for a second "what wealth to (him) it had brought", also implying that no material criterion can be compared to the joy brought to him by the presence of nature. Therefore, this poem is also in accordance with the ecocritical principle that requires "challenging the logic of industrialism which assumes that nothing matters beyond technological progress" (Coupe 4).

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not be but gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed and gazed but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought: (13-18).

"Natural movement" is very apparent in the poem since nature is portrayed as very vivid and vital with the "dancing and the fluttering" daffodils, "tossing their heads" and similar expressions (Sucksmith 149), demonstrating that nature is also alive. It also includes the movement of the waves which dance too and the movement of light and moreover, the poet is in motion at the beginning of the poem "wandering", and at the end of the poem his heart is "moved" by the beauty of nature (Sucksmith 150).

As the selected lines demonstrate, the poem contains "ecological implications" (Slovic 160) and "the values expressed here are consistent with ecological wisdom" (Glotfelty "What is Ecocriticism"), since nature is glorified in the poem. In those moments when he finds himself concentrated to a natural landscape, he knows that they have a relieving effect on his soul when it is wearied by the daily and unhealthy conditions of the urbanised way of life. This message given in the poem – the idea that nature has a therapeutic effect on the spirits of human beings who have been slowly mechanised by the effects of industrialization and urbanization and who were drawn into depression – is the same message that today's ecocritic theorists try to give to modern people. Just like them, Wordsworth here tries to emphasize the fact that psychological survival of the humankind is only possible by returning to nature.

Conclusion

Upon scrutinising his poems, it is possible to say that what Wordsworth believed in was the fact that the natural order, in which every creature has its own place and rights – if sanctified and completely understood by the humankind – can be useful in creating an order in society. His poetry served to the same purpose with today's ecocritical theory since the dominant theme he dealt with was the connection between the natural world and the human kind. The ecocritical principle which dominates his poetry was nature's therapeutic effect on human psychology and the message he tried to give his reader was that a return to and reconciliation with nature, from the industrialised and materialist-based way of life would be the key to true happiness.

One of his distinctive qualities as a nature poet, that brought him one step ahead and made him special among the other nature poets and Romantics was his successful nature descriptions which were almost in photographic quality. His ability to capture and record specific visual moments and landscapes in his mind during his travels in natural landscapes like a not-yet invented photographic camera was closely related to his deep love for nature. He successfully converted natural beauties he witnessed during his travels or walking tours into the lines on a paper and tried to make the reader feel the glory and beauty of nature just like the way he did. By showing the soothing and healing effects of nature on individual psychologies, he demonstrated the fact that it is possible for people to find solace and happiness in nature, if they learn to be an integral part of it, thus, realising what today's ecocritical theory tries to do more than two centuries earlier, which makes it possible to classify him as a proto-ecocritical poet.

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