



## Faculty of Letters Journal of Social Sciences

| cujos.cumhuriyet.edu.tr |

Founded: 1982

Available online, ISSN: 1305-5143

Publisher: Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi

Leavers as Romantics: A Critique of Civilization in Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael*Sedat Bay<sup>1,a,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Sivas, Türkiye

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## Research Article

## History

Received: 31/12/2024

Accepted: 07/07/2025

## ABSTRACT

Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael* presents a scathing critique of modern civilization through the contrasting lenses of the "Takers" and the "Leavers." The Takers, representing industrialized societies, are characterized by their insatiable consumption, their domination of nature, and their pursuit of endless growth. The Leavers, embodying Indigenous cultures, offer a stark contrast, prioritizing ecological balance, intergenerational wisdom, and a harmonious relationship with the natural world. This article argues that the Leavers, with their emphasis on community, interconnectedness, and reverence for the Earth, embody many of the core tenets of the Romantic movement. Like the Romantics, they critique the alienation and dehumanization of industrial society, celebrate the power of nature, and seek a more authentic and meaningful existence. While the Leaver model may represent an idealized vision, it serves as a powerful critique of the Taker worldview and offers a valuable framework for rethinking our relationship with the environment and with each other. *My Ishmael* ultimately serves as a call to action, urging readers to question the prevailing paradigms of progress and to seek more sustainable and equitable ways of living.

**Keywords:** Daniel Quinn, *My Ishmael*, Romanticism, Leavers, TakersRomantik Olarak Bırakanlar: *My Ishmael*'de Bir Medeniyet Eleştirisi

## Öz

Daniel Quinn'in *My Ishmael* romanı, "Alanlar" ve "Bırakanlar" arasındaki çarpıcı karşılaştırma yoluyla modern medeniyete sert bir eleştirisi getirir. Sanayileşmiş toplumları temsil eden Alanlar, doymak bilmez tüketim, doğa üzerindeki hakimiyet ve sınırsız büyüme arayışıyla özdeşleştirilir. Yerli kültürleri temsil eden Bırakanlar ise çarpıcı bir kontrast oluşturarak, ekolojik denge, nesiller arası bilgelik ve doğayla uyumlu bir ilişkiyi önceliklendirir. Bu makale, Topluluk, bağlantılılık ve Dünya'ya saygı vurgusuyla Bırakanların, Romantik hareketin temel ilkelerinin birçoğunu somutlaştırdığını savunmaktadır. Romantikler gibi, onlar da endüstriyel toplumun yabancılaşma ve insanlık dışılaşmasını eleştirirler, doğanın gücünü kutlarlar ve daha otantik ve anlamlı bir varoluş arayışındadırlar. Bırakanlar modeli idealize edilmiş bir vizyonu temsil edebilse de Alanlar dünya görüşüne güçlü bir eleştiri oluşturur ve çevre ve birbirimizle olan ilişkimizi yeniden düşünmek için değerli bir çerçeve sunar. *My Ishmael* nihayetinde, okuyucuları, ilerleme paradigmalarını sorgulamaya ve daha sürdürülebilir ve adil yaşam biçimleri aramaya teşvik eden bir eylem çağrısı olarak işlev görür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Daniel Quinn, *My Ishmael*, Romantizm, Bırakanlar, Alanlar

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0000-0001-9118-2775

**How to Cite:** Bay S (2025) Leavers as Romantics: A Critique of Civilization in Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael*, Faculty of Letters Journal of Social Sciences, 49(2): 129-136

## Introduction to Romanticism

Romanticism emerged in Europe during the late 18th century, profoundly influenced by the tumultuous societal and political transformations of the era (Allegretti, 2024). The Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the rise of urbanization and industrialization all contributed to a sense of social and political upheaval. Many individuals, including intellectuals and artists, felt disillusioned with the Enlightenment ideals of reason and order, seeking solace and inspiration in alternative ways.

Emerging in Europe at the end of the 18th century and extending into the 19th, the Romantic movement displayed characteristics fundamentally opposed to those of Classical, and more specifically, Neoclassical tendencies across various disciplines, including literature, criticism, painting, music, and architecture. Stemming in part from the urban squalor induced by the Industrial Revolution and the ideas ignited by the French Revolution, as well as countless other societal factors, Romanticism represented a rebellion against the human condition's weariness of order, harmony, rationality, and materialism (Güvenç, 2014, p. 113). This rebellion coincided with a heightened emphasis on the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the spontaneous, the emotional, the mystical, and the transcendent. During this period, nature assumed paramount importance as the source and manifestation of creative power. Similarly, Imagination, enabling human integration with nature, was celebrated as a creative force. According to Kathryn Calley Galitz (2004), unlike the previous era's view of the artist as a mechanical producer bound by specific rules, the Romantic era extolled the artist's ability to create original works. Art, once defined as a mirror reflecting the external world, was now reinterpreted as a medium for conveying the artist's soul in all its complexity (Galitz, 2004). In contrast to high art, popular works produced by ordinary people were considered more valuable due to their simplicity and perceived closeness to Nature. Instead of focusing on lofty themes conveying the general and typical, or works centred on the lives of the nobility, there was a shift towards exploring the lives of the poor, the lonely, and the marginalized (Ağıl, 2009, p. 9).

In response to the chaos and instability of the time, many key figures in the Romantic movement sought refuge in nature. They saw the natural world as a source of comfort, inspiration, and spiritual enlightenment. Notable examples include the poet William Wordsworth, who, *"unable to endure the tumultuous societal upheaval caused by rapid industrialization, coupled with the increasingly oppressive rule of the deranged King George III in the London of the 1790s, eventually retreated to a rural cottage with his sister and editor, Dorothy"* (Aksakal, 2020). Other prominent Romantic figures who found solace in nature were the English poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley, the Scottish poet Robert Burns, and the German poets Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. In their writings, these authors frequently praised the strength and beauty of nature while delving into themes of personal autonomy, the sublime, and the interdependence of all things.

In addition to offering a tangible haven from the bustle of the city, this retreat signalled a profound change in philosophy and artistic expression. Wordsworth and other Romantics aimed to re-establish a more natural way of living and break free from the confines of contemporary society. Alongside this retreat to nature, there was a change in values that prioritised the subjective, the emotional, and the individual over the objective and the logical. Romantics praised the beauty of nature and the strength of the imagination, viewing them as sources of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment.

The intentional rejection of the materialism, order, and rationality that characterised Neoclassicism was at the heart of Romanticism. The subjective, the emotional, and the transcendental were preferred by romantic thinkers, who saw these attributes as constrictive (Peckham, 1951). Rebellion against the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and conformity, which they believed stifled individual creativity and spiritual freedom, served as the impetus for their movement. The Romantics' admiration for nature, which they saw as the source and expression of creative power, was closely linked to their revolt against intellectual rigidity.

Nature was a living force, infused with a spiritual essence that could stimulate creativity and nourish the human soul, according to the Romantics, who saw it as more than just a setting for human activity (Salvador, 2021). The natural world was praised for its beauty, durability, and ability to arouse strong emotions. Nature emerged as a major character in Romantic literature, providing a counterpoint to the urbanisation and industrialisation that were progressively reshaping society (Patel, 2023, pp. 528-529). The Romantics believed that the fundamental truths of human existence could be discovered in the countryside, which served as a haven from the chaos and corruption of contemporary society.

Wordsworth, in particular, saw nature as a vital force in human development. In *Lyrical Ballads*, he writes that *"the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity"* in rural life, where *"the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature"* (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2005, pp. 236-237). For Wordsworth, the simplicity and purity of rural existence allowed for a deeper connection to one's emotions and to the natural world, fostering creativity and personal growth. This celebration of the natural world was a defining feature of Romanticism, representing the movement's belief in the power of the imagination and the transformative potential of the natural landscape.

In contrast to the industrial cities, which the Romantics often associated with alienation and moral decay, nature was seen as a space of renewal, a place where individuals could reconnect with the more profound aspects of life. By turning to nature, the Romantics sought not only to escape the pressures of a rapidly modernizing society but also to critique the growing materialism and loss of individuality that accompanied it. For the Romantics, nature was not just an aesthetic ideal but a symbol of resistance to the mechanized, profit-driven world they increasingly observed around them.

The Romantics also celebrated the power of imagination as a creative force, emphasizing its role in human interaction with nature. Imagination, for the Romantics, was not merely a tool for artistic creation but a means to transcend the limitations of the material world. Romantic artists, unlike their Neoclassical predecessors, were no longer seen as mechanical producers of art but as original creators whose works expressed their inner souls. Art was reinterpreted not as a reflection of the external world but as a medium through which the artist's soul, in all its complexity, was revealed. Wordsworth famously argued that "*Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity*" (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2005, p. 252). This emphasis on emotional authenticity marked a significant departure from the highly structured, rule-bound art forms that had dominated the previous generations.

Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge rejected the lofty themes and artificial diction of earlier poetic traditions, particularly those characteristics of Neoclassicism, which favoured formality and grandiose language. Instead, they championed a style that was closer to the language of ordinary people, believing that poetry should be accessible and grounded in everyday experience. This was a radical departure from the dominant poetic conventions of the time.

In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously declared that he had "*taken as much pains to avoid*" the elaborate poetic diction of earlier traditions as others had "*ordinarily taken to produce it*" (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2005, p. 241). This statement underscores his commitment to simplicity and naturalness in poetic language, a move that aligned with the broader Romantic emphasis on authenticity and emotional expression. Wordsworth's aim was to strip poetry of its artificiality and return it to a form that was closer to the speech patterns of ordinary people, particularly those living in rural areas.

For Wordsworth, this commitment to plain language was not merely an aesthetic choice but a reflection of deeper Romantic values. He believed that the "*manners of rural life germinate from elementary feelings*," suggesting that the simplicity and purity of rural life were more conducive to genuine emotional and spiritual experiences (Wordsworth & Coleridge, 2005, p. 236). In this view, the lives and emotions of ordinary people were inherently valuable and worthy of poetic exploration, in contrast to the aristocratic subjects and classical myths favoured by earlier poets.

By focusing on the everyday language and experiences of rural people, Wordsworth and Coleridge sought to democratize poetry, making it a medium for exploring the universal aspects of human experience rather than reserving it for intellectual elites. Because it questioned the hierarchies that had long governed artistic expression and placed emphasis on the individual's emotional and imaginative engagement with the world, this change in poetic style was a defining characteristic of Romanticism.

The influence of the Romantic movement extended beyond literature into painting, music, philosophy, and even politics. One of the most significant legacies of Romanticism was its challenge to the mechanized, industrialized world. The Romantics were deeply suspicious of the alienation caused by industrial capitalism, which they saw as degrading human relationships and disrupting the organic connection between humanity and nature. Sayre and Löwy describe how Romanticism was animated by a "*painful conviction that in modern capitalist reality something precious has been lost*" (Sayre & Löwy, 2005, p. 434). This sense of loss often manifested as nostalgia for a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist past, a "lost paradise" that was believed to offer a more authentic way of life (Sayre & Löwy, 2005, p. 435).

In addition to their critique of industrialization, many Romantics were also sceptical of organized religion, turning instead toward pantheism or the belief in the immanence of the divine in nature. This move reflected the broader Romantic emphasis on individual experience and the belief that spiritual truths could be accessed directly through personal encounters with the natural world rather than mediated through institutionalized religion. For many Romantics, nature itself became a ministering force, capable of offering solace, guidance, and even spiritual enlightenment.

William Wordsworth, in *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey*, encapsulates this sentiment when he proclaims that nature "*never did betray / The heart that loved her*" (O'Neill & Callaghan, 2018, p. 5). Here, Wordsworth suggests a deep, abiding trust in the healing and nurturing power of the natural world, positioning nature as a force that sustains and nourishes the human soul. This belief in nature's inherent goodness and reliability stood in contrast to the more rigid doctrines of traditional religion, which many Romantics felt alienated from.

However, there were conflicts and uncertainties associated with this Romantic belief in nature. In the same poem, Wordsworth himself admits that such trust is brittle. He considers the possibility that his faith in the constancy of nature may "Be but a vain belief" (O'Neill & Callaghan, 2018, p. 5). The Romantics frequently praised nature's beauty and strength, but they were also conscious of its unpredictable nature and the boundaries of their knowledge, as this moment of uncertainty reveals. This ambivalence towards nature highlights the Romantic concern with the sublime and the unknown, as well as the understanding that human endeavours to derive meaning from the natural world may be hampered by uncertainty.

As a result, the Romantics' involvement with nature involved more than just idealisation; it also involved pondering existential issues pertaining to faith, purpose, and humanity. The Romantic relationship with nature was both reverent and introspective because the sense of wonder and awe that nature inspired was frequently tempered by an awareness of its mysteries and complexities.

The way that authors and artists approached myth was also significantly influenced by romanticism. Romantic writers like John Keats reinterpreted mythological stories in ways that highlighted the diversity and fluidity of human experience rather than just recounting old tales. According to the Romantics, myths were dynamic, living tales that, depending on the period and viewpoint of the narrator, could depict various facets of the human condition.

Keats, for example, in poems like *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Lamia*, used classical myths not simply to recount ancient tales but to explore timeless themes such as beauty, transience, and desire. His approach illustrates the Romantic belief in the subjective and interpretive nature of storytelling. Rather than treating myths as authoritative sources of truth, Romantics saw them as symbolic narratives open to endless reimagining. As O'Neill and Callaghan note, Romantics like Keats reshaped traditional myths “less to consolidate the truth of a new story than to remind us that all human stories can be endlessly reinterpreted” (O'Neill & Callaghan, 2018, p. 5).

This reinterpretation of myth reflected the broader Romantic emphasis on the individual and the imaginative, where personal engagement with a story could reveal new insights. It aligned with their rejection of rigid conventions and celebration of artistic freedom, encouraging writers and artists to approach ancient tales with creativity, imbuing them with new meanings relevant to contemporary life. In this way, Romanticism fostered a dynamic and evolving relationship with myth, emphasizing its capacity to illuminate diverse and shifting dimensions of human experiences.

In sum, Romanticism was a movement deeply invested in the emotional, imaginative, and transcendent aspects of human experience. It stood in stark opposition to the rationality and materialism of the Enlightenment, seeking instead to restore a sense of wonder, connection, and meaning in a rapidly changing world. The Romantics' reverence for nature, their belief in the power of imagination, and their critique of industrial capitalism continue to resonate in contemporary discussions about art, society, and the environment.

### Leavers as Romantics in Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael*

Daniel Quinn's novel *My Ishmael* (1997), part of his celebrated “Ishmael” trilogy, provides a critical examination of civilization, human nature, and societal structure through the lens of a telepathic gorilla named Ishmael. One of the most provocative concepts in the novel is the distinction between two groups: the Takers and the Leavers. The Takers represent modern, industrialized, and hierarchical civilizations, while the Leavers embody Indigenous, tribal societies living in harmony with nature. Through the character of Ishmael and his teachings, Quinn presents the Leavers as Romantics, illustrating their way of life as an idealized return to a simpler, more sustainable existence. This notion of Romanticism in the portrayal of the Leavers challenges readers to reconsider the dominant worldview of progress and invites them to imagine an alternative model of living that reconnects humanity with nature, balance, and ecological wisdom.

Jurgen Leitherner (2012) posits that the term “takers,” within the context of their analysis, encompasses the majority of the global human population. These individuals, commonly characterized as ‘civilized,’ are defined by their consumption patterns, the generation of substantial waste, and an inherent departure from ecological equilibrium. Ecological equilibrium, in this framework, signifies the natural cyclical processes observed in undisturbed ecosystems, where waste is virtually non-existent and every element serves a defined function within the system (e.g., a decaying tree provides sustenance for insects, fungi, etc.). In contrast, human beings generate a considerable volume of waste, with an estimated per capita annual waste production of 572.4 kg. (p. 15). This observation echoes the poignant reflection in Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael* (1997): “WITH MAN GONE, WILL THERE BE HOPE FOR GORILLA? The way we were going, gorillas were not going to be around for very much longer. So, the answer was yes. With Man gone, there would be hope for Gorilla” (1997, p. 6). This stark assessment underscores the profound impact of human activities on the environment and the urgent need to re-evaluate our relationship with the natural world. The quotation explicitly links human absence to the possibility of environmental restoration and the survival of another species. This highlights the Leavers' deep respect for the natural world and their recognition of the destructive impact of human civilization. The emphasis on “hope for Gorilla” signifies a desire for a world where humans and other species can coexist peacefully, rather than humans dominating or exploiting the natural world. This aligns with the Romantic ideal of harmonious integration with nature.

### Romanticism and The Leavers' Idealized Past

To interpret the Leavers as Romantics in *My Ishmael*, one must first explore the main characteristics of the Romantic tradition itself. Romanticism, a literary and artistic movement that began in the late 18th century, emphasized emotion, individualism, and a reverence for nature. It often involved a critique of industrialization, urbanization, and the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and progress. Instead, Romantics celebrated the pastoral, the wild, and the untamed aspects of life, romanticizing the idea of a “noble savage” living in harmony with the natural world.

In *My Ishmael*, the Leavers are presented as embodying these Romantic ideals. They are depicted as societies that live sustainably, taking only what they need from the environment, and coexisting with other species rather than dominating them. The Leavers live in a world that is not a world of scarcity. They live in a world of plenty. They take only what they need, and they leave plenty for others. They do not own the land, rather they belong to the land. Quinn contrasts this way of life with that of the Takers, who are driven by a need to conquer nature, expand their dominion, and consume resources beyond what is necessary for survival.



This focus on technological advancement without corresponding wisdom in living is central to Quinn's critique of the Takers. As Ishmael observes, "*You know how to build marvelous electronic gadgets, you know how to send ships into space, you know how to peer into the depths of atoms. But the simplest and most needful knowledge of all—the knowledge of how to live—simply doesn't exist among you*" (Quinn, 1997, p. 31).

The Leavers' relationship with nature is one of respect and balance, mirroring the Romantic vision of a world in which humans are part of a larger, interconnected ecosystem. Quinn's portrayal of the Leavers taps into the Romantic ideal of an idealized past. The Leavers are not characterized as primitive or backward; instead, they are seen as custodians of a wisdom that modern society has lost. This wisdom is grounded in a deep understanding of the cycles of nature and the interdependence of all life forms.

This emphasis on cultural transmission is crucial to understanding the Leavers' enduring wisdom. As Ishmael explains, "*Each tribe has its own distinctive cultural collection that it passes on from one generation to the next, along with the various techniques I mentioned a moment ago, which are the common heritage of all Awks*" (Quinn, 1997, p. 72). This intergenerational preservation and sharing of knowledge and practices ensures the continuity of their sustainable way of life.

Within the Romantic tradition, there is often a longing for a return to an idealized past where humans lived more authentically, free from the alienation and exploitation that accompanied the rise of industrial society. Similarly, Quinn's Leavers are presented as a model of how humans might live in a more authentic, harmonious relationship with the natural world. Daniel Quinn critiques the Taker society's approach to essential human services, contrasting it sharply with the Leaver model. While Leaver societies seamlessly integrate education and care for the vulnerable into their communal fabric, with all adults actively participating, the Taker society has commodified these essential services. Education, instead of being a collective responsibility, has become a product, with schools competing for resources and the quality of education often determined by socioeconomic status. Similarly, the care of the elderly, the infirm, and the disabled, which is a communal responsibility in Leaver societies, has been transformed into a market-driven service in Taker society, where access and quality are largely determined by wealth (Quinn, 1997, pp. 154-155). This commodification of essential human needs, according to Quinn, not only exacerbates social inequalities but also undermines the interconnectedness of the human community. He argues that the survival of the Taker society depends on a fundamental shift in perspective, urging them to "*start listening to your neighbours in the community of life*" (p. 155) and recognize their interdependence with the broader ecological system.

## The Leavers as Critique of Modernity

Quinn uses the Leavers to critique modernity in much the same way that Romantic writers critiqued the Industrial Revolution. Just as poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley lamented the loss of connection to nature in the face of urbanization and mechanization, Quinn, through Ishmael, critiques the destructive tendencies of contemporary industrial society. The Takers, representative of modern civilization, have created a culture based on endless growth, accumulation, and domination, which is unsustainable in the long term. Like the Romantic poets who decried the Industrial Revolution's alienation from nature, Ishmael offers a scathing indictment of modern industrial society. Quinn, through the voice of Ishmael, argues that the Takers, driven by a relentless pursuit of growth and domination, have strayed from a sustainable path.

*The lie is in the word people, Julie. It wasn't people who did this, it was the people of your culture—one culture out of tens of thousands of cultures. The lie is that your actions are humanity's actions. The lie is that you are humanity itself, that your history is human history. The truth is that ten thousand years ago one people gave up the foraging life and settled down to become farmers. The rest of humanity—the other ninety-nine percent—went on exactly as before.* (Quinn, 1997, p. 40)

This drive for control is a fundamental characteristic of the Taker mentality. As Ishmael explains, "*And Takers don't trust anything that's self-controlling. They want to manage it all and can't stand having anything going on around them that is outside their control.*" (pp. 87-88). This demand to dominate and control nature, rather than understanding and collaborating with it, lies at the heart of the Taker's destructive tendencies. This destructive tendency stems from the core of Ishmael's critique: the Taker way of life is predicated on the belief that humans are separate from and superior to nature, an idea that has led to environmental degradation, social inequality, and spiritual alienation. This misguided belief system is further exemplified in the education system. As Ishmael points out: "*Mother Culture's deception here is that schools exist to serve the needs of people. In fact, they exist to serve the needs of your economy. The schools turn out graduates who can't live without jobs but who have no job skills, and this suits your economic needs perfectly. What you're seeing at work in your schools isn't a system defect, it's a system requirement, and they meet that requirement with close to one hundred percent efficiency.*" (Quinn, 1997, p. 122)

This view demonstrates how the education system, instead of fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the world, serves to perpetuate the Taker mentality by producing individuals who are primarily geared towards serving the demands of the economy, further reinforcing the destructive cycle of consumption and control.

Daniel Quinn critiques the cyclical and ultimately self-defeating nature of the modern Taker economy. He observes that the primary function of the Taker economy is to produce goods solely for the purpose of acquiring

other goods, creating a perpetual cycle of consumption and production. While money serves as a medium of exchange, its true value lies in its ability to acquire desired products, not in the currency itself. Quinn further argues that the very act of hoarding food, a fundamental necessity for survival, transformed it into the cornerstone of the Taker economy. In contrast, Leaver societies operate on a fundamentally different economic model. Human energy, rather than the production and exchange of material goods, serves as the primary currency. This exchange of skills, labour, and knowledge within the community occurs naturally and seamlessly, often unrecognized as a formalized economic system (Quinn, 1997, pp. 146-147).

The Leavers, in contrast, represent a romantic alternative to this narrative of progress. They do not seek to dominate nature but to live within its limits. Their societies are often egalitarian, small-scale, and based on mutual aid and cooperation rather than competition and exploitation. In this sense, the Leavers echo the Romantic critique of industrial society as one that alienates individuals from both nature and each other. Quinn suggests that the problems facing the modern world—climate change, resource depletion, and social fragmentation—are a direct result of the Takers' worldview, and that a return to the Leavers' way of thinking may offer a solution: *"Among tribal peoples, you don't find laws that forbid disruptive behavior. To the tribal mind, this would be supremely insane. Instead, you find laws that serve to minimize the damage of disruptive behavior. For example, no tribal people would ever frame a law forbidding adultery. Instead, what you find are laws that set forth what must happen when adultery occurs"* (Quinn, 1997, p. 90).

In Romantic literature, there is often a tension between the individual and society, with the individual seeking to reclaim a sense of autonomy and authenticity in a world that seems increasingly impersonal and mechanistic (Izenberg, 1992). This tension is present in *My Ishmael* as well, as Ishmael instructs his young student, Julie, about the possibility of an alternative way of living that rejects the conformism and alienation of the Taker culture. Julie, like many Romantic protagonists, is searching for meaning and purpose in a world that seems hollow and devoid of connection to the deeper truths of existence. Ishmael offers her a vision of a different kind of life, one that is rooted in the rhythms of nature and the wisdom of the Leavers. This alternative, as Ishmael describes, is markedly different from the Taker experience: *"They're not at war with each other, generation against generation or class against class. They're not plagued by anguish, anxiety, depression, self-hatred, crime, madness, alcoholism, and drug addiction. They don't complain of oppression and injustice. They don't describe their lives as meaningless and empty. They're not seething with hatred and rage. They don't look into the sky, yearning for contact with gods and angels and prophets and alien spacemen and spirits of the dead"* (Quinn, 1997, p. 96).

This stark contrast highlights the profound alienation and suffering that characterize Taker society, further emphasizing the need for a return to a more authentic and fulfilling way of life.

### The Natural World and The Spiritual Dimension

Another key aspect of Romanticism that resonates in Quinn's depiction of the Leavers is the connection between the natural world and the spiritual dimension of life. For the Romantics, nature was not just a physical space but a source of spiritual renewal and inspiration. Poets such as Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge frequently portray nature as a living, breathing thing that provides comfort and direction to those who seek it. In a similar vein, Quinn's Leavers are not merely surrounded by nature; they have a strong spiritual bond with it. Their way of life is not only sensible, but it also represents a greater comprehension of the cosmos and how humans fit into it.

Ishmael's teachings place a strong emphasis on the spiritual significance of coexisting peacefully with the Earth and the significance of understanding the interconnectedness of all life forms. This reflects the Romantic notion that nature should be admired and respected rather than subjugated or exploited. The Leavers' way of life is presented as a manifestation of spiritual wisdom, acknowledging that humans are a part of a greater cosmic order rather than existing independently of the natural world. Because it draws a contrast between the Takers' materialism and exploitation and the Leavers' respect for life and balance, this spiritual aspect is essential to comprehending the Romanticism of the Leavers.

This spiritual aspect is essential to comprehending the Leavers' Romanticism because it draws attention to the difference between the Takers' materialism and exploitation and the Leavers' respect for life and harmony. Because the Leavers have a deep awareness of how economic systems can lead to social and environmental imbalances, their respect for life transcends both the ecological and the economic. Without producing or selling anything, tribal peoples are able to effectively govern themselves. This inherent understanding of economic systems is further emphasized by Ishmael's observation: *"Tribal peoples manage to govern themselves quite effectively without making or selling anything. 'A system based on exchanging products inevitably channels wealth to a few, and no governmental change will ever be able to correct that. It isn't a defect of the system, it's intrinsic to the system. [...] My point is not that product-generated wealth always goes to individuals but rather that it always goes to a few individuals."* (Quinn, 1997, p. 147).

### Conclusion

Daniel Quinn's *My Ishmael* transcends a mere critique of modern civilization; it offers a profound philosophical and spiritual inquiry into the human condition. Through the contrasting lenses of the Takers and the Leavers, Quinn presents a powerful indictment of the dominant

Western worldview, one that emphasizes endless growth, technological dominance, and the relentless pursuit of material accumulation. Quinn contends that the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and advancement, which gave rise to the Takers' worldview, has resulted in social injustice, ecological destruction, and deep spiritual estrangement.

The Leavers, on the other hand, represent a very different perspective that is strongly aligned with the fundamental principles of the Romantic movement. The Leavers, like the Romantics, place a high value on spiritual and emotional ties and stress the value of imagination, intuition, and a respect for nature. They see humans as an essential component of the ecological web rather than as something distinct from it, acknowledging the interdependence of all life. The Takers' exploitative relationship with the environment is rooted in Cartesian dualism, which divides humans from nature and mind from body. This viewpoint questions this dualism.

Quinn's depiction of the Leavers goes beyond the idealised idea of "noble savages." They represent a timeless wisdom and a profound comprehension of ecological principles that predate the emergence of industrial civilisation, rather than merely existing in the past. They present a strong counterpoint to the consumerism and individualism that define Taker society through their emphasis on community well-being, respect for the Earth, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

It is imperative to recognise, though, that the Leaver model as it is portrayed in *My Ishmael* is an idealised concept. The intricacies and difficulties that Indigenous communities have encountered over time, such as colonialism, displacement, and the lingering effects of globalisation, must be acknowledged. It is important to approach the Leavers' worldview with humility and refrain from romanticising the past or downplaying the complexity of modern Indigenous societies, even though they provide a useful framework for critical reflection.

*My Ishmael* is ultimately a potent call to action. It pushes readers to look for more sustainable and just ways of living and to challenge the dominant paradigms of progress. With its strong roots in Romantic philosophy, Quinn's writings encourage us to rediscover nature, develop a greater sense of empathy and interconnectedness, and envision a time when people coexist peacefully with the environment and one another. Despite its utopian nature, this vision provides a glimmer of hope and a reminder that there is still time to choose a different course—one that prioritises sustainability, community, and the welfare of all living things.

### Extended Abstract

This study examines the philosophical and artistic movement of Romanticism, looking at its fundamental principles, such as respect for nature, individualism, and opposition to industrialisation. It also examines how Daniel Quinn's novel *My Ishmael* uses the idea of "Leavers"—indigenous societies coexisting peacefully with nature—to exemplify important Romantic ideals.

Romanticism emerged as a reaction to the Enlightenment, emphasizing emotion, intuition, and the individual over reason and societal norms. Key figures like Wordsworth and Coleridge celebrated the natural world as a source of inspiration and spiritual enlightenment, advocating for a simpler, more authentic way of life. They championed individual expression, emphasizing the importance of imagination and the subjective experience.

Quinn's "Leavers" mirror these Romantic ideals. They live sustainably, respecting the interconnectedness of all life forms. Their societies, characterized by cooperation and egalitarianism, offer a stark contrast to the Takers—modern, industrialized societies driven by endless growth, consumption, and the domination of nature. Quinn critiques the Taker society's focus on material accumulation, technological advancement without corresponding wisdom, and the alienation and suffering it produces.

The Leavers, like the Romantics, emphasize the importance of living in harmony with nature, not as conquerors but as participants in a larger ecological system. Their reverence for the natural world extends beyond the practical to the spiritual, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of living in balance.

Quinn's novel, through the lens of the Leavers, offers a powerful critique of modernity, echoing Romantic concerns about industrialization, alienation, and the loss of connection to the natural world. The Leavers serve as a model for a more authentic and fulfilling way of life, one that prioritizes community, sustainability, and a deeper understanding of our place within the ecological web. *My Ishmael* thus provides a contemporary framework for understanding and appreciating the enduring relevance of Romantic ideals in addressing the challenges facing humanity today.

### Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu makale, Romantizm felsefi ve sanatsal hareketini inceleyerek, doğaya saygı, bireysel ifadeye vurgu ve endüstrileşmenin eleştirisi gibi temel ilkelerini araştırmakta ve Daniel Quinn'in romanı *My Ishmael*'in, doğayla uyum içinde yaşayan yerli toplulukları temsil eden "Bırakanlar" kavramını kullanarak temel Romantik idealleri nasıl somutlaştırdığını incelemektedir.

Romantizm, Aydınlanmaya bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkmış, duygu, sezgi ve bireyi akıl ve toplumsal normların üzerine çıkarmıştır. Wordsworth ve Coleridge gibi önemli figürler, doğayı ilham ve manevi aydınlanma kaynağı olarak kutlamış ve daha basit, daha otantik bir yaşam tarzını, hayal gücünün ve öznel deneyimin önemini vurgulayarak bireysel ifadeyi savunmuşlardır.

Quinn'in "Bırakanları", bu Romantik idealleri yansıtır. Sürdürülebilir bir şekilde yaşarlar ve tüm yaşam formlarının birbirine bağlılığını önemserler. İş birliği ve eşitlik ilkeleriyle örgütlenmiş bu topluluklar, sınırsız büyüme, aşırı tüketim ve doğanın kontrol altına alınması gibi hedeflerle şekillenen modern, endüstrileşmiş

toplumlara belirgin bir tezat oluşturmaktadır. Quinn, Alanlardan oluşan toplumunun peşinde koştuğu maddi kazanımları, teknolojik ilerlemeyi ve ürettiği yabancılaşma ve ıstırapı eleştirir.

Bırakanlar, Romantikler gibi, doğayla uyum içinde yaşamanın önemini vurgularlar; fakat fetihçi değil, daha geniş bir ekolojik sistemin bir parçası olarak. Doğal dünyaya olan saygıları, pratikten öteye uzanarak, tüm yaşamın birbirine bağlılığını ve denge içinde yaşamanın önemini kabul eder.

Quinn'in romanı, Bırakanlar perspektifinden, moderniteyi güçlü bir şekilde eleştirir ve endüstrileşme, yabancılaşma ve doğal dünya ile bağlantının kaybı hakkındaki Romantik kaygıları yankılar. Bırakanlar, topluluğu, sürdürülebilirliği ve ekolojik ağ içindeki yerimizi daha derinlemesine anlamaya öncelik veren daha otantik ve tatmin edici bir yaşam tarzı için bir model görevi görür. *My Ishmael*, böylece insanlığın bugün karşılaştığı zorlukları ele alırken Romantik ideallerin kalıcı önemini anlamak ve takdir etmek için çağdaş bir çerçeve sunar.

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