

THE SENSE OF PLACE, THE INSCRIPTION AND WORDSWORTH'S 'POEMS ON THE NAMING OF PLACES'

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Abstract

This paper discusses William Wordsworth's 'Poems on the Naming of Places' from the perspectives of the sense of place and the inscription. I argue that the group of poems, which were written shortly after Wordsworth's move to Grasmere in 1799, demonstrate the poet's attempt to combine poetry-making with home-making as he settled in and felt the need to strike root and to establish a sense of place in the new surrounding. The act of 'naming,' I suggest, is a form of inscribing through which the poet 'inscribes' himself and his family on the landscape, not only for commemoration reasons, but also in an attempt to achieve a sense of place.

The 'Poems on the Naming of Places,' however, are not traditional inscriptions carved onto gravestones. In writing these poems, Wordsworth has innovated the genre and transformed the *genius loci* common in the inscription into *genius poeticus*; and in turning the poet into the 'spirit' that guards the place, he has not only humanised the *genius loci*, but also metaphorically 'possessed' the place, so that the place becomes part of the self.

Key Words: sense of place, inscription, *genius loci*, spirit of place, 'Poems on the Naming of Places'