

Wordsworth's "Silent Poet"

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Abstract

This paper consists of two parts. The first part is a discussion of Wordsworth's ideas concerning language and poetry in the light of eighteenth-century linguistic theories. I try to demonstrate that the poet's linguistic ideas are influenced by eighteenth-century linguistic primitivism and linguistic organicism, which form the basis of Wordsworth's representation of the silent poet. In the second part of the paper, I try to show that besides John Wordsworth, there are other figures in Wordsworth's poems that can be regarded as silent poets. My argument is based on three poems—"A Poet's Epitaph," "When, to the attractions of the busy world," and *The Excursion*. The second among these three poems is where Wordsworth broaches the term "silent poet." And I argue that the mourner in "A Poet's Epitaph" is an embryonic form of this figure, whereas the Wanderer in *The Excursion* is for Wordsworth an ideal person who is not only a silent poet, but also a social reformer. In portraying the Wanderer, Wordsworth resolves his conflict between his sense of the inadequacy of language and his social conscience.

Key Words: silent poet, 18th-century linguistic theories, "A Poet's Epitaph," "When, to the attractions of the busy world," *The Excursion*