

## 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'

In *The Prelude*, William Wordsworth uses the phrase 'spots of time' to describe significant moments in his life. With this phrase, the poet turns past memories into 'places' where the poet goes to from time to time for 'renovation' and poetic inspiration. The phrase thus reveals a spatialisation of an essentially temporal act so that recollection becomes not only a movement in time, but also a metaphoric travelling in space. Such spatialisation has much to do with the Wordsworthian 'sense of place', or, the poet's fascination with 'spots' and 'places', which Geoffrey Hartman calls the 'spot syndrome' (1977, 84–86). This syndrome is also manifested in Wordsworth's fascination with the 'process' of going to places and of discovering 'spots', which is related to his love of nature and his habit of wandering. In her book on 'walking' and nineteenth-century English literature, when Anne D. Wallace names Wordsworth's peripatetic practice 'excursive walking', she has identified the precise nature of Wordsworth's wanderings. The aimlessness of these wanderings, and hence the emphasis on 'passage' rather than 'destination', and the intention of returning, are both essential to the Wordsworthian sense of place (Wallace, 119–122). Very often, the pattern of Wordsworth's wanderings is, that the traveller sets out on his journey, having no specific destination in mind, meets a person, or sees an object, or comes to a certain place; whatever it may be, the encounter gives significance to the place so that the place becomes part of the self, or the self becomes part of the place. Also, sometimes it is not a particular place, but the process of discovering it, that has become memorable to the poet, which afterwards induces the poet to return to the spot again and again, both in reality and in recollection. So we must expand Wallace's meaning of returning—going back to

where the walker sets out—to include what we just described. This kind of returning to a place is symptomatic of Wordsworth's desire to perpetuate, through repeated journeys, the sense of 'self' which can only be recovered through the sense of place because, as mentioned above, the place has become part of the self. For Wordsworth, therefore, recollection of past experiences is at the same time a 're-collection' of his past selves. The two kinds of returning just mentioned, though opposite in direction, combine to form Wordsworth's sense of place which is based on the notion of home-making. Wallace's use of returning represents this notion in a realistic and narrow sense (going back home), and mine in a broader sense to include spiritual belonging. What this home-making signifies is not merely Wordsworth's search for origin and rootedness, but also the spatialisation of a temporal concept of the self—perpetuation of the self through identification with place.

In the first two books of *The Prelude*<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth repeatedly presents nature nourishing and educating him through 'beauty and . . . fear', so the sense of place in this work has much to do with the beneficent and formative influence of nature on the poet. In Book I of *The Excursion*, the narrator also describes the Wanderer receiving his education largely through his early exposure to nature, as well as through his close observations of it, and hence 'He had small need of books' (163). Book II opens with a passage in praise of the carefree wandering life of the minstrel with which the Poet compares that of the Wanderer, concluding that

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<sup>1</sup> All references are to the 1805 *Prelude* unless otherwise stated.

. . . not the noblest of that honoured Race  
 Drew happier, loftier, more empassioned, thoughts  
 From his long journeyings and eventful life,  
 Than this obscure Itinerant had skill  
 To gather . . . (19-23)

The comparison between the minstrel and the Wanderer first of all links the latter with poets, echoing lines in Book I that correspond to Wordsworth's idea of the 'silent Poet': 'Oh! many are the Poets that are sown / By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts, / The vision and the faculty divine; / Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse' (77-80). And in keeping with what Wordsworth says in *The Prelude* about poets and the 'higher' mind of the silent poet, the narrator here also places the Wanderer above the minstrel. The 'nobility' of the Wanderer is due to his 'natural' education—a profound love of nature and a compassion for living things developed from his communion with natural objects. All this leads to the love of wandering that first precipitates him toward his career as a pedlar, and after his retirement becomes a habit. The Wanderer's experience parallels Wordsworth's account of his own experience in *The Prelude*. So love of nature leads not just to love of man, but also to the love and the habit of wandering, which form the basis of the sense of place in Wordsworth's poetry as the poet transforms pedestrian experiences into poetry depicting people and feelings associated with places he has visited.

*Lyrical Ballads* is Wordsworth's first attempt, using the narrative form of the ballad, at recording the life of rural people and their feelings, which begins to create a sense of place in his poetry. *The Prelude* is an experiment with autobiography and blank verse that continues to build this sense of place. What I

would like to explore, however, is the relatively less discussed relationship between the inscription and the sense of place. The reason for my choice is that in Wordsworthian 'places' the *genius loci*, a predominant feature of the inscription, often makes its appearance. We remember that 'Nutting', a surplus passage from the 1799 *Prelude*, concludes with these lines: 'Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades / In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand / Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods'. The childhood memories recounted in the opening books of the 1805 *Prelude* also contain references to warnings from nature reminiscent of the guarding of sacred places by *genius loci* in the inscription. And the many 'Lines' written on seats, stones, tablets, leaves of books, or the back of pictures were obviously written with this particular genre in mind.

In both 'Tintern Abbey' and *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes his changing relationship with nature. What is not mentioned in the former poem, however, is the 'strong infection of the age'—the picturesque way of viewing nature. Dwelling on the influence of this eighteenth-century aesthetics on his imagination, Wordsworth in *The Prelude* depicts how he

. . . through presumption, even in pleasure pleased  
 Unworthily, disliking here, and there  
 Liking, by rules of mimic art transferred  
 To things above all art. But more—for this,  
 Although a strong infection of the age,  
 Was never much my habit—giving way  
 To a comparison of scene with scene,  
 Bent overmuch on superficial things,  
 Pampering myself with meagre novelties  
 Of colour and proportion, to the moods

Of Nature, and the spirit of the place,  
 Less sensible. (XI. 152-163)

Here Wordsworth contrasts 'superficial things' with 'the moods of Nature, and the spirit of the place'. John Barrell in his comparison between Wordsworth and John Clare proposes to find out 'whether what Wordsworth called the "spirit" was a very thing different from its "genius"' (63). He does not answer this question directly, but contends that Wordsworth's sense of place is very different from Clare's in that the latter's inability to freely go wherever he wants has given his sense of 'Helpston' a 'concreteness' unmatched by any other works on place (except one passage from 'Michael') (181-184). From such a contention we can assume that he probably would have concluded that Wordsworth's spirit of place is not the *genius loci*.

I would like to argue, however, that Wordsworth's spirit of place eventually *is* the *genius loci*, although this 'genius' may be different from Barrell's concept of it. The relative lack of 'concreteness' in Wordsworth's poetry which Barrell mildly complains of partly results from the poet's transformation of this spirit of place, which is closely related to his strong sense of self. And it is this sense of self that forms part of Geoffrey Hartman's argument, in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, about the dialectic between self-consciousness and nature in Wordsworth's poetry. Hartman sees the *genius loci* as an 'intermediary concept' that links the 'genius' of the place with the 'genius' of the poet, and its function is to 'inspire or guard the poet's "genial" powers' (212). The bridging of the two is actually a bridging of the poet's past self with the present self through place, and it is in this effort of the poet to capture his past that the motif of death, which is inherent in the epitaph and the inscription, comes to be significant

in a Wordsworthian way. The search for inspiration brings the poet back to childhood when he, nourished and educated by nature, was still assured of his 'immortality', when self and the other, the internal and the external worlds, still seemed undifferentiated. This is probably why Barrell says that for Wordsworth, the spirit of place is 'to be found by looking *through* the place itself' (182). The 'concreteness' of the place dissolves as the poet reaches through time to his former self. Yet this sense of time is 'disguised' in the representation of space, the more so when he invokes the 'genii' and 'powers' of rocks and trees and hills to help him in his creative activity.<sup>2</sup> Reading Wordsworth's poetry, especially *The Prelude*, in terms of *genius loci* and the inscription is therefore very much an examination of the interrelation between the poet's present and past selves, and Hartman's phenomenological approach, which places emphasis on the poet's encounter with the self, and therefore an internalisation of external encounters in life, is really a reading in the light of temporality.<sup>3</sup>

Following the methodological and ideological lines of *Wordsworth's Poetry*, Hartman in 'Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry' continues to place emphasis on the dialectic between mind and nature. In this essay he asserts that Words-

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<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Hartman has pointed out that 'the early MSS of *The Prelude* show several at least implicit instances' of invocation to genii and powers. See Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry*, 212-213.

<sup>3</sup> Paul de Man, engaging himself in discourse with Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry*, asserts that 'The key to an understanding of Wordsworth lies in the relationship between imagination and time, not [as Hartman shows] in the relationship between imagination and nature' (Paul de Man, 'Time and History in Wordsworth', *Diacritics* 17.4 (Winter 1987): 16). From our perspective here, Hartman's argument has already included the element of temporality.

worth transforms the inscription and brings forth a new form of Romantic lyric. According to him, in the eighteenth century there emerged a new type of inscription—nature inscription. A strong sense of place is in this kind of inscription, and the monument onto which the inscription is engraved is no longer restricted to the gravestone, but can be rocks, trees, or simply any spot in nature. Wordsworth's contribution to this new form of poetry is that 'he made the nature-inscription into a free-standing poem, able to commemorate any feeling for nature or the spot that had aroused this feeling' (32). Hartman also recognises that Wordsworth in re-creating the inscription has at the same time revived the belief in the spirit of the place which determines both the doctrine and the form of the Wordsworthian nature-inscription. Regarding the form Hartman states that 'Formally it is the *genius loci* who exhorts reader or passerby; and the same spirit moves the poet to be its interpreter—which can only happen if . . . he respects nature's impulses and gives them voices in a reciprocating and basically poetic act' (42). In writing poems such as 'Tintern Abbey', the Lucy poems, and the Matthew poems, Hartman continues to argue, Wordsworth has done more than binding together 'the wisdom of the dead and the energy of the living'. Fearing that 'the very spirit presiding over his poetry is ephemeral, . . . he refuses to distinguish between its death in him and its historical decline', and therefore the Lucy poems, for example, are 'a lament on the decay of English nature feeling' (42-43).

Hartman's argument is inspiring in that he has made the connection between inscription and nature in Wordsworth's poetry, and has also briefly traced the history of the inscription, enabling us to read Wordsworth's poetry against the literary



background of this genre. Hartman is certainly right in pointing out that the poet in writing inscriptions acts as an interpreter of the *genius loci*. Yet in opposing nature against consciousness, Hartman has also limited his interpretation of the two geniuses—spirit of place and spirit of the poet. What I would like to add to his argument, therefore, is that Wordsworth is ambitious to be more than an agent of nature; in writing poems such as 'Michael', and the 'Poems on the Naming of Places', he has identified himself with the *genius loci*, or, more appropriately, he has replaced natural spirit with poetic spirit and humanised the *genius loci*.

In 'Michael', the archaic form of addressing the passer-by, 'halt! traveller', which Wordsworth still adopts in some such inscription poems as 'Inscription for a Seat by a Roadside' and 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree', has disappeared. Such a disappearance is of course not unreasonable because the poem is not an inscription after all. However, its earliest version shows that Wordsworth once intended it as 'a modification of the epitaph' (Hartman, 1987, 41). The epitaph, which is cognate with the inscription, always presumes the presence of a monument. Although 'Michael' in its final version is no longer a recognisable epitaph, it is not difficult to see the unfinished sheepfold as a kind of monument. In a letter to Charles James Fox, Wordsworth writes that to the rural landed statesmen, their 'little tract of land served . . . as a tablet upon which their [domestic feelings] are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten' (*Letters*, 314-315). The 'fields and hills' which preserve Michael's memories 'like a book' are just such a tablet. In the same way is the sheepfold to Wordsworth and later poets. Now al-

though the address to the traveller is gone, there are vestiges of it. The traveller, instead of being asked to stop and read carved words, is now invited to turn from the public way towards the brook of Green-head Ghyll and look at some unhewn stones. At this point the traveller would not be able to recognise them as Michael's unfinished sheepfold without hearing the ensuing tale. And it is here, in the story-telling, the purpose of which is to hand down the poetic tradition, that we see Wordsworth's transformation of the inscription or the epitaph. There are no longer words to be read in the usual sense of the inscription; rather, there is the poem which, through relating Michael's story, provides a different form of inscription that serves the same end—the perpetuation of the self, since Wordsworth writes 'for the sake / Of youthful Poets, who among these hills / Will be my second self when I am gone' (37-39). Seen in this light, the straggling heap of stones become a pledge between Wordsworth and later poets, and the place becomes a sacred spot in terms of poetic tradition. Wordsworth also becomes in this sense the *genius loci* that guards, not simply the dead Michael or his unfinished sheepfold, but the poetic tradition which first enables him to write and will continue to inspire later generations. The consecration of the spot also seems to suggest an elevation of rural places and rustic figures such as Michael.

'Michael' was composed in 1800, the year following Wordsworth's move back to his native country with a hope to re-embark on *The Recluse*. As he settled in, the need to identify with the place arose, because, as Wilhelmina L. Hotchkiss in her article on Wordsworth, Constable and place asserts, 'Admitting a strong identification with his landscape . . . strengthen[s] his claims of significance as a poet' (185). The elevation of places

or people I just mentioned has much to do with this need. As John Garetson Dings also maintains, 1800 'was the year in which [Wordsworth] meant both to put down fresh roots of his own and to remind himself of the roots which he already had in Grasmere. . . . The poet who hoped to assume the prophetic voice of the Recluse would first have to become solid with himself and with his chosen world'. And he continues with the assertion that 'The most interesting documents of Wordsworth's settling-in are the Poems on the Naming of Places' (54).

Yet for Wordsworth Grasmere was a place with no substantial personal history. The only memory attached to it is what Kenneth Johnston calls another 'spot of time' (87) described at the beginning of *Home at Grasmere*, a poem celebrating the Wordsworths' move to what they in their exaltation regard as the earthly paradise. To truly make Grasmere their home the place must evoke the sense of place that his childhood haunts possess. *Home at Grasmere* reveals such an urgent need:

Embrace me then, ye Hills, and close me in,  
Now in the clear and open day I feel  
Your guardianship; I take it to my heart;  
'Tis like the solemn shelter of the night.

...

. . . but *no* where else is found,  
Nowhere (or is it fancy?) *can* be found  
The one sensation that is here; 'tis here,  
Here as it found its way into my heart  
In childhood, here as it abides by day,  
By night, here only; or in chosen minds  
That take it with them hence, where'er they go.  
'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense  
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,

A blended holiness of earth and sky,  
 Something that makes this individual Spot,  
 This small Abiding-place of many Men,  
 A termination, and a last retreat,  
 A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,  
 A Whole without dependence or defect,  
 Made for itself, and happy in itself,  
 Perfect Contentment, Unity entire.

(110-151)

But the rapturous emanations are more or less wishful thinking (“or is it fancy?”) and hence not sustainable to elicit a true sense of place. To make up for this, what Wordsworth does in *Home at Grasmere* is to incorporate into the poem local people’s stories, hoping, perhaps, that through them he can find the identification he is looking for. In the early version of *Home at Grasmere* there were three tales about an adulterer, a widower and a widow respectively. Yet the first two were later struck out. Dings provides a reason for the omission by saying that “The subject of “Home at Grasmere” . . . is the poet himself in his new setting, and the prevailing movement of the poem is that of a diary, in which each event that comes up is happening right now and right here, in the presence of the poet, with only the poet’s own life considered in its relation to the past’ (37). This is true. The Wordsworthian sense of place is closely linked to the sense of self so that other people’s stories will not do for him at this crucial point in both his life and his poetic career. These stories would have to become pastorals like ‘Michael’, or to be changed into the verbal epitaphs in *The Excursion*. For now, what Wordsworth needed was a poetic form that might stamp his being on the place he chose to live. What, then, could be more appropriate than the inscription?

Thus the year 1800 saw Wordsworth composing, among some obvious inscriptions,<sup>4</sup> a group of poems on 'the naming of places', poems which would help him create a sense of place through commemorating and perpetuating present feelings for future recollection, and which contribute to the process of home-making. This latter function explains why four out of the six poems that form the group are dedicated to family (or would-be family) members. But how does the naming of places come to be connected with the inscription? There is, after all, only one poem in the group that involves actual inscribing. Dings, who has done much study on the sense of place in Wordsworth's poetry, does not see the poems as inscription, yet he has recognised their close relationship: 'Closely related to the Poems on the Naming of Places . . . are the inscriptions, in which Wordsworth writes not only about but on the setting, so that language and object are bodily joined' (61). But Hartman provides a clue to our question by identifying naming as an act analogous to inscribing and writing because they are all 'types of a commemorative and inherently elegiac act' (1987, 40). Commemorative these poems certainly are, but whether they are elegiac is a moot point. Yet this is precisely where Wordsworth departs from the conventional inscription and transforms it to suit his purpose.

The 'Poems on the Naming of Places' include 'To M. H.', 'There is an Eminence,—of these our hills', 'It was an April morning: fresh and clear', 'A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags', 'To Joanna', and 'When, to the attractions of the busy

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<sup>4</sup> For example, 'Written with a Pencil upon a Stone in the Walls of the House . . .', 'Written with a Slate Pencil upon a Stone . . .', and 'For the Spot Where the Hermitage Stood . . .'.

world'.<sup>5</sup> The earliest written of them, 'To M. H.', consists almost entirely of descriptions of a nook which Wordsworth has visited. Not until the very end of the poem do we realise that it is really about the naming of this nook. On the surface, it is simply about a place in nature and the name given to it. But then we find it is more than that, for it is as much about Mary Hutchinson as about the place. To begin with, notice that the nook is not named 'for', but 'from', Mary. This suggests that the place bears traits of Mary, to whom the poem is dedicated, and all along Wordsworth is actually describing the person through limning the landscape. By so doing Wordsworth has rendered person and place inseparable. Wallace Jackson remarks that the poem's '[d]escription is the translation of the disclosed being of Mary Hutchinson . . . into the objectification of landscape. . . . The landscape is invested with human form, is a vestment of consciousness, and, reciprocally, makes patent to the poet his knowledge of Mary' (137). Jackson is certainly right in seeing that landscape serves for Wordsworth the function of objectifying his imaginative process and 'making patent an awareness of *another*' (136). Yet in 'To M. H.', it is difficult to tell whether the emphasis is on person or on landscape, for in spite of our pleasant discovery at the end of the poem that it is about Mary, the nook is not entirely metaphoric; whatever it may represent, it is still important in its own right. The Wordsworthian landscape never completely transforms into something else, or loses itself to what it may stand for. This is perhaps what Herbert Lindenberger means when he says that 'It is diffi-

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<sup>5</sup> In 1845 a seventh poem, 'Forth from a jutting edge, around whose base', was included in the 'Poems upon the Naming of Places'. But since it was composed in 1845 instead of 1800, we will not discuss it here.

cult to distinguish between the literal and metaphorical level in Wordsworth, for the literal becomes figurative and then literal again' (69).

In 'To M. H.', reference to home-making emerges in an indirect way:

And if a man should plant his cottage near,  
Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,  
And blend its waters with his daily meal,  
He would so love it, that in his death-hour  
Its image would survive among his thoughts[.]

(18-22)

These lines adumbrate preliminary home-making on two levels: home in Grasmere, and home with Mary. I say preliminary because here Wordsworth mentions not his own home, but that of an imaginary other. Of course the reference to home carries strong implication of his possible marriage with Mary. Yet the poem being the first written of the group seems to serve as a threshold poem for both the poet and the reader to enter the following five 'places' which he directly and formally links with his own home.

In 'There is an Eminence,—of these our hills', the transition from landscape to person is as imperceptible as it is in 'To M. H.':

'Tis in truth  
The loneliest place we have among the clouds.  
And She who dwells with me, whom I have loved  
With such communion, that no place on earth  
Can ever be a solitude to me,  
Hath to this lonely Summit given my Name.

(12-17)

The word 'loneliest' in line 13 is echoed in line 16 by the word 'solitude', and connects the peak with the poet before it is given his name. The act of naming at the closing of the poem then identifies the poet with the summit. But the poet asserts that the peak's loneliness is not reflected in his life; does this identification, then, take away the loneliness of the place, or bring solitude to the poet? It is rather ambiguous. But of course through Dorothy who both does the naming and provides companionship, the loneliness of the place is expelled. Her act of name-giving is equal to her companionship. It is interesting that in the poem, certain words are capitalised: Eminence, Peak, She, Summit, and Name. Although the first-person 'I' is always in capital, it nevertheless stands out in this particular verse as belonging to the group of capitalised words, especially when it appears only once in the poem. Dorothy's act of naming is thus re-enacted in the poem by way of capitalisation, and the words form a group not only textually, but also in reality, as 'She' provides a sense of community through her company and name-giving. And this is why she, who is neither the peak nor the poet, is also capitalised and becomes part of the group. Landscape, people, and creative acts combine in this poem to introduce a sense of home-making.

The third of the poems on the naming of places is intriguing in that it reveals a strong sense of 'possessing landscape':

I gazed and gazed, and to myself I said,  
 'Our thoughts at least are ours; and this wild nook,  
 MY EMMA, I will dedicate to thee'.  
 —Soon did the spot become my other home,  
 My dwelling, and my out-of-doors abode.  
 And, of the Shepherds who have seen me there,



To whom I sometimes in our idle talk  
 Have told this fancy, two or three, perhaps,  
 Years after we are gone and in our graves,  
 When they have cause to speak of this wild place,  
 May call it by the name of EMMA'S DELL.

(‘It was an April morning’, 37-47)

The possessing begins with the poet turning landscape into ‘thoughts’ and personal dedication, thus metaphorically appropriating a public space, whereby the place soon becomes ‘home’. This process of ‘privatisation’ is then followed by a desire to acquire other people’s acknowledgement through *their* naming the place ‘Emma’s dell’. This potential act of naming furthermore contains a sense of epitaphic memorializing that not only associates Emma (a figuration of Dorothy) with the place after her death, but brings in the brother as well, for it is he who provides the shepherds with the potential name for the dell. And so home-making becomes also community-making not unlike that in ‘There is an Eminence,—of these our hills’, yet clearly on a larger scale.

The implication of appropriating place through name-giving further involves actual inscription in ‘To Joanna’ as the poet carves her name on the rock that takes on her laughter and sets off echoes from other hills and crags. Yet her laughter triggers not merely responding voices, but also the cataloguing of place-names, which, although not as radical as direct name-giving, is meaningful in a similar way. The recitation of names from Helm-crag to Kirkstone is both geographically fascinating and poetically effective. The sense of family and community, which the poem seeks to provide along with an atmosphere of grotesqueness associated with poetic imagination, is implied in

the rehearsal of these names. At both the opening and closing of the poem, Wordsworth depicts a picture of household intimacy:

Amid the smoke of cities did you pass  
 The time of early youth; and there you learned,  
 From years of quiet industry, to love  
 The living Beings by your own fire-side,  
 With such a strong devotion, that your heart  
 Is slow to meet the sympathies of them  
 Who look upon the hills with tenderness,  
 And make dear friendships with the streams and groves.  
 Yet we, who are transgressors in this kind,  
 Dwelling retired in our simplicity  
 Among the woods and fields, we love you well,  
 Joanna! and I guess, since you have been  
 So distant from us now for two long years,  
 That you will gladly listen to discourse,  
 However trivial, if you thence be taught  
 That they, with whom you once were happy, talk  
 Familiarly of you and of old times. (1-17)

. . . I sat down, and there,  
 In memory of affections old and true,  
 I chiselled out in those rude characters  
 Joanna's name deep in the living stone: —  
 And I, and all who dwell by my fireside,  
 Have called the lovely rock, JOANNA'S ROCK.  
 (80-85)

By inscribing Joanna's name on the landscape, Wordsworth places her on the list of place-names, and makes her a member of the group who 'make dear friendships with the streams and groves', thus also establishing her bond with the place and re-

newing her familial ties. People in this poem are not identified with landscape, but they are part of it. Jonathan Bate reads this poem alongside some other English poems, and considers it in the tradition of English poetry of place that began with Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*. Wordsworth's contribution to this tradition, Bate asserts, is transforming it by personalisation (111). He also comments that such a poet is 'lord of that he does not possess', because 'though these places are not materially the poet's, yet through the imaginative activity of the poem [places] are found and possessed' (111). This reminds us of the possessive urge in 'It was an April morning', and also points us to a hidden sentiment in the Wordsworthian inscription—perpetuation through poetic possession.

The last of this group of poems I shall discuss, 'When, to the attractions of the busy world', is dedicated to the poet's brother John, who died at sea in 1805. What strikes us about this poem is the emphasis on walking and poetry-making. The poet frequents the fir-grove in the hope that the grove can provide him, as winter snow has blocked other paths, an open space where he may pace to and fro, presumably composing verses as he walks.<sup>6</sup> Wordsworth later abandons the grove for the precise reason that the thickness of the trees deprives him of such an open space. As spring comes, however, he discovers that his sailor brother, who has recently stayed with them, has resorted to the copse and with a finer eye has found a natural path for

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<sup>6</sup> Anne D. Wallace remarks that Wordsworth 'habitually walked while composing, . . . repeating the returning motions of excursive walking in whatever space was available'. She also reports that while the Wordsworths lived in Grasmere and Rydal, Dorothy's journals record 'one or more walks . . . almost everyday'. See *Walking, Literature, and English Culture*, 129, 126.

walking:

. . . I found  
 A hoary pathway traced between the trees,  
 And winding on with such an easy line  
 Along a natural opening, that I stood  
 Much wondering how I could have sought in vain  
 For what was now so obvious. . . .

. . .  
 Pleasant conviction flashed upon my mind  
 That, to this opportune recess allured,  
 He had surveyed it with a finer eye,  
 A heart more wakeful . . . (47-61).

From here on, the verse, through this pathway in a grove, enters into a series of subtle identification and associations between the brothers' shared habit of walking, their love of nature, and poetry-making. Although John does not compose while walking in the grove, his visits to the copse are representative of his love of nature which distinguishes him as a 'silent Poet'. Imagining John pacing in the grove, Wordsworth also associates it with the sailor's pacing the deck, and furthermore, he imagines his brother reciting the poems he wrote (as he himself walked) whilst thus pacing on the deck.

Wallace has noted that the brothers' respective walking 'synchronize mountain and ocean, poetic and economic labours, private home-making and public nation-building' (132). She has certainly elucidated the intricate relations in this poem between walking, labour and poetry-making, but I would like to add one more angle to the reading of this poem. I mentioned earlier that one function of the 'Poems on the Naming of Places' is commemoration, a function of the inscription. As a poem

belonging to this group, 'When, to the attractions of the busy world' reveals this function not simply in the naming of the fir-grove after John:

—Back to the joyless Ocean thou art gone;  
Nor from this vestige of thy musing hours  
Could I withhold thy honoured name,—and now  
I love the fir-grove with a perfect love. (84-87)

Memorializing through inscription is also implied in the writing of poetry and the activity of walking. The trace of the footpath, which William picks up as a sign of John's poetic, though inarticulate, 'genius', inspires William's own performance of poetic genius. Hartman in his essay on inscription and Romantic nature poetry tells us that in the evolution of the inscription from its archaic form to the Romantic meditative nature poetry, one significant change is the 'freedom from obtrusive personification', a change that can be found in Akenside's inscriptions: 'There are no persons in Akenside's inscriptions except the spirit of the place (or its interpreter) and the offstage traveler. If this traveler, moreover, is significantly identified as the poet himself, a still closer relation is established between nature and the poet' (1987, 38). In the poem dedicated to John, we find that both the traveller and the spirit of the place are identified as the poet, whether an articulate or a silent one. So not only is the poem freed from personification, but the spirit of the place is seen to assume human shapes. In this way Wordsworth naturalises and humanises the *genius loci* that protects the place and alerts passers-by to the sacredness of the place in conventional inscriptions. The intriguing thing is that, in this poem, walking becomes an oblique means to achieve this naturalisation and humanisation,

as it is a sign of John's poetic genius and is almost a necessary part of William's act of composition. Such a relation between 'genius', walking and poetry-writing thus enables us to interpret the pedestrian activity as a unique, Wordsworthian form of inscription, and one that is even more physical and more direct than conventional carving, naming, and writing. Walking becomes in this particular poem a bodily inscribing on earth and land, a form of inscription less visual than words, yet certainly more concrete in a materially spatial sense.

Dings has said that Wordsworth's treatment of place is indicative of an interest in 'joining [separate spheres], in establishing continuity', an interest that forms part of his 'more general, underlying concern with rootedness—the rootedness of the self in its own past and in its own physical and human setting, or—in social terms—tradition and community' (53-54). This is most true. Yet the way in which Wordsworth seeks to become part of a place—naming and inscribing—suggests something more than a concern with rootedness. If indeed his moving to Grasmere has to do with the project of writing *The Recluse*, the move is important to him not simply in establishing a tie with his childhood which is poetically educative, but also in anticipating a future of being a poet who will carry forward the tradition of English poetry by writing a piece of work 'that might live', by placing Grasmere on the map of English literature.<sup>7</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup> Wilhelmina L. Hotchkiss in her discussion of Wordsworth's claiming of places also mentions a forward movement revealed in his poetry after he moved to Grasmere. However, she focuses mainly on *Home at Grasmere* and does not mention the 'Poems on the Naming of Places'. See *Wordsworth, Constable, and the Claim of Personal Geography*, PhD Dissertation (U of California at Los Angeles, 1988), 85.

is in this sense that naming, walking and place combine to produce a unique form of inscription that is more forward-looking than retrospective, that represents the desire for perpetuation by 'possessing' places through naming and inscribing. It is temporal continuation through geographic and spatial expansion. 'Death' does appear in these poems ('To M. H.' and 'It was an April morning'), but it does not strike an elegiac note. It is as if through the identification between people and place, the negative element of death is expelled.

The childhood memories of *The Prelude* have shown us how the sense of place provides Wordsworth with the means to examine the source of his poetic imagination. This imagination, although not directly stemming from nature, is inevitably bound up with 'the meadow, grove, and stream, / The earth, and every common sight' of his birthplace. With the writing of the 1799 *Prelude*, he had more or less dealt with and brought forth the sense of place associated with the past. Now as he tried to put down fresh roots after moving to Grasmere, he also needed to give meaning to the present. The 'Poems on the Naming of Places', therefore, are his attempt to re-create a sense of place for both the present and the future. There is less vision in these poems than in *The Prelude*, but there is a stronger sense of concreteness, which John Barrell would certainly approve of, and such a concreteness is the result of joining people and place by way of inscribing, both textually (naming, poetry-making) and physically (carving and walking). Hartman's reading of the Wordsworthian inscriptions, which does not include the 'Poems on the Naming of Places', provides a reading from the perspective of self-consciousness, death, and hence the sense of 'time'. A reading of these poems on place-naming in terms of inscrip-

tion complements Hartman's by directing attention to a spatial treatment of the genre, showing Wordsworth's innovative use of this genre.

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## 地方意識、銘文和渥滋華斯的 〈為地方命名之詩〉

余幼珊

### 摘 要

本文試圖從「地方意識」和「銘文」的角度來討論威廉·渥滋華斯的〈為地方命名之詩〉。詩共六首，皆為渥滋華斯一七九九年移居湖區後隔年所寫。這些詩顯現詩人在定居之初，欲在新環境中營造安居生根之氣氛，並建立「地方意識」，故試圖將「作詩」和「成家」結合起來。「命名」這個舉動可視為一種「銘刻」，詩人藉「命名」將自己和家人「刻」在這片土地的景物草木上，一方面達到紀念之目的，另一方面則透過此舉而產生「地方意識」。從這個角度來看，在〈為地方命名之詩〉這些詩裡面，渥滋華斯翻新了傳統的「銘文」。他將傳統「銘文」中經常出現的「地靈」轉變成了「詩魂」，以詩人替代了神靈。如此不但將神靈人形化，而且將地方收為己有，自我與新環境得以互相融合。

**關鍵詞：** 地方意識、銘文、地靈、〈為地方命名之詩〉