



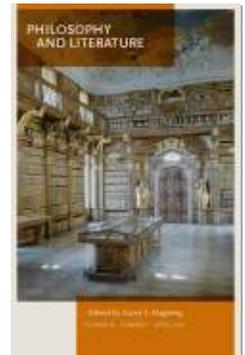
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The Meaning of Community Under the Pen of Wordsworth

Yin Qi-ping

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YIN QI-PING

THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY UNDER THE PEN OF WORDSWORTH

Abstract. Although Wordsworth never used the term “the structure of feeling,” his views coincide with those of Raymond Williams, who invented the term: by the structure of feeling Williams means “the deep community” that makes “communication possible.” What concerns Wordsworth in his imagined communities is exactly how to make this communication possible, so his ideal community is nothing short of a deep community. It should also be pointed out that Wordsworth anticipated T. S. Eliot by more than one hundred years and that their thoughts, though similar, were rendered more poetic under the pen of Wordsworth.

I

THE MEANING OF “COMMUNITY” in William Wordsworth’s poems deserves further exploration. Recent studies have shown an increasing interest in Wordsworth’s thoughts and feelings regarding community. Of all the ongoing debates, the most interesting is the one between Lucy Newlyn and Simon J. White. In an article whose subtitle is “Community in *The Prelude*,” Newlyn argues that in writing *The Prelude* Wordsworth’s “aim was nothing less than to show how the foundations of a benevolent society might be laid using ‘the growth of the poet’s mind’ as the starting point. Self, as he understood it, was best seen in terms of its responsibilities to community.”¹ This view is challenged by White who, on the one hand, acknowledges that “the poem is about the role of

community in the development of the individual” and, on the other hand, insists that Wordsworth’s sense of community can only be found in “suppressed interstices of the narrative,”² or “tempered by the suppressed accounts” (*RR*, p. 66). “In general,” White proceeds to argue, “representations of work and the working community are absent from *The Prelude*. Instead the speaker employs suggestive rustic imagery in the quasi-philosophical response to the working countryside. In so doing he satisfies the expectations of a polite reading audience conditioned by the absence of close-up images of work from eighteenth-century pastoral and *Georgic* poetry” (p. 64).

White further claims that, by the time Wordsworth had completed *The Excursion*, his thoughts had undergone a fundamental change and “he had become less concerned with individual human agency . . . and more concerned with local social structures . . . and rather than condemn ‘those responsible’ for human suffering, he asks what makes for properly functioning human communities that are mutually supportive and self-sustaining” (*RR*, p. 67). In other words, “Wordsworth’s poetics had moved on from one rooted in the representation of heroic individuals to one that acknowledged the importance of connections between people” (p. 79). Both White and Newlyn have made a praiseworthy contribution to shedding light on a sense of community in Wordsworth’s poems, but their views are both biased in their respective ways: Newlyn has laid an exclusive emphasis on the role of the individual in a community, whereas White has put the notion of individual in antithesis with that of community, thus losing sight of their dialectical relationship. Wordsworth’s views on community are, in fact, multidimensional and developed from different perspectives. We must therefore approach the issues concerned by examining them in a broader context.

One framework in which we can benefit by examining Wordsworth’s “communitarian” poetics is the ongoing theoretical debate between modern communitarian thinkers, like Raymond Williams and Alasdair MacIntyre, and such liberal theorists as Stephen Holmes. As Valerie Wainwright has aptly summarized, communitarian thinkers firmly believe that “the community model provides its members not only with essential life goods (security, solidarity, fraternity) but also . . . with a robust sense of personal identity, with a ‘thick’ self that is firmly rooted in his or her environment and capable of affection and empathy,” whereas “liberals translate ‘embeddedness’ into restriction and restraint and find that the liberal goals of personal freedom and individuality are ditched in the cause of belonging.”³ Holmes’s interpretation of “embeddedness” can

be traced to Martin Heidegger, who has developed “a set of formulations that sum up the distinction . . . between being in a community, that is, lost in the ‘they,’ and detaching oneself from the community for the sake of becoming what one already secretly potentially is, that is, authentic *Dasein*.”⁴ Is it true, then, that being in a community will inevitably lead to the loss of one’s authentic *Dasein*? Or, in Holmes’s terms, the loss of personal freedom and individuality? A close-up look at Wordsworth’s poems will help throw insight into the intricate, and yet dialectical, relationship between the individual and community.

In order to have an adequate understanding of Wordsworth’s thoughts on community, we must start with the basic meaning of the concept of community. A definition of community will therefore be my next starting point.

II

Any history of community studies would be impoverished by the absence of Ferdinand Tönnies, whose classic definition of “community” (*gemeinschaft*) is developed in opposition to the meaning of “society” (*gesellschaft*): “Community means genuine, enduring life together, whereas Society is a transient and superficial thing. Thus *Gemeinschaft* must be understood as a living organism in its own right, while *Gesellschaft* is a mechanical aggregate and artefact.”⁵ This definition dovetails with Wordsworth’s views on community.

Wordsworth lived in an age that witnessed the disintegration, under the impact of unprecedented industrialization, of traditional rural communities. Such a situation bears close resemblance to what Matthew Arnold describes, with reference to the social transition in which he found himself, as “wandering between two worlds, one dead, / the other powerless to be born.”⁶ The new communities in Wordsworth’s time were too powerless to be born. The spiritual vacuum created by such social transition naturally compels thoughts on how a new world/community should be built, and it gives rise to a great anxiety that finds expression in *The Prelude*:

If these thoughts
Be a gratuitous emblazonry
That does mock this recreant age, at least
Let Folly and False-seeming, we might say,
Be free to affect whatever formal gait

Of moral or scholastic discipline
 Let them parade, among the Schools, at will;
 But spare the House of God. Was ever known
 The witless Shepherd who would drive his Flock
 With serious repetition to a pool
 Of which 'tis plain to sight they never taste?⁷

Implied in these lines is a mockery on rationalism and mechanism, which pervaded British society at that time, and the thrust of criticism is toward such Enlightenment thinkers as William Godwin. Wordsworth was once one of Godwin's followers, having been inspired by the social vision in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*.

With time, however, Wordsworth discovered that society as envisaged by Godwin was one dominated by mechanistic principles, namely what Tönnies would call "a mechanical aggregate." This aspect of Wordsworth's thinking should be given priority when we study his views on community. As a matter of fact, Wordsworth makes numerous challenges to mechanism, a typical example of which can be found in "The Tables Turned": "Our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: — / We murder to dissect."⁸ Similar thoughts are also expressed in *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth describes how he himself had once been "a bigot to a new idolatry," namely to Godwin's mechanical theories:

Thus strangely did I war against myself;
 A Bigot to a new Idolatry . . .
 And, as by simple waving of a wand
 The wizard instantaneously dissolves
 Palace or grove, even so could I unsoul
 As readily by syllogistic words
 Some charm of Logic, ever within reach,
 Those mysteries of passion which have made,
 And shall continue evermore to make,
 (In spite of all that Reason has perform'd
 And shall perform to exalt and to refine)
 One brotherhood of all the whole human race. (*PG*, p. 208)

Here "one brotherhood of all the whole human race" is obviously a vision of community, with which both "syllogistic words" that "unsoul . . . mysteries of passion" and the "meddling intellect" that "mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things" are completely out of tune. In other words, Wordsworth was already aware, while envisaging the future of

humanity, that community building should start with abolishing the idolatry of instrumental reason and mechanism.

Wordsworth's thoughts on community, regarding how to abolish this idolatry, touch upon various aspects and layers. In addition to the role of the individual in a community and the role of local social structures, which Newlyn and White have respectively pinpointed, Wordsworth's views take into account such factors as the bonds of a community, shared faiths and creeds, the interaction and dialectical relationship between the individual and society, interpersonal communication (including that between the living, the dead, and the unborn), the communication between humans and Nature, etc. His descriptions of those factors may or may not involve direct use of the word "communication," but they all point to what he regards as prerequisites for the depth of communication. For instance, communal beliefs constitute a basis for communication. What I would like to emphasize is that all the types of communication under Wordsworth's consideration have one common element, namely, feeling—not merely personal feeling but the structure of feeling, pervading a whole society—which is exactly what we find lacking in rationalist and mechanistic thought. Although Wordsworth never uses the term "the structure of feeling," his views coincide with those of Williams, who invented the term: by the structure of feeling Williams means "the deep community" that makes "communication possible."⁹ What concerns Wordsworth in his imagined communities is exactly how to make this communication possible, so his ideal community is nothing short of a deep community.

That is to say, Wordsworth attaches great importance to the depth of communication in his pursuit of the depth of community. In order to guarantee such a depth, he would not confine himself to a narrow concept of communication. Instead he takes into consideration the cornerstone of communication—such as the cultivation of the mind when advocating for interpersonal communication, for example. The cultivation of the mind, as we know, presupposes the scenes where an individual thinks things out for him/herself, especially the scenes where s/he can draw nourishment, inspiration, and intimations from Nature. This is where Wordsworth often gets misinterpreted and comes under fire—such as from White who, as mentioned above, has blamed him for indulging for a period of time "in the representation of heroic individuals." Another example can be found in the critique from Timothy Clark, who accuses *The Prelude* of "promulgating an individual ethos of continuous self-development."¹⁰

These accusations are grounded in the fact that Wordsworth has devoted a lot of space in *The Prelude* to the passages in which the poet-speaker thinks and moves all by himself: those of his communing with Nature in particular. But are these accusations fair? Does solitude necessarily mean singularity or, in Heidegger's terms, "detaching oneself from the community"? If we take an all-inclusive view of *The Prelude*, we will find a large amount of evidence pointing to the fact that Wordsworth was far from indulging in representing heroic individuals who seek to escape from communitarian life. The following lines from *The Prelude* merit our attention and suggest what an ideal university should be:

A habitation sober and demure
 For ruminating creatures; a domain
 For quiet things to wander in; a haunt
 In which the Heron might delight to feed
 By the shy rivers, and the Pelican
 Upon the cypress spire in lonely thought
 Might sit and sun himself. (*PG*, p. 46)

It is true that such expressions as "ruminating creatures," "a domain for quiet things to wander in," and "in lonely thought" suggest solitude. However, it is erroneous to mention solitude and singularity in the same breath. On many occasions, the image of a "solitary" under the pen of Wordsworth does not signify severing ties and communications with others. In the case of *The Prelude*, the poet-speaker often appears to be a solitary figure, but he actually opts for solitude not for its own sake. Rather, his solitude is for the sake of getting on more harmoniously with others.

I make my argument above on the strength of two observations.

First, what the poet-speaker thinks about, though in solitude, mostly has to do with the common destiny of mankind. When he is in school, he is found pondering alone over the ways in which a human being, even from early childhood, can become "an inmate of this active universe" (*PG*, p. 27). He has also described Coleridge as, starting from their youth, "In many things my brother," "For thou hast sought / The truth in solitude" (p. 33). During summer vacations (in book 4), we find him often wandering alone in "rural solitude," just as we find him in "The Daffodils," but

A freshness also found I at this time
 In human Life, the life I mean of those
 Whose occupations really I lov'd.
 The prospect often touch'd me with surprize,
 Crowded and full, and Chang'd, as seem'd to me,
 Even as a garden in the heat of Spring,
 After an eight-days' absence. For (to omit
 The things which were the same and yet appear'd
 So different) amid this solitude,
 The little Vale where was my chief abode . . . (PG, p. 58)

Here the community sentiments, as couched in “whose occupations really I loved,” stand vividly revealed on the paper. In book 12 the poet-speaker is found in self-reflection:

Such meditations bred an anxious wish
 To ascertain how much of real worth
 And genuine knowledge, and true power of mind
 Did at this day exist in those who liv'd
 By bodily labour, labour far exceeding
 Their due proportion, under all the weight
 Of that injustice which upon ourselves
 By composition entail. To frame such estimate
 I chiefly look'd (what need to look beyond?)
 Among the natural abodes of men,
 Fields with their rural works . . .
 And tumult of the world's to me could yield,
 How far soe'er transported and possessed,
 Full measure of content; but still I craved
 An intermingling of distinct regards
 And truths of individual sympathy
 Nearer ourselves . . . (PG, pp. 220–21)

While interpreting these poetic lines, critics tend to focus on the debate between Wordsworth and Godwin. Godwin holds that rural laborers are deficient in virtue because they are deficient in learning, which is the basis of virtue, whereas Wordsworth sees in rural laborers mental power and genuine virtue. I would like to add that Wordsworth here voices his deep concern for the depth of community, for these lines touch upon such issues as the social basis of community, the main community members the rest should rely on, and the community ethics that are significantly represented by ordinary, rural laborers who

are hardworking and of a piece with Nature. Equally significant in the lines above is the emphasis on “truths of individual sympathy nearer ourselves,” which later on finds an echo in George Eliot’s views on sympathy (it is well-known that Wordsworth had a tremendous influence on Eliot). Gao Xiaolin has given an apt exposition of Eliot’s concept of sympathy: “Sympathy can sometimes be understood as fellow-feeling with an emphasis on communal emotional experiences, thus differentiating itself from condescending pity. . . . Sympathy lays emphasis on the experience of a subject who identifies his own feeling with those of others, or on the exchange of feelings between one subject and another. This kind of sympathy often shows a greater power of social cohesion than cool intellect, and is therefore an important bond of social harmony.”¹¹ Such a comment also applies to Wordsworth.

Second, the poet-speaker in *The Prelude* often rests himself, only to receive intimations and inspirations regarding the true meanings of community. In book 1 he emphasizes that “Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up / Foster’d alike by beauty and by fear” (*PG*, p. 9). The significance of these lines goes beyond the cultivation of an individual soul, for community building is unthinkable without the cultivation of the individual mind. Since the shaping of a community should begin, as mentioned above, with abolishing the idolatry of instrumental reason and mechanism, the poet-speaker needs to turn to Nature from time to time, for that is where he can draw inspiration as to the ways in which such idolatry can be abolished. Here is an example of what he “sought” from Nature:

I hasten on to tell
 How Nature, intervenient till this time,
 And secondary, now at length was sought
 For her own sake. But who shall parcel out
 His intellect by geometric rules,
 Split, like a province, into round and square?
 Who knows the individual hour in which
 His habits were first sown, even as a seed?
 Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,
 This portion of the river of my mind
 Came from yon fountain? (*PG*, pp. 25–26)

Similar examples abound. In books 6 and 13, for instance, there is no lack of “episodes that defeat rational control—moments of surprise, shock, accident, chance, and mischance.”¹² In opposition to rationalist modes of thinking, the poet-speaker is well versed in living Nature:

My inner knowledge,
 (This barely will I note) was oft in depth
 And delicacy like another mind
 . . . for being vers'd
 In living Nature, I had there a guide
 Which open'd frequently my eyes, else shut,
 A standard, which was usefully applied,
 Even when unconsciously, to things
 Which less I understood. . . . (*PG*, p. 88)

This sort of aesthetic pursuit is foregrounded in books 11 and 13, which are both entitled "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored." What restores imagination and taste is Nature, as realized by the poet-speaker:

[Nature] . . . early tutored me
 To look with feelings of fraternal love
 Upon the unassuming things, that hold
 A silent station in this beauteous world.
 Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
 Once more in Man an object of delight,
 Of pure imagination, and of love . . . (*PG*, p. 219)

One cannot but read into these lines a strong sense of community. In the same book the poet-speaker makes it clear that Nature has helped him see

With settling judgments now of what would last,
 And what would disappear, prepared to find
 Ambition, folly, madness, in the men
 Who thrust themselves upon the passive world
 As Rulers of the world, to see in these,
 Even when the public welfare is their aim,
 Plans without thought, or bottom'd on false thought
 And false philosophy: having brought to test
 Of solid life and true result the Books
 Of modern Statists, and thereby perceiv'd
 The utter hollowness of what we name
 "The Wealth of Nations." (*PG*, p. 220)

Here "the public welfare," "solid life," and "the wealth of nations" all indicate a solicitude for community. More important in these lines is

“the utter hollowness of what we name / ‘The Wealth of Nations’,” which obviously refers to Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*. Wordsworth’s satirical description of Smith’s theories as “Plans without thought, or bottom’d on false thought,” and even “madness,” is consistent with his criticism of rationalist/mechanical modes of thinking as represented by Godwin. Such a criticism on one hand is based on taste, imaginative and aesthetic criteria drawn from Nature, and, on the other hand, is impregnated with a deep concern for community life.

The above analysis shows that Wordsworth, in his thoughts on community, views the individual and society as two inseparable concepts. He in fact anticipates Williams, whose well-known cultural theory is built upon the following dialectical way of thinking: “In the case of the individual and society we need to learn ways of thinking and feeling which will enable us genuinely to know each in the other’s terms.”¹³ In other words, those who wrongly accuse Wordsworth of promulgating individualism have lost sight of the fact that he has a deep understanding of the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, and of the truth that there can be no depth of community without a deep inquiry into the individual.

III

The depth of a community can also be measured by its members’ attitudes toward strangers. A community would have no depth whatsoever if strangers could not find a foothold or feel rebuffed by it. One important aspect of Wordsworth’s thoughts on community is the way he thinks strangers should be treated. Jon Mee has pointed out that the encounter with strangers is Wordsworth’s favorite subject. “In the Wordsworthian encounter poem,” he argues, “there is often dialogue in formal terms, at least two speakers are often represented in the text, but mutual comprehension is rarely its outcome. Interiorities resist disclosure.”¹⁴ Mee’s remarks are in fact an echo of a conclusion made by David Bromwich, who claims that Wordsworth’s poems contain an overwhelming implication that “the motives of every moral agent are special to that agent, and we can never enter into them sufficiently to judge them.”¹⁵ If this were true, the community under the pen of Wordsworth would be deficient in depth, for the “dialogue” that seldom leads to mutual comprehension is no in-depth communication and therefore cannot lead to a deep community.

What is mystifying in Mee's above-mentioned studies is the conspicuous absence of *The Prelude*, which contains no lack of in-depth communication, especially among strangers, even though it is often criticized for its so-called "individual heroism." Moreover, throughout the poem, wherever communication is found lacking, there is an implication of criticism and an indication of wishes for wholesome communication. In book 7, for instance, the criticism is spearheaded against the phenomenon of alienation during the poet-speaker's residence in London: ". . . one thought / Baffled my understanding, how men lived / Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still / Strangers, and knowing not each the other's names" (*PG*, p. 108). In contrast to such alienation, many episodes or scenes are symbolic of in-depth communication and a vision of the deep community. In book 2 the poet-speaker addresses his aspirations to Coleridge:

Thou, my Friend! wert reared
 In the great City, 'mid far other scenes;
 But we, by different roads at length have gained
 The selfsame bourne. And for this cause to Thee
 I speak, unapprehensive of contempt,
 The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
 And all that silent language which so oft
 In conversation betwixt man and man
 Blots from the human countenance all trace
 Of beauty and of love . . . (*PG*, p. 33)

Obviously, the "conversation betwixt man and man," which is indicative "of beauty and of love" and which has "gained the selfsame bourne" "by different roads," is an in-depth sort of communication. A more specific episode with the same message is in book 4, where the poet-speaker has a chance encounter with a veteran soldier/traveler who is held up by illness. Their initial conversation is marked by "a strange half-absence" on the part of the veteran, but the ice is broken after the poet-speaker helps him find a cottage where he can rest:

Assur'd that now my comrade would repose
 In comfort, I entreated that henceforth
 He would not linger in the public ways
 But ask for timely furtherance and help
 Such as his state required. At this reproof,
 With the same ghastly mildness in his look,
 He said, "My trust is in the God of Heaven,
 And in the eye of him that passes me!" (*PG*, p. 66)

Such words as “trust” and “mildness in his look” (with “ghastly” meaning “ethereal”) make it clear that the stranger is now no longer strange and that estrangement can be overcome by in-depth communication.

In book 9 the poet-speaker has another encounter with a stranger, an officer “With harder fate, / Though like ambition”: “many a long discourse, / With like persuasion honour’d we maintained” (*PG*, p. 162). Their long and many conversations touch upon some “dearest themes,” and they both have the ambition of “making social life, / Through knowledge spreading and imperishable, / As just in regulation, and as pure / As individual in the wise and good” (p. 161). It is not hard to perceive in such conversations a deep concern for the depth of community. Almost half of book 9 is devoted to their conversations which, moreover, unfold progressive thoughts and feelings regarding community. The following lines are but one of the many examples:

We summon’d up the honourable deeds
Of ancient Story . . .
And how the multitudes of men will feed
And fan each other . . .
How quickly mighty Nations have been form’d
From least beginnings; how, together lock’d
By new opinions, scatter’d tribes have made
One body spreading wide as clouds in heaven . . .
To ruminate with interchange of talk
On rational liberty, and hope in man,
Justice and peace . . . (*PG*, pp. 161–62)

In these lines the solicitude for community transcends territory and nationhood, thus attaining the realm of great harmony of mankind as a whole. What is particularly worthy of attention here is how “scatter’d tribes” can be “together lock’d by new opinions,” which raises the issue of the roots of communal identity. Over the past three centuries in the history of Britain, debate has occurred, on and off, as to whether a community has to be rooted in a particular place or in a particular worldview. White sees Robert Burns as a representative of “the world-view camp,” for “he does represent a cohesive world-view that transcends place and social or class distinctions,” and “his poetry represents a commonalty and mutuality rooted in a very particular world-view” (*RR*, pp. 152, 177).

In my view Wordsworth is a more typical and more sophisticated representative of those who would like a community to strike its roots in a worldview, namely what he calls “new opinions.” More important, Wordsworth’s poetry raises the questions of whether and how a stranger

can identify himself with a community, or how each community member should treat a stranger. The cohesiveness of a community depends on how each of its members imagines their own community including strangers therein, simply “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁶ In other words, for each member of a community, most of his/her fellow members are actually strangers. Is there any way, then, in which strangers can be integrated into a cohesive force? A brilliant answer is given by such Wordsworthian lines as “together lock’d / By new opinions.”

As a matter of fact, scenes of encounter and communication with strangers are numerous in *The Prelude*. In book 13, for instance, the poet-speaker gives an account of his “dear delight” in conversing with rural laborers whom he has never met before but speaks of as if he were meeting friends:

Oh! next to such enjoyment of our youth,
 In my esteem, next to such dear delight,
 Was that of wandering on from day to day
 Where I could meditate in peace, and find
 The knowledge which I love, and teach the sound
 Of Poet’s music to strange fields and groves,
 Converse with men, where if we meet a face
 We almost meet a friend, on naked Moors
 With long, long ways before, by Cottage Bench,
 Or Well-spring where the weary traveller rests. (*PG*, pp. 221–22)

The scene in which one can “Converse with men, where if we meet a face / We almost meet a friend” is little short of a hallmark of the deep community. What is more thought-provoking here is the consistency between the poet-speaker’s seemingly solitary “wandering on from day to day” and the actual realm of the deep community he has attained. The poet “could meditate in peace, and find / The knowledge which I love, and teach the sound / Of Poet’s music to strange fields and groves,” which indicates that he is an integral part of Nature. Only in an organically developed community, which is in the meantime in perfect harmony with Nature, can one meet a stranger as if s/he were meeting a friend. These implied meanings have unfortunately been overlooked by people like White and Mee.

I offer one more example of the extent to which, in Wordsworth's eyes, strangers should communicate with each other:

. . . When I began to enquire,
 To watch and question those I met, and held
 Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
 Were schools to me in which I daily read
 With most delight the passions of mankind,
 There saw into the depth of human souls,
 Souls that appear to have no depth at all
 To vulgar eyes . . . (PG, p. 222)

Here "familiar talk," "daily read . . . the passions of mankind" and "saw into the depth of human souls" all point to the depth of communication. In such a deep community, the phenomenon of interiorities resisting disclosure, as Mee claims, can only last temporarily even if it does exist.

In contrast to the scenes analyzed above, some episodes in *The Prelude* are of a completely different kind, such as the social occasions that the poet-speaker experiences at Cambridge: "Our eyes are cross'd by Butterflies, our ears / Hear chattering popinjays; the inner heart / Is trivial, and the impresses without / Are of a gaudy region" (PG, p. 46). What is depicted here forms part of the poet-speaker's self-reflection—part of his university life is spent in "unprofitable talk": "We saunter'd, play'd, or riot'd; we talk'd / Unprofitable talk at morning hours" (p. 41). This sort of talk is unprofitable, the poet-speaker realizes in his reflections, because it does not aim at "seeking those who might participate / My deeper pleasures . . ." (p. 40). By offsetting scenes of encounter with strangers that involve the depth of communication against unprofitable talk, Wordsworth drives home the message that shared values will lead to in-depth communication even among strangers, whereas acquaintances will feel estranged from each other if they share no beliefs and ideals.

By "strangers" Wordsworth also means those who are dead. Many of his poems give prominence to images of graveyards and funeral processions, as in the second book of *The Excursion*: The poet-speaker and the Wanderer, while traveling together, come across a funeral procession and are deeply touched by the mourners' dirge: "Shall in the grave thy love be known."¹⁷ To the poet-speaker and the Wanderer the one lying in the coffin is surely a stranger, but a bond is forged between them by the words of the dirge, which gives expression to Wordsworth's ideal that a true community should include those who have passed away, no

matter how long ago they died. While watching the mourners lift the corpse and move it toward its final home on earth, the Wanderer is seized with an impulse and blurts out: "What traveller—who— / (How far soe'er a *stranger*) does not own / The bond of brotherhood, when he sees them go . . . ?" (*EP*, p. 69; emphasis added).

A strong sense of community is here revealed in the bond of brotherhood that brings together the living and the dead. A more thought-provoking example is found in a dialogue between the Wanderer and the Solitary. The Wanderer, seeing the graves in a churchyard, describes the dead as "blest": "Oh! blest are they who live and die like these, / Loved with such love, and with such sorrow mourned!" The Solitary, however, replies "with a faint sarcastic smile": "That poor Man taken hence to-day . . . must be deemed, I fear, / Of the unblest. . . ." The poet-speaker, who is also present, makes it clear that the Solitary's reply "did not please me" (*EP*, p. 70). In the whole dialogue is couched Wordsworth's own critique of the views represented by the Solitary. To Wordsworth, in other words, the dead constitute an indispensable part of a family and a society/community. Of all his poems that give expression to the same thoughts, "We Are Seven" is perhaps the most touching one. The poem revolves around a dialogue between the poet-speaker and a little cottage girl, who insists that her family still contains seven children despite the fact that two of them, John and Jane, have passed away:

"How many of you, then," said I,
 "If they two are in heaven?"
 Quick was the little Maid's reply,
 "O Master! We are seven."

"But they are dead; those two are dead!
 Their spirits are in heaven!"
 'Twas throwing words away; for still
 The little Maid would have her will,
 And said, "Nay, we are seven!"¹⁸

This is indeed a deeply touching dialogue, which, in addition to conveying the little maid's genuine love for her siblings, drives home a message that enables the poet-speaker to undergo an emotional transformation. Although Jane and John are out-and-out strangers to the poet-speaker, a bond is forged between him and the two dead children under the impact of the little maid's spontaneous overflow of feelings. Furthermore, he develops a new cognition of and affection for the deceased, whom he

has never met. Between such lines as “Quick was the little Maid’s reply,” “’Twas throwing words away” and “The little Maid would have her will” we can read into the poet-speaker’s admiration for, appreciation of, and identification with the little cottage girl, and his culturally significant reflections on the implications of a deep community.

Reading Wordsworth’s poems is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot, who forges a direct link between the fate of a community and the attitude toward strangers, including the deceased. In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot queries the notion of the family that consists of merely living members and of no more than three generations. Against such a concept, then prevalent among his contemporaries, Eliot develops his own definition of the family in line with his thoughts on culture, of which the idea of the community is an integral part: “When I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces a longer period of time than this: a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote. Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community.”¹⁹ What deserves our particular attention here is the direct use of the word “community” and the direct link between the fate of a community and its attitudes toward strangers, inclusive of its deceased members. I point out here that Wordsworth anticipated Eliot by over one hundred years and that their thoughts, though similar, were rendered more poetic under the pen of Wordsworth.

In a nutshell, Wordsworth’s poems envision and often dramatize the practice of “community” values that have significant implications for the current debate over the following theoretical issues: What is the meaning or nature of community? Is there such a thing as a genuine community? Can the ideal of communitarian life be realized at all? If yes, in what ways? Does the pursuit of community life necessarily lead to the loss of personal freedom and individuality? Or, on the other hand, does solitude necessarily mean singularity? If not, what is the proper relationship between the individual and community? My analysis in the foregoing passages shows that Wordsworth’s poems prove to be rich resources into which we can tap while dealing with the issues above.

More specifically, at least three basic features of Wordsworth’s theoretical assumptions about community emerge in his poems. One is the assumption that humanity can fulfill its dreams of an ideal community and that the ideal model is none other than what Williams would call “the deep community,” which presupposes shared faiths and creeds and, above all, the “truths of individual sympathy nearer ourselves”

that bear great resemblance to what Williams would describe as “the structure of feeling.”

The second assumption, which is fundamental to Wordsworth’s thinking about community, is that great importance should be attached to the depth of communication in humanity’s pursuit of the depth of community. In order to guarantee such a depth, he lays emphasis on the cultivation of the mind, which he looks upon as the cornerstone of communication. A key to the successful cultivation of the mind, to Wordsworth, lies in communing with Nature, which eventually inspires an individual in such a way as to achieve deep and successful interpersonal communication.

Last but not least, Wordsworth’s vision of an ideal community is, by and large, determined by his assumption about the dialectical relationship between the individual and community. For him, individuality and community need not be contradictory, one being inseparable from the other and vice versa. In his imagined communities, each member has a strong sense of belonging and a robust sense of personal identity and, on the other hand, the community model is made possible and forever enriched by various individuals whose minds are cultivated, hence capable of love and empathy. Even strangers can find a firm foothold in Wordsworth’s community where, contrary to the theoretical claims made by Mee and Heidegger, interiorities need not resist disclosure and where the authentic Dasein need not get lost in the “they.” Furthermore, Wordsworth’s notion of strangers includes the deceased members of a community, which not only anticipates Eliot but also has far-reaching theoretical implications for many community-building generations to come.

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