

Some Aspects of Adjectives in *The Prelude*

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Abstract

The purpose of my paper is to extract the adjectives that modify natural things in *The Prelude* and then investigate which nouns (expressive of human ‘mind’) those adjectives tend to modify in turn. I compiled a table which made a qualitative classification of adjectives used more than ten times in *The Prelude*. What is clear from the table is that Wordsworth is attracted by something ‘great,’ ‘strong,’ ‘mighty’ and ‘sublime.’ Closer observation of the table revealed the following two points. One is a tendency for the poet to use identical adjectives to qualify both natural things and human temperaments. In other words, a correspondence is recognized between the adjectives describing natural objects and those that describe human minds, so that you see the same adjectives appear in both descriptions of nature and human activity. The other point is that Wordsworth uses the adjectives of ‘heavy, thick, long, large’ type rather than those of ‘light, thin, short, small’ type. This must be a natural consequence of the poet’s way of looking at things. He takes a broad and wide view of things around him. He shows more interest in the real state of affairs than superficial appearance of affairs.

Keywords: adjective; ‘in’ and ‘out’; ‘mighty Mind’; mirror-image relation; *The Prelude*

1 Preliminary remarks

First of all, I should like to talk about the background of my paper. I wrote my PhD thesis on Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. The title was ‘The Vocabulary that Constitutes *The Prelude*.’ I investigated the network of the body of words in the long poem, in other words, which words are chosen and how they are intertwined in *The Prelude*. I dealt with the lexical items which occurred more than ten times.

The conceptual diagram of chapters in my thesis is shown in Figure 1. Chapter 1 offers a few general remarks on the “vocabulary” of *The Prelude* from four perspectives. Chapters 2 to 5 pick up a particular word from each section of Chapter 1 and they amplify the lexical items singled out from each section of Chapter 1 (i.e. sections 1.1-1.4). Dependences of one section to other chapters are shown by arrows. Chapter 6 observes the poem syntactically from another perspective of “expression.” The content of section 1.3 and chapter 4 is my topic of investigation in this paper, that is to say, ‘Some Aspects of Adjectives in *The Prelude*.’

V o c a b u l a r y

E x p r e s s i o n

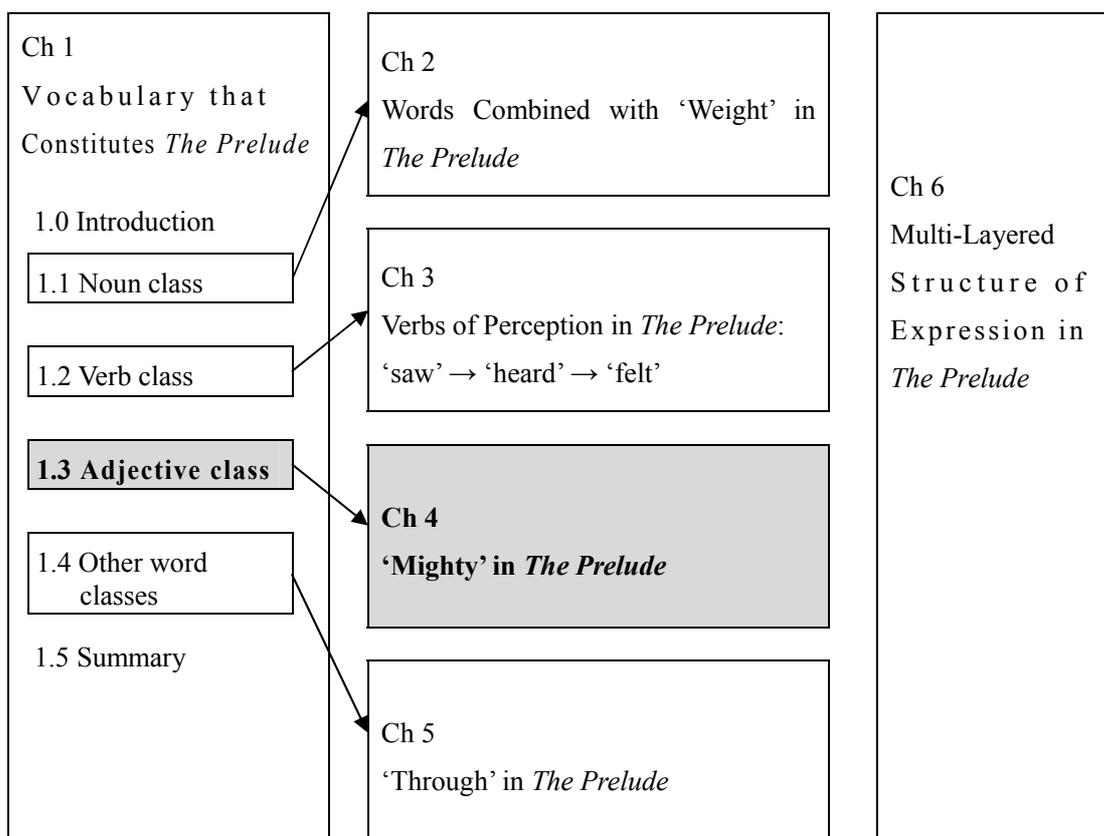


Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of distribution of chapters

2 Model of classification

As a model of classification, I consulted the *Word List by Semantic Principles* (1989: 5, 165-67) compiled by the National Japanese Language Research Institute. The framework of its classification is shown in Table 1, which divides the entire Japanese vocabulary into four large groups. The whole numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 refer to, in this order, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and others (i.e. conjunctions, interjections, etc.), and the decimals 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4 and 0.5 refer to the semantic fields. To give an easy example to understand by using the third row (HUMAN ACTIVITY—MIND AND DEED), I can locate the noun ‘joy’ in division 1.3, the verb ‘enjoy’ in 2.3, the adjective ‘joyful’ in 3.3, and the interjection ‘oh’ in 4.3.

With this as an introduction, let us proceed to the main subject of adjectives in the following sections.

Table 1: Framework of *Word List by Semantic Principles*

	nouns	verbs	adjectives	others		
ABSTRACT RELATION	1.1	2.1	3.1	4.1		
AGENT OF HUMAN ACTIVITY	1.2	—	—	—	subject	
HUMAN ACTIVITY —MIND AND DEED	1.3 (joy)	2.3 (enjoy)	3.3 (joyful)	4.3 (oh)	predicate	
PRODUCTS FROM HUMAN ACTIVITY	1.4	—	—	—	object	artificial
NATURE—NATURAL THINGS AND PHENOMENA	1.5	2.5	3.5	—		natural
	entities	events	abstracts	relational		

(The divisions attached to the bottom of the *Word List* are from Nida (1975: 178-86). Those on the right, which show the syntagmatic relationship (i.e. subject + predicate + object), are devised by myself.)

3 Quantitative classification of adjectives in *The Prelude*

In this section I will extract the adjectives that appear more than ten times in *The Prelude* and then classify them into ten categories according to their meaning. Please look at Table 2. The figures in the table indicate frequency counts:

Under each category, there are several adjectives displayed at both sides of a broken vertical line. They are placed in an antonymous relation to each other. Roughly speaking, positive-image words are put on the left side of the table. Some words do not have their pair words. Non-existence of such pairs means that the frequency is less than ten and does not necessarily mean zero.

Table 2: Quantitative classification of adjectives in *The Prelude*

POSITION	23	distant	near	31
	23	outward	inner	12
	27	high	low	13
	17	higher		
	13	highest		
	11	lofty		
	36	deep		
	11	deeper		
SHAPE	70	great	small	23
	15	large		
	13	huge		
	14	wide		
	12	vast		
	36	open		
	40	long	short	21
AMOUNT	30	full	vain	16
	352	all	one	188
	11	endless	little	40
SUBSTANCE			simple	17
	34	strong	weak	12
	23	mighty		
	21	young	old	59
	33	new	ancient	21
	12	fresh		
STIMULUS	11	loud	quiet	17
			silent	30
			still	15
	12	bright	dark	13
	23	visible	invisible	14
			unknown	19
		green		24
		golden		11
TIME	36	first	last	34
	19	early	later	14
			daily	14
	21	present	past	22
	12	steady		

STATE	18	divine	human	63	
	11	holy			
	11	busy	gentle	21	
	14	awful	wild	26	
	13	sublime			
	20	naked			
VALUE	34	living	dead	16	
	38	good			
	26	better			
	27	best			
	22	true	false	18	
	11	real			
	14	glorious	plain	16	
	23	pure			
	14	beauteous			
	10	beautiful			
	20	fair	vulgar	14	
	13	perfect			
			mean	15	
	10	worthy			
	TYPE	32	common		
		12	universal	individual	15
40		same	different	20	
13		kindred			
DEGREE	10	utter			
TOTAL NUMBER	1,467		855		

4 Observations of classified adjectives

What is noticeable from this table is that Wordsworth is attracted by something ‘great (70),’ ‘long (40),’ ‘strong (34),’ and ‘mighty (23).’

To be a little more specific on the shadowed lexical items:

‘Outward’ in **POSITION** is used when a natural thing acts on the poet’s inner world, and ‘high’ is relevant to his ascending inclination towards something sublime and eternal, as seen also in the

famous 'Plain living and high thinking are no more' ("Written in London, September, 1802," 11).

'Great,' 'large,' 'huge,' 'wide' and 'long' in **SHAPE** are used in relation to <grandeur> and <magnificence> of both nature and the poet's mind.

'Strong' and 'mighty' in **SUBSTANCE** are relevant to <power>. In particular, 'mighty' culminates in a phrase 'a mighty Mind' (13, 69), which might be called the most important word combination in *The Prelude*. This point will be specifically investigated later.

'Invisible' and 'unknown' in **STIMULUS** are made use of when what is mysterious and inscrutable to ordinary people can be seen by the poet. Wordsworth is able to conceive of things that would never occur to ordinary people.

'Steady' in **TIME** shows the poet's firm attention when he concentrates his mind upon the real state of affairs.

'Living' and 'dead' in **STATE** are seen respectively in 'ye who are fed / By the dead letter' (8, 431-32) and 'Mighty indeed, supreme must be the power / Of living Nature' (5, 166-67).

5 Result of observations

What can I extract from the above observations? There are at least two findings.

5.1 Identical adjectives to qualify both 'inward' and 'outward'

One finding is a tendency for the poet to use identical adjectives to qualify both natural things and human temperaments. In other words, a correspondence is recognized between the adjectives describing natural objects and those that describe human minds, so that you see the same adjectives appear in both divisions of 3.3 and 3.5 in Table 1. Let us remember that the division 3.3 deals with 'Human Activity—mind and deed' and the division 3.5 deals with 'Nature—natural things and phenomena.' Here I will give you a representative example of an identical adjective: 'mighty.' It is realized in the phrases of 'mighty' Mind (13, 69) and 'mighty' Forms (1, 425). 'Mighty' Forms of Nature deeply influence Wordsworth's mind, hence his 'mighty' Mind. I cannot help feeling the poet's deepest debt to Nature is condensed into this phrase, 'mighty Mind.'

5.2 'heavy, thick, long, large' type rather than 'light, thin, short, small' type

The other finding is that Wordsworth uses the adjectives of 'heavy, thick, long, large' type rather than those of 'light, thin, short, small' type. This must be a natural consequence of the poet's way of looking at things. As a matter of fact, he takes a broader and wider view of things around him. He shows more interest in the real state of affairs than the superficial appearance of affairs. Wordsworth is a poet who looks into the essence rather than the surface of things. That is why the heavy and serious type of adjectives is preferred in *The Prelude*.

6 Qualitative classification of adjectives in *The Prelude*

In Table 2, I classified the adjectives of *The Prelude* into ten categories according to their meaning. That was rather a quantitative study and did not reveal so much peculiar to Wordsworth. I would like to find some more characteristics of adjectives in *The Prelude*. So I will try to find qualitatively significant points. In order to find a further interesting point, I survey the adjectives which modify the 'mind' of the poet and the 'forms' of Nature.

6.1 Adjectives with or without comparative degree

When I carefully examined adjectives that modify 'mind' and 'forms,' I came across an interesting linguistic fact. Those adjectives which modify 'mind' sometimes have the comparative degree. For example, the following combinations are found:

That mellow years will bring a riper mind (1, 237)
they are kindred to our purser mind (2, 333)
My wiser mind grieves now for what I saw (3, 516)
Add comments of a calmer mind (10, 78)
Calling upon the more instructed mind (13, 297)

Notice that each underlined adjective is in comparative degree. Comparative in essence connotes the process and the result of growth. We might well remember that the subtitle of *The Prelude* is 'Growth of a Poet's Mind.' Growth inevitably entails comparison. It is, therefore, quite natural that the poet's growing 'mind' should be described by using the comparative degree of adjectives.

By contrast those adjectives which modify 'forms' do not take comparative degrees. The following are representative examples:

huge and mighty Forms (1, 425)
lovely forms (1, 660)
the beauteous forms / Of Nature (2, 51-52)
all exterior forms, / Near or remote, minute or vast (3, 159-60)
mighty forms (6, 347)
awful Powers, and Forms (8, 213)
her awful forms (8, 485)
fair forms (9, 209)
pure forms and colours (11, 110)
sublime and lovely Forms (13, 146)

As shown, *forms*-modifying adjectives are in the positive degree. This is because Wordsworth

adores Nature as an absolute being. ‘Form’ is one embodiment or manifestation of Nature. Nature is absolute and admits no comparison. Nature assumes a solemn and grave appearance. Nature refuses to accept a compromise. It is interesting to note that, in *The Prelude*, such a super-ordinate word as ‘forms’ does not go with adjectives of the comparative degree.

6.2 Polarized adjectives

The above reminds me of the linguistic behavior of the noun class, that is to say, super-ordinate nouns are preferred to hyponyms. I have only to remember ‘things’ and ‘objects’ are used abundantly in *The Prelude*. The same tendency is actually observed in the adjective class, that is to say, adjectives belonging to what may be called super-ordinate type are preferred to those describing individual superficial attributes.

Table 3: What might be called super-ordinate adjectives

	Super-ordinates	Hyponyms
Nouns	things objects	hill mountain river
Adjectives	(1)<size> great (2)<height> high (3)<power> strong (4)<metaphysic> sublime	beauteous beautiful good

As seen in Table 3, what I call super-ordinate adjectives may be divided into four types: (1) <size>, (2) <height>, (3) <power>, and (4) <metaphysic>. Typical examples of each, in this order, is ‘great,’ ‘high,’ ‘strong,’ and ‘sublime.’ At the other end of the scale are adjectives such as ‘beauteous,’ ‘beautiful’ and ‘good.’ One of the reasons for this tendency toward bipolarization may be that the former appeal forcibly to the poet’s mind and the latter appeal superficially to his eyes. The intrinsic grandeur of Nature is so great that the superficial beauty of Nature is, so to speak, eclipsed, which will be represented typographically at the lower right in Figure 2. The lightness of the printed letters there should be noted.

Wordsworth sees things from a broader point of view. He puts the outer world into perspective. He assesses situations from a broader perspective. Therefore the above-mentioned four types of adjectives are preferred or favored, because they appeal more strongly to the poet’s sense of morality than to his sense of beauty. He uses adjectives depicting the real state of affairs rather than superficial appearance of affairs. Put simply, Wordsworth prefers to use ‘mighty’ rather

than ‘beautiful.’ In the next section I would like to rearrange the adjectives discussed in Table 2, (but not all of them,) so as to gain another glimpse of the distribution of adjectives in *The Prelude*.

6.3 Three-dimensional rearrangement of adjectives

In Figure 2, I would like to rearrange the adjectives given in Table 2. I arrange them differently, that is to say, from the four points of view: <size>, <height>, <power>, and <metaphysic>. These four types, especially their upper half, are the adjectives suggestive of something that goes straight to the poet’s mind. They are contrastive to those appealing to his senses. These *mind*-moving adjectives are large in number. It is surprising to know the total number of ‘beauteous’ and ‘beautiful’ is only 24.

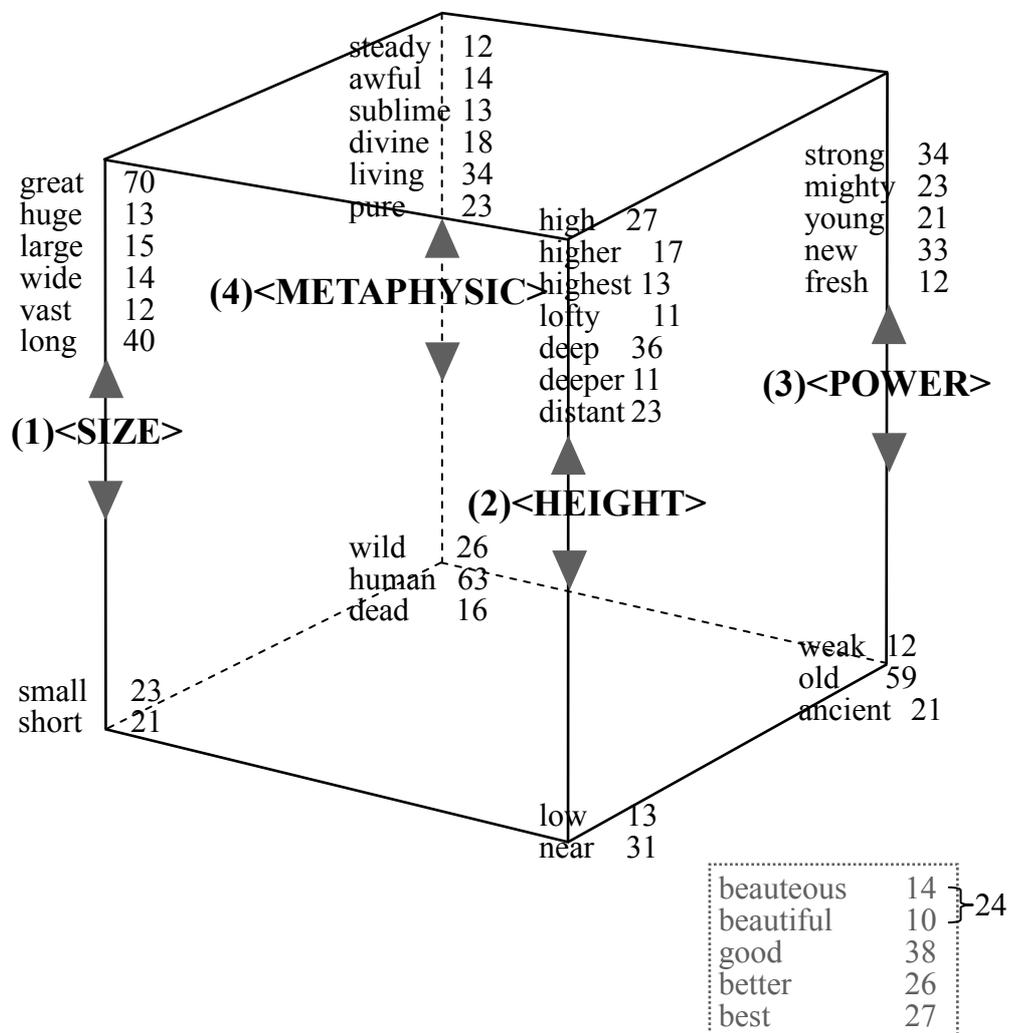


Figure 2: Three-dimensionally rearranged adjectives

Let me talk specifically about the third point <power>. It is traditionally acknowledged that literature aims at the pursuit of ‘truth, goodness and beauty.’ In the case of Wordsworth, however, <power> is sought after in addition to, or rather prior to the ‘truth, goodness and beauty.’ Havens (1941: 472), in his commentary of *The Prelude*, states:

‘Power was a favorite word with Wordsworth; he uses it and its plural over six hundred times in his poetry. . . . De Quincey’s (1785-1859) emphasis on the literature of power as opposed to the literature of knowledge was derived from Wordsworth.

7 Mirror-image relation between ‘in’ and ‘out’

As I mentioned earlier, Wordsworth has a tendency to use the same adjective in order to describe both the poet’s mind and Nature. This means that an adjective common to both worlds functions, as it were, as a mirror which reflects both his mind and the world around him. Figure 3 represents the corresponding relation between adjectives describing inner and outer worlds.

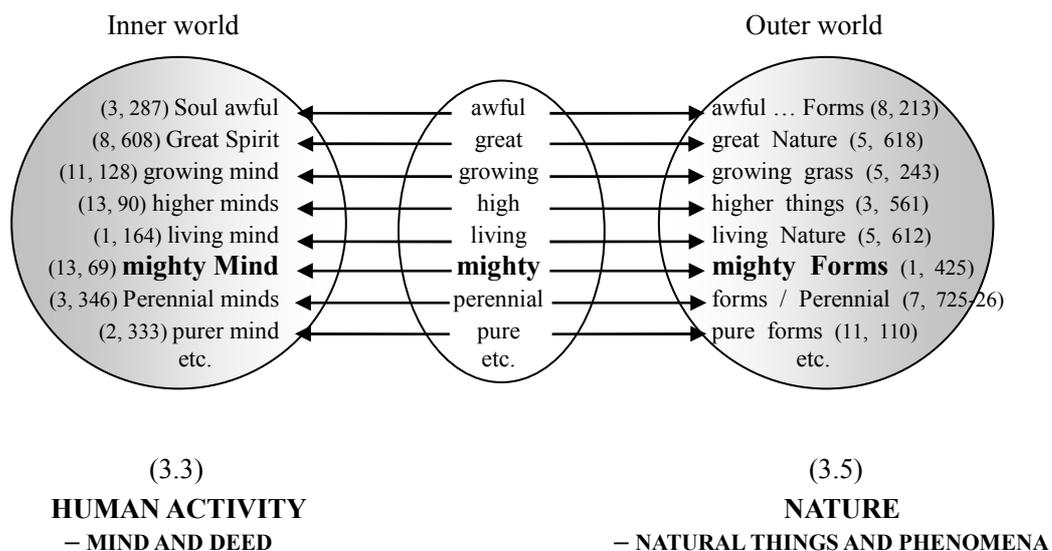


Figure 3: Mirror-image relation between ‘in’ and ‘out’

Expressions in the left circle depict aspects of the human mind and those in the right refer to Nature. Adjectives in the center are those common to both worlds.

Take a good look at the adjectives in the center circle. Strangely enough, almost all of them belong to those at the upper half of Figure 2. They are the adjectives that go straight to the poet’s mind, not to his senses. ‘Awful,’ ‘great’ and ‘mighty’ are their typical examples.

In a certain passage of Book 13, Wordsworth actually declares to the effect that ‘he has barely touched upon the more superficial and yet sweet charm, “Nature’s secondary grace”’ (13, 278-286). This means that he regards the grandeur and sublimity of nature as “the primary grace”. ‘The changeful language of their [hills’] countenances’ (7, 727) and ‘the speaking face of earth and heaven’ (5, 12) still have an amazing charm for the poet. These charms, however, are secondary and superficial to him. Wordsworth, surpassing the superficial and shallow beauty of nature, always tries to seek something more sublime and divine, which ultimately is connected with God. In this way Wordsworth tends to use the adjectives pertaining to the primary grace, i.e. ‘awful,’ ‘great’ and ‘mighty.’

8 Close adhesion of ‘mighty’ and ‘mind’ within 15 lines

Out of the eight expressions describing the poet’s inner world in Figure 3, I will single out ‘mighty Mind’ and explain it further. As I said before, I believe the essence of Wordsworth’s perceptive ability is condensed into this word combination of ‘mighty Mind.’ In order to examine the co-existence of ‘mighty’ and ‘mind’ within 15 lines in *The Prelude*, I used my personal computer and tabulated my findings. Computers are very, very useful in this kind of literary study. We can immediately investigate how close any given two words stand next to each other. The result is shown in Table 4:

Table 4: *Mighty’s* proximity to *mind* within 15 lines

	mighty	mind
1	1, 425	1, 426
2	6, 73	6, 64
3	6, 73	6, 76
4	6, 178	6, 179
5	6, 347	6, 334
6	6, 459	6, 443
7	8, 702	8, 701
8	9, 383	9, 394
9	10, 952	10, 944
10	12, 302	12, 288
11	13, 69	13, 69
12	13, 69	13, 74

There are 12 examples in total, in which ‘mighty’ and ‘mind’ occur together within 15 lines. It is not until line 69 of the last Book 13 that both words appear on the same line and both stick together, that is to say, become juxtaposed without any words in between.

‘Mighty Mind’ appears in the following famous Snowdon passage.

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely Mountain when the scene
Had pass’d away, and it appear’d to me
The perfect image of a mighty Mind.

(13, 66-69)

Wordsworth was brought up surrounded by ‘mighty Forms’ of Nature. He seldom shows interest in things artificial and vulgar. The crudity and shallowness of things are what he dislikes. Mighty forms of the outer world of Nature are mapped onto the mind of the poet, hence his ‘mighty Mind.’

Let me make a careful examination of the sound structure of the phrase. The two words can be said to be composed of almost the same sounds: /máiti/ and /máind/.

First, alliteration of the ‘m’ sound is conspicuous: /máiti/ and /máind/.
By the way there is an interesting story by Jakobson (1960: 357)

A girl used to talk about ‘the horrible Harry.’ ‘Why horrible?’ ‘Because I hate him.’
‘But why not *dreadful, terrible, frightful, disgusting?*’ ‘I don’t know why, but horrible fits him better.’ Without realizing it, she clung to the poetic device of paronomasia.

Why mighty? Why not *strong*? Of course Wordsworth certainly realized the poetic effect of paronomasia, that is, alliteration.

Second, the sounds, /t/ and /d/, are identical in the point of articulation and different only in the point of <voiceless> and <voiced>. When pronounced aloud, the /t/ sound in ‘mighty’ and /d/ sound in ‘mind’ resound to each other. Therefore, strength is added and amplified when the foregoing sound /t/ moves to and meets with the following voiced /d/. Consequently, the total meaning of the word combination gains weight and solidity.

Wordsworth regards the Snowdon passage as the most important of all episodes in *The Prelude*, and therefore he must have chosen to put it at the beginning of the last Book 13 titled ‘Conclusion.’ It is no mere coincidence that the two words ‘mighty’ and ‘mind’ co-occur in one and the same line in the important Snowdon passage. Wordsworth must have placed the significant phrase ‘mighty Mind’ in the last Book of *The Prelude* consciously and intentionally.

9 Conclusion

I have made a quick survey of adjectives used in *The Prelude*, specifically of ‘mighty.’ The consideration of the adjective class shows that the poet uses the identical adjective for describing both nature and the human mind. What Wordsworth depicted in *The Prelude* was the workings of the poet’s ‘mighty Mind.’ The word combination, ‘mighty Mind,’ is loaded with the best blessings of Nature that Wordsworth received through her ‘mighty Forms.’

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