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Hazlitt and Hume: Personal Identity as Imaginative Narration

William Hazlitt's complex and provocative *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) attained only sporadic recognition among contemporaries, but it has recently been the focus of sustained critical attention.[1] In this work, Hazlitt explicates his "metaphysical discovery" (17:312). Opposing a dominant strand of Anglo-French Enlightenment philosophy, he maintains that human action is not inevitably self-interested or resulting from self-love. On the contrary, it is naturally disinterested.

The rigour of this conclusion is admittedly debatable, but critics have justly admired the way in which Hazlitt explores the underlying issue, the nature of personal identity. In particular, his discussion of the role of the imagination in constructing a human being's sense of identity evinces a striking modernity. Thus two scholars with a background in cognitive science, Raymond Martin and John Barresi, summon Hazlitt in support of their sceptical argument that there is nothing substantial about personal identity, no "essence" of the self (*The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* 162-170). Their reading of Hazlitt as anticipating a modern debate joins some substantial work on the intellectual background to the *Essay*, most notably Uttara Natarajan's book *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*.

So far, however, Hazlitt's relationship with the most challenging eighteenth-century writer on the topics of personal identity and imagination has tended to elude discussion.[2] David Bromwich's pertinent observation that "Hazlitt wrote the *Essay* as a disciple of Hume" (*Mind of a Critic* 18) has gone largely unheeded. I will argue that this insight is key not only to a nuanced reading of the *Essay*, but even to Hazlitt's approach to the writing of (auto)biography in his subsequent journalistic career. In developing this view, I aim to refine Bromwich's own suggestion about Hazlitt's relationship to David Hume. According to Bromwich, Hazlitt dispensed with Hume's presentation of imagination as delusory and in this way gained a clearer sense of the imagination as a principle of action. I will suggest that, on the contrary, Hazlitt's "discipleship" of Hume consists precisely in a very similar, double-edged view of imagination. For both these writers the imagination is responsible for constructing personal identity, and I hope to show that this process may be construed both negatively, as a form of delusion, and positively, as creative or artistic narration.

In 1798, when Hazlitt, eager to discuss his "metaphysical discovery," had his first, formative meeting with Coleridge, he was studying Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. This arose in conversation, and Hazlitt was positively offended when the older man "spoke slightingly of Hume" and his prose style: "I was not very much pleased at this account of Hume," (recounted Hazlitt) "for I had just been reading, with infinite relish,

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[2] An exception is the narrowly focused article by Cain.

that completest of all metaphysical *choke-pears*, his *Treatise on Human Nature*, to which the *Essays*, in point of scholastic subtlety and close reasoning, are mere elegant trifling, light summer-reading" (Hazlitt 17:113). A "choke-pear" was a piece of iron in the shape of a pear that robbers used to force into the mouths of victims. When the attacker turned a key, iron points would shoot out, securing the device and preventing the victim from crying out. The figurative meaning was thus "[a]n argument to which there is no answer."[3] Hazlitt's use of the phrase intimates the unflinching rigour of argument in Hume's *Treatise*, such as to silence all objections; and he was probably recalling this episode when he later described his own *Essay* in the same words, as a "metaphysical choke-pear", and paid it the compliment of a direct comparison – it was "nearly as subtle as anything in Hume or Berkeley" (Hazlitt 17:312).[4] Hazlitt went on to lament that the *Essay* "fell dead-born from the press" (*ibid.*), the very same words that a rueful Hume had used (with pardonable exaggeration) of his *Treatise* (Hume, "My Own Life" 352). These verbal parallels reveal a considerable degree of identification with Hume on Hazlitt's part, and in later years it would not have escaped Hazlitt that his career had developed along the same trajectory as Hume's, from the composition of abstruse philosophical works to that of elegant essays.[5] That Hazlitt clung so fiercely to Hume in 1798 reflects, too, the young radical's independence from literary fashion: for Hume's *Treatise* had indeed enjoyed only a muted reception in England, and there is little evidence that other Romantics – Godwin, Shelley and probably Coleridge excepted – studied it in much detail. Moreover, Hume occupied a contentious and often marginal position in the Rational Dissenting culture of Hazlitt's upbringing. Unitarians sometimes utilised Hume's arguments for the purpose of contesting the metaphysics of Trinitarian theology, but were typically wary of "le bon David's" ironic and subversive attitude to religious faith.

It was in the context of Dissenting religious debates that Hazlitt, as a student of the Hackney Academy in the mid-1790s, first encountered radical doubts about the nature of personal identity. The relevant question was about the resurrection of the body or the soul prior to the Last Judgment: in what sense may the person whom God reconstitutes to reward or punish be conceived as identical to the person who lived on earth? Such a question may strike modern readers as a theological curiosity, but at its heart was a moral problem, for if death radically severed personal identity prior to the day of supernatural reconstitution, how could we eventually benefit or suffer from our good or bad deeds? The freethinker Thomas Cooper pressed this doubt to an extreme, suggesting that personal identity does not even persist from moment to moment: paradoxically, Cooper felt that such scepticism removed the conceptual difficulty from the resurrection. For if a human being has no continuous identity from one point in time to the next, then there is no *special* problem involved in the future reconstitution of a

3 Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 162. More recent editions define a choke-pear as a bitter fruit, figuratively as something hard to swallow: a major difference in meaning.

4 Hazlitt also refers to Sir James Mackintosh's appreciation of his *Essay*, "that dry, tough, metaphysical *choke-pear*" (11:102).

5 Rabeler surveys Hazlitt's comments on Hume (114-115). Schoenefield pursues the comparison between Hume and Hazlitt's literary careers.

dead person (see Martin and Barresi, "Self-Concern"). Hazlitt's tutor, Thomas Belsham, countered that such radical scepticism about identity was deleterious to morality. Belsham appealed breezily to the evidence of everyday introspection: "Upon the whole, whether we can, or cannot distinctly analyse personal identity, the consciousness of every individual is to himself a sufficient ground for admitting the fact" (Belsham 163-164). No doubt Hazlitt considered this to be inadequate reasoning.

Hazlitt worked feverishly on the problem (his concern with the Last Judgment appears in Hazlitt 1:46-47) until the publication of his *Essay* in 1805, in which he announced the "metaphysical discovery" that had evidently liberated him from religious bugbears (Hazlitt 9:58 and Kinnaird 19, 28, 386). Thomas Cooper had not referred to Hume in this context (see Martin and Barresi, "Self-Concern"), despite the similarity of his scepticism about personal identity to that of Hume in book I of the *Treatise of Human Nature*. Belsham, meanwhile, is critical of Hume. It is evident from his enthusiastic comments that Hazlitt engaged more wholeheartedly than his Rational Dissenting forebears with Hume – and that is probably what enabled Hazlitt to go beyond the immediate context of the Last Judgment and resurrection, pursuing an enquiry that would have wider implications for imaginative creation.

For the most substantial reflections on this topic were to be found in the first book of Hume's *Treatise*. In the conclusion to this book, Hume pictures himself "launching out" into "immense depths of philosophy" (*Treatise* 171, S-B 263) – an explorer who is melancholy because of the untrustworthiness of his own equipment, the faculties of the mind. Hume has just asked, what is the "self" of which we seem to be always intimately aware? It is nowhere to be found. I am conscious of an array of perceptions, notes Hume, but if I try to "enter intimately into what I call *myself*" I never find anything *except* perceptions. "I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception." This fact leads Hume to conclude that the human mind is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions" in perpetual flux (*Treatise* 165, S-B 252). Apart from that famous "bundle" metaphor, he also compares the mind to a theatre, in which different perceptions come and go like actors – but with the caveat that we know nothing about the stage (*Treatise* 165, S-B 253). For although we usually assume that a self is (somehow) a simple substance that unites all those perceptions, that assumption is a "fiction" generated by the imagination (*Treatise* 166, S-B 255). According to Hume, this is merely one example of a fundamental way in which our imagination deceives us: for we have no rational evidence that any object ever remains the same over time, and thus we have no "idea of identity" (*Treatise* 133, S-B 200) at all. When we look at an object, our perception is at some point interrupted, and we may then look again: on this second view, there arises a perception so similar to the first one as readily to convince us that the object has remained identical. Strictly speaking, though, the only valid assertion is that perception *x* strongly resembled perception *y*. The "biass from the imagination" (*Treatise* 166, S-B 254) leads us to think of identity (things being *exactly* the same) where there is really only resemblance (things being *nearly* the same); and this, writes Hume, is a "confusion and mistake." "Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation" (*Treatise* 166, S-B 254-5). Hume's conclusion

is radically sceptical: "The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one" (*Treatise* 169, S-B 359). To modern readers, the potentially literary connotation of the terms "feigning" and "fictitious" is readily apparent.

Even though the self may be a mere deceptive "fiction of the imagination" (*Treatise* 133, S-B 201), however, Hume proceeds to admit that the *sense* of self, or personal identity, is integral to human beings and constantly present. In book II he asserts that an "impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us" (206, S-B 317). Here, Hume presents all human behaviour as dependent on a comparison between the self and others. Certain key emotions, such as pride and humility, are in Hume's view relational; they arise when I assess myself and my assets, whether personal or material, and weigh them against you and your assets.[6] This bourgeois naturalism appears to sit uneasily with the scepticism about the whole concept of personal identity expressed in book I. Yet a continuum between these approaches is apparent: for just as the imagination is responsible for producing the illusion of a unified self exposed in book I, so it is likewise the imagination that makes possible the interaction between human beings studied in book II. We constantly predict other people's actions, according to Hume, and we do this by discerning their *character*. Character is nothing more than what I repeatedly observe to be the usual, typical conduct and emotions of a particular person; and I assess the component parts of character by means of a distinct agency of the imagination, an agency that Hume calls *sympathy*. Sympathy is a purely mechanical process, by which I observe the outward behaviour of another person, and thus receive an *idea* of what that person is feeling; this idea then produces an emotional response in me, something more lively than the idea, which in Hume's vocabulary is an *impression*. This impression (that I now have) can even be as forceful as the original impression felt by the other person (*Treatise* 206, S-B 316-317). Put simply, Hume's view is that emotions transfer from one person to another, and it is the *imagination* that bridges the gaps. It bridges the gaps between my perceptions, tricking me into believing that I am a unified, simple self that persists through time; and it bridges the gaps between myself and other people, enabling me to feel what they feel.

The especially significant point for Hazlitt is the following: Hume indicates that imagination and the sympathy it enables even extend beyond the present, into the future: "'Tis certain, that sympathy is not always limited to the present moment, but that we often feel by communication the pains and pleasures of others, which are not in being, and which we only anticipate by the force of imagination" (*Treatise* 248, S-B 385). If, to use Hume's example, I see someone lying in a field about to be trampled by horses, I rush to assist because my sympathy with the victim's future pain is just as great as if the pain were actually occurring at this very moment. Hume continues that "in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern" (*Treatise* 248, S-B 385-386). This is a function of the imagination that Hume notes more than once: thus

[6] This constitutes a major difference between Hazlitt and Hume: as Jacques Kahlip remarks, "Unlike Hume, [...] Hazlitt eschews the logic of property" in his discussion of identity and sympathy (37).

"the fancy anticipates the course of things"; for this reason, the future flows ever nearer to us, while the past retires (*Treatise* 276, S-B 431-432).

This account, especially of the future-directedness of sympathy, or the sympathetic imagination, surely contributed to Hazlitt's reflections. In his *Essay*, Hazlitt focuses on the motives for human action, and therefore on our ideas about the future: for all action aims to effect some change that will necessarily take place in the future. As noted above, Hazlitt's "discovery" is that human action is "naturally disinterested." His polemic is directed against philosophers and theologians who had asserted that all action is always self-interested, arising inevitably from self-love; such philosophers claimed that the motives even of an apparently altruistic action can be traced back, through various associations, to a self-interested core. It is significant that this group of philosophers did not include Hume, who believes, much as Hazlitt does, that "the hypothesis, which allows of a disinterested benevolence, distinct from self-love, has really more *simplicity* in it, and is more conformable to the analogy of nature, than that which pretends to resolve all friendship and humanity into this latter principle" (Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* 94).[7] Hazlitt responds with an extension of Hume's observation about the capacity of sympathy:

> The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being, and interested in it. I could not love myself, if I were not capable of loving others. (1:1-2).

The point is that the future exists only in imagination. I do not have a future self, for the future is not yet here; so if I act from self-interest, i.e. for the benefit of my future self (all action being future-directed), this is just as much an *imaginative* act as acting for the benefit of another person would be. The imagination is the "immediate spring and guide of action" (1:23). I have what Hazlitt calls an "interest" in my present state and in my past states, because these are intimately present in consciousness and memory. But a "future being" or purely hypostatized entity that I might turn into cannot possibly influence my conduct (except by way of mistake, of which more shortly): there is no "positive communication between a man's future, and present self" (1:7). Rather I act, argues Hazlitt, for the sake of what I consider to be "good" (as Bromwich emphasises in "Disinterested Imagining" 22): it is in principle indifferent whether it is good for *my* self or good for *your* self, since both exist only as imaginative constructions.

Hazlitt's expansion of Hume's hint about the future-directness of sympathy depends on scepticism about the nature of personal identity, a scepticism that is Humean above all in the important sense that Hazlitt continues to view the imagination as deceptive. The imagination, that is, while constructively projecting us out of ourselves into the future, also imparts a falsely extensive sense of personal identity. Like Hume, Hazlitt notes that nothing ever remains absolutely the same from one moment to another, so that in the strictest sense all identity, including personal identity, is illusory. That said,

[7] The *Treatise* even suggests that self-love is impossible, since love is always directed to an other (214; S-B 329).

Hazlitt is then willing to assume that human beings do have a fairly reliable sense of self (1:36-37), and denies only that this could possibly reach into the future. Thus his "questioning of identity" is indeed "radical" (Bromwich, "Disinterested Imagining" 21), but neither more or less so than Hume's. Hazlitt's approach coincides with that of Hume, in first sceptically questioning personal identity and then nevertheless adopting it as a necessary assumption.

Hazlitt's central claim is bold: that my interest in my own future self is inseparable from and not essentially more powerful than my interest in other people's future selves. A reader might, however, object that this claim lacks the explanatory power with which Hazlitt hoped to invest it. For is it not the case that a strong sense of connection to a future being belongs so indissolubly to our sense of self that selfish action, even if it is not more 'natural' to a young child than unselfish action, must become so at a very early stage of human development? In addressing this objection, Hazlitt reveals further the close affinity of his view of imagination to that of Hume. Hazlitt offers a detailed explanation as to why, despite the fact that human action is *naturally* disinterested, people *in practice* act selfishly most of the time. Habitually selfish action, thinks Hazlitt, is founded on the error he has just exposed: the fact that we *do* identify ourselves with a non-existent entity, what we think of as our "future being." And such false identification only reflects the "force of the imagination" (1:29) that is responsible for this illusion. Hazlitt provides a developmental account of selfish action, whereby an "illusion of the imagination" or a "natural deception" (1:20, 22) begins in early childhood. For Hazlitt, we acquire the sense of self by realising that our perceptions have a different effect upon us from the effect that they have on others – the sense of self is thus, as in Hume, relational, dependent on interaction with other people. Hazlitt also follows Hume's principle of contiguity: we are most powerfully affected by, and sympathise most readily with, whatever and whoever is closest to us (1:43; Trawick 279).[8] Since our own perceptions tend to be more vivid than the perceptions of others, we gradually learn to satisfy our own needs rather than theirs. Hazlitt offers a typically knotty yet vivid description of this universal deception that the imagination causes:

> As our actual being is constantly passing into our future being, and carries this internal feeling of consciousness along with it, we seem to be already identified with our future being in that permanent part of our nature, and to feel by anticipation the same sort of necessary sympathy with our future selves, that we know we shall have with our past selves. We take the tablets of memory and reverse them, and stamp the image of self on that, which as yet possesses nothing but the name. It is no wonder then that the imagination outstripping the progress of time, when it's course is marked out along the strait unbroken line of individuality, should confound the necessary differences of things, and confer on my future interests a reality, and a connection with my present feelings which they can never have. (1:41, cf. 40n.)

The play of tenses in this passage mimics the confusion described, a typical technique that Hazlitt employs to infuse urgent feeling into a train of thought. In "outstripping the progress of time," the imagination is to the future as memory is to the past. Since, as beings who live in time, we move continually forward, we can no more function without imagination than we can function without memory. Yet the imagination inevitably misleads us, since it seems to give us information about an object – the "future self" – that does not in fact exist. In this way, imagination in Hazlitt's *Essay* retains the double-edged power that it had in Hume's *Treatise*: on the one hand, it enables us to sympathise with others and act in their interest; on the other, it outruns its own function, as it were, and tricks us into feeling an excessively fixed and expansive sense of our own personal identity. In a different context, Coleridge expresses this dilemma neatly in a letter of 1801: Coleridge writes of "Imagination, which if it be a Jack o'Lanthorn to lead us out of [the common] way is however at the same time a Torch to light us whither we are going" (646). Transferring this metaphor to the moral sphere, it may be said that the imagination is a torch that lights up others' minds, but it is also a kind of deceptive and capricious will o' the wisp that leads us into selfish action. Given the way Hazlitt's *Essay* remains poised between these two aspects, it would be inaccurate to read it as a naively over-optimistic diagnosis of the springs of human behaviour.

That means, furthermore, that it is necessary to revise Bromwich's suggestion about the manner in which Hazlitt adapted Hume's theories. According to Bromwich, Hume

> never brought the sceptical refutation of personal identity and the movement from "vivacity" to sympathy, into a single view of the imagination as a principle of action. It took Hazlitt to join them. In doing so he seems to have performed a simple logical maneuver, and yet taken a step inconceivable to Hume. For throughout Hume's *Treatise*, and notwithstanding the force of his own arguments, "imagination" retains something of the sense of "morbidly roving fancy," its primary meaning for Hobbes and Locke. (*The Mind of a Critic* 51)

The development that Bromwich rightly notes primarily consists in Hazlitt's focus on the future-directedness of the imagination; but Bromwich overlooks the extent to which Hazlitt, a true disciple of Hume, does continue to view the imagination's creativity from *both* angles – as constructive on the one hand, but also as deceptive on the other. Thus it is quite consistent that Hazlitt should later assert: "Life is the art of being deceived; and in order that the deception may succeed, it must be habitual and uninterrupted. [...] To take away the force of habit and prejudice entirely, is to strike at the root of our personal existence" (4:84).

[8] Natarajan underplays this point when she suggests: "Following Hume, Hazlitt recognizes the sensory constraint upon imaginative capacity. But his theory, unlike Hume's, allows for such constraints to be altogether surpassed by the cultivation of the imagination." ("Circle of Sympathy" 118). Bromwich notes a relevant "dilemma at the heart of Hazlitt's thinking about the imagination, which has broad consequences for the shape of his career, and leads to the famous double-topics for essays: 'On Genius and Common Sense,' 'On Paradox and Common-Place,' 'On Vulgarity and Affectation.' In forming sympathies we begin with what we know best because we know it from habit. We have a self, a family, a neighbourhood, and move outward gradually to a community, and at last to mankind. Habit drives us back into our selves, and yet habitual feelings alone lend to all our sympathies a more than speculative character" (*The Mind of a Critic* 60).

Moreover, Hume himself provides further hints as to a possible reconciliation of the two faces of the imagination, mischievously tricking us into believing in simple, unitary selves, *and* usefully discerning character to enable sympathetic action; and Hume's hints shed considerable light on Hazlitt's practice as a writer. A recent line of interpretation indicates that in the philosophy of Hume, persons or selves "emerge as *narrative* existences" (Pitson 92). The point is that the imagination, both in the cases of oneself and others, bundles together a mass of perceptions and makes order out of them, an order that appears to persist and develop over time. Extrapolating Hume's perspective, it appears that the deception of the imagination, conjuring up a self where previously there was no more than a bundle of perceptions, is necessary and may even evolve into an art form. While I assemble my own perceptions into an entity that I call myself, I also put together the signals gained through imaginative sympathy in order to construct characters. Literary narratives, according to Hume, connect events and actions together in the same kind of way that the imagination connects perceptions in the mind. In the "loose hints" on this topic that appear in the original version of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (23), Hume underlines the fact that any portrayal of a human being, whether in routine daily life, in biography or poetry, consists entirely of such linking: "even a biographer, who should write the life of ACHILLES, would connect the events, by showing their mutual dependence and relation, as much as a poet, who should make the anger of that hero, the subject of his narration" (19). This observation has evident implications for assessing what is involved in self-awareness: for on this view, I would stand in relation to my own life much as a biographer stands to his or her subject – assembling various elements and connecting them, through imaginative synthesis or even novelistic illusion, into a coherent whole. The tendency to regard the self as a narrative construction is often latent in Hume, informing for instance the character-analysis at the end of his brief autobiography ("My Own Life" 356). It connects him with modern definitions of the self in terms of narrative derived from philosophers as diverse in their approaches as Daniel Dennett and Paul Ricoeur. According to one such definition, self-identity "is *the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*" (quoted in Bode 14, n.5; cf. Bode 13).

The logic of this solution points us to a reason why Hazlitt, confronted by a similar dilemma regarding the imagination, turns aside from scepticism about personal identity to embrace, in his later work, the task of the biographer and autobiographer, roles he habitually combines. Thus Hazlitt analyses *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, or presents *The Spirit of the Age* as a galaxy of characters conspicuously observed from a partisan standpoint. In one barbed portrayal of a Coleridge-like character who lacks "life and spirit," Hazlitt writes: "The first impression he gives you of him answers nearly to the feeling he has of his personal identity" (here is another reflection of the doctrine of association, as first outlined by Hume: other people's emotions provoke a technically 'sympathetic' response in us). Then comes a further extrapolation through the commentator's imagination: "and this image of himself, rising from his thoughts, and shrouding his faculties, is that which sits with him in the house, walks out with him into the street and haunts his bed-side" (Hazlitt 8:304: "On the Knowledge of Character"). It is the imagination that produces such a dismal self-image, and likewise the imagination that enables a narrative portrait of the same phenomenon: imagination as deceptive Jack o'Lanthorn, imagination as enlightening torch. To return to Hume's discussion of the imagination, "No wonder a principle so inconstant and fallacious should lead us into errors, when implicitly follow'd (*as it must be*) in all its variations" (*Treatise* 173, S-B 266, italics added). The wandering paths of the imagination must be followed because we must narrate ourselves, because (in other words) there is a "true moral necessity" (Hazlitt 1:12) in our self-fashioning.

In conclusion, my purpose has not been to claim that Hume's *Treatise* had any notable influence on the original "metaphysical discovery" that Hazlitt made in the mid-1790s, for the chief context of that discovery was the Dissenting debate about the possible persistence of personal identity after death, a debate to which Hume was not central. As Martin and Barresi suggest ("Self-Concern") it is possible that Hazlitt's enthusiastic reading of the *Treatise* in 1798 may have been for the first time. I hope, however, to have established Hume's influence on the work in which Hazlitt presented his "discovery," the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* of 1805. Awareness of this influence in turn prompts a comparative examination of Hazlitt's theory of "natural disinterestedness" in the light of the two-pronged treatment of personal identity in Hume's *Treatise*. To juxtapose Hazlitt with Hume in this way is to see how both writers regard the imagination as at once necessary to all (moral) conduct *and* as necessarily deceptive; it is to see how Hazlitt's writing develops Hume's "loose hint" that the two aspects of the imagination – as deceptive Jack o'Lanthorn, as enlightening torch – converge in the narrative construction of personal identity.

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From the Apocalypse to Infinity: Blake's Visions of Imagination[1]

Between 1796 and 1809 Blake made a number of unsuccessful attempts to establish himself on the market as an illustrator and a painter. His failures gave rise to several remarkable texts explaining his art which are mostly fragments from his Note-Book (formerly known as The Rossetti MS) linked with the *Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* printed in 1809. The unsuccessful exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts is the most likely cause of Blake's "Public Address" (ca. 1810) connected with the *Descriptive Catalogue*. Here Blake defends his largest painting *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1809) and his aesthetics and technique. Another fragment, entitled "For the Year 1810. Additions to Blake's Catalogue of Pictures, &c.," describes one of Blake's most elaborate works, a watercolour called *The Last Judgement* (1808). This text in particular is very important as it contains Blake's reflections on "[t]he Nature of Visionary Fancy, or Imagination."[2]

In contrast to recent approaches,[3] this article examines Blake's "visions" of imagination (reflections as well as artistic representations) in relation to Deleuze's interpretation of Plato's distinctions between "Essence-Appearance" and "Original-Copy" (Deleuze, "Logic" 299). These distinctions are not based on the criteria of resemblance or *mimesis* but of hierarchy, legitimacy and power. In *The Logic of Sense* and other works, Deleuze contrasts Plato's notions of original and copy with the Nietzschean view of power as "affirmation" of chance, heterogeneity and diversity. In this framework, the affinities of Blake's reflections and art with Nietzsche's notion of the "will to power" (Nietzsche 619) are explored. Simultaneously, Blake's concepts of time and of its specific apocalyptic dimension are discussed in the context of Deleuze's philosophy of time.

At first glance, Blake's notion of imagination is related to Plato's metaphysics and to Christian understanding of the Bible as the book containing "All that Exists" (*CW* 604). However, Blake's "Eternal Vision or Imagination" (*CW* 604) cannot be identified with Plato's Ideas or with the Christian or Hebrew God. The "Eternity" (*CW* 605) of imagination does not consist of a capacity to represent eternal, unchangeable Essences but of "the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images" (*CW* 605). Claiming that imagination is "a Representation of what Eternally Exists, Really & Unchangeably" (*CW* 604), Blake does not emphasize the difference between the original and the copy, rather he suggests that imagination can erase the difference between presentation (that is, "what Eternally Exists, Really and Unchangeably") and representation (i.e., the activity of imagination), eternity and temporality. In contrast to mere fiction ("Fable", *CW* 604) or allegory which always represent something else (features

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2 William Blake, *Complete Writings* (subsequently referred to as *CW*), 604.

3 Cf., e.g., Baulch, Broglio, Eaves, Larissy, Makdisi, Richey, Viscomi, Williams.