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Pre-Romantic Concepts of Imagination

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The story of imagination needs to be told, we need to recall what imagination was then in order to understand imagination now.

—Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern* (1998, p. 6)

Abstract

The starting point of the history of imagination in poetry can be traced in the early attempts to define poetry, as in Aristotle's *Poetics*. My investigation in the concept of imagination shows that while there are numerous comprehensive studies that provide a chronological survey of the idea of imagination as it appears in various fields, little has been done to examine the conceptual history of imagination in poetry. This article aims to explore the main developmental trends of the concept of imagination in poetry before its glorification during the Romantic period. I have structured these concepts according to the features that have appeared significant in the evolution of the concept of imagination from an imitating faculty to the creative imagination in artistic creation and poetry. While this article presents a critical review of the available literature in the studies of imagination in poetry, it also conveys the gaps and inadequacies in some of the most significant developments in the concept of imagination.

[**Keywords:** imagination, conceptual history, poetry, creative imagination, image, literature, Romantic]

Introduction

Referring to the quotation above, the present article is based on an overall project that traces the story of poetic imagination following Kearney's maxim: to recall what poetic imagination was in order to understand poetic imagination now. The story of poetic imagination is tied to the story of imagination in philosophy and psychology especially in the early periods. The story commences with concepts of imagination in philosophy and in the early attempts to define poetry, as in Aristotle's *Poetics*. My investigation in the concept of imagination shows that while there are numerous comprehensive studies that provide a chronological survey of the idea of imagination as it appears in various fields, little has been done to examine the conceptual history of imagination in poetry. This article aims to explore the main developmental trends of the concept of imagination in poetry before its glorification during the Romantic period. The conceptual survey reveals that imagination was initially examined by philosophers, including some minor and sometimes argumentative references to poetry. Later the concept of imagination was investigated in the studies related to arts and artistic creation. This occurred at a time when creative dimensions of imagination began to receive greater recognition. In a comprehensive chronological survey of imagination across various fields, Engell (1981)

tells us the idea of imagination in its general sense was actually the creation of the 18th century. Studies of imagination in poetry were simultaneously developed with examining this concept in the arts. Therefore, in order to collect and examine major features of poetic imagination within the realm of poetry, I was required to investigate the main characteristics of imagination in arts, philosophy and early psychology. I have organized these concepts according to the features that appeared significant in the evolution of the concept of imagination primarily in relation to poetry. While this article presents a critical review of the available literature in the studies of poetic imagination, it also conveys the gaps and inadequacies in some of the most significant developmental trends of the concept of poetic imagination. I will first provide an account of imagination in its early conceptualization – before the late 16th century – to contextualize the concepts that I have reviewed and drawn as ‘pre-Romantic concepts’.

Imitation was an essential component of imagination particularly before its creative dimensions were explored and poeticized during the Renaissance. In the classical world, imagination was given an intermediary role between perception (senses) and thinking (thought), in relation to the soul, perception and memory. In one of the early references to imagination, Aristotle’s *De Anima (On the Soul, 350 B.C.E)*, the imagination was considered as part of common sense (*sensus communis*) – the belief in the sensory nature of imagination implies that imagination judges the perceptual traces and interprets these traces in various ways. By ascribing the functions of interpreting or judging to imagination, Aristotle, in fact, decreased the imitative attributes of imagination and prepared the groundwork for exploration of the role of imagination in appreciation and criticism of the arts and literature and also its creative potentiality.

Relating imagination to the soul was discussed in Neoplatonists’ emanationist theory in which imagination was a dimension of the soul and one of its capacities along with desire, perceiving and thinking. Crediting imagination with an implicit sense of abstraction in assigning its relationship with the soul released imagination from the confinements of the mere imitative nature. Imagination helps us to perceive persons, things and scenes. In this way, imagination mediates consciousness to the objects so that it can recognize the mental images (mental realities) from the sensory images (sensory realities) of the objects. The sensory reality can be seen with our ‘outward eye’, the sense experiences. Mental reality consists of the impressions of the sense experience and can be observed with our ‘inward eye’. These are the reproductive images of the mind’s eye (St. Augustine’s notes). The discovery of reproductive images in the mind foreshadows, I presume, the sighting of the probable existence of productive images created by imagination in the late Renaissance.

In the early concepts of imagination before the late 16th century, there was also a vague reference to imagination in relation to passion and emotion in poetry as in Longinus’ *On the Sublime* (c. 3rd AD). Longinus applied the term ‘image’ or ‘imagination’ to every idea of the mind, in whatever forms it presents itself. Imagination was used predominantly for the passages inspired by strong enthusiasm seeking “to stir the passions and the emotions”. Before the late Renaissance, imagination had not yet been recognized in relation to poetry; however, the imagination was related to sensory

experiences, judging power, notions of soul, memory, emotions and passions. Associating imagination with soul, and emotions suggests the subjective elements inherent in the power of imagination (Zalipour, 2008).

By the term ‘pre-Romantic’ in this article, I refer to the concepts of imagination in poetry from the late 16th century up to the Romantic period when it was studied within the domain of poetry. Pre-Romantic concepts can be called a turning point in the conceptual history of imagination in poetry, as they encompassed a transformation of the early notions of imagination when becoming a popular and dominant subject of literature and poetry in the 17th century. I have charted them by the following landmarks:

- Late Renaissance – when the creative act of writing a poem was termed as ‘imagination’.
- The Hobbes’ legacy – the distinction and appreciation of the role of imagination in literature and poetry.
- The Enlightenment period – when imagination was studied as ‘creative imagination’ in artistic creation and poetry.
- The 19th century – prior to the Romantic period when the creative dimensions of imagination began to be studied.

Pre-Romantic concepts also display the increasing interests of the major figures of the Enlightenment period in their understanding of the nature of imagination. The change in treating concepts of imagination started with Hobbes in the early 17th century. By the mid-18th century (the mid Enlightenment period) a new literary premium was put on imagination when it was studied in relation to appreciation and criticism of arts and literature. Critics and poets were rapidly becoming confident that imagination alone permits the greatest poetry.

The early concepts of imagination became more distinct and developed in the course of time; such concepts show a growth of *imagination* from a notion in philosophy to *creative imagination* in the arts and literature. These developmental trends prepared the ground for a full recognition of the creative power of imagination in poetry as *poetic imagination* later in the Romantic period. From the late 16th century onwards, imagination was recognized as a faculty having levels of power and creativity. Imagination was considered as the judgment of taste and source of genius in appreciation of art and literature. It was also examined with the concepts of memory, fancy, soul, emotions and passions, and libido. A momentous progress in the development of imagination was the exploration of a distinction between reproductive and productive powers of imagination that I consider as the threshold of studying imagination in literature and poetry. The summary of the concepts and the diagram below demonstrate the developmental trends of imagination, and particularly the aim of this article to conceptualize pre-Romantic concepts of imagination in poetry:

- The early notions of imagination: this refers to the concepts mainly discussed by philosophers before the late Renaissance.

- The creative act as ‘imagination’: this refers to labeling the poet’s ability to write poetry as ‘imagination’ in the late Renaissance period.
- The role of imagination in literature and poetry: this refers to Hobbes’ legacy as the origin of an interest in the role of imagination in literature and poetry in the seventeenth century.
- The birth of the term ‘creative imagination’ in the process of poetry writing: the phrase ‘creative imagination’ appeared as early as the 1730s.
- The theories of imagination in poetry offered in the Romantic period: this refers to the nineteenth century concepts of creative imagination in poetry and literature. The Romantics developed the creative concept of imagination to ‘poetic imagination’.
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Pre-Romantic Concepts		
From the late 16 th c. to the early 17 th c.	From the early 17 th c. to the early 18 th c.	From the early 18 th c. to the Romantic period
<i>The creative act as imagination</i>	<i>The role of imagination in poetry and literature</i>	<i>Creative imagination</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagination as memory • Imagination as a distinction between reproductive and productive creations • Imagination as fancy • Imagination as a reflection of the soul • Imagination as an actuator/creator of passions and emotions • Imagination as the source of genius 		

Imagination as Memory

Imagination and memory are essentially similar mental processes where their content consists of sensory images – referring to the act of reviving or calling to mind the images that are received from the senses. Later, Hobbes referred to memory as a simple kind of imagination or fancy. In “Chapter II: Of Imagination” in *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes tells us that a body in motion moves forever, and this is why we sense objects even after the external object is removed from our immediate presence. But over a period of time the sense impression decays, and it becomes more obscure through interference from other sense impressions – the content of the mind are the fading relics of sense impressions. Thus the mental phenomena are created by snapshots of the external world. Hobbes defines imagination as “nothing but *decaying sense*” which resembles memory:

This decaying sense, when we would express the thing itself ..., we call imagination, but when we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called memory. So that imagination and memory are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath diverse names.

The difference between imagination and memory lies in the use of the sense of ‘decaying’. In memory we would use decaying to signify the sense of fading of the contents of the past.

In the process of recalling from the past or from stored mental images, the sequence and order of time and place of occurrence of the images must be taken into account. The sequence of time and place is significant in distinguishing memory from the imagining process with the recent being linked to the senses and the distant to memory, but was not attended to till the development of imagination in modern psychology in the 17th and 18th century (when the notion of sequence of images in the literary creation was studied). When images recur in the same order of time and place as in the original sense experience, it is called memory. Imagination comes when the order of images of the objects of sense is different from the recurrence of original sense experience of the same images (Abrams, 1953, 161).

Imagination as a Distinction between Reproductive and Productive Creation

A momentous progress in development of the imagination was the exploration of a distinction between reproductive and productive powers of imagination, which was essential to understanding of function of imagination in artistic creation. The terminology of 'reproductive' and 'productive' imagination was Kant's construction. The principle of the reproductive imagination is the "association of ideas" where it presupposes the impressions of "appearance" already being given through sensibility and making it wholly empirical (Kant, 1787, p. 144). This means that in reproductive imagination the associated items (ideas and images) connect conditionally and refer directly to sensory experience. The "appearance" (the phenomenon) is the object as considered within our cognition, produced by our sensory experiences. Imagination is reproductive if it gives us something to see, and provides us with a mental image of an object that we have initially perceived with our eyes. On the other hand, imagination is not solely restricted to the reproduction of visual perceptions. Productive imagination is distinct from reproductive imagination in not being subject to empirical associations. Productive imagination includes the combination of sensory input and background beliefs, memories, and expectations in the unified process of construction and complex abilities. It aims at nothing except the necessary unity in the "synthesis" of appearance's diversity and making it the "transcendental function of Imagination" (Kant, 1787, p. 145-56). This characteristic reminds us of indirect sensory contact with reality, while reproductive power of imagination is based on direct sensory contact with reality. Whereas the reproductive imagination uses images "to give a pattern to experience", productive imagination "creates a schema that do not exist in nature" (Engell, 1981, p. 131). Kant's distinction between reproductive and productive imagination highlights the ability of imagination to go beyond what is seen by means of images and also the role of imagination as a middle term in perceptual experience.

Before the distinction was originally termed and defined as reproductive and productive imagination by Kant, it had sometimes been characterized in relation to the 'passive' and 'active' powers of mind by Hobbes and Locke and many other thinkers who believed that the mind is both passive and active. From the concept of passive and active mind, the concept of reproductive and productive imagination appeared in its primordial

form as a distinction between memory and imagination. This is what Hobbes earlier referred to as two levels of imagination: imagination as memory and as a compounded imagination (the latter was associated with artistic creation). Generally Hobbes discusses imagination as “a rich faculty that is responsible for everything that goes on in the mind” (Engell, 1981, p. 13). Imagination as memory is responsible for perceptions and ideas as well as for our “‘experience’ and picture of reality;” compounded imagination works “on a ‘higher’ level; it produces new pictures and ideas; it fashions new experiences; it adorns and creates; it is the force behind art” (Thrope, 1940, p. 294). ‘Higher level’ here refers to the creative and artistic side of imagination.

The developments in the concept of imagination have implications on the notion of imagination used as a tool for appreciation and criticism in the artistic creation. This capacity of imagination can initially be understood in the link between imagination with notion of pleasure. Feeling of pleasure and displeasure had been a basic principle in the judgment of taste in aesthetics. The embodiment of a distinction between productive and reproductive imagination had been simply termed as the two “pleasures of imagination” by Joseph Addison even before Kant. “The pleasures of imagination” were discussed in a series of papers which appeared in Addison’s *Spectator* (the 1740s). Engell in chapter four of *Creative Imagination* (1981, p. 33) – “The Creative Impulse” – explains the importance of Addison’s papers and studies in the revitalization of the term ‘imagination’ to form a comprehensive idea which connected it directly to poetry and the arts. Addison’s two pleasures of imagination were termed ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’. Though these terms were not identical to Kant’s reproductive and productive imagination, they generally referred to two activities of imagination beyond passive responses of the mind to senses.

For Addison, the primary pleasure of imagination deals with forming mental copies, especially visual images of objects in their presence, while the secondary pleasure of imagination is to produce ideas or images when the objects are not before the eyes but may be called up from memories or may be formed into “agreeable visions” of absent or fictitious things (Preminger, 1965, p. 372). Addison says imagination “has something in it like creation; it bestows a kind of existence, and draws up to the reader’s view several objects which are not to be found in being. It makes additions to nature ...” Hence the secondary pleasure of imagination is connected closely to the creative power of art and literature, to taste and appreciation and as a complement to nature. Addison’s papers were important in shaping an interest in imagination in relation to the creative act, appreciation of art, literature and poetry. This attitude was expressed in the studies of imagination as ‘a literary value’ in the late 17th century (Engell, 1981, pp. 32-35).

Imagination as Fancy

The etymology of the word ‘fancy’ connects it to ‘fantasy’ in the 15th century (*Etymology Dictionary*), which resembles the sense of fancy as we use it today and makes it synonymous with ‘imagination’ and ‘to imagine’ (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). My study shows that there was a tendency among the thinkers and writers during the Enlightenment period to take fancy synonymously with imagination. This happened

especially at the early stages while there were also writers who simply ignored the imagination/fancy distinction or made minor references to it.

If we want to characterize fancy along with imagination, we should start from the time imagination emerged as an essential element in artistic creation, that is, from Hobbes' studies. He took imagination and fancy as synonyms and defined it as: "this decaying sense... (I mean fancy itself), we call imagination" (Hobbes, 1651). Both imagination and fancy have been described as a "decaying sense" which reminds us of memory.

Addison's notion of fancy and imagination hints at a similar thing, and associated it with a kind of writing wherein the poet chooses the characters and actions that have no existence, "such are fairies, witches, magicians, demons, and departed spirits" (Addison, 1712). He explained that the poet's aim here is to entertain the reader's imagination. He evaluated that this kind of writing (which has been called "*fairy way of writing*" by Dryden) and is more difficult than any others because it depends on "the poet's fancy". The reason, Addison offers, is that the poet "has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own invention". In his elaboration on the features of this kind of writing we find that he does not make any distinctions between fancy and imagination: "There is a very odd turn of thought required for this kind of writing, and it is impossible for a poet to succeed in it, who has not a particular cast of fancy, and an imagination naturally fruitful and superstitious". For Addison fancy and imagination were equal, linking them with superstitions, legends, fables, romances, and the like.

As mentioned earlier, fancy is commonly associated with supernatural creatures and phenomena. We understand these phenomena from our general understanding of the world or because their elements exist in nature. An element of creativity which exists in fancy cannot be ignored though it may hint to an artificial sense. Like fancy's association with supernatural and superstition as we saw in Addison's observation, Kant's notion of fancy also highlights the unruly feature of fancy. In Kant's famous distinction between reproductive and productive imagination, fancy is a stage in the productive imagination. Kant divided productive imagination into two stages in relation to the role of will in imagination. One is "a willfully productive capacity" and the other is not connected to "the willed purpose". Kant called the unwilled stage as fancy. He defined "the willed imagination" (Kant's term) as one that can "exercise the activity of imagination with discretion, let images well up and disappear, and shape them according to one's desire" (Engell, 1981, pp. 135-136). In fancy there is no control and power over images in the way they appear and are altered. This means that imagination uses the made materials at this stage of productive imagination, and the imaginer (poet) cannot make changes according to his likes or dislikes.

Imagination as a Reflection of the Soul

The connection between imagination and soul sounds very intricate. Initially this connection was based on religious and theological doctrines, but later imagination was

regarded as a reflection of the soul in the realm of arts and literature – in relating the exposure of the soul to elements of sublime and beauty and also in considering the soul of the artist in an artistic creation. On the other hand, there has also been a theological notion regarding imagination and soul, which discarded imagination from the soul due to the shortcomings theology ascribed to the imaginative faculty. I will first explain the theological sense of imagination in relation to the soul and later deal with its artistic sense.

Descartes' 'theory of innate ideas' in the 17th century considered imagination primarily as "a faculty of lower soul". According to this theory, there are ideas in our mind which are "unimaginable [and] could not have entered by means of sense or imagination" (Bond, 1937, p. 250). From the viewpoint of the theory of innate ideas, imagination acquaints us with the "outward shows of things" and is utterly unable to help toward "a knowledge of God or the soul" (Bond, 1937, pp. 250-252). Disparaging imagination as a part of man's lower soul was totally opposite to the Neoplatonists' treatment of imagination in the early concepts in which imagination can take the soul to God. However, later imagination was treated on a different plane and it was the time when the role of imagination in poetry was recognized (e.g. in the works of Hobbes and his contemporaries).

Therefore, the idea of imagination in the 18th century became associated with the notion of pleasure, which brought a new dimension to the relationship between imagination and soul. Addison explains this in saying that the "pleasures of the imagination" arose from the "sight of what is *great, uncommon, or beautiful*". Everything that embodies one of these three elements "raises a pleasure in the imagination, because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed". Addison's statement on the pleasures of imagination suggests an intimate connection between soul and imagination. When an element of beauty fills soul with revelation and enthrallment, imagination is also filled with pleasure which shows imagination depends on and is influenced by the soul in its functioning. Addison further explained the way element of beauty affects the soul and the way consequent satisfaction is felt through imagination: "there is nothing that makes its way more directly to the soul than *beauty*, which immediately diffuses a secret satisfaction and complacency through the imagination." This means that imagination allows us to feel the reflections of our soul when exposed to elements of splendor (beauty), in-ordinariness (un-commonality) and the sublime (greatness). In other words, we feel our soul and its musings and deliberations through our imagination. Here imagination plays the role of a mediator.

Later the soul was connected to artistic creation through imagination. Interestingly the stimulants of pleasures (beauty, greatness and un-commonality) became closely attached to the artistic creation. Sulzer in *General Theory of the Fine Arts* (1792-1799) focused on the place of imagination in the arts, especially poetry, and considered it as "the superior gift of the artist", and "the mother of fine arts". He asserts that "only in the soul of the artist does imagination work with pre-eminent liveliness and elastic power" (Engell, 1981, p. 104). From this idea I infer two points in reference with the

relation between imagination and soul: (a) It is evident that imagination has been considered as an indispensable part of the soul of the artist; (b) There is an implication that imagination is able to create works of art from the soul of the artist. In this way imagination changes ideas, feelings, images, and impressions into identifiable works of art, which represents or symbolizes experience.

Imagination as an Actuator/Creator of Passions and Emotions

Many scholars have referred to the interconnection between passions and emotion with imagination but with relevance to the imagination of audience and not that of the poet or the artist. It was Hume who attempted to theorize the relation between passions and imagination in his 'Dissertation on the Passions' (1757). To understand this relation we need to grasp first 'impressions' and 'ideas' in Hume's philosophy: imagination is synonymous with mind. Impression and ideas (these are both images) are in mind or imagination. Impressions are those stimuli we receive directly from the outside world through our senses and are commonly called sense impressions. Ideas are the mind's later reproduction of sense impressions. These ideas may or may not be identical to the original impression. Obviously, in reproducing impressions as ideas, the association of ideas works according to the laws of association. In addition, the imagination also works to change, reverse, twist the sequence, divide, or fuse the impressions. Therefore, impressions and ideas are influenced by associations plus imagination itself. Hume discovered a richer contribution of imagination in this process and argued that imagination also fuses, intermingles and combines passions with ideas and thus produced a richer arrangement (Engell, 1981, pp. 52-53). Passions refer to an admixture of feeling, sensation, passion, and the like which may be classified as 'emotions' in Hume's terminology. These are themselves impressions that may put forth greater impact or intensity than ideas. In Hume's view, emotions are 'secondary impressions'. Association of ideas is thrown "open to emotions and feelings as well as to images and ideas" (Engell, 1981, p. 67). This means that association of ideas works according to the laws of association for emotions and feelings as well as images and ideas in a similar way.

It is interesting that each mind has a store of a unique and huge volume of images and connects its own passions, feelings, and habits to images. In *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Hume discusses of a close connection that exists between our imagination and emotions in which imagination is a faculty of producing images or representation and is always accompanied by "emotional states". Emotional states include feelings, passions, desires, aversions, and the like. These are also impressions. These secondary impressions are different from the impressions we get from the senses. They can be strengthened, excited and elevated. To do this, emotions seek to produce related images, and this is the central account of how imagination in the artistic creation operates (Warnock, 1976, pp. 39-40).

Role of imagination as an actuator of passions and a creator of artistic creation should be highlighted here. In the process of reproducing ideas from impressions (sense impressions), imagination initially combines passions (an emotional state) with ideas and

produce a richer arrangement. When the impressions are secondary, emotional states, the ideas produced themselves are rich and subjective to the creator/producer. At this point, imagination combines passions with these ideas. Therefore, imagination comes up with a richer and more creative arrangement compared with its initial occurrence. This is a stage where imagination manifests its creative dimensions in the artistic process. In this way, the role of imagination as an actuator is elevated to the role of a creator.

Imagination as the Source of Genius

The idea of genius has its roots in the ancient idea of the divine inspiration and enthusiasm. In classical speculation on art, the inspired genius was said to be “filled with god,” and because he utters divine words, is able to give “birth to beauty” (Bertocci, 2003, p. 577). In modern times, the genius is ordinarily regarded as a man endowed with a distinct productive or creative imagination. The Enlightenment period focused on imagination as the source of creative power in the artistic creation. The associationist school of thought during the Enlightenment period contributed psychological discoveries to what constitutes genius and creativity in art. One major contribution was the emphasis on genius as the power of imagination (Engell, 1981, p. 65). Blankenburg, Gang, Meiner, and Gerard were among many who discussed genius in the 18th century. Alexander Gerard, the German philosopher, used the principles of association to explain the powers of genius in the arts and sciences. My interest in his studies of imagination is particularly in artistic creation and not in scientific inventions. In *An Essay on Genius* (1774), Gerard elaborated the principle of association in a passage from *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. In fact, he moved the associationist idea of imagination to a higher plane.

Taking imagination as the source of genius, attributes the role of a designer to imagination. For Gerard (1774), imagination collects “piecemeal associations” and simultaneously makes up a “design” or plan informing the whole effort. This plan or design suggests “an organic unity that instinctively selects those ideas which will fit the finished creative work and automatically rejects others”. Each individual performs this according to the natural inclination of his own genius (Gerard, 1774, pp. 169-173). Associations are ideas and images that the mind gathers together in a pattern according to the “laws of association”. Therefore, the selection and design are different in different individuals – some designs are more creative than others. Thus the result of the whole effort as artistic creation will be more creative and innovative. We can see that this is imagination that governs the form or plan in the artistic work. Of course, the imaginative mind conceives the whole design almost at once, not merely connecting ideas like chains.

In the process of imagination operating as genius, Gerard stressed the role and functions of passion, and analyzed the way passion excites and conducts imagination. The imagination blends the thoughts and passions until they suggest each other. Feelings are not only “conjoined, but also mixed and blended so perfectly together, that none of them shall be distinctly perceivable in the compound which arises from their union” (Gerard, 1759, p. 161). Passion is an emotion that works on objects and experiences and also in the

impressions that these make according to the laws of association. Passion then transforms the ideas and images made from those impressions and unites with them.

The force of imaginative genius embodies force of passion. Gerard (1774) explained there is particularly one strong passion that holds the artistic creation together. A poet moves from image to image quickly, relating them through one strong passion. In this sense ideas and images are framed in a design or framework by feelings and then receive “a tincture from that passion”; passion was defined by Gerard as the entire emotional side of the psyche or “sensitivity of heart” (Gerard, 1744, p. 152). It allows the poet to be closer to his subjects and plays an important role in the poet’s creative act. The poet’s talent to identify with his subjects emotionally is a factor in shaping the genius. The poet assumes the sentiments of subjects as his own and imagine and imitate not merely describe the real nature and character of his subjects’ feelings. Gerard pointed out that this identification is difficult, indeed, and “the best poets cannot always perfectly attain it” (Gerard, 1774, p. 150). He defined genius as the ability to produce original works of art.

Conclusion

This article demonstrated how the notion of *imagination* has been associated to various concepts in different stages of its development to *creative imagination* before its glorification during the Romantic period. The early concepts illustrated that the early notions of imagination were mainly associated with sensory and imitative images. In the early periods, imagination was studied neither as creative nor as poetic. In fact, it was a philosophical concept rather than an attribute or association to poetry. This article demonstrated the ways the imagination was identified with many concepts and ideas from the later 16th century, and conceptualized them as pre-Romantic concepts. My conceptual review showed that the idea of imagination was explored to be present and inherent in various phenomena, while it had not yet been examined and conceptualized in specification to its creative power in poetry. The exploration of “imagination as the creative act” in writing poetry within the pre-Romantic stage inaugurated a period of evolution of imagination in relation to poetry. Then various roles of imagination were identified and acknowledged in literature and poetry. This was followed by defining creative imagination that paved the way for the Romantics to discuss creative imagination in poetry as poetic imagination.

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