THE IMAGINARY, A PRODUCT OF FANTASY AND IMAGINATION. CLARIFICATIONS ON THE FANTASY/IMAGINATION DICHOTOMY[1]

Motto: *"GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole".*
(Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. II, 1907)

Abstract: *The present paper aims to explain the difference between fantasy and imagination by analyzing the concept of the imaginary in its multiple facets studied by philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and historians from Antiquity to the 21st century. On the one hand, I will be analyzing how fantasy, "imagination's elder sister" in Leigh Hunt's opinion, was regarded as a faculty which is superior and spontaneous, artistic and aesthetic, creative and intuitive. On the other hand, I will be focusing on how mere memory, namely imagination, which Charles Baudelaire labeled as "the queen of faculties and truths", was regarded as a faculty which is inferior and active, artistic and intellectual, creative and reproductive. In time, imagination replaced fantasy, to eventually, during Romanticism and Modernism, signify the ability to create, invent, imagine, project mental images in the realm of dream and the fantastic.*
Key words: *imaginary, fantasy, imagination, difference.*

1. Introduction

As long as the airy vision and the fantastic define both the products of fantasy and those of imagination, it is fitting to clarify the two terms which have long been considered synonymous.

Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française explains the term *fantasy* as:

> [...] L'Imagination, la faculté imaginative de l'homme. [...] Esprit, pensée, idée. [...] Humeur, envie, désir, volonté. [....] Opinion, désir, sentiment, goût. [...] Caprice, boutade, bizzarrerie. [...] en termes de Peinture et de Musique, Des ouvrages où l'on suit plutôt les caprices de son imagination que les règles de l'art [...] (***, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, I, 1835: 731).

The same Dictionary defines, in its second volume, *imagination* as:

> Faculté d'imaginer, de se représenter quelque chose dans l'esprit. [...] en Littérature et dans les Beaux-Arts, de La faculté d'inventer, de concevoir, jointe au talent de rendre vivement ses conceptions. [...] Des ouvrages dont l'auteur a fait preuve d'imagination. [...] Pensée, conception. [...] Il se dit en outre de La croyance, de l'opinion qu'on a de quelque chose sans beaucoup de fondement. [...] Fantasie bizarre, idée folle et extravagante (*Ibidem*, II, 1835: 6).

In *Dictionnaire de la langue française* edited by Émile Littré, *fantasy* is defined as:

> Ancien synonyme d'imagination. [...] Volonté passagère. [...]. Goût particulier. [...]. Terme de peinture. Ouvrage où l'on a suivi son caprice et son imagination en

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> s'affranchissant des règles. [...] Terme de musique. Réunion d'airs pris selon le caprice du compositeur, et liés entre eux par des transitions ou ritournelles » (*Dictionnaire de la langue française* [1863-1872]).

The same Émile Littré defines *imagination* as:

> Faculté que nous avons de nous rappeler vivement et de voir en quelque sorte les objets que ne sont plus sous nos yeux. [...]. Particulièrement, en littérature et dans les beaux-arts, faculté d'inventer, de concevoir, jointe au talent de rendre vivement les conceptions. [...]. Résultat de la faculté d'imaginer, chose imaginée (*Ibidem*).

Norbert Sillamy states in his *Dictionnaire de psychologie* that *fantasy* and *imagination* are two separate fields in psychology: on the one hand, *fantasy* unconsciously renders the impulse in the sphere of the imaginary and thus simbolically validates through the production of images, and, on the other hand, *imagination*, as a faculty, renders absent objects and mental images and by succesively combining the images, gives birth to reveries, dreams, raptures.

Dictionarul de termeni literari defines the term *fantasy* [(fr. *fantaisie*, lat. gr. *phantasia* (φαντασία)] as: „[...] the creative imagination, the faculty of creating freely, of producing images which may or may not correspond to reality; the action of fantasizing, or inventing with one's mind, of fabricating, of imagining [...]" (Săndulescu, 1976: 171, our translation Ancuța Gurban-Dinu). Throughout various literary movements, *fantasy* will develop along different stages: Classicism will reject it, the Enlightenment will see it as a chimaera, Romanticism will see it as a literary principle, Realism and Naturalism will interpret it as a secondary element, Modernism will discover its true meaning, that of the esthetic creation of an image, a meaning that will impose itself from this moment on to the following literary movements: Expressionism, Surrealism, Abstractionism, etc. The same Dictionary defines *imagination* (fr. *imagination*, lat. lit. *imaginatio*) as:

> [...] the faculty of the human spirit of representing the images of objects it has once been aware of, of forming images of the objects it has not perceived or of creating new combinations of these images, of creating spontaneously, of impovising, of fantasizing, of inventing, outside the contents of a direct experience and even outside reality and logical connections (our translation) (*Ibidem*: 207-208, our translation A. G.-D.).

Imagination is the forger of the entire imaginary universe: subject, plot, characters, etc. Because it has the ability of recreating and animating this fictious world, it is often mistaken for talent, creative genius. In time, imagination will replace fantasy, attaining in the Reinassance the power of the artist to create a universe comparable to or similar with the real one, and in Romanticism and Modernism the capacity of creation, invention, planning, projection of visions if the field of the dream and the fantastic.

2. Clarifications of the fantasy/imagination dichotomy

2. 1. From Antiquity to Symbolism. In order to precisely define imagination, we start from Aristotle, who, in his *Poetica*, enphasizes that the function which literature accomplishes is that of presenting facts which can occur. In other words, for him literature represents a product of the imagination, imagination which is mobile, as we have already seen, within the limits of „verisimilitude and the necessary" (Aristotel, 1965: 64-65, our translation A. G.-D.). By „verisimilitude" he understands the possible, the plausible, the truthful, something that can happen in reality, and by „necessary" - the relation of causality. However, Aristotle will enlarge the sphere of versimilitude by accepting a third meaning, the believable: „Rather than possible events which are

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difficult to believe in, one must prefer impossible events but which are presented as truthful" (Aristotel, 1965: 90, our translation A. G.-D.). Aristotle states that the subjects of actions, the happening of facts, the intrigue, the adventures, the upheavals which the litarary characters participate in as well as the outlines of their characters must take place within the limits of verisimilitude and the necessary, thus within the limits of imagination.

In his *Scienza nuova*, Giambattista Vico shows the fact that both memory and imagination are only mental processes which belong to the mind, but they are only to be found within the body from which they extract the strength they need. Vico analyses memory as remembrance, imagination and creative spirit: „[…] it is memory because it remembers things; it is imagination because it changes and falsifies; it is creative spirit because it changes and organizes them according to harmony" (Vico, 1972: 428, our translation A. G.-D.).

In *Éléments de Littérature*, Jean-François Marmontel sees imagination as simple memory, and when imagination is creative, it is due to genius:

> […] faculté de l'ame qui rend les objets présents à la pensée ; elle suppose dans l'entendement une appréhension vive et forte, et la facilité la plus prompte à reproduire ce qu'il a reçu. Quand l'*imagination* ne fait que retracer les objets qui ont frappé les sens, elle ne differe de la mémorie que par la vivacité des couleurs. Quand de l'assemblage des traits que la mémoire a recueillis, l'*imagination* compose elle-même des tableaux dont l'ensemble n'a point de modèle dans la nature, elle devient créatrice ; et c'est alors qu'elle appartient au génie (Marmontel, III, 1825: 125).

Joseph Joubert, in the first volume of *Les Carnets de Joseph Joubert*, considers that imagination is a faculty and fantasy is a capacity: « L'imagination est éminemment la faculté de revêtir de corps et de figure ce qui n'en a pas. L'imagination est peintre. Elle peint dans notre âme et au dehors à l'âme des autres. Elle rêvet d'images » (Joubert, I, 1938: 282) or, as he well says in *Pensées*: « L'imagination est l'œil de l'âme » (Idem, I, 1861 : 158). In the second volume, he gives us clearly the definition of imagination: « J'appelle imagination la faculté de render sensibile tout ce qui est intellectual, d'incorpporer ce qui est esprit, et en un mot, de mettre au jour sans le dénaturer ce qui este de soi-même invisible » (Joubert, II, 1938: 493).

Towards the end of the 18th century, William Blake no longer sees imagination only as an artistic faculty, but it assigns to it a higher position thus becoming a mental faculty at both an immanent and a trascendant level. Vision or imagination is closely related to inspiration, outside the realm of memory, being a representation of what exists eternally, realistically and immutably. In one phrase, man signifies imagination, and "[...] Imagination is Eternity" (Blake, 1982: 270) and the sole power which can turn a person into a poet.

In *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, J. P. F. Richter makes a distinction, like Schelling, later also adopted by Schlegel, between imagination, an inferior faculty and a strong memory, and fantasy, a superior faculty which merges all the parts into one whole:

> Einbildungkraft ist die Prose der Bildungkraft oder Phantasie. Sie ist nichts als eine potenzierte hellfarbigere Erinnerung, welche auch die Tierre haben, weil sie träumen und weil sie fürchten. […] Aber etwas Höheres ist die Phantasie oder Bildungkraft, sie ist die Welt […]. Die Phantasie macht alle Teile zu Ganzen – statt daß die übrigen Kräfte und die Erfahrung aus dem Naturbuche nur Blätter reißen – und alle Weltteile zu Welten, sie totalisiert alles, auch das unendliche All […] (Richter, 1990: 47).

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In *Vorlesungen über schöne Litteratur und Kunst*, A. W. Schlegel emphasizes the fact that the genius has all the intrinsic faculties of the human spirit: imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), intellect (*Verstand*), fantasy (*Fantasie*) and reason (*Vernunft*)[1]. In the second volume, Schlegel creates a distinction between imagination and fantasy, considerind the latter as a superior faculty, associated with reason: „Mann muß nur wissen, daß die Fantasie, wodurch uns erst die Welt entsteht, und die wodurch Kunstwerke gebildet werden, dieselbe Kraft ist, nur in verschiedenen Wirkungsarten" (Schlegel, II, 1884: 84). This is exactly Schelling's disctinction between primary and secondary imagination, upon which Coleridge has relied very heavily.

William Wordsworth, in his „Preface" from 1798 to the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, specifies that imagination and fantasy, followed by invention, preceed the judgement which decides the faculty that must assert itself and establishes the species of composition, its genre:

> Imagination and Fancy, – to modify, to create, and to associate. […] Invention, – by which characters are composed out of materials supplied by observation; [...] And, lastly, Judgement, – to decide how and where, and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be exerted; [...]. By judgement, also, is determined what are the laws and appropiate graces of every species of composition (Wordsworth, I, 1815: IX-X).

G. W. F. Hegel, in he first volume of *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, defines imagination as an artistic and creative faculty, relating it to the ideas of genius and inspiration. He distinguishes between artistic imagination, which is creative, and the imagination which is a simple faculty of thought. Artistic imagination is on the one hand related to the power of capturing reality which through the senses of hearing and sight renders different images to the human spirit, and on the other hand, to memory, which keeps the images. Adding to this perception of outside reality, imagination implies an understanding of the human soul and all its passions.

In the first volume of *Biographia Literaria*, S. T. Coleridge defines imagination as: "[...] shaping and modifying power [...]" (Coleridge, I, 1907: 193), and fantasy as "[...] the aggregative and associative power; [...]" (*Ibidem*). Here he also emphasizes that "The FANCY is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; [...]" (*Ibidem*: 202). It merges with regular will and memory and allows itself to be modified by them. In the second volume of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge asserts that imagination:

> [...] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgement ever awake and steady self-possession, with profound or vehement enthusiasm and feeling; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, it still subordinates art to nature; […] (Coleridge, II, 1907: 12).

This idea does not actually belong to Coleridge, but to Schelling.

In *Vorlesungen über Aestetik*, K. W. F. Solger makes a distinction, like Schelling, between Phantasie (fantasy) and Einbildungskraft (imagination), emphasizing

[1] *Apud* René Wellek, *Istoria criticii literare moderne: 1750-1950* (*A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1955), vol. II (Epoca romantică), Bucureşti, Univers, 1974, p. 49.

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the fact that imagination is related to common knowledge and is only „[…] das menschliche Bewußtsein, insofern es die ursprüngliche Anschauung in dem zeitlichen Zusammenhange ins Unendliche wiederherdstellt" (Solger, 1829: 186), while the fantastic imagination resembles divine creation, where the act of creation and the created are identical.

Inspired by Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, in *Imagination and Fancy*, designates fantasy as a "[…] younger sister of Imagination" (Hunt, 1846: 29) and, at the same time, a spiritual image or appearance, while imagination is the feeling of the most subtle and impressive analogies:

> That is imagination; – the strong mind sympathizing with the strong beast, and the weak love identified with the weak dew-drop. […] That is fancy; – a combination of images not in their nature connected, or brought together by the feeling, but by the will and pleasure; and having just enough hold of analogy to betray it into the hands of its smiling subjector. […] That, again, is imagination; – analogical sympathy [...]. And that is fancy; – one image capriciously suggested by another, and but half connected with the subject of discourse (*Ibidem*: 30-31).

In his essay „Marginalia", Edgar Allan Poe emphasizes that imagination merges and selects, it does not create. Imagination, fancy, fantasy and humor all meet on the grounds of combinations and novelties:

> The *pure Imagination* chooses, from *either Beauty or Deformity*, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; the compound, as a general rule, partaking, in character of beauty or sublimity, in the ratio of the respective beauty or sublimity of the things combined – which are themselves still to be considered as atomic – […]. *** Thus, the range of Imagination is unlimited. Its materials extend throughout the universe. Even out of deformities it fabricates that *Beauty* which is at once its sole object and its inevitable test. But, in general, the richness or force of the matters combined the facility of discovering combinable novelties worth combining, and, especially, the absolute «chemical combination» of the completed mass are the particulars to be regarded in our estimate of Imagination (Poe, V, 1884: 205).

In „Imagination and Fancy", the American writer, using Coleridge as a starting point and his belief that fantasy combines and imagination creates, makes a distinction between imagination and fantasy by which he emphasizes their non-creative character:

> The fancy as nearly creates as the Imagination; and neither creates in any respect. […] We might make a distinction, of degree, between the fancy and the Imagination, in saying that the latter is the former loftily employed. But experience proves this distinction to be unsatisfactory. What we feel and know to be fancy, will be found still only fanciful, whatever be the theme which engages it (Idem, VII, 1902: 126).

The Italian reviewer Francesco de Sanctis, in a chapter entitled „La lirica di Dante" from the first volume of *Storia della letteratura italiana*, points out a dissociation between imagination and fantasy and states that the latter is superior to imagination:

> […] L'immaginazione ti dà l'ornato e il colore […]. La fanatasia è facoltà creatrice, intuitiva e spontanea […]. L'immaginazione è plastica: ti dà il disegno, ti dà la faccia […]. La fanatasia lavora al di dentro […]. L' immaginazione è analisi; […]. La fantasia è sintesi: mirra all' essentiale, e di un tratto solo ti suscita le impressioni e i sentimenti di persona viva e te ne porge l'immagine. La creatura dell'immaginazione è l' immagine finita in se stessa e opaca; la creatura della fantasia è il *fantasma* […]. L' immaginazione ha molto del meccanico; è comune alla poesia e alla prosa, a' sommi e a' mediocri; la

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> fantasia è essezialmente organica; ed è privilegio di pochissimi, che son detti Poeti. (De Sanctis, I, 1919: 74).

Charles Baudelaire, in his preface to *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, mentions that imagination « [...] la reine des facultés [...] » (Baudelaire, 1884: XI.) must not be mistaken for fantasy. It is « une faculté quasi divine qui perçoit tout d'abord, en dehors des méthodes philosophiques, les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et les analogies » (*Ibidem*).

In another study, *Salon de 1859*, Baudelaire points out that imagination is a « […] faculté cardinale […] » (Idem, II, 1868: 268) and queen of truth capable of analysis and synthesis, of teaching and rendering sensitivity, of creating and governing, in one phrase, of getting mingled with the boundless:

> Elle est l'analyse, elle est la synthèse ; […] Elle est la sensibilité […]. C'est l'imagination qui a enseigné à l'homme le sens moral de la couleur, du contour, du son et du parfum. Elle a créé, au commencement du monde, l'analogie et la métaphore. Elle décompose tout la création, et, avec les matériaux amassés et disposés suivant des règles dont on ne peut trouver l'origine que dans le plus profond de l'âme, elle créé un monde nouveau, elle produit la sensation du neuf. Comme elle a créé le monde […], il est juste qu'elle le gouverne. [...] L'imagination est la reine du vrai. (*Ibidem*: 264-265).

2. 2. From Modernism to present. In the 20th century, Théodule Ribot publishes a book entitled *Essai sur l'imagination créatrice*, where he renders a distinction between passive or reproductive imagination, which mentally creates the images of some realities, phenomena, happenings, from the present or past, but which can not be comprehended directly, and active or creative imagination (constructive), which is oriented towards all that is possible, the future and the new. At the end of his study, Ribot states that the creative imagination « […] pénètre la vie tout entière, individuelle et collective, spéculative et practique, sous toutes ses formes: elle est partout » (Ribot, 1900: 277).

As we have discovered, starting from the Antiquity and up to Croce, the two terms, fantasy and imagination, have been synonymous and have designated the same concept. Starting from the 20 century, Benedetto Croce, a follower of Giambattista Vico, is the first one, in his *Breviario di estetica*, to emphasize a difference between imagination and fantasy. By being an artistic and esthetic creation of the image, and a creative, intuitive and spontaneous faculty, fantasy invents, fantasizes, creates in the field of arts, and imagination, as a reproductive faculty and a form of memory, reproduces, combines, associates mental images.

For Carl Gustav Jung imagination and fantasy are two synonymous notions. In *Psychologische Typen*, Jung understands by fantasy both the airy vision, „[...] the emanation of the creative activity of the spirit, an action or a product of a combination of elements mentally endowed with energy" (Jung, VI, 2004: 449, our translation A. G.-D.), as well as the imaginative activity, which represents „[...] the direct expression of a vital activity of a mental nature, of psychic energy which is invested within conscience only as images or contents [...]" (Jung, VI, 2004: 455, our translation A. G.-D.).

Gaston Bachelard notes in his study, *L'Air et les Songes: essai sur l'imagination du mouvement*, that imagination is not the capacity of forming the images offered by perception, but, paradoxically, of modifying and replacing them. This very transformation of images implies the field of imagination. The center of gravity of imagination is the imaginary and not the image, as we may be tempted to believe. « Grâce à *l'imaginaire*, l'imagination est essentiellement *ouverte*, évasive. Elle est dans le

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psychisme humain l'expérience même de *l'ouverture*, l'expérience même de la *nouveauté*. Plus que toute autre puissance, elle spécifie le psychisme humain » (Bachelard, 1943: 6). In the end, the author emphasizes the fact that imagination lusts for the realities of the air and doubles every effect into a new image.

Jean Starobinski, in his study entitled *La Relation critique*, points out that imagination is to be found within perception and memory. It not only evokes reality, but it also has the capacity of moving away from it, thus giving birth to a new world. He states that literary imagination is a capacity which can not be severed from the activity of the conscience. It strains inside perception, it finds its way through the meanders of memory, giving us access to a possible universe. At the same time, it attains a power of detaching with the help of which we can represent things from distant places and we can move off from present realities. Due to its capacity of foreshadowing, it can offer us the representation of a realisable event before it actually happends. In this first manner, the imagination works together with the «function of reality» (Starobinski, 1974: 159, our translation A. G.-D.). In a second manner, however, „[...] it is fiction, game, or dream, more or less voluntary error, pure fascination" (*Ibidem*, our translation A. G.-D.), it soothes our existence, luring it inside airy visions. Thus it helps us, on the one hand, to reign over the real, and, on the other hand, to interrupt our connections with it.

We will conclude this article with Adrian Marino's perfectly valid idea, according to which „[...] the fantastic can take off only from the middle of fantasy, the only one to produce, justify and assign it as a specific esthetic product" (Marino, 1973: 657, our translation A. G.-D.). Fantasy is essentially fantastic and within the act of creation it gives birth to the fantastic.

3. Conclusion

If fantasy and imagination keep being used today as synonyms, we will designate by fantasy the capacity of creating all kinds of artistic productions, not only fantastic, and by imagination the capacity of producing and inventing, of imagining and projecting visions, within the sphere of the fantasy and the dream. This is what actually Romanticism consists of.

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