

A second major concern of 18th-century writers was the role of [imagination](https://www.britannica.com/topic/imagination). Addison’s essays were [seminal](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/seminal), but discussion of imagination remained largely confined to the associative theories of Locke and his followers until Hume gave to the imagination a fundamental role in the generation of commonsense beliefs. Kant attempted to describe the imagination as a distinctive faculty, active in the generation of scientific judgment as well as aesthetic pleasure. Between them, Hume and Kant laid the ground for the [Romantic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Romantic) writers on art: [Johann Gottfried von Herder](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johann-Gottfried-von-Herder), [Friedrich Schiller](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Friedrich-Schiller), Friedrich Schelling, and Novalis (pseudonym of Friedrich Leopold, Freiherr von Hardenberg) in Germany, and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Taylor-Coleridge) and [William Wordsworth](https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Wordsworth) in England. For such writers, imagination was to be the distinctive feature both of aesthetic activity and of all true insight into the human condition. Meanwhile, Lord Kames and Archibald Alison had each provided full accounts of the role of association in the formation and justification of critical judgment. Alison, in particular, recognized the inadequacies of the traditional Empiricist approach to imaginative association and provided a theory as to how the feelings aroused by a work of art or a scene of natural beauty may become part of its appearance—qualities of the object as much as of the subject (*Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* [1790]).

The concept of [imitation](https://www.britannica.com/art/mimesis), introduced into the discussion of art by [Plato](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Plato) and Aristotle, was fundamental to the 18th-century [philosophy of art](https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophy-of-art). Imitation is a vague term, frequently used to cover both representation and expression in the modern sense. The thesis that imitation is the common and distinguishing feature of the arts was put forward by James Harris in *Three Treatises* (1744) and subsequently made famous by Charles Batteux in a book entitled *Les Beaux Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746; “The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle”). This diffuse and ill-argued work contains the first modern attempt to give a systematic theory of art and aesthetic judgment that will show the unity of the phenomena and their common importance. “The laws of taste,” Batteux argued, “have nothing but the imitation of beautiful nature as their object”; from which it follows that the arts, which are addressed to taste, must imitate nature. The distinction between the fine and useful arts (recast by Collingwood as the distinction between art and craft) stems from Batteux.