Deconstructing Dreamscapes of Femininity

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Lolitas, in the Mist

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF TABLES

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According to C. George Boeree […] *an archetype is an unlearned tendency to experience things in a certain way* [...] *it acts as an "organizing principle" on things we see* [...] *The archetype is like a black hole in space, you only know it's there by how it draws matter and light to itself* (8).

(From the book: *The Trickster Brain: Neuroscience, Evolution, and Narrative*, 2012, by David Williams)

INTRODUCTION

THE *LOLITA* ARCHETYPE

No longer a child but not yet a woman [...] *Lolita embodies one of the most ambiguous aspects of femininity—the crucial transformation from childhood to adolescence, between the years of asexuality and the first manifestations of sexual attraction.*

This child-woman moves in a universe that adults cannot penetrate. In the words of […] Simone de Beauvoir, "The age difference re-establishes between them the distance that seems necessary to desire" […] *her erotic fascination remains predominantly and poetically,* beyond the *possibility of any physical contamination because she simply would not exist without her innocence and freshness* […] *this* […] *figure represents a danger insofar as it expresses a power of which she is aware but does not yet fully understand. Lolita* […] *The name conjures up a vivid dream* […] *Nabokov gave the world a potent verbal container for this ineffable, ephemeral energy, the same energy that imparts life to the butterfly when it emerges from the cocoon.*

(From the book: *Lolita, The Myth of Youth in Fashion,* 2017, by Giulia Pivetta)

Little Girl Lost (AKA *Lolita, in the Mist*)

The *Lolita* archetype has emerged not only from fiction, but also from film and fashion. Couched within these three kinds of imagery is the transformation of *girl into woman*. Here, the unconscious mind of her onlookers is ever-so roused at the sight of a child's burgeoning awareness of her growing seductive power. Amid the salience of physical and biological changes taking place in a girl, are strong phenomenological undertones of more private and individualized experience—experience that is all her own. The girl, who is typically between the ages of eleven and fourteen, is an human incarnation of an eternal awakening that is rather brief or evanescent in terrestrial time–-as Giulia Pivetta says, "a butterfly emerging from its cocoon", and

she is meant to be resolutely untouchable, both figuratively and literally. Indeed, she should be perceived from afar, and should exist, psychologically and socially, as both herself-and-not-herself simultaneously, as a complex eternally-coded vision amid who she currently is and whom she is becoming. This study is an attempt to (cognitively) characterize the complex nature of this "vivid dream", this child-to-woman transformation situated principally in the human imagination.

In her 2017 book, *Lolita*: *The Myth of Youth in Fashion*, fashion and style researcher, writer, and teacher Giulia Pivetta tracks the socio-cultural development of the *Lolita* archetype in the West, which spans the last seven or so decades. Some of her *Lolita* (archetype) categories include: "Hollywood Babes" of the 1900's such as Mary Pickford. She states, "Before being promoted to representatives of the Lolita archetype, these girls interpreted roles not unlike those of older actresses, in historical films, comedies, and musicals" (2017,19). She continues, " […] screenwriters had a new character to energize their scripts—the all-too-young temptress […] With…golden curls and flapper bobs, wide-open dreamy eyes…who causes nothing but trouble for men (ibid., 19)" ; "Teenyboppers" of the 1940's, whom Pivetta says, "…were the first-ever form of serial nymphets…For these girls…the bedroom became the private space par excellence, acquiring the magical significance it still has today in a girl's life (ibid., 23)". She continues, "From school to free time, teenyboppers were busy keeping up with their own fashion. Saddle shoes, short white socks and roll up jeans all conveyed a sense of untainted innocence (ibid., 24)"; "Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome" of which Pivetta states, "This was another type of French Lolita […] who chose to call attention to herself by wielding the classic charms of female seduction, including even malice […] by presenting a façade of nonchalance while mixing in a dose […] of dependency which she herself was unable to escape […] this topology was […] shaped […] by the sublime Brigitte Bardot […] a delicate, sensual child-woman…her clothes were always unmistakably sexy […] skirts with slits, undergarments poking out, garter belts left visible, bra straps slipping naughtily off her shoulder […] (ibid., 73-74)": "Downtown Girls" who Pivetta describes as, "The stars of media communication in the late 70's early 80's were the good girls of the prevailing wasp culture of affluent neighborhoods […] New faces were

needed for the new advertising narratives […] Brooke Shields who, at fifteen…lent her body (and her voice) to a controversial advertising campaign […] with her legendary provocation […'] You want to know what comes between me and my Calvins?...Nothing' (ibid., 21)". The last category "Little Girl Lost" is the *Lolita* incarnation being studied here at length. The following is Pivetta's characterization of this archetype, in other words, "[…] how it draws matter and light to itself":

> Enveloped in an aura of nostalgia, this figure seems to come from the world of fairy tales or from an idealized Victorian epoch, in which women, in the form of Arcadian shepherdesses or country aristocrats, were still granted private spaces and secret gardens. They long to take refuge in hidden places off-limits to men, who can only spy from afar the elusive objects of their desire. This enigmatic projection is blurry; the vision is immersed in a misty light that blinds and tricks the eye, a haze that protects the women and invites the viewer to abandon himself to daydreams…the entire atmosphere conveys a sense of freshness and purity. (Pivetta. 2017, 111)

For this study, this *Little Girl Lost* version of the *Lolita* archetype will be explored in detail, and will instead be referred to as *Lolita*, *in the Mist*. Chapter Three will examine this archetype as a cognitive projection that depicts basic emotional health in the form of "A Vivid Dream". Next, Chapter Four will examine the archetype as a cognitive projection that depicts annihilation through emotional torment in the form of *Lolita, in the Mist*…in Shards!

The following are *Lolita*'s unique qualities previously described; in other words, they are based primarily on Pivetta's characterization. Notice that this characterization emphasizes two levels of detail simultaneously—the one that refers to *Lolita, in the Mist* specifically (for instance, the "gardens and lakes" detail, in which she is physically off limits to boys), that has couched within it the other more general level of the archetype (for instance, when Pivetta says that *Lolita's "*erotic fascination remains predominantly and poetically, beyond the possibility of any physical contamination because she simply would not exist without her innocence and freshness [...]")

1.

She wears an "innocent sensuality"– often in shades of white, cream, and ecru, often with ribbon, tulle, ruffle, lace, embroidery and/or appliqués, undergarments, a bodice or corset, long flowing dresses/skirts full or sleek, with longer flowing hair, often held in place by ribbons, bows, and/or combs. The illustration below depicts hypothetical examples of *Lolita's* dress from the paper doll book *Little Lost Girls*. In many ways, this clothing exemplifies this *Lolita, in the Mist* archetype, as it exists, at least to some degree, in the artist Mab Graves' imagination.

Image I-1 By the artist Mab Graves, from her book *Little Lost Girls Paper Dolls* (2013). Reproduced by permission of Dover Publications.

2.

She prefers the company of other (human) females to that of boys/men, and longs to take refuge in hidden places, such as gardens and lakes, off-limits to males (where they can admire her only from afar); for she is in love with the notion of love itself, an abstraction written about in poems, stories, and fairy tales.

3.

She projects a feeling of being lost or “far away”, unreachable and untouchable while at the same time, seeming comfortable and psychologically protected in both her mystique and, if you will, the “mist-que” that is her watery light.

CHAPTER ONE

IT'S ALL IN THE HEAD: ON *THIS WORLD* AND *THE OTHERWORLD* (AKA *THE OTHER)*

The world is a construct of our sensations, perceptions, and memories.
It is convenient to regard it as existing objectively on its own.
But it certainly does not become manifest by its mere existence.

(Physicist Erwin Schrodinger. From *What is Life?*: *With Mind and Matter and Autobiographical Sketches,* 2012)

Based on Pivetta's poignant characterization of *Lolita* in general, and *Lolita, in the Mist* in particular, could it be that human consciousness flows and functions on two planes of experience simultaneously, namely one that situates us in a three-dimensional, material world, tying us to our corporeal self, and one that transcends such familiarity of time and space, simultaneously tying us to our spiritual or eternal self? And, could it be that this cocktail combination of the former and latter contains what George Boeree refers to as the "organizing principle" of a certain archetypal pattern deep in consciousness? Perhaps, this principle acts as a kind of etch-a-sketch, if you will, to allow a certain gestalt of matter and light to be drawn to itself in the mind's eye, producing a cognitive projection that is both timeless and intimately tied to the material, terrestrial present; in this case it is a *Lolita* more generally couched within a *Lolita, in the Mist* more specifically interpretation. This gestalt, which is a product of the imagination, and would, presumably, include: one, certain elements of *Lolita's* clothing, the fabrics that can be acquired and molded in the material world, showing texture, color, and skin to convey an "innocent sensuality"; two, a misty garden or lake scene, conveying an aura of freshness and purity, where *Lolita* is protected from the physical touch of boys, free to dream about love as she understands it to

be in poems, stories, and fairy tales; and three, elements of *Lolita's* face and countenance, as both uncertain of who she currently is and feeling safe, protected and "far away" in her cocoon of light, and so comfortable with her changes and welcoming of whom she is still becoming.

Indeed, The Other (AKA The Otherworld) speaks to immersion in a dreamy, transcendental mindset that also, and perhaps ironically, incorporates a corporeal foothold. In his insightful book *The Otherworld in Myth, Folklore, Cinema, and Brain Science* (2019) psychologist Jim Kline states,

> The Otherworld is a living reality that complements waking world reality. It is structured out of eternal ideas about life, time, and space, inhabited by eternal beings, and powered by an eternal, inexhaustible life force. The Otherworld usually manifests itself to individuals during times of extreme emotional states: trauma, panic, and near-death experiences […] Aspects of the Otherworld most commonly appear in certain types of dreams usually associated with REM (rapid eye movement) sleep and triggered by crucial moments in a person's life filled with anticipation, anxiety, and fear. Because of its relationship with emotionally volatile states of being, the Otherworld is a world of extremes (1).

He continues,

> When our reliance upon physical reality for security […] is threatened during times of stress and fear of death, the eternal elements of the Otherworld, linked with the archetypal reality of the human psyche, become more of a living reality. A potent example of how archetypal reality can permeate waking world reality during times when death becomes a real threat, and "a strong need" creates "a situation that satisfies it," is illustrated in the autobiographical narrative, "You Can Count on Miracles." Its young author Aphonetip Vasavong relates how, at the age of eight, he was attempting to flee with his family from their home country of Laos to Thailand in order to escape political persecution. The family left on foot in the middle of the night and struggled through jungle terrain as they made their way to a large river where a boat was waiting to take them to Thailand. Along the way, Vasavong became separated from his family and hopelessly lost. Terrified of being left behind, Vasavong wept to himself as he frantically looked around for any sign that would help him find his family. Suddenly, a glowing object appeared out of the darkness:

> I could see that it was a rabbit. It was beautiful and bright like a light. It came back toward me and stood in front of me. I reached out to pet it, but it ran toward the same path that it had come from a moment ago. I decided to follow the rabbit along the path. As I did, I was able to see my way through the woods because the rabbit and the path were bright […] I continued to follow the rabbit along the path until it disappeared into darkness. I looked around for the rabbit, and what I saw instead was my family getting into the canoes. (3)

> It is interesting to note that Vasavong never questioned the reality of his vision despite its dreamlike qualities: a friendly rabbit appearing out of nowhere as a glowing object of light encouraging him to follow it, a phenomenon straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. Vasavong's youthful age was a major factor. The sudden appearance of a lit-up bunny might have sent someone older with a less open attitude toward the supernatural, running in panic deeper into the jungle. As fantastic as the creature might have seemed, he accepted it as real, behaved accordingly, and saved his life… (5)

Regarding the archetype, Kline explains further:

> The archetypal substratum of the human unconscious – what C. G. Jung called the collective unconscious – is a manifestation of the Otherworld, embodying and expressing characteristics of this realm. The characteristics referred to previously about the Otherworld – its eternal dimension, its inhabitants made up of spirit or post-mortal entities, its language made up of metaphors and symbols – all pertain to the archetypal dimension of the unconscious. This means that an aspect of the Otherworld exists within all of us. And yet, one must also understand that archetypal reality has a type of existence somewhere outside of us. Jung considered archetypes living energies with an autonomous relationship with ego consciousness. This seemingly contradictory location of the Otherworld – both an inner and outer reality – relates Jung's ideas about how the physical and psychic realms are two aspects of the same reality:

> Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another…it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing…[The] nonpsychic [i.e., material representations] can behave like a psychic, and vice versa, without there being any causal connection to them…In archetypal conceptions and instinctual perceptions, spirit and matter confront one another on the psychic plain. (2)

Kline describes the glowing rabbit as an archetypal projection coming from The Otherworld. (This is an example of a helping spirit animal who guides and protects). He states, "[…] it can be said that Vasavong's inherent survival instincts manifested themselves as a glowing rabbit that led him out of a life and death situation to safety" (2019: 4). So too, might this profound imaginary experience be described as a cognitive projection or in words like those of Erwin Schrodinger "...a construct of…sensations, perceptions, and memories". Indeed, within the human psyche, such may take the forms of many cognitive elements from the physical world, terrestrial time-space (human) understandings, and corporeal reality, entwined with cognitive elements from The Otherworld, which encompass a knowing-of-that-which-is-eternal and a phenomenological immersion in spiritual reality.

The presumably greater capacity of adults than children to have mixed emotions may contribute to saving their lives in physical earthly reality. In her book, *The Secret Life of the Grown-up Brain* (2010), author Barbara Strauch:

> As we get older, we…have more mixed emotions, a trait that works in our favor. A study by Susan Turk Charles found that when viewing a scene of clear injustice—a film clip…younger people react only with anger, but older people are both angry *and* sad.
>
> The more complex, nuanced response to the world slows us down, restricting impulse acts…another case in which a middle-aged brain may function better simply because of how it's set up.
>
> "It you have one emotion it is easier to act," Charles explained. "And if you're on the Savannah and la lion is chasing you, that quick action can help you out there. But in our complex world, it might be good to go slower, to think twice. (2010: 43-44).

For instance, like deciding not to yell at your boss despite your anger because you did not get the pay raise that you were promised, and avoid possibly being fired by him-or her. But when situations in physical, terrestrial reality become extreme such as when a person is in mortal danger, the presumably adult-like tendency to abandon one's Otherworldly, dreamlike cognitive experience can be profoundly detrimental.

Indeed, in being less open to the supernatural, imagination may tend to take a more hypothetical turn. Jean Piaget's pioneering stage Theory of Cognitive Development, the last stage, referred to as *Formal Operational*, implies a tendency to make an educated guess about what is likely to happen in an imagined future experience. This experience, while generated in the imagination portraying what "could happen", is not meant to be particularly dream-like, (for instance, imagining the number of outfits that can be made among clothing items, while keeping in mind the limited space in your luggage, but is heavily tied to experience as part of terrestrial reality; in other words, there is no interjecting of strong emotion and fantastical imagery, e. g., the presence of one's "clothing fairy" whatever she or he may look like, as part of the image situated in the mind's eye. A hypothetical imagination can be quite useful for making plans regarding what to do in some upcoming terrestrial situation, or for supposing what will likely happen if certain conditions of this world were to transpire in the future, e. g., if an alien race came to planet Earth.

The converse of this experience, one can say, would be the interjecting of more rational, emotionally temperate thought, into fantastical or "fairy tale" visions or images. Such an experience may lead to a kind of sense-making that is more than exclusive to terrestrial existence, but that which lends itself to both the mundane and the eternal simultaneously and in unison. In having such as experience, longer amounts of time may be needed for reflection and contemplation to happen, which can transform fantastical, fairy tale imagery into a kind of conscious experience that is somewhere between the mundane or mortal and terrestrial, and The Otherworldly or spiritual and eternal. Broad examples would be ones that concern the synergistic nature of life and death. In her book, *Re-doing Rapunzel's Hair* (2014), Pavlik-Malone explores the symbolic meaning of hair that traverses *physical* life and death, *romantic* life and death, *spiritual* life and death, and *psychic* life and death, respectively. Of physical life and death, she states the following:

> Thus, in hair, we have the synergistic juxtaposition of death and life, the *hair strands deceased*, alongside the living cells out of which they have grown…So, each hair follicle continuously restores its own vitality; neither internal conditions, i.e., the person's own blood stream, nor any conditions of the external body environment, including neighboring follicles, contribute

> to the growth of each strand or shaft. The self-organizing nature of the hair follicle organ has implications for imagining how Rapunzel's strands of hair might have fared all those years in the desert, where her body managed to carry both her developing children to term.
>
> For instance, did her hair also continue to grow? And if so, when the prince finally found her in the desert, was her hair luxurious…as before, when he secretly visited her by climbing "the golden stair"? Thus, certain alternate scenarios of the fairy tale that potentially include Rapunzel's hair, might allude to synergistic activity between life and death, where life continues to develop (in the forms of a boy and a girl) in the "Kingdom of Death" (the desert). (Pavlik-Malone, 2014, xx-xxi)

Pavlik-Malone goes on to describe in some detail, the nature of life and death as it relates the romantic (referring to energy forces that center around and encompass human *lovemaking*), the spiritual (referring to energy forces that center around and encompass human *inner strength*), and the psychic (referring to energy forces that center around and encompass human *intuition* and *nuanced feeling*). The following describes how all four forms of energy might work in unison to produce synergistic life and death in the Rapunzel fairy tale.

> In the fairy tale, we know that the prince did not fall in love with her, at least initially, for her physical beauty. Instead, it was her beautiful, fairy-like singing voice, that he would listen to everyday in the forest, that captivated him before he even saw what she looked like. "It was the beauty of her soul that makes him want to ascend the tower" (Grimm & Grimm: 2004: 279). *If this is so, might the blind prince, connecting to his dreams, visions, instincts, and inner urges while roaming through the desert, have had emotionally-laced internal images of his love—Rapunzel—that included her beautiful singing voice and her long, flowing blonde hair simultaneously?* Indeed, it may be that spiritual life (connecting his mind to her soul) giving him inner strength to persevere, and romantic life (connecting his mind to her hair and body) giving him something to desire and dream about, become one with psychic life minus physical life. Without any physical trace of even a hair of Rapunzel's, the prince's profound focus inward—his persistent attention to nuanced feeling and his incessant keeping track of subtle changes in patterns of information in consciousness—guided him to her location in the desert. (Pavlik-Malone, 2014, xxix)

This intuitive understanding of the prince's inner life seems rationally based, at least to a significant degree, on how each of the four kinds of energy—physical, romantic, spiritual, and psychic—is operationally defined by the author (who is Pavlik-Malone) as well as by how she conceptualizes the synergistic effects of each kind of energy on each other. Here, a certain gestalt of matter and light forms in her mind's eye or imagination, producing an outward psychological projection that is archetypal alongside her rational thought, intertwining This World and The Otherworld energy patterns in certain ways. For instance, archetypal patterns of both youth and beauty, as well as those of romance and lovemaking (which correspond to "physical life and death" and "romantic life and death", respectively) may come, at least in part, from unconscious templates that correspond to the *Aphrodite* and *The Lover* archetypes; in other words, in this particular *desert* scenario of the Rapunzel fairy tale, created by Pavlik-Malone, the author's more temperate emotional state contributes to her fathoming both the prince being swept away by youthful beauty and romantic love (the Aphrodite archetype) and an acknowledgment of a marked influence of human intuition in the physical absence of his object of desire (The Lover archetype)—the princess Rapunzel.

Imagined Reality Constructed

A recent study conducted at the University of Colorado at Boulder, indirectly supports the existence of two dimensions of the "mind's eye" experience: one is "real", based on the four-dimensional, physical or terrestrial—as Schrodinger says, "a construct of our sensations, perceptions, and memories", and the other one is "imagined", about which Schrodinger might also describe as "a construct of our sensations, perceptions, and memories".

For their 2018 study, researchers M. C. Reddan, T.D. Wager, and D. Schiller, did the following:

> 68 healthy participants were trained to associate a sound with an uncomfortable, but not painful, electric shock. Then, they were, divided into three groups and either exposed to the same threatening sound, asked to "play the sound in their head," or asked to imagine pleasant bird and rain sounds—all without experiencing further shocks.

> The researchers measured brain activity using functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Sensors on the skin measured how the body responded.
>
> In the groups that imagined and heard the threatening sounds, brain activity was remarkably similar, with the auditory cortex (which processes sound), the nucleus accumens (which processes fear) and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (associated with risk and aversion) all lighting up.
>
> After repeated exposure without the accompanying shock, the subjects in both the real and imagined threat groups experienced what is known as "extinction," where the formerly fear-inducing stimulus no longer ignited a fear response.
>
> Essentially, the brain had unlearned to be afraid.
>
> "Statistically, real and imagined exposure to the threat were not different at the whole brain level, and imagination worked just as well," said Reddan.
>
> Notably, the group that imagined birds and rain sounds showed different brain reactions, and their fear response to the sound persisted.
>
> "This research confirms that imagination is a neurological reality that can impact our brains and bodies in ways that matter for our wellbeing," said Tor Wager, director of the Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Laboratory at CU Boulder and co-senior author of the paper, published in the journal *Neuron.*
>
> "If you have a memory that is no longer useful for you or is crippling you, you can use imagination to tap into it, change it, and re-consolidate it, updating the way you think about and experience something," said Reddan… (ScienceDaily, 2018, 1-4)

Also, in her May/June 2023 article from Discover magazine titled "Dream Weavers", science writer Avery Hurt cites Jennifer Windt, a cognitive scientist at Monash University in Australia:

> Scientists are learning that sleep is much closer to waking consciousness than we have traditionally thought, explains Windt. And the reverse is also true. "Wakefulness is actually much more dream-like and much more sleep-like than we would have thought," says Windt, who studies mind-wandering

> as well as dreaming. This similarity is found not only in the subjective experiences of wakefulness and dreaming, but in actual neurological patterns observed during these states. (65)

So, what may be the differences between these two "mind's eye" experiences? One may be that what is imagined can fundamentally include, among other things, the unique instance of one or more archetypal projections to support a "strong need" that creates "a situation that satisfies it". In other words, it may be that in the act of imagining, a gateway can open, so to speak, letting in Otherworld elements of consciousness. Some such elements may seem quite strange to another individual but come to make perfect sense in the image maker's psyche, at the soul level, if you will. This phenomenological quality may come, at least in part, from nuanced experience created through matter and light (and out of the vastness of super-positioned possibilities at the quantum level) to enable highly personal, as well as timeless and universal, meaning to form at the same time, in a fundamentally improvisational way.

In his 2017 book, *The Evolution of Imagination,* philosopher and professor Steven Asma offers a detailed explanation of what he refers to as "the improvising imagination". He writes:

> Consider Miles Davis stepping up to the microphone and sculpting a powerful musical statement—complete with furtive tonal secrets, inside jokes, and blasting climatic summits—all composed in real time over a hard-swinging rhythm section…Now envision a team of digital engineers doing some "outside the box" brainstorming, as they work to invent a new app. Or slow it down and we find the Darwins and Einsteins of science testing and trying fresh theoretical solutions to the nagging mysteries of nature. The shared element in these diverse activities is the enigmatic engine of human creativity, the improvising imagination. Human culture itself is impossible without imagination. Why does a story evoke a whole world inside us? How are we able to rehearse a skill or an event in our mind's eye? How does creativity go beyond experience to make something altogether new? And how does the moral imagination help us improvise our way toward a more ethical society? (Asma, 2017, 2)

He continues,

> We live in a world that is only partly happening. We also live in co-present simultaneous worlds made up of "almost" or "what ifs" and "maybes". At the moment that I'm failing at some task, for example, I'm simultaneously running a success scenario of my actions, and this imaginary reality is creating real emotions inside of me. Or I see this open grassy field here, but also see (through imagination) my future home that will be built on this empty plot. Imagination is the possibility maker. It is the home of hope (and regret). (Asma, 2017, 3-4)

Based on Asma's ideas, this author asserts that "co-present simultaneous worlds" in consciousness may also include the distinctions between and synergies of This World and The Other, for conjuring up profoundly complex, highly personal and strong emotionally laced meaning from the particulars of self-generated imagery, both visual and otherwise.

As Asma states:

> What is the relationship between improvisation and imagination?... The philosophical and the artistic traditions have considered imagination as a mental faculty that mediates between the *particulars* of the senses (e.g., luminous blue colors) and *the universals* of our conceptual understanding (e.g., the judgment that Marc Chagall's blue *America Windows* is beautiful, or sunrises are beautiful)…But I will argue…that this tradition over-intellectualizes the imagination…For example, we see that this man has a snub nose, this other man is bald, this man is young, this one old, this one hungry, this one tall, et cetera, but eventually we see past all this to recognize their shared features; they are all rational, featherless bipeds. The common defining features are the real objects of knowledge, according to this long-standing tradition…Against this universal approach, the imagination stays close to particular sensual impressions—the snub nose and the baldness of the men are more relevant (e.g., the hunchback is not subtractable from Quasimodo of Notre Dame). Often the imagination adds many traits rather than subtracting them, as in cases of flying pigs, talking animals, and composite hybrid creatures like mermaids, griffins, and even gods like the Hindu Ganesh. The imagination is interested in the particular. If imagination captures a universal—and it frequently does—it is emotional rather than conceptual, as when a theatrical tragedy (rich with particular detail) captures a universal aspect of grief or love…Improvisation, in my account…the main *activity*…of the imaginative faculty…is not just what the imagination does but is the adaptive meeting place between the organism and the environment. The improvising