

# ROBERT ROMANYSHYN AND WOLFGANG GIEGERICH: POLES APART

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THE COMBATANTS

In *Spring 82* (2009), Wolfgang Giegerich writes a long criticism of Robert Romanyshyn's article, "The Melting of the Polar Ice: Revisiting *Technology as Symptom and Dream*," published in *Spring 80* (2008).<sup>1</sup> In it he disputes Romanyshyn's foundational premises. Perhaps most striking in Giegerich's approach is his profound need to distance himself from Romanyshyn's project. Such a requirement is encapsulated in his title, "The Psychologist as Repentance Preacher and Revivalist: Robert Romanyshyn on the Melting of the Polar Ice."<sup>2</sup> As Giegerich repeats abundantly, he believes that Romanyshyn's writing has strayed outside "psychology proper" (used several times) and is floundering illegitimately in the wilder fringes of theology, unsupported by institutions or established epistemologies (Preacher and Revivalist).

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## MY STANCE

I do not agree with Giegerich's taking to task of Romanyshyn on two levels. In the first place, while I recognize and honor Giegerich's fundamental attitude to knowledge, I do not consider it sufficient. Instead, I believe that Romanyshyn's equally historically and philosophically founded epistemology is more needed now, at least in part because it has been dangerously repressed in the past. Secondly, there are problems with the way that Giegerich has structured his criticism, which speak to my particular expertise as a literary scholar. Therefore I plan to sketch out some of the divide between these two psychologists before focusing more closely on what I can bring to the debate: the literary detective.

## A DIVIDE IN KNOWLEDGE

Giegerich begins with divisions. Knowledge must be "properly" divided up and boundaries respected. In particular, he labels Romanyshyn's work "eco-psychology," while admitting that is not how Romanyshyn himself describes it in his polar ice article. Rather, Romanyshyn writes eloquently of his approach as phenomenology, research that he has substantiated and pioneered for many years. Unfortunately, to Giegerich, this work is a pollution problem. Ecopsychology is "incompatible with what I would consider psychology proper."<sup>3</sup>

There is a dualism in Giegerich's thinking that I have critiqued before for its pervasive monotheism.<sup>4</sup> There I pointed out that when Giegerich located the decisive evolution of consciousness in the male prehistoric hunter thrusting his spear, there was an-other form present.

In the spear the male has his self (it was therefore not in himself).  
Likewise the blood shed in the hunt was not merely the biological  
juice of life. Rather, the sacrificial animal's blood was collected by  
the women in a basket (in which they had their selves)...<sup>5</sup>

According to Giegerich's argument, the "women's basket" offers an-other structuring of consciousness that gets forgotten in the relentless logic inhabiting the modern soul. Similarly here, Giegerich starts his attack on Romanyshyn by evoking "two" kinds of thinking, while

actually striving to prove that there is only “one” psychology, his own. Of course a rhetorical strategy of apparently ceding some ground to the opponent and then chipping away at it has a long history; Giegerich dignifies his methods under the term dialectics. What he does not address with any clarity is the question of the challenge to his own metaphysics.

It is easy to charge an-other with inaccuracies if the two approaches consist of incompatible worldviews. Dialectics is itself a form of idealism for it is more the product of a desire for a monotheistic culture than of rigorous logic. Deeply heir to the Newtonian perspective that believes in atomizing, dividing up knowledge as small as it can go in order to pursue it to its logical conclusion, Giegerich is profoundly asserting that “nature” has nothing to do with the soul.

If it were not “un-natural,” if it were itself a piece of nature, there would not be soul at all.<sup>6</sup>

Later on the passion for division reaches the polar ice itself. Melting ice is “empirical fact,” which is not the same as “truth.”<sup>7</sup> Romanyshyn’s “error” is to bury the soul in a nature who is not the “divine Mother Nature of old, but the modern physical reality.”<sup>8</sup> What has been achieved is merely “New Age kitsch.”<sup>8</sup> Here is matter intrinsic to Giegerich’s work, now in acid form: that the modern psyche has no access to past styles of consciousness. It is one of the many ways in which Giegerich’s psychology parts from Jung’s, as the latter believed that psyche and culture preserved forms of pastness that were important to present consciousness. Romanyshyn’s work is heir to Jung’s in this and much else.

To me there are real problems, not in Giegerich’s modernism *per se*, but in his adherence to it as an exclusive reading of reality. For a start, it upholds boundaries of self and world, inside and outside, technology and science, as wholly rational modern enterprises. Such exclusive fidelity negates valuing other cultures that may have very different divisions. What Jung intuited, and so inscribed in his psyche as Eros and Logos qualities of consciousness, was that there are more significant modes of knowing than those espoused by Enlightenment reason. Romanyshyn’s “anxiety” is first placed by Giegerich as “one kind of thinking,” then dismissed. Yet emotion, particularly when

it is more accurately described in Jung's terms as "feeling" or "valuing" can be a source of legitimate knowledge in Eros. Is this right because Jung says so?

No, Jung is not the only justification for treating "feeling" as a path to the real. Even from within our mainstream science we find that biology tells us that brain cells are not exclusively to be found in the skull, bringing an embodied and emotionally affected mode of "thinking." Nor does evolution claim a rational basis for our emotions in teaching us to make successful choices. There are a number of frameworks (some within rational division of knowledge themselves) beyond Jung and non-Western epistemologies that value emotion, affect, feeling, and connection as originating principles.

My basic quarrel with Giegerich's dualism is that it is really monotheism, so that it takes no account of its real "other," the animistic and connected mythical scheme of reading the real. What Jung more than intuited, so that it formed the bedrock of his archetypal schema, was that modernity inherited not a dialectic, but a dialogic between (patriarchal) monotheism, or the desire for one true path that only recognizes its other as "error," and an animistic legacy of great antiquity.

Jung's monotheistic "self," always in tension with the inherent multiplicity of archetypes, is one structure this ancient mythical dialogue takes in his work. The apparently neat duality between Eros and Logos is another. Here we might notice Logos as spirit and discrimination and separateness of ego and soul is entirely to be found vigorously re-worked in Giegerich's psychology of "soul" alone, severed from body, nature, emotion, and connection. Yet Jung added *and taught us to value* Eros as body, connectedness, feeling, and emotion. The path to "truth" cannot be restricted to one modern logic.

If Jung was serious about valuing a form of consciousness oriented to body and connectivity, then he, at least, re-joins the evolutionary sciences, which regard humans as an-other animal species. Thus Jung speculated that animals might possess archetypes similar to, or the same as, humans. Moreover, regarding the body as a nourishing basis for consciousness has to take account of the body as an eating, breathing creature. We have a consciousness that is eco-centered where we are knowing *because* we are part of nature. These structures of consciousness are multiple, multicultural, ecopsychological, and rooted in the psychoid mind/body union.

Here, most of all, are the liminal and the Gothic, those challenges to borders and categories that Giegerich admits are artificial. However, what the occluded animistic pole of modernity asserts is the necessity of the dialogical approach to texts of worlds as well as that of *the* world. Dialogics means that propositions are always constructed through dialogue with an-other in which no absolute conclusion can be reached. Knowledge has to be envisioned as a web rather than a purifying logic of truth. Put another way, a map of reality that consists of strict categories presupposes a chaos it replaces. That is the picture that Giegerich paints of his position. But suppose that chaos is rather *produced* by the rigid demarcations, and the “other” to modernity’s rationality is a web of interconnectivity? From the point of view of Logos, Eros may look terrifyingly chaotic. That does not mean that we should only look out of “his” eyes. Such a gendered argument brings me to the literary detective.

SHERLOCK HOLMES & M. DUPIN AND RATIONAL,  
DISEMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

What bothers me in the method of Giegerich’s criticism is its “animus” and its use of the metaphor of the literary detective. “Animus” is here an ambiguous term. In popular parlance, it signifies a motivated aggression, which I find in his piece, particularly in his remark I quoted earlier about “kitsch.” It undermines Giegerich’s own case because he has called for “icy” detachment when it comes to melting ice, and for pure, logical categories of argument. Yet “animus” is also a Jungian word used to signify the unconscious masculinity of women.

However, this ambiguity is trickier and more imaginatively fertile than it first seems. It is indeed the essence of my entire thesis here that categories that prove *not* firmly divided off from each other are also meaningful. Jung has too much animus in his animus! When he writes of a woman’s animus, it is to indict a frightful propensity in women to “false logic:”

The anima has an erotic, emotional character, the animus a rationalizing one. Hence most of what men say about feminine eroticism, and particularly about the emotional life of women, is derived from their own anima projections and distorted accordingly. On the other hand, the astonishing assumptions

and fantasies that women make about men come from the activity of the animus, who produces an inexhaustible supply of illogical arguments and false explanations.<sup>9</sup>

Of this quotation I have pointed out many times how Jung undercuts himself in saying that men can never be objective about women and then so comprehensively proving it! What is so delightfully impossible here is to decide whether or not the author intended this “slip” into animated language or not? Is Jung giving us his animus against the animus as an example and warning, or has his ego truly lost control? I suggest that our inability to logically deduce the status of the animated sentence itself makes this piece of writing a valuable source of knowledge. Not all epistemologies have to be based upon strict division, especially when it comes to gender.

So I am speculating here that Giegerich’s animus (aggression) is not wholly divisible from “animus,” an unconscious principle associated with masculinity and Logos thinking. Which brings us to the detective.

Giegerich asserts a major historical break in consciousness in the early nineteenth century, and notes the subsequent rise of related cultural movements, the literary detective among them.<sup>10</sup> He then accuses Romanyshyn of writing a sloppy detective story. Beginning with the corpse in the melting ice, Romanyshyn slips into a “whodunit,” yet fails to properly occupy the role of the rational mind of the true detective.<sup>9</sup> Rather, Romanyshyn falls into the character of the bumbling policeman who arrests all the usual suspects rather than carefully scrutinizing the clues that Giegerich himself, taking the detective role, successfully secures. Hence, the true detective of the crimes against modernity is Giegerich, not Romanyshyn.

This, in essence, is the structure of Giegerich’s detective fiction metaphor. One immediate consequence is to note that this is supremely narrative. For an adherent of dividing off “empirical facts” from “truth,” Giegerich is suspiciously dependent upon a narrative form—and moreover one dedicated to the conversion of facts into truth as “clues.” Secondly, I dispute Giegerich’s portrayal of the true detective as one who prioritizes logic and rationality above all other forms of making knowledge.

No literary detective is such a being. And one can go back to Giegerich’s own “origin story” of consciousness to see this. But before we do, let’s remember that those supposed icons of rational self-

consciousness, Sherlock Holmes and M. Dupin, were no such thing. Fuelled by cocaine, Holmes is a Gothic detective who, in his famous *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902),<sup>11</sup> most resembles his quarry, a spectral dog and a trickster.<sup>10</sup> We may remember M. Dupin in his study advising the police chief in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter,"<sup>12</sup> but his successful "solution" depended upon a long mediated thirst for revenge.<sup>11</sup>

Returning to the prehistoric hunter with a spear, the alternative *connected* way of viewing his ascent into modern man is to recall his embodied existence in a community with at least one other cultural form, the basket. In fact, as Lewis Hyde shows in *Trickster Makes This World* (2007), it is more likely to be the trickster myth that enables consciousness to develop from hunting.<sup>13</sup> Trickster can overleap and not eradicate boundaries and categories. "He" is multiple, embodied, sexual, amoral, both genders, animal, human, and divine.

Crucially, as a figure bound up with hunting he enabled consciousness to escape the dualistic either/or of being hunter or hunted. Trickster was both and neither. He is credited in various mythologies for inventing the net, the *web* method of engaging with the environment. He exists in culture today in many forms, particularly in the arts. Today, trickster's most intense incarnation is in the genre of the literary detective.

For I am not alleging that the literary detective is simply a trickster. He is quite capable of being, at least for a time, a Giegerich-like adherent of rational detachment. Rather, the literary detective *needs to be able* to be a trickster, in addition to one other related embodied role that is similarly enmeshed in nature: the shaman. Literary detectives are tricksters when Dupin makes sure he is paid before revealing the trick of his adversary, and when Holmes becomes a haunting figure personifying the Gothic horrors of the moor to that epitome of modernity, Dr Watson. Literary detectives are also shamans when they stick to their belief that truth is possible despite the messy, embodiment of the material world. Sometimes they combine the two in becoming false shamans in order to gain truth by leading witnesses astray.

Becoming trickster is so necessary because the essence of the detective literary genre is to revive the corpse, which Giegerich cannot do. The literary detective is more faithfully echoed by Romanyshyn than by Giegerich. Giegerich is quite correct to locate the genre at a

key moment of modernity when nature has been “framed” as a dead body, yet what the literary detective is most deeply about—in various narrative disguises as trickster and shaman—is reviving the dead body of Mother Nature by hunting for what is meaningful.

Trickster stories, even when they clearly have much more complicated cultural meanings, preserve a set of images, from the days when what mattered above all else was hunting.<sup>14</sup>

As a hunter, the trickster is not a hero. His stories are not about stupendous bravery in fighting a monster to the death. Rather he is the sponsor of a weak, slow animal (*Homo sapiens*) in developing a complex relationship to a world beset with dangers. Trickster, in fact, in the earliest myths, is the inventor of fishing nets. As Coyote in the Americas and Hermes in Ancient Greece, trickster’s nets help thwart monsters who used to eat humans. Myth is both literal and metaphorical in giving us a trickster who responds to devouring forces in the world with a non-oppositional strategy.

When you cannot beat the game, you change the rules. Hence, when Sherlock Holmes is unable to protect a threatened client, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, by heroically asserting his ordering presence, he instead melts into Gothic mists and mysterious shadows.<sup>15</sup>

Hyde also makes an important point about the relation of the trickster and the shaman. While the trickster tends to parody a shaman, he suggests that this figure of fascinating unreliability is within the operative system of shamans, not outside as wholly other.<sup>14</sup> A “true” shaman surely welcomes the kind of alert consciousness that comes from learning from the trickster about “false” shamans. Finding tricksters and shamans together is to reveal something about the complexities of the recognition of truth. This subtle and insightful argument by Hyde is also illuminating, I suggest, for looking at the literary detective.

The detective hunts, but is not limited to the role of hunter, for that would be to put him into a dual, either/or relation to the criminal. He is also a shaman who by rituals and recognizing signs will ultimately uncover a “truth,” even if, shaman-like, it provides no “doctrine” by which to expel chaos forever. Yet the detective is also a trickster, in exposing false strategies for truth, and is a shaman in revealing the criminal’s false shamanism. As shaman and trickster, the detective trickily incorporates the embodied psyche of the reader in the world.

So trickster embodies two attitudes to the whole notion of reading reality for “truth.” One is that there is a higher truth, only our access to it is complicated by this unreliable being. The second trickster-construing of prophecy is that no higher truth exists. Even more, the very idea of higher truth is a dangerous fantasy that imperils embodied life. Again, we see how trickster molds the literary detective as he tries to decide whether there is a stable, coherent truth “out there.” Or perhaps the entire concept of detecting, based as it is upon a belief in signs pointing to truth, is merely an illusion drawing him into trouble. Detectives are haunted by the fear that their tricksterish “meddling” does more harm than good.

Of course, these figures of shaman and trickster entail, as Hyde demonstrates, a complex perspective on signs. Whereas the prophet and the shaman rely upon signs to be truthful, trickster has no compunction in using signs to deceive. Indeed, at a deeper level, trickster is the trickiness of signs, or is the tricky spirit inhabiting signs. Also by signs, we mean items, objects, symbols that are used to make meaning, to signify.

What the trickster shows, above all, is ingenuity in his embodied engagement with non-human nature. Emphatically, his stories do not portray a disembodied abstract mind. Trickster is a creature of appetites, very often pure and simple hunger. The myth animates the body. Yet the myth animates the body that works indivisibly from the psyche. In this, trickster again betrays his origins in Earth Mother consciousness. Hyde puts this very concretely. Trickster tells us that what modernity prizes about human beings, the development of the capacity to think, is derived from trickily securing meat. In other words, the trickster myth activates us as embodied, nature saturated, carnal creatures.

These myths suggest that blending natural history and mental phenomena is not an unthinking conflation but on the contrary, an accurate description of the ways things are. To learn about intelligence from the meat-thief, Coyote, is to know that we are embodied thinkers. If the brain has cunning, it has it as a consequence of appetite; the blood that lights the mind gets its sugars from the gut.<sup>16</sup>

I propose that a major revival of the trickster myth occurred in the development of the literary detective. This revival is *not* that the detective

is merely a trickster. It is the detective genre that most completely inherits the trickster myth. Here it is important not to confuse the genre with its defining protagonist. Rather, what we see in detective novels is akin to the trickster's primal scene: the negotiation between trickster and shaman, in the context of hunting.

Of course detective fiction is vitally concerned with social issues. Yet its trickster inheritance knows that just as mind cannot be considered apart from body, so too our social collective is entirely contained in the non-human environment. Detective fiction is a (relatively) modern attempt to realize this; to make it real for us.

To conclude, I suggest that the trickster and the literary detective refute Giegerich's claim that there can be *only* a psychology of soul separated from non-human nature. Rather it is the nature of consciousness, evolved by the trickster, to have an alternative to either/ or thinking, to be also embodied, erotic, tricky, and other. Moreover, such consciousness is embedded in the very trickiness of signs and the genres as they stick together in the making of culture. Giegerich's own text testifies to this aspect of connected embodied consciousness in its animus, which gains so much resonance from Jung's inability to categorize a concept (a woman's unconscious masculinity) securely apart from his feeling reaction.

Giegerich's divisive approach is that of the literary detective when that figure tries to turn the bloody mess of a corpse into clues, signs that can replace the body, and turn the crime into a ritual enactment in a court of law. Such structuring of consciousness is necessary and important to the modern psyche. Yet, what I believe Romanyshyn to have superbly demonstrated is the even more necessary, because so long repressed, work of the literary detective as a "revivalist" of the dead body, the body deadened by the effect of its too long exclusion in modernity!

Here Romanyshyn as detective is most intensely a trickster when enmeshed in the relations of bodies and meaning. So if trickster, as Hyde argues, preserves images from consciousness emerging through hunting for food, then appetite as filling the stomach becomes the appetite for meaning, a need to satisfy the mind. Trickster is Earth Goddess consciousness here because there is no fixed divorce in trickster, or detective, between body and mind.

Trickster and detective seek to redeem a body made empty of mind by murder. The detective tries to animate the corpse into meaning,

tries to make discarded matter, dirt even, into signs as clues. By sticking with the matter-at-hand as potentially animate, potentially meaningful, the detective's trickster ambiguous relations re-animate the Earth Goddess in modernity.

Robert Romanyshyn's essay helps us to know who has been murdered, opening us to the full mystery of the solution.

#### NOTES

1. Robert D. Romanyshyn, "The Melting of the Polar Ice: Revisiting *Technology as Symptom and Dream*," published in *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 80 (Fall 2008), pp. 79-116.

2. Wolfgang Giegerich, "The Psychologist as Repentance Preacher and Revivalist: Robert Romanyshyn on the Melting of the Polar Ice," *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 82 (Fall 2009), pp. 193-221.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

4. Susan Rowland, "Nature Writing: Jung's Eco-Logic in the Conjunction of Comedy and Tragedy," *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 75 (2006), pp. 275-298.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Wolfgang Giegerich, "Killings," *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture* 54 (1993), pp. 5-18.

7. Wolfgang Giegerich, "The Psychologist as Repentance Preacher," p. 208.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

9. C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* 17 § 338.

10. Wolfgang Giegerich, "The Psychologist as Repentance Preacher," p. 207.

11. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010).

12. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Purloined Letter" (1844), *Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

13. Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art* (1998).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-305.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

