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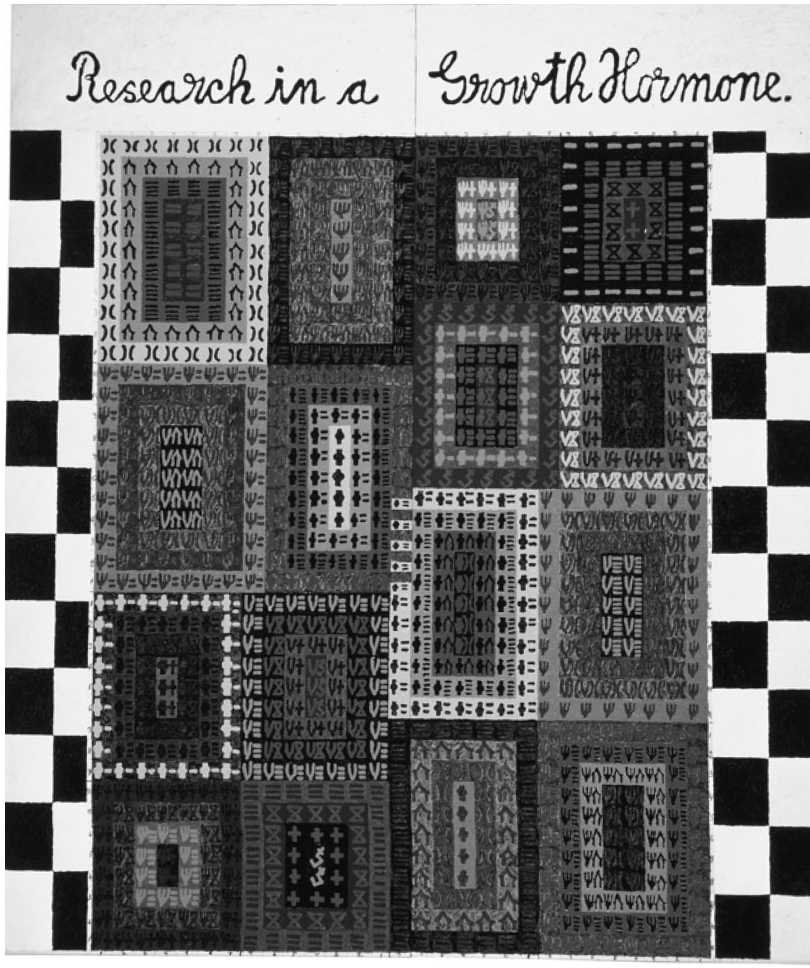
Following the Footsteps of the Soul in Research

Thomas Elsner

Robert Romanyshyn's latest book, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind*, recognizes that the unconscious, as Jung understood it, is present not only in analysis but also in the transference field that can open up during a research project. Romanyshyn forms this recognition in a working theory, process, and method that seeks to leave space for the unconscious as a creative and positive factor in research. This article explores Romanyshyn's text in relation to the author's own experience, compares its epistemological assumptions to those discoverable in modern physics, and places it within the context of a new ethics of depth psychology. My conclusion is that *The Wounded Researcher* is both a symptom of an increasing collective necessity to come to terms with the discovery of the unconscious as well as an ethical response to this necessity.

When I finished reading *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* by Robert Romanyshyn for the first time, I thought: What a bold, courageous, and unique attempt to bring Jung into the academy. Finally a person with the necessary academic background and training, along with the necessary depth and symbolic sensibility, has come forth to articulate a hermeneutical theory that takes into account the reality of the unconscious, as Jung understood it. Well grounded in process and method and filled with examples, the author's own dreams, and the experiences of his students, this monumental volume is creative and original, practical and useful, and is, without a doubt, *the* book in the field that most fully and deeply expresses a new way of approaching and understanding research from the depth psychological perspective. It is Robert Romanyshyn's *summa*.

But then, looking beyond the personal intentions and qualities of the author, I began to wonder if *The Wounded Researcher,* through its insistence



Alfred Jensen, *Research in a Growth Hormone*, 1978. Oil on canvas.
Overall: 114″ x 96″ (289.6 cm x 243.8 cm);
two panels, each measure: 114″ x 48″ (289.6 cm x 121.9 cm).
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Photo courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York

on bringing the discovery of the unconscious outside of the confines of the consulting room and into all fields of study, might not be reflective of, or symptomatic of, a collective necessity of our times. I have become increasingly convinced that this is so, and, in this sense, what now strikes me most vividly about *The Wounded Researcher* is that it is a profoundly ethical book, an idea to which I return at the end of the article.

The goal of *The Wounded Researcher* is to "make a place for the soul of the work to speak beyond the calculus of a researcher's subjective prejudices" (p. 44). The attempt alone is groundbreaking. But beyond breaking ground, this book profoundly succeeds in giving intelligent, heart-infused, mythopoetic, philosophical, and intellectually sophisticated expression to the way in which the researcher in any field might become conscious of the presence of the unconscious, not only as bias or a barrier to objectivity, but as a creative matrix and a means to objectivity through deep subjectivity, in his or her work. In my reading, the "wounded" researcher (wounded by the awareness of the non-ego dimensions at work in research, in the same sense that Jung described any encounter with the Self as a "defeat" for the ego) makes room for the unconscious as not only repository of disowned complexes and repressed memories, but also as a "great Dream" that speaks to the future and uses not only the artist but also the researcher as a mouthpiece.

Romanyshyn . . . recognizes that there is a transferential field in research . . . that is mediated by fantasies, reveries, and images . . . the essential secret of the work . . .

Much work on qualitative research methodology has already been done that recognizes the presence of subjective factors in research in the physical and social sciences, and *The Wounded Researcher* builds on this work. The starting point is the unsettling, nagging realization that there is more to academic research than professed "objectivity" and identification with a professor persona. "It is," psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison says, "an awful prospect giving up one's cloak of academic objectivity," but just here the wounded researcher begins to surface. "Why are you *really* studying mood disorders?" Mogen Schou, the Danish psychiatrist who introduced lithium into the treatment of manic–depressive illness, asked Jamison. Her unease and hesitancy to answer this question were assuaged by his admission that he was studying such things because of their presence in his family history (as cited in Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 109). But Romanyshyn's sense of what it means

to make room for the unconscious of the researcher in the work is not just the bracketing of phenomenological hermeneutics or Moustakas's heuristic approach, because neither of these methods attends systematically to finding a way to *include* the unconscious participation of the researcher as a creative factor in the research process. Going beyond the *recognition* of subjectivity in the research process, Romanyshyn engages it. He recognizes that there is a transferential field in research (as indeed in all of life) that is mediated by fantasies, reveries, and images. This transferential field is by no means simply a subjective illusion to be acknowledged and then bracketed out, but rather the essential secret of the work; "reveries hold the secrets of the work, secrets that the researcher does not yet know" (p. 143). The creative work is found within reverie when its symbolic images are approached and understood through poetic faith. In this way a perspective opens up toward the work that is not identical to the ego perspective. "The wounded researcher," Romanyshyn writes, "goes down into the [subjective/objective] abyss the vulnerable researcher attempts to bridge" and in this way transforms a "wound into a work" (p. 108).

Romanyshyn has succeeded in articulating something extremely important and profound in this volume, something that many of us in the field of Jungian or depth psychology have experienced or intuited, but which has never been a recognized aspect of hermeneutic methodology: namely, that dreams, active imagination, complexes, symptoms, and synchronicity all participate in a creative and meaningful way in what we consider to be "our" research projects and "our" ideas. Romanyshyn calls this confluence "alchemical hermeneutics"; as a method it involves a process of "dying" to one's egocentric biases and assumptions in favor of the creative unknown that seeks to be born in a research project. Such a project can then become an alchemical process, an individuation process, in which the work transforms the working. "In creating," Jung said, "we are created."

Romanyshyn describes the vocational dimension of research by using the image of continuing the unfinished business of our ancestors as it engages us through our complexes:

> Research as vocation places the researcher within a context that is larger than his or her intentions for the work. Indeed, the work is the site where the complex pattern of the researcher's history and the unfinished business of the ancestors meet, where the time-bound and the timeless qualities of the work encounter each other. (p. 110)

My experience of reading such passages for the first time was accompanied not only by fascination but by a sense of recognition that would at times take the form of physical trembling! This book largely describes the actual process

of research as I experienced it, but which experience never seemed to make its way into the academic discussion. We know that all of Jung's creative work, as he said in *Memories*, was inspired and founded upon dreams and active imagination. But such activities of the psyche have hardly become an accepted approach to academic research!

Romanyshyn's sense of being in touch with the ancestors through the complexes that lead us into research work was highly meaningful to me, for I had already been deeply impressed by this in my own experience of writing a diploma thesis on Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for my training as a Jungian analyst. I kept track for over 2 years of the dreams that commented on both the process of writing and the content as I worked on this project. I had dreams in which Coleridge appeared and spoke to me about his work, other dreams that commented on the meaning of Coleridge's art and life. Coleridge—I decided upon this topic long before reading *The Wounded Researcher*—was a symbolic ancestor. I will not go into the dreams here, except to comment that the opening up of a dialogue between conscious and unconscious through a research work became far and away the most personally meaningful and transformative dimension of this project. In my personal research I followed my fascination with Coleridge, the hints and statements of my dreams, the archetypal amplifications, the synchronicities, and remained true to them. For this reason I had a deeply meaningful impression of the *value* of this work, that the work had become my alchemy, and that this was ultimately its *raison d'être*. At times I felt like the alchemist who is following the footprints of *mater natura* in the dark with thick glasses and only a little candle. The image of Atalanta fleeing came to mind quite frequently.

The method of alchemical hermeneutics . . . requires both extensive research to acquire actual knowledge, as well as a living engagement with the symbols from within . . .

Alchemical hermeneutics opens up the symbolic reality of the human soul. As we make the decision to consciously follow the footprints of the soul as they appear in symbols that engage us as we are engaged in research, we might become aware, as Marie-Louise von Franz recognized, that "it is as if something were 'known' in the form of images—but not by us" (1975, p. 240). Here we are on the "lunatic fringe" of academia, to be sure. But these are the real experiences—fantasies, dreams, visions, being gripped and inspired, the dramatic truth or symbolic truth of hallucinations and intuitions—irrational though they are, that actually do happen as research begins to become

Engraving of *Atalanta Fugiens*, Michael Maier, 1618.

important. They are the central experiences of Jung's life and work. I am grateful that a book has appeared that takes such phenomena seriously and provides a way to begin to understand them within the context of a hermeneutical theory and research methodology.

The method of alchemical hermeneutics described in *The Wounded Researcher* is not easy to follow in practice. It is difficult work that requires both extensive research to acquire actual knowledge, as well as a living engagement with the symbols from within—an engagement that is experienced as letting *them* speak to *us*, telling us things we did not previously suspect. We are all trained to think rationally, logically and linearly, in this culture, and it is easy to do that. Reductive interpretations are tempting because we feel on solid ground, and they defend the ego against the danger of getting lost in the mythic dimension. But *The Wounded Researcher* recognizes that working with material from the unconscious requires something else from us; it requires us to think symbolically as well as linearly. The symbol is the best possible expression of psychophysical contents that are unknown. For this

reason it is impossible, on principle, to understand symbolism rationally, in a causal or reductive way, by equating it with something that is already well understood. Yet by being patient and diligent, pondering over the symbols, circling around them again and again, by doing our best to follow the symbolic thread wherever it might lead, without thinking that we already know everything in advance through a theory (or, just as frequently, through a complex), we may learn to develop the faculty that Keats calls "negative capability" (one of Romanyshyn's favorite phrases): the ability to remain in the darkness of not knowing and wait for something to reveal *itself*. Von Franz writes:

> . . . this thinking process is rather like listening to what the symbol itself has to say. Then thinking becomes an instrument which lends itself to self-expression of the material. That is what Jung called "symbolic thinking." It is something difficult to learn and the more one has learnt the scholarly way, the more difficult it is to switch to this symbolic thinking. But through it you have an invaluable instrument for understanding the raw material of the psyche and its new and not yet known expressions, which we have to know if we want to deal with the unconscious. I would encourage you to make an effort in this direction, for it can bring out of otherwise unintelligible material a new light and wealth of understanding. (1980, p. 119)

I have had the experience that, as I pondered over the symbols that appeared in my dreams around a research project, these symbols began to weave a most interesting and informative tapestry of meaning out of themselves. In this way the unconscious explains the unconscious, and we learn something new from the material itself, something we didn't know before, which is actually very exciting and enlivening. The research begins to speak to *us*. "Progress in knowledge," Romanyshyn writes, "coincides with the ongoing task of making the collective unconscious of humanity more conscious" (p. 94). When this occurs we might receive some real shocks! But that is what keeps our work from getting stale—and not only academic research but also day-to-day clinical practice. Those of us who are psychotherapists know that in psychotherapy it is an act of love to be this way with our patients, as opposed to an act of power. This same attitude can be applied to our research projects.

It is very hard work. It is the essential work of turning grapes into wine or spinning straw into gold, the essential work of the alchemical transformation of *prima materia* into the philosopher's stone. It takes effort, patience, and understanding to distill the raw material of the symbolic imagery of dreams, symptoms, and imagination into something that is also rationally and collectively comprehensible and realistic. A "path to the library,"

as Romanyshyn recognizes, must emerge from the engagement with deep subjectivity. Archetypal images that come from deep subjectivity are simply facts, facts that stimulate our intuition, touch our feeling, and create a context of meaning that makes an interpretation possible. It is vitally important that we finally make an interpretation and distill the essence of meaning from the vast amount of symbolic material that weaves itself like a spider web around archetypal motifs. Otherwise we get lost and caught in the transpersonal realm; we need to bridge that iridescent material into our own era and into the world of the ego in order to integrate it and make it comprehensible to ourselves. We need to translate all the rich tapestry of living symbolism into *our* myth today, which is, at least in the depth psychological field, the psychological myth. There are, of course, other myths, other fundamental perspectives and guiding principles.

Transference dialogues . . . are a method of approaching the secrets of the transferential field that surrounds research. These dialogues seem to be basically an extension of Jung's active imagination transferred from the analytical to the research setting.

Alchemical hermeneutics suggests that we can make a systematic place for the observer, his or her complexes, and the "unconscious depths of the conscious 'I'" (p. 110) in the research process. But how? Here is where Romanyshyn proposes the use of "transference dialogues." Transference dialogues are a starting point from which to bring these larger questions into a research project. They are a method of approaching the secrets of the transferential field that surrounds research. These dialogues seem to be basically an extension of Jung's active imagination transferred from the analytical to the research setting. They take the following form:

A. Setting a ritual space of reverie (passive letting go of ego-driven thinking)
B. Engaging in the transference dialogues (active engagement with the unconscious)

    a. Setting the stage
    b. Invitations
    c. Waiting with hospitality
    d. Engaging the "others" in the work

i. Giving form and being a witness
ii. Critical regard
    1. The way of aesthetics
    2. The way of understanding

e. Scholarly amplification

Romanyshyn gives many useful examples of how some of his students used this method, how they found it to be helpful or not helpful, and what resistances they noticed. He also delineates some safeguards for opening up this type of engagement with the unconscious and points out when it might be contraindicated.

Transference dialogues, as Romanyshyn makes clear, are subject to all the same limitations, dangers, and misunderstandings to which Jung recognized active imagination to be subject. The primary danger is the possibility of becoming overwhelmed by the affects, images, and impulses coming up from the unconscious depths. Other dangers, as Jung pointed out, include getting "caught in the sterile circle of [one's] own complexes" or "remaining stuck in an all-enveloping phantasmagoria" so that nothing is gained (as cited in Chodorow, 1997, p. 12). Therefore, as Romanyshyn recognizes, the presence of a strong ego structure that can keep its own perspective during these dialogues is assumed as a necessary prerequisite. When it comes to recommending transference dialogues as part of a research methodology, these dangers are perhaps heightened because these dialogues are practiced outside the supervision of a therapeutic setting. Romanyshyn wisely recognizes this and includes various safeguards as to their practice.

Jung stated that active imagination was not a method, preferring instead to understand it as something that is only justified and helpful when it takes place out of an inner necessity:

> I must therefore expressly emphasize that my method of treatment does not consist in causing my patients to indulge in strange fantasies for the purpose of changing their personality, and other nonsense of that kind. I merely put it on record that there are certain cases where such a development occurs, not because I force anyone to it, but because it springs from inner necessity. For many of my patients these things are and must remain double Dutch. Indeed, even if it were possible for them to tread this path, it would be a disastrously wrong turning, and I would be the first to hold them back. The way of the transcendent function is an individual destiny. . . . Wherefore I entreat my reader to understand that I write about things which actually happen, and am not propounding methods of treatment. (par. 369)

Although it is necessary to keep in mind that it might be dangerous for some individuals to open up transference dialogues as part of a research project, in my opinion we must also consider the equally valid possibility that it might be increasingly dangerous in our own time *not* to. Again, this is where the ethical dimensions of Romanyshyn's work deserve serious consideration. It can be cogently argued that since the unconscious has been discovered, we can no longer pretend that it does not exist. Taking the unconscious into account in research—keeping soul in mind, as the book's title states—may not be simply an option but an ethical imperative; not just a should or a should not but a *must*. In fact, it might be the paramount ethical responsibility of our time to consciously confront the unconscious; perhaps we live in an age in which it has become more dangerous to avoid that confrontation than to engage it. Romanyshyn quotes Erich Neumann's work in this regard: "The old ethic . . . an ethic of the conscious attitude . . . is typified by the text from St. Augustine in which the saint thanks God that he is not responsible to him for his dreams" (p. 333). The new ethic, on the other hand, the ethic of the *Wounded Researcher*, implies that we are living in a time in which more and more individuals are fated to wrestle with their dreams (in the broadest sense of the word) and also to take ethical responsibility for the way in which they do or do not wrestle with them. Perhaps this is a way of growing up as a collective. In this sense, *The Wounded Researcher* might be one example of what is going to become an increasingly necessary collective task.

Along these lines I would also argue that not only are the *Wounded Researcher's* ethical premises entirely contemporary, even cutting edge, but also that its epistemological and ontological premises are as well. They are in line with cutting-edge trends of thought in the physical sciences, not outside of them, although these new dimensions of thought in physics, for example, such as the new depth psychological ethic, have yet to be fully integrated into the mainstream academic or popular understanding.

The main insight of 20th-century physics is that the scientific picture of the "objective" world that took hold in the 17th-century European mind was created by using the greatly simplifying device of excluding the psyche of the observer from the causal nexus of events. This following excerpt sounds like the argument of a postmodern hermeneutic philosopher, I know, but it was Einstein who wrote the following:

> Now it is characteristic of thought in physics, as of thought in natural science generally, that it endeavors in principle to make do with "space-like" concepts *alone*, and strives to express with their aid all relations having the form of laws. The physicist seeks to reduce colors and tones to vibrations, the physiologist, thought and pain to nerve processes, in such a way that the psychical element as such is eliminated from the

> causal nexus of existence, and thus nowhere occurs as an independent link in the causal associations. It is no doubt this attitude, which considers the comprehension of all relations by the exclusive use of only "space-like" concepts as being possible in principle, that is at the present time understood by the term "materialism" (since "matter" has lost its role as a fundamental concept). (1961, p. 162)

Francis Bacon was one of the first to express the materialistic attitude that Einstein describes as resulting from eliminating the psychic factor from events. In 1620 he made a clear distinction between facts and imagination:

> And all [in science] depends on keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are. For God forbid that we should give out a dream of our own imagination a pattern of the world. (1620/2000)

The Wounded Researcher . . . like the new physics, clashes with and challenges the old ontology that sharply divides reality and imagination.

In contrast to this 17th-century attitude (Einstein recognizes it as an attitude), Wolfgang Pauli summed up the epistemological premises of 20th-century science in a way that makes no absolute distinction between reality and imagination. That distinction, he said, belongs to the "old ontology" of science:

> By allowing for occurrences and the utilization of possibilities that cannot be apprehended as predetermined and existing independent of the observer, the type of interpretation of Nature characteristic of quantum physics clashes with the old ontology that could simply say, "Physics is the description of reality" as opposed to "description of what one simply imagines." (as cited in Meier, p. 92)

Pauli and Jung together put forth the hypothesis that the mind and what is known in perception are subject to an archetypal order objectively conceived. *The Wounded Researcher* is close to this hypothesis as well and in this sense it sails with the current of modern ideas in the physical sciences, not against it. For this reason it also, like the new physics, clashes with and challenges the old ontology that sharply divides reality and imagination. Yet this seems

to me to be an argument in favor of the book, not against it. If the majority of us are still living in the 17th century when it comes to such things and cannot yet see determinism, materialism, reductionism, or objectivity as an "attitude," as Einstein says, as a dimension of the imagination, then that is our fault—we are the ones who do not understand. The new ontology seems to state that any researcher must, of necessity, have an imaginative picture of the law or hypothesis that he or she is pursuing. Intuition, feeling, and the framing of attention play an inexorable role in the development of any research into nature, culture, or psychology. The laws and discoveries that follow from research progress in conformity with archetypal patterns. Perhaps it is becoming an increasingly ethical imperative to begin, as a culture, to recognize this as well.

And with this I will end with my starting point—the ethical dimension of *The Wounded Researcher*. As I read Jung's passages on active imagination as being not a method of treatment but rather a development that arises out of inner necessity, questions came into my mind about the collective significance of Romanyshyn's book. If we understand the transference dialogues, for instance, as an example of active imagination arising out of an inner necessity, and if this "way of the transcendent function" now appears outside of the clinical setting as an approach toward research, could this be evidence that more and more persons are fated today to become aware of and deal with the unconscious depths of the soul? Is the appearance of a book such as *The Wounded Researcher* evidence that there is an increasing level of inevitability in the general culture today, even necessity, to consciously risk an encounter with the unconscious? This is where the ethical quality of this book comes to mind. If we now have a book that envisions an academy in which the soul is taken seriously, in which its creative and destructive manifestations in dreams and active imagination are treated with respect, and safe routes toward those depths are taught, in my opinion that is more than a personal idiosyncrasy of the author but evidence of an ethical response to an important need. If it is indeed the case that the conscious recognition of the unconscious is becoming a matter of increasing necessity in our own time, then Romanyshyn's attempt to make room for the unconscious in academic research is both a symptom of this collective necessity and a profoundly ethical response to it. The goal of *The Wounded Researcher* is to "make a place for the soul of the work to speak beyond the calculus of a researcher's subjective prejudices" (p. 44); I believe that one dimension of the soul of *this* work arises out of a collective ethical need that goes beyond Romanyshyn's own subjective prejudices.

My enduring reactions to *The Wounded Researcher* are first gratitude and second an abiding sense of this deeply ethical quality. It takes a devoted and courageous consciousness to bring an awareness of the creative role of the unconscious into the academic discussion. I certainly do not take this book

as an instruction manual or anything of the sort for how research *should* look or what *should* happen in the research process. *The Wounded Researcher* recognizes that the unconscious, as Jung understood it, is present not only in analysis but also in the transference field that can open up during a research project. Informed at its heart by an ethical sensibility that feels it is important for research to keep this in mind, Romanyshyn forms this ethical sensibility into a working theory, into method and process.

The Wounded Researcher speaks of being true to the ancestors upon whom one's own efforts are based, and sees vocation in continuing to work with their unfinished business as it constellates in our own complexes. Certainly Robert Romanyshyn is doing that in this book. And certainly Jung is one of those ancestral souls.

Thomas Elsner is a Jungian analyst in private practice in Santa Barbara, California, a member of the C. G. Jung Study Center of Southern California, and adjunct faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute. Some of his interests include the relationship between psychology and literature, especially between Romanticism and depth psychology, and he is currently working on a book about Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

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