

Robert Romanyshyn, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus at Pacifica Graduate Institute. He has published six books; contributed essays to numerous edited volumes; has published articles in psychology, philosophy, education and poetry journals; and has edited special journal issues. He has given lectures and workshops at universities and professional societies in the U.S., Europe, Australia, South Africa, Canada, and New Zealand. He recently finished a new book, *Leaning toward the Poet: Eavesdropping on the Poetry of Everyday Life*, and he is working on a play, "The Frankenstein Prophecy." He lives in Summerland, CA, with his wife Veronica Goodchild.

ROBERT ROMANYSHYN

Sitting on a Bench with James Hillman: Conversations with the Dead

[T]o us he is no more a person
now but a whole climate of opinion

Under whom we conduct our different lives:
Like weather he can only hinder or help,
The proud can still be proud but find it
a little harder, the tyrant tries to

make do with him but doesn't care for him much:
he quietly surrounds all our habits of growth
and extends, till the tired in even
the remotest miserable duchy

have felt the change in their bones and are cheered...

(Auden, 1976, p. 217)

WHAT W.H. AUDEN SAID in his elegy for Freud in the late 1930s, might we also say today of James? Is it not so that James has become a climate of opinion, an atmosphere, the weather of the soul? And, recalling that the poet also said, "The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living" (Abrams, 1975, p. 2615), might we add that now we are all in the process of digesting and being nourished by James who is now not only atmosphere and climate, but also companion, one who shares his subtle bread—soul food—with us, one who though he be absent is still present and who continues to feed the anima mundi, the soul of the world of which we are a part?

So we gather today within this atmosphere to continue a conversation with our companion James. The talk this time is about city and soul, about the polis and the psyche.

Already this conjunction of city and psyche takes me back to those days in Dallas when Phenomenology and Jungian-Archetypal Psychology irritated each other into breaking the window that had for so long split the public and the private realms. Notwithstanding some disagreements I would have with you, James, regarding your description of mirror and window, your essay "From Mirror to Window: Curing Psychoanalysis of its Narcissism" does recall the cooperation that was necessary between the two traditions (Hillman, 2006). Phenomenology's critique of depth psychology's solipsistic subjectivity—its inveterate narcissistic preoccupation with the patient's interior life—and its return to the

things themselves to unravel, as Erwin Straus once noted, the unwritten constitution of everyday life was complemented by archetypal psychology's insistence on the lived world's animation, its liveliness, its image quality, its depth. Together and on the other side of the window, enlivened by the world's breath, inspired by the awful beauty of its sensuous charms, whom did the phenomenologist and archetypal psychologist meet, lingering there, perhaps on a park bench somewhere in Dallas? None other than the poet, patiently waiting to take up the question of an old man, Carl Jung, who quite near the end of his life, wondered why his work had to require the death of the poet?

Benches! I like to imagine benches as the strange attractors of soul because like their physical counterpart what takes place on benches are conversations that are and remain fluid, dynamic, ongoing, conversations that seek a hint of order in the chaos of experience, which then slips back into that chaos, into what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called the savage being of the world. Every bench, even an empty one, is an oasis in the turbulent currents of life, a place where for a moment one encounters an other be he or she living or dead, a place where the horizons of a past remembered and a future imagined condense in the present into a story, a fable, a way of shaping the stray lines that always undo the fictions we create with our mapmaking minds, a temporary dispensation from the dissolution of the fixed structures we build to endure the continuous descents into the chaos that the alchemy of ordinary life imposes. Benches, even empty ones where the dead present in their absence sit and wait, are temporary havens that assuage the loneliness of the road. At the end of this essay I will return to this dynamic quality of benches and their place in the cityscapes of soul. For the moment, however, I see you James sitting on a bench with John Keats. Let me eavesdrop for a moment and listen into the conversation:

John: He doubted that he would produce anything but a heap of shards had he made his work aesthetic. He refused therefore to press the poet's wreath upon his head.

James: He was right to refuse to do so. Psychology is not poetry and the psychologist is not a poet. And yet something was lost. "Call the world . . .," you said, "the vale of soul-making. Then you will find out the use of the world."

John: The use of the world! What is that use? Indeed, is the world useful? Should it be? And, if it is, then for what and to whom? These are hard questions especially in your day when so many believe that its use is as resource for your use and abuse.

James: I confess that I had to make a decisive turn in my work when I realized that I was reading your words within the context of the

*latent virus of narcissism in Jungian and Archetypal psychology.
The therapy room had isolated itself from nature and the city, and
had ignored the patient as citizen.*

John: And the citizen as patient?

*James: That too as some of my colleagues in phenomenology had
been saying. For them the world is the home and habitat of sub-
jectivity and for me I had to acknowledge that in considering "the
world out there to be useful for making one's own soul," I had made
a serious mistake. Psychologists are not poets but with a poetic sen-
sibility one can hear your words as saying "we go through the world
for the sake of its soul making, thereby our own." (Hillman, 2006, p. 74,
italics in original)*

A breeze scattered the leaves around the bench, and John and James were gone. As I walked around a bend in the road, I was thinking about James's re-visioning of what Keats meant about the world as the vale of soul-making when I saw another bench with a book of poems by Mark Strand lying on it. The breeze of a moment ago had opened the pages to his poem, 'The Night, The Porch.'

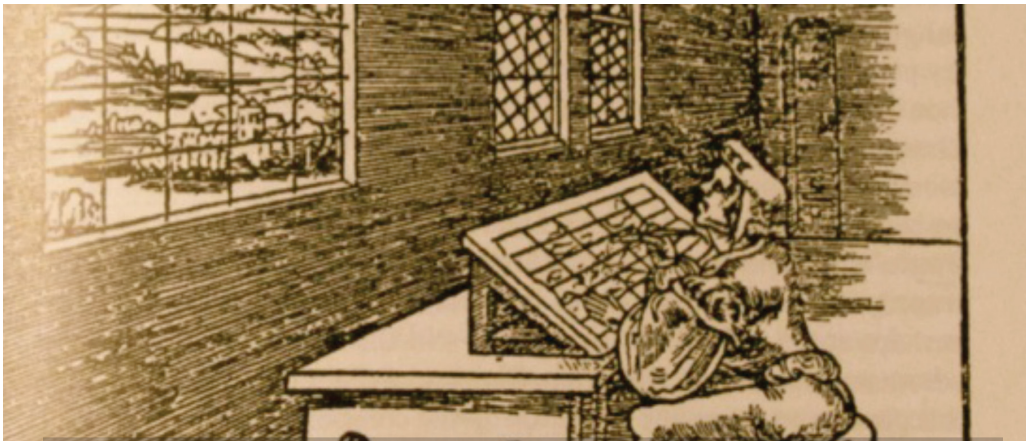
To stare at nothing is to learn by heart
What all of us will be swept into, and barring oneself
To the wind is feeling the ungraspable somewhere close by.
Trees can sway or be still. Day or night can be what they wish.
What we desire, more than season or weather is the comfort
Of being strangers, at least to ourselves. This is the crux
Of the matter, which is why even now we seem to be waiting
For something whose appearance would be its vanishing—
The sound, say, of a few leaves falling, or just one leaf.
Or less. There is no end to what we can learn. The book out there
Tells us as much, and was never written with us in mind. (1998, p.10)

When we dream we are strangers to ourselves, and just as a dream needs a dream, a poet needs a poet. And there around another twist in the road John Keats and Mark Strand, the dead and the living, laughing and agreeing that to find out the use of the world one has to lose his or her mind as one has to do if one is to avoid colonizing the dream.

James, might we propose that psychology is useless, or should be (Romanyshyn, 2002)? To find out the use of the world do we not have to let go of the professional temptations to be useful, or meaningful or even helpful? Are not these so-called values examples of psychology's narcissism, which would replace

vernacular understandings of such practices with its professional and prescribed practices?

The days in Dallas when Archetypal Psychology and Phenomenology converged shattered the window of the Spectator Mind, which, with its eye upon the world, is a disembodied subjectivity that has severed the bonds between the sensuous skin of world and the sensual flesh of the body, a despotic eye that has broken the erotic love affair between them (fig. 3.1).



(fig. 3.1)

On the other side of the window, in the chiasm between world and body, we see, as the philosopher Merleau-Ponty says, because we are seeable, to which we might add we speak because we are addressed by the displays of the world. The delightful early morning play of light and shadows (fig. 3.2), or the fading light of a late afternoon that is still dreaming itself as green (fig. 3.3) or the sudden piecing rays of light through a copse of trees (fig. 3.4), or the reflection of clouds not in but as water (fig. 3.5) reveal the splendor in the simple, the extraordinary in the ordinary, and even, if one be so inclined to be so bold, the miracle in the mundane. These forays into the world are and should be a key part of any psychological education, an education via their seduction of mind to fall into its flesh.

Earlier I promised I would return to the bench. Now is a good time for I see a breeze has brought you back. There is a bench up ahead. Let's stop there. I would like to tell you a story about benches to illustrate their place in the chiasm of city and soul.

In the late 1940s and throughout the 50s I grew up in a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. In the early evenings of spring, summer and fall, neighbors would gather after supper to talk and to gossip. Those after dinner rituals enacted mostly by women impressed upon me how those occasions were forms of consolation, ways in which those women shaped and shared



(fig. 3.2) The delightful early morning play of light and shadows



(fig. 3.3) The fading light of a late afternoon that is still dreaming itself as green



(fig. 3.4) The sudden piecing rays of light through a copse of trees



(fig. 3.5) The reflection of clouds not in but as water

the ordinary struggles and hardships of daily life. Companionship and compassion graced those gatherings. Those benches were places for making communities, places of performance, street theater as it were persons embodied specific types and characters and played out their particular roles. It was, of course, all done without rehearsal, psychological life displayed in action lived out straightforwardly in the world. Witnessing those performances and sometimes eavesdropping on the conversations, I was beguiled by them. They were the grammar school of my vocation into psychology.

Those rituals gradually disappeared as television invaded the neighborhood. The benches emptied as more and more people went inside, in both senses. The characters faded from the world, the bonds of community were broken, and neighbors became strangers.

There were, of course, other kinds of benches where different dramas were enacted. As I got older I gravitated toward the benches where old men gathered. They taught me how to play checkers, chess, poker and other card games. But sometimes they would just sit there and, with their eyes half closed, they would drift into reverie and tell tall tales as if to no one, reminiscing about their heroic deeds and conquests of women, most of which I learned later were simply melancholic dreams of old men. I liked those moments of tall tales best, but those rituals too disappeared, and their benches became more and more empty.

There is something melancholic about an empty bench (fig. 3.6, 3.7). They are haunted by an absence that is still present. Existing in a kind of liminal space, they shimmer between a thing and an image. Holding a tension between



(fig. 3.6) There is something melancholic about an empty bench

presence and absence, they can slow one down, invite one to pause for a moment, to linger awhile between the certainty of what is—the empty bench—and the uncertainty of what might be—who or what is present in that absence. Not long ago, James, I had an experience of what might happen when one accepts that subtle invitation and sits for a moment on an empty bench.



(fig. 3.7)

Meeting Patrick Kavanagh in Dublin

Along a walkway near the Liffey River in Dublin, Ireland is a bench where the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh used to sit. I discovered one day that he still sits there, even though he died many years ago.

'Trying to be a poet,' he told me, 'is a peculiar business.'
 'What does it feel like,' I asked, 'to be a poet?'
 But then a breeze rustled the leaves in the tree
 and he was gone, leaving me with that question.

I have wondered about this business of being a poet for a long time. I do not think of myself as a poet even though I do write some poems. And I do read the poets, almost everyday, a kind of ritual practice.

But the word itself—poet—it seems to me,
is a benediction bestowed by others.
One does not bless oneself in this way.
Orpheus, the eponymous poet, I think, would be offended.

The tribe of the poets is a small one.
To join it, even if only to tag along at the very far end of their wanderings,
like some beggar,
picking up the crumbs of the feast left by those who are poets,
feels uncomfortable and even dangerous.
Prose feels more comfortable
and I feel more at home in the well-fashioned costumes of my prosaic self.

But sometimes I dream
I am following along at the end of that procession,
wearing a patchwork garment
made by a rag picker from the odds and ends of life.
And the dream always ends on that bench beside the Liffey River in Dublin
where I watch Patrick Kavanagh sewing patches on the sleeves of torn coats.

(Romanyshyn, 2014)



(fig. 3.8)

So, James, we are back with the poets. Two psychologists in liminal space! It makes me wonder about the death of the poet that troubled Jung. Is it possible that benches might be places for nurturing a poetic sensibility for a psychology in that liminal space between city and soul? Is it also possible that benches might be places of soul making? If they are, then what might a city without benches be? Soulless?

A final word, James. Benches presume paths. Walking on paths we arrive at benches where the rhythm between movement and rest can change, where one might hesitate between going on and stopping. When there is a bend in the road one might also hesitate for a moment at the uncertainty of the unfamiliar that lies beyond the bend, where the bend with its coy seduction seems to promise some adventure, the possibility of some new wonder (fig. 3.8, 3.9). If benches are the strange attractors of soul making, then might bends in the road be the verbs of soul? Might paths and the bends in paths inscribe in the world the different moods of mind and soul? Might a path in its turning be a place where the straight and narrow road with its clarity and fixed direction, with its tempting promise of progress, embody the indicative mood of life, whereas the turn, suggesting possibility and inviting one to imagine and dream of what might be, might be the subjunctive mood of life? If that be the case, then what might a city be without such paths for going 'round the bend, and without the benches that line the way?



(fig. 3.9)



(fig. 3.10)

Postscript:

Dallas! What a place! Thirty-five years ago, soul making took place here. Phenomenology and Archetypal Psychology each following their respective paths from Pittsburgh and Zurich and many places in between to Dallas met each other along the way. A conversation began, often heated as good conversations are, and it continues. James is gone now and yet he lingers. If you pause now and then, you might meet him on an empty bench some morning or evening as you amble and drift along the road in reverie that leads to unexpected places (fig. 3.10).

Notes:

Fig. 3.1 is from *Technology as Symptom and Dream* (Romanyshyn, 1989)

Fig. 3.2-3.9 photos by Robert Romanyshyn

Fig. 3.10 photo by Veronica Goodchild