

## A Translator's Journey: A Retrospective

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### Abstract

An exploration of a central discovery opening up onto Michael Heller's "System of the Dimensions of the Organism" in the process of translating his book *Body Psychotherapy: History, Concepts and Methods*. How, borrowing from Michel Heller's language, a collegial endeavor benefited from the mainly indirect global organismic regulation mechanisms connecting the dimensions of the organism (metabolism, body, behavior, and psyche). The showcased experience is the translator's surprising re-discovery of his French mind, leading to improved collaborative mutuality.

*Keywords:* translation, organismic, re-discovery, linguistics

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Whatever would possess anyone to agree to translate a 600-page text so far-reaching it addresses issues relevant to body psychotherapy that span from the origins of yoga to discoveries in the neurosciences? After a two-and-a-half-year long adventure that eventually resulted in the publication of Michel Heller's *Body Psychotherapy: History, Concepts and Methods* by W. W. Norton this past August, this translator must admit that he had become smitten by an earlier perusal of the first French edition. This led to the writing of a brief review for the USABP Journal in 2008 and to a later invitation, facilitated by Jacqueline A. Carleton, PhD, editor of the *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, to collaborate with the author on an English translation of a revision of the original French version. After a cautionary period, hesitation and perfectionism took a back seat to passion and excitement.

Those of you who have had such an intimate experience as the one afforded a translator know the delicate dance between being a faithful conveyer of another's thought and an inadvertent mis-interpreter. The well-known Italian phrase "traduttore, traditore" (meaning the translator is a traitor) merits a sticky note at eye level to warn the translator against the elusive temptations of the lurking traitor. To those of you who have not had this experience, if it presents itself to you, do not let it slip through your fingers, especially if the author is a formidable intellectual, respected researcher and a practitioner of nuance.

The following is not an academic discussion of the project. Instead, expect some personal observations and excursions in the lived process of this two-and-a-half-year heartfelt collaboration which has resulted in a lasting friendship built on mindful agreements and unexpected elucidations after respectful disagreements.

The translator was born into a Franco-American family with roots in the French-speaking Catholic culture of the Province of Quebec. He spoke Canadian French at home and with playmates until, at the age of five, he entered a bilingual parochial school in 1944. In an unusual turn of events, he continued having a bilingual education through college and his first graduate degree. Yet, his later education and professional and family life was to be and is now lived in English. The opportunities to read, write and speak French were and

are sadly few and far between, but savored as rare moments. The invitation to translate a scholarly text awakened neurotic feelings of inadequacy. Would he be up to the challenge? How would he assess the adequacy of his French-to-English skills?

As in love, erotic impulses led to adventurous experimentation. The prospect loomed of failing to meet the expectations of the author and the standards of the editor. He first translated the introduction and the glossary, which the author was to evaluate with regard to language and accuracy. He submitted samples of his professional writing to the editor. And then he waited, fully aware that the verdict was not assured. Either one could nix the journey.

Mercifully, he did pass muster. The game was on if he wanted to play. It was time to negotiate the terms. Sitting at his desk in the quiet of his study, he listened to the message conveyed by his responsive physiology. "Set your limits up front. Honor your NO." He did not want to be responsible for the bibliography or for the index. The prospect of having to manage that minutia would awaken his abusive obsessive-compulsive personality traits and his shamefully inadequate computer skills. He was surprised that the author generously agreed to relieve him of those tasks. It was a first moment in what would become an open and respectful working relationship. The translator easily resolved to accept the modest but realistic stipend, get down to business, and take the first step on what was to morph into a journey of a thousand discoveries.

In retrospect, the translator neither recalls the very first nor each and every subsequent discovery. He does remember how naturally the exchange of documents floated back and forth high above the Atlantic. The author sent the first chapter with a message flavored with a touch of apprehension but offset with confidence, as if to suggest a need to treat the fruit of his scholarship with the tenderness of an appreciative nanny. The translator first received the French document with his English-thinking mind. He was tentative. How was he to hold it, let himself be touched by it, respond to it? He struggled and see-sawed between fidelity to content and context, erring at first on the side of verbal accuracy for fear of imposing unnoticed personal interpretations. Soon thereafter, he sought to find a measured fidelity to the author's thoughts and arguments. Yet something was missing in the translation process.

Nonetheless, on time, the first chapters landed on one another's desks. A ping pong match ensued: the French text followed by a draft English translation followed by an annotated editing of the draft and a return of a revision with bracketed explanations and suggestions for greater clarity. By this time, the two had become partners and both more direct in their exchanges. They were heavily into the part of the text relating to the contributions of the European philosophers after the earlier contributions of the yogis from the East. Something was still amiss. The translator was suffering from a split. He had not yet acclimated to the French text. He had not yet found his French mind.

There were options for the translator: Accept that his reading skills alone would not suffice. Enhance his speaking skills. Engage in an immersion experience.

It was Christmastime. His wife gave him the Rosetta Stone French Level V. For the next months into the full first year of the translation, he discovered something he had long forgotten: that muscle memory figured centrally in language. A realization learned in his earlier linguistic studies returned to him: that climate influenced the evolution of languages. The Germanic languages are more guttural and the Romance languages more labio-dental. Moving his oral apparatus from an English mid-mouth position contributed to his English/French mental dissonance when he repeated the French. Given that he

resided in the Arizona high-country where towns and cities are miles and hours apart, driving to and fro provided ample opportunities to listen to the Rosetta Stone lessons. But listening and mumbling the words and sentences in the car at 75 miles per hour was initially a frustrating exercise in futility. The translator continued to think mostly in English.

Then one mid-winter day, six months in, on a three-hour trip down from the mountains south to Phoenix, as the wind whipped loudly across the highway, he yelled out the dialogue above the noise. And there it was, clear as the expansive, blue sky: a pivotal and surprising discovery! The more he articulated the phonemes, moved his tongue, his cheeks, his jaw, took deep breathes, gestured slightly with shoulders and arms, bounced a bit on his seat, the more the sounds resonated in his entire body. Independent morphemes clustered into phrases and sentences, and they into cogent paragraphs. Something quite unexpected and dramatic was happening. He was re-awakening the long dormant French language circuitry of his brain and mind. He could sense it. He could feel it.

Over the ensuing months, every minute alone in the car turned into a reprocessing session. The early morning and early evening translating time afforded the translator longer lasting moments of communication with the author's thought. The translator was being delivered of his fear of being a traitor. He began to trust himself and to accept the author's expressions of satisfaction and even pleasure.

It was not yet time for complacency. The frank feedback afforded to the translator by the author and Dr. Carleton necessitated revisions of the beginning chapters. In fact, complacency never entered the picture, not for the translator or for the author. The editors saw to that.

Over the successive months of collaborative work on the translation, the translator developed, as he put it, a French mouth; thus, to his great delight, he rediscovered his French mind. Author and translator engaged in more frequent conversations, sometimes in French, and submitted more versions of a text to each other. In this way, they were reaching a mutually pleasing revision that faithfully expressed the author's intent. Finally, this began relieving the translator of his neurotic defenses against imagined rejection. A work trip to Assens in 2011 as the guest of the author and his wife, Nicole, confirmed the translator's conviction that the author was indeed intellectually and ethically committed to his work and to the field of body psychotherapy.

In one of the countless exchanges, Dr. Heller reminded the translator in late August of 2011 that "what sometimes appears as a sliver of a concept in body psychotherapy is often the tip on an iceberg leading to deep discussions with lengthy antecedents." On another occasion, an email correspondence occurred between the author and the translator, who is Jungian at heart, where the author wrote, "The psyche is...associated to the soul, or to behavior or to emotion as if these formed a coherent whole." Or when in their conversations the author stated, "The body is sometimes [that which] a Rolfer works on, sometimes physiology, sometimes the whole person." And the translator would now add, recalling Cohen and Weiss' 2003 book, *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, that the body is also sometimes the body politic, a body of work, the body "as a text", the body as object and the body as subject, the body as erotic, the body as corpse, and so much more—even as one of the pivotal dimensions of the author's "System of the Dimensions of the Organism".

In the end, the translator likes to entertain the idea that he brought to the English text the interplay of his body, psyche, behavior and metabolic activity as guided by the organismic regulation mechanisms of his being as a person.

## BIOGRAPHY

After a 45-year-long career, Marcel A. Duclos still enjoys the performing arts of teaching, psychotherapy and clinical supervision. He has consulted in the field of child protective services, addictions and trauma. He served 28 years as a college faculty member, administrator and consultant. He has directed a nonprofit agency specializing in crisis intervention, substance use disorder treatment, and homelessness. He currently serves as the clinical director of the Northland Family Help Center in Flagstaff, AZ. He is a specialist in trauma and addiction treatment. He presents and trains at home and abroad in the field of trauma treatment for adult victims of abuse and violence. A life-long learner, he brings his study of philosophy, theology, developmental psychology, Jungian Archetypical Analysis, Core Energetic Evolutionary Therapy, EMDR, body psychotherapy, Internal Family Systems Therapy, and Gnostic Christian spirituality to his psychotherapeutic practice, and to his life. He has co-authored four books with Connie Robillard, MA, LCMHC: *Common Threads: Stories of Life After Trauma*; *Necessary Illusions: Musings by a Man and a Woman in Prose and Poetry*; *A Door in the Desert*; and *Cultivating Hope for Abuse Survivors: Watering the Cracks in the Sidewalk*.

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