

# Fictional Rolfing®

by Raymond J. Bishop, Ph.D.

One of the most interesting aspects of bodywork is its rich use of metaphor. Just as when we try to verbalize music, we find ourselves describing our experiences of body in a representative figurative language, since this is invariably the most meaningful way to communicate our internal sensations and aid our clients in describing the rich and slowly emerging world of embodiment. Many of us in somatic therapy look far and wide for a language that is suggestively evocative yet not so esoteric that our clients feel inadequate if they cannot access that magical kinesthetic realm whose many facets we reveal in our structural and movement sessions.

For me the world of music has been one of great interest largely because I have spent over 40 years studying it, while I have only studied bodywork for the past eleven and have been teaching it for a paltry five. During my advanced musical studies, I read avidly in the fields of history, philosophy, literature and the arts. These parallel pursuits interfaced symbiotically and helped deepen my understanding and appreciation of the operas and chamber music I studied, providing a larger context for my analytical explorations of these genres within rather narrow chronological parameters.

Since beginning my Rolfing practice I frequently returned to fiction as a welcome respite from my diverse anatomical and scientific readings. Several years ago I began experiencing a growing desire to marry my love of literature and structural bodywork. This realization led me to examine a variety of sources for a deeper understanding of some key concepts of language, philosophy and literary theory in the hope that I might find an imaginative way of structuring a somatic essay, one that offered a novel perspective (pun intended) on how we experience our work. This article is an elaboration of a previous exploration of these relationships to which I recently returned after encountering several sources that shifted my ideas about how

such an essay might be structured and how its argument might be advanced. What we consider below are various metaphorical and theoretical relationships between these subjects, some of which were discussed in the original piece.

First let's look at somatic metaphor. Once we consider them through the proper lens, all models of bodywork rely on metaphor to explain sensation and structure, elucidating patterns through diverse mapping systems, emotional chartings and proprioceptive images. Rolfers and other structural integrators, for example, have richly mined this area in articles and widely disseminated books.<sup>2</sup> Looking at Dr. Rolf's work, for instance, you might say that her anthropomorphization of gravity (the famous "gravity is the therapist" remark) is the most fundamental somatic metaphor, the "ur-metaphor" that underlies all our discussions of how our work creates change and order. The richness of this single gravitational image could occupy us for considerable time, but let us rather embrace a larger picture here.

Many authors in our community, such as those cited in note 2, employ a wide range of images and devices to illustrate their points, creating imaginative constructs that certainly have a more universal appeal than biomechanical descriptions of ROM (range of motion), shear forces and joint functionality. We all learn a repertoire of such metaphors in our trainings and eventually develop our own through trial and error or epiphany. In fact one could convincingly argue that the entire language of Rolf Movement (and most other movement therapies) is metaphorical and that without this rich repertoire of somatic images, we would be hard-pressed to translate internal experience into a coherent language.

As I sought corroboration for this thesis, I soon realized that I had never done a movement or structural session without employing metaphorical phrasings specifically de-

signed to enhance my client's internal felt-sense of the work. Furthermore, I can recall no structural integration session I received which was not analogously structured. Also, when receiving sophisticated work, I often delighted in learning some new image which subsequently appeared somewhat reconfigured in my own sessions.

This led me to wonder about the why and how of metaphor in our language in general. Not being an expert in language, however, I had no clear notion of where to look for a workable theory, until stumbling across a fascinating book on linguistic theory, *The Unfolding of Language*. I was delighted to read that, in the author's view, one of the most important aspects of language is its multidimensional metaphorical structure. In the fourth chapter of this book, the author, Guy Deutscher, explores the rich and omnipresent wealth of metaphor at all levels of expression, even the most prosaic. Here is a typical passage from this aptly titled chapter: "A Reef of Dead Metaphors": "And one certainly does not have to be an aspiring poet in order to transfer concepts from one linguistic domain to another. Even in the most commonplace discourse, it is hardly possible to venture a few steps without treading on dozens of metaphors ... We use metaphors not because of any literary leanings or artistic ambitions, but quite simply because metaphor is the chief mechanism through which we describe and even grasp abstraction."<sup>3</sup>

If Deutscher's view that what we describe is inherently abstract is correct, then our use of metaphor is inevitable if not inescapable. Once we accept his argument, we start looking deeper at the richness of metaphor in our professional and daily language. Deutscher, it seems, does exactly for us what we aspire to do with our clients, enhance awareness through association. With this new understanding, we can more sensitively attend to how our "soundings of the commonplace" echo through our client's consciousness.

What we will soon find, I think, is that when we describe the abstractions that are the bases of our work without the use of metaphor, our language becomes hopelessly labored and we ultimately find ourselves adrift in a sea of confusion. Metaphor anchors our languaging of somatic experience and provides the most successful entrée into our client's system and psyche. Metaphor in language transforms and connects.

Since I wished to extend this exploration into the philosophical realm, imagine my delight when I encountered a somatically-based philosophy that deals with not only mind and consciousness, but also one that playfully explores a wealth of embodied metaphor. That this work additionally presents numerous literary allusions was a wonderful bit of serendipity that I realized would dovetail nicely into some ideas I had encountered in the field of literary criticism. All this was coalescing quite nicely.

The book in question, *Philosophy in the Flesh* by Lakoff and Johnson, presents us with a consideration of a somatically-based discipline that the authors call cognitive philosophy. While their book is extremely ambitious and far-reaching, its most important ideas for our purposes can be expressed quite simply. The authors identify three tenets which underlie their philosophical method: 1) the mind is inherently embodied; 2) thought is mostly conscious; and 3) abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.<sup>4</sup> This first thesis of embodied thought flies in the face of most Western philosophy of the past 2,000 years. Accepting this notion, for instance, means a repudiation of the Cartesian notion of dualism, the separation of mind and body. Similarly, the authors argue, if all thought is embodied, then there can be no Kantian autonomous individual with absolute freedom nor can there be such a thing as transcendent reason. Pursuing this line of reasoning, the authors challenge a wide variety of more recent philosophical theories including analytic philosophy and Chomsky's dualistic linguistics.<sup>5</sup>

Once I decided to sidestep the complexities inherent in any attempt to explore conscious and unconscious thought, I quickly moved on to the third tenet, which states that abstract thought is mostly metaphorical. The ubiquitousness of metaphorical language is wittily explored throughout Lakoff and Johnson's extensive tome. Remarks like the following crop up frequently. "It is virtually impossible to think about the mind in any serious way without conceptualizing it metaphorically. Whenever we conceptualize aspects of mind in terms of grasping ideas, reaching conclusions, being unclear, or swallowing a claim, we are using metaphor to make sense of what we do with our minds."<sup>6</sup>

Later, Lakoff and Johnson examine the issue of embodied metaphor, presenting three complex theoretical models of its structure. They then show how simple and complex

somatic metaphors are formed, analyzing them quite exhaustively. A particularly delightful love metaphor they scrutinize comes from Aretha Franklin's 1980s hit: "Freeway of Love." They focus on one line in particular: "We're driving in the fast lane on the freeway of love." Said line evokes a wealth of "love" metaphors such as: love as a journey, love as a reckless act, love as a high-speed race, a freeway (hence love) as a risky road on which to travel, etc. Travel metaphors among others are also explored in their consideration of this joyful popular tune.

What I found particularly serendipitous about this discussion was its title: "Novel Metaphor."<sup>7</sup> This wonderful examination of amorous metaphor, and its fortuitous title, provided the perfect leaping off point for the last leg of my broadly conceived journey, the literary piece. Lakoff and Johnson's felicitous choice of text seemed to invite this ultimate excursion, and I gladly rose to the challenge. This journey, suggested by the song's text, precipitated an avalanche of literary images and inspired me to scan a more distant horizon.

To me, this logical leap from "The Queen of Soul" to the realm of literature seemed an "Invitation to the Dance" that I simply could not resist. The next question was how to reroute my wide-ranging peregrinations to an exploration of subjects "novelary" (a fictional conflation of novel and literary). After consulting an expert on Roman fiction, I devoured a recommended source that provided the means for my transition from linguistics and cognitive philosophy to contemporary literary theory.

The first section of this classic resource explores how an author should best interpret his character's actions, and addresses the thorny question of narrative voice (yet another somatic metaphor *par excellence*).<sup>8</sup> A central idea that the author, Wayne C. Booth, develops is the inherent fallacy of objectivity in fiction. He presents many examples of recent writers who faulted their predecessors and contemporaries for failing to maintain an objective distance from their characters. Yet, Booth argues, these same writers consistently intrude their presence at every turn by virtue of their subjective structural choices and implicit attitudes to their characters. Booth states that, despite his best efforts, it is impossible for an author not to intrude. "In short, the author's judgment is always present to anyone who knows how to look for it. ... We must never

forget that the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear."<sup>9</sup>

In few novels is this unavoidable dichotomy so obvious as Gustave Flaubert's "manifesto for detached realism," *Madame Bovary* (1857). This scandalous masterpiece evolved from Flaubert's well-documented efforts to create a mundane yet totally objective work, one which champions form as the sole means for achieving literary truth. He explicitly details his intention to remove all traces of the author's presence. Here is his famous remark about the need for the author to remain unobtrusive at all times. "An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere. The more visible the author, the weaker the work." Years later, however, he admitted the complete failure of his grandiose scheme: "I have always sinned that way, I have always put myself into everything I have written."<sup>10</sup>

In light of this admission, we more properly see this "roman à thèse" as a brilliant yet failed literary exercise in self-effacement.<sup>11</sup> Equally famous failures are the "scientific novels" of Emile Zola (especially those that make up his massive Rougon-Macquart series). These grimly fatalistic novels inspired by Social Darwinism rather clumsily document the "inevitable" deterioration of tragically flawed characters, unfortunates predestined to misery and self-destruction, victims of their genetic deficiencies. In fact, on closer inspection, these "scientific" works are replete with moralistic philosophizing and social commentary. Never is this "objective" author's presence far from sight. Like Flaubert before him, Zola eventually abandoned his scientific experiments and moved into the mystical realm, as did many other artists of that era.<sup>12</sup>

How like Flaubert and Zola are we when we struggle with our narrative voice and the role we play in our client's process? Is it not equally impossible for us to remain truly objective and absent? Does not our every touch, word, gesture, and choice of technique or fascial geography shape not only our client's structure but also his subjective reality? Obviously, this must be so. So, since we clearly cannot avoid these connections, we might as well make peace with them.

As I ruminated on the above questions, particularly the last, I wandered through the rich mines of several favorite novels and

asked myself why these works appealed and how I might use them to bolster my argument. Here some interesting patterns emerged.

I then considered this question: What is it about those writers who deliberately intrude, unabashedly chiding and maneuvering me to accept a particular point of view that so greatly appeals to me? Why for instance am I so enamored of the delicate intrusions of my favorite Victorian author, Anthony Trollope?<sup>13</sup> What I realized was that his approach to subject and plot mirrored how I actually work. What a curious and unexpected insight.

Trollope is now remembered (if at all) for his six-volume Barchester series and the later thematically related Palliser or Parliamentary novels, most particularly through such marvelous works as *Barchester Towers*, *The Small House at Arlington*, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* and *The Eustace Diamonds*. While these works are masterfully written and rich with psychological insight, what I love most about them are Trollope's frequent interpositions of his gently persuasive self in his novels, each intrusion a wonderfully deliberate effort to sway his readers, shaping their view of his characters, mostly in a sympathetic manner.

In few of his novels is this narrative affectation more evident than his 1860 novel set during the 1840s Irish potato famine, *Castle Richmond*. This is how the novel opens: "I wonder whether the novel-reading world—that part of it, at least which may honor my pages, will be offended if I lay the plot of this novel in Ireland!"<sup>14</sup> Here Trollope begins by defending his choice of subject and location, neither of which were particularly common choices among his Victorian English brethren. Later in this novel, Trollope indulges in a direct appeal to his readers as he sheds light on his hero's actions in a passionate and paternal manner. "Oh my friends! Be not hard on him in that he was thus weeping like a woman. It was not for his lost wealth that he was wailing, nor even for the name or splendor!"<sup>15</sup> This curious defense of an honorable man's apparent weakness seems more a comment on the sensibilities of his male readership than an explanation of what in context seems a most natural outpouring of emotion. And again, here is how he sets up the novel's conclusion: "My story is nearly at its close, and all readers will now know how it is to end."<sup>16</sup>

Such direct petitions and engaging of the reader became anathema to most later writers, perhaps because those who used such devices to establish such a rapport were by then perceived as naïve and embarrassingly obvious. This dated style and language hardly resonate with most serious contemporary fiction. Yet, although such language now feels quaint and rather silly, I ultimately accepted that I luxuriate in Trollope's gentle intercalations and consciously model my bodywork on his transparent techniques. I deliberately evoke Trollope's importuning style, inviting my client to share the ways I shape the session and openly reveal to them the tools I employ to facilitate rapport and change as I am in the act of employing them (just as I am doing here while writing this sentence). To me, this approach is both humane and compassionate. It creates a deeper connection and serves to demythologize our often poorly understood work.

Before concluding, I would like to briefly consider two recent novels that present very different contemporary approaches to the question of narrative voice. The first is Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979), a brilliantly structured novel that is largely a surreal adventure story about the frustrating search for the true version of a book called *If on a winter's night a traveler*. This rather exceptional example will seem to violate my suggestion that contemporary authors eschew engaging the reader. Yet, what we have here is something wonderfully different, dripping with irony and artful complexity, light years from the gentle pleadings of Trollope and his ilk; and this is precisely why it was selected.

As much as any novel I know, it challenges not only our expectations of what a novel is, but also our whole notion of novel as "telling." From the opening sentence we are included and asked to participate actively in the novel. "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade ... Find a comfortable position: seated, stretched out, curled up or lying flat on your stomach." I can hardly imagine a less likely opening, one in which we feel so immediately engaged. From the first sentence, we feel wonderfully included, our physical comforts seemingly foremost in this benevolent writer's mind. Imagine how a client might feel if we began each session thus.

A bit later, Calvino plays with conventional narrative expectations and seems to thumb his nose at literary artifice, while employing a supremely artificial technique to do so. "You have now read about thirty pages and you're caught up in the story. At a certain point you remark: 'This passage sounds somehow familiar. In fact, this whole passage reads like something I have read before.' Of course: there are themes that recur, the text is interwoven with these reprises, which serve to express the fluctuation of time. You are the kind of reader who is sensitive to such refinements ... But, at the same time you also feel a certain dismay; just when you were beginning to grow truly interested, at this point the author feels called upon to display one of those virtuoso tricks so customary in modern writing, repeating a paragraph word for word."<sup>18</sup> We are again engaged and yet experience a growing sense of unease, a disconcerting state Calvino elegantly redirects. How strangely familiar and yet how far from the interpolations of our beloved Trollope.

As he proceeds with his imaginatively convoluted plot, Calvino deliberately adds ever greater levels of complexity of narrative voice, self-referencing and structural prestidigitation. What a brilliant tour de force of literary technique. We cannot help but admire and might wish to imitate this master of language.

May not this multi-layered self-referential virtuosity serve as a model for how the true artists among us work? Are not those most magical among us at their best when they indulge in surreptitious entrainment while playing with the irony of this situation with both freshness and imagination, inviting the client to share in the illusion? Are those who play the game best not like Calvino (or Penn and Teller), letting us in on the joke as they dazzle and mystify us? A qualified yes. By this I mean that while some may love to cloak their work in mystery, many, I think, are more inclusive in their approach.

Clearly, I believe that we cannot avoid intrusions into the client's process, and that any attempt at total objectivity is as doomed to failure in bodywork as it proved to be in *Madame Bovary* or Zola's "artistic" novel; *L'Oeuvre* (The Masterpiece). As suggested above, we have two choices. We can either pretend we do not intrude or we can delight in those impositions into our client's subjective reality and play this complex "Glass Bead Game"<sup>19</sup> with panache, ever reminding our clients (and our gentle readers, a

surreptitious nod to Trollope) as we tweak, nudge, suggest and probe to facilitate and enhance their internal awareness. Their private monologue will always be shaped by our manipulations to some extent. So, why pretend that we are detached and do not create change as we write loving mis-sives on their fascia?

I would like to end with a quote from a novel that deliberately evokes a bygone era. This exquisite evocation of Victorian fiction, A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, richly reconstructs the world of the late 19th century British Romantics. Its plot in fact centers on the uncovering of a romantic relationship between two fictitious authors of Trollope's era, a relationship that parallels that of the novel's two literary scholars who cooperate to uncover the mysteries of their respective subjects' well-concealed love as they themselves fall in love. Again, self-reference and artifice abound.

In this novel, I found a most remarkable passage dealing with literary metaphor, and restructured this entire essay to accommodate this insightful explanation of what drives writers like yours truly to explore "hidden connections."<sup>20</sup> I read this passage as at once a cautionary warning of the dangers of "metaphor mining" as well as a profound explanation of why the novel's heroine feels irresistibly drawn to seek deeper meaning and relationships. In a wonderfully revelatory way, Byatt's heroine expresses what drives this author to formulate novel metaphors of somatic meaning in such disparate realms as Mozart symphonies, osteopathic tides, the blues, color mappings, meditation, pattern problems and the novels of Anthony Trollope. "Do you never have the sense that our metaphors eat up our world? I mean of course everything connects and connects — all the time — and I suppose one studies — I study — literature because all these connections seem both endlessly exciting and then in some sense dangerously powerful — as though we held a clue to the true nature of things."<sup>21</sup>

Since I cannot hope to express the essence of this compulsive search better than Byatt, I end here; one step further along my unpredictable journey through the world of metaphor. A rich and endless world that will continue to obsess and haunt me, unexpectedly appearing in any new novel or somatic essay I read, any new artwork or film I view, any piece of music I hear, or any new client who graces my office.

## NOTES

1. An earlier and less developed version of this article appeared under the title: "A Novel Metaphor," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Summer, 2000): 37-39. In this version, all the italicizations of literary puns have been eliminated since this device seemed transparently whimsical, while its value as a conceit rapidly failed in my view. Another change is the enhancement of somatic metaphors in a deliberate effort to not only enrich my writing but also to evoke what I describe as I carefully manipulate language, a translucent somatic pun that should not go unnoticed.

2. For example: Fahey, Brian, *The Power of Balance: A Rolfing View of Health* (Portland, OR: Metamorphosis, 1989), pp. 96 ff; Thies, Roger, "Which Way Is Up?" *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (July/August 1990): 25-29; Maitland, Jeff, "The Tao of Rolfing," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (May/June 1990): 1; The Druid, "Tubular, Dude!" *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (September/October 1990): 18-19; The Druid, "Tubes Rule Okay," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (November/December 1990): 20; Gaggini, Liz, "Structure in Free-Float: Motility, Gravitation and 4-Dimensional Reality," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter: 1997): 26-30; McElroy, Austin, "A Lifting, Three-Dimensional Model of Human Structure," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1997): 20-23; Johnson, Don, "The Body, the Cathedral, and the Kiva," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter 1999): 13-20; Johnson, Will, "The Mudra as Line of Transformation," *Rolf Lines*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter 1999): 33-34; Myers, Tom, "Body<sup>3</sup> (The Body Cubed or the Body to the Third Power): A Therapist's Anatomy Reader" (a collection of anatomy essays originally published in *Massage Magazine* between 1997 and 2000); Hedley, Gil, "Reconceiving My Body: Take Two, from the Heart" (Series: *Reconceiving Our Bodies*, Vol. 1) (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2000); and Hedley, Gil, *The Integral Anatomy Series Vol.1: Skin and Superficial Fascia* (Somerset, NJ: Integral Anatomy Productions, 2005).

3. Deutscher, Guy, *The Unfolding of Language: An Evolutionary Tour of Mankind's Greatest Invention* (New York: Metropolitan, 2005), p. 117. For a fascinating look at metaphors of pain in literature, see the author's: "A Review of *A Scream Goes Through the House: What Literature Teaches Us About Life*," by Arnold Weinstein, *Structural Integration*, Vol. 32, No.1 (Winter/February 2004): 32-33. See in particular Weinstein's analysis of William Blake's "canonical" 1794 poem:

"London," pp. 17-25.

4. Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 346-538.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 235. See also p. 14 and p. 391 ff.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

8. Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction, Part I, Artistic Purity and the Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd Paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 3-166. Thanks to my friend Professor Cecil Wooten, at the Classics Department, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for his help with source material.

9. Booth, *Fiction*, p. 20.

10. VanderWolk, William, "Flaubert, Gustave," *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Criticism*, ed. by Michael Grodin and Martin Kreis Wirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Literary Press, 1994), p. 277.

11. A roman à thèse or "thesis novel," is one whose philosophical theme takes precedence over character or plot. The works of the French Naturalist school, those of Emile Zola in particular, are prime examples of this genre.

12. I trace this transformation of Zola's literary output in my doctoral dissertation: "The Operas of Alfred Bruneau," Ph.D. dissertation in musicology (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1987). I wish here to acknowledge Jean-Max Guieu whose "Le théâtre lyrique d'Emile Zola", Ph.D. dissertation in French literature (University of Maryland, 1976) was the only source I could find that documented and offered theories for this shift in Zola's oeuvre.

13. Booth holds that Trollope and other major British writers are similarly inconsistent. "Much as Fielding and Dickens, Trollope and Thackeray may talk about their passion for truth to nature or the real, they are often willing, as some modern critics have complained, to sacrifice reality to tears or laughter." Booth, *Fiction*, p. 57.

14. Trollope, Anthony, *Castle Richmond* (New York: Dover, 1984), p. 1.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 348.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

17. Calvino, Italo, *If on a winter's night a traveler*, translated by William Weaver (San

Diego: Harvest, 1981), p. 7.

18. Ibid., p. 25.

19. A veiled reference to Hermann Hesse's masterpiece, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, (*The Glass Bead Game*, also known as *Magister Ludi*).

20. Another not-so-obvious allusion, this time to a recent New Age book by Fritjof Capra: *The Hidden Connections: Integrating the Biological, Cognitive, and Social Dimensions of Life Into a Science of Sustainability* (New York: Random House, 2002).

21. Byatt, Antonia Susan, *Possession: A Romance*, Reprinted. (New York: Vintage International, 1991), pp. 275-76.