

## LUISE VON FLOTOW

Luise von Flotow, de dupla cidadania – canadense e alemã, é professora e atual diretora da School of Translation and Interpretation da Universidade de Ottawa, Canadá. Suas principais áreas de interesse são as influências políticas e ideológicas na tradução, especialmente questões de gênero; tradução audio-visual, dublagem e legendagem; tradução literária como diplomacia pública. A pesquisadora atua também como tradutora literária do alemão e do francês para o inglês, havendo traduzido diversas obras de escritoras alemãs (Christa Wolf, Herta Müller, Ulrike Meinhof), e algumas de escritores (Thomas Brasch, Martin Walser), das escritoras do Québec France Theoret, Anne Dandurand, Claire Dé, Hélène Rioux, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, de várias autoras do Leste Europeu, além de textos teóricos sobre tradução. Possui uma vasta lista de publicações de livros, artigos e capítulos de livros na área dos Estudos da Tradução. Um livro de grande destaque foi *Translation and Gender*, publicado em 1997, traduzido na China e na República Tcheca. Agora ela acaba de lançar o livro *Translating Women*, que reúne artigos de diversos teóricos e teóricas dos Estudos da Tradução em torno das mais recentes pesquisas realizadas na interface Estudos de Gênero/Feministas e Estudos da Tradução. Foi professora visitante em universidades de diversos países ao redor do mundo: Espanha, Noruega, Chile, Argentina, México, Áustria, Portugal, Irã, Equador, Estados Unidos, Brasil. Sua viagem para a América Latina neste ano tem como objetivo divulgar e encontrar parcerias para um amplo projeto de pesquisa que está sendo realizado pelas universidades de Ottawa e de Concórdia. O

tema da pesquisa é o movimento da literatura de ficção e não-ficção canadense para a América Latina via tradução.

Luciana Wrege Rassier & Rosvitha Friesen Blume  
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Cadernos de Tradução (CT): *You have just published Translating Women, 14 years after having published Translation and Gender. What do these titles reveal about your work?*

*Luise von Flotow (LF)*: In 1997 when I published *Translation and Gender. Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'*, I remember that the term feminism had become a little tiresome, overused perhaps, and that we were moving on toward 'gender'. Or we felt we were moving on to something more complex, that would broaden research angles and approaches. In the years since then, however, this expectation has not really been fulfilled, in my view – changing the terms also changed the politics, and the *raison d'être* of the kind of work we were doing. Gender became such a mainstream term on the one hand (in its popular usage, such as 'doing gender') and so contested in its academic usage on the other hand, that it has not been very useful for broader questions in Translation Studies. In fact, this just switched the identity focus to the 'other' genders (the GLBTs – gay, bi-sexual, lesbian, transsexual). Women (were) moved out of the picture, or the focus on them was obscured and dispersed by the foregrounding – in sociology, literary studies and many other disciplines – of the GLBT genders. My purpose in preparing the book *Translating Women* was to re-focus research work and interests on *women* writers, translators, characters, and their fates in translation.

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CT: *To what extent can Queer theory and Psychoanalysis be applied to Translation Studies?*

LF: Queer theories can apply to Translation Studies – but they need to allow categorization and some generalization which they often resist: for example, the activist aspect of queer theories can be paralleled with activist and ‘intentional’ aspects of translation; the notion of ‘taking up interlocutory space’ (Sedgwick Kosofsky) as an important part of queer can also apply to the study of translations which, by definition, ‘take up new space’. Finally, the rather pessimistic notion of ‘the performative’ (Butler) according to which humans simply re-enact an already existing script, with small variations, can easily be brought into contact with translation – and its ethnocentric qualities – since translations are known to also produce slight variations on an existing script (Berman, Hofstadter). Psychoanalytic work by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger is very interesting for theorizing translation as a ‘threshold’ experience, where communication and dependence and negotiation with an Other prevail over Freudian theories of separation and individuation. Ettinger focuses on the period of late-pregnancy, i.e. on a human experience that affects all humans not just those armed with the Phallus, and where, in her view, the ‘non-rejection of the unknown non-I’ is THE predominant moment. This moment implies and demands tolerance of the Other, communication, inter-dependency, and constant referencing between two or more separate/separable entities that are, however, still in a close embrace. And *choose* to be so. The applications of these metamorphic theories are of great interest to translation, which has traditionally and conventionally been troped as female, reproductive rather than productive, secondary and always somehow untrustworthy. Applying Ettinger’s metamorphosis to translation allows us to think beyond the metaphoric view (where the translation replaces the source text – which we know does not occur) and the metonymic view

(where the translation stands for a part of the source text.) With metramorphosis it is melded with the source text, inextricably communicating with it, affecting it, receiving impulses from it, in an ongoing relationship that does not leave the source text unchanged either.

*CT: What do you think about the term 'post-feminism'? Do you think we are indeed living in a 'post-feminist' time? Is feminism still necessary?*

*LF:* I don't use the term post-feminism at all – but I think that for some it exists, and defines this particular era in which feminisms have declined because of various different developments – (with results such as those recently announced in Canada – that young women with a university degree now in 2011 earn 68% of what young men with that same degree earn, while in the early 1990s, twenty years ago, they were earning 88% of their male peers' salaries.) So YES, feminist work must be maintained and supported in all domains, not just those concerned with literary studies; it is a given, a necessity, that has to be addressed anew in every generation. Women are not men, and are still not equal participants in most societies; they continue to be discriminated against in many different ways.

*CT: Besides teaching and researching, you also translate literary texts and texts about Translation Studies written in German and French into English. What are the theoretical and practical differences of translating these two kinds of texts?*

*LF:* I don't think I make any differences between the translation strategies I use to translate literary texts or academic texts about

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translation. Perhaps because the academic authors I have translated, Antoine Berman and Walter Benjamin, have very literary styles. But basically, I see very little reason to approach these types of texts differently.

*CT: Why do you mainly translate literary works by women writers?*

*LF:* I decided early on to translate primarily women writers: I like to think I understand them better, or maybe sympathise/empathise more with their work – not with all of them, of course – there are several I have refused, one I translated entirely and then decided the book was too terrible to publish with my name on it, etc. But generally, I think I can handle the details, and the content of women's texts better than I could most male authors' work. In the several cases where I have translated male writers from German (Brasch, Walser, Chiellino) there have always been moments when I resisted their texts, translated against them! This does not make for a pleasant working environment – though it can be fun and amusing to undermine certain pomposities, and especially misogynist stuff. Another reason to translate women writers is that it benefits them more. Men have their own strong systems of dissemination and international fame – women are late-comers to this arena and so I prefer to be of use in this area.

*CT: In your opinion, what is the relation between the translation of literary texts and public diplomacy?*

*LF:* Public diplomacy depends on translation; it cannot do without translation! When a country exports its cultural products in order to draw attention to itself, make itself attractive to others and generally

impress, it must almost always use translation for the texts it sends abroad. Musical productions, other shows (such as Canada's Cirque du soleil) can perhaps do without much translation, but no literary works, plays, and films can travel abroad without being translated. This is an enormous area of influence for translation and also a fruitful area of study for Translation Studies scholars, but it has, up till the present, been rather quiet.

*CT: Would you consider your translations of literary texts by French, German and Eastern-European women writers as feminist translations? What is the difference between a feminist and a non-feminist translation?*

*LF:* Normally I do not claim to do feminist translations. There are certain moments for such work, and the time and context must be right. Otherwise they are not published. But my choice of women authors is definitely a feminist strategy... a determination to make women's texts visible and draw attention to them.

As for the differences between a feminist and a non-feminist translation, I think the main thing is the translator's attitude, and her willingness to point out and take credit (or blame) for the feminist decisions she makes: for instance, in intervening in and perhaps changing aspects of text she does not like or approve of politically. Or adding explanations, or paratexts, or even special glossaries in very difficult or distant texts. The explosion of feminist translations in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, developed from a very specific moment and very specific types of texts – I do not think this can be repeated everywhere in the same way. It is a process that builds up and reaches a climax as women collaborate to undermine and subvert the structures and systems that build up over time, always working to exclude them or minimize their work.

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CT: *What made you translate into English the writings of Ulrike Meinhof, leader of The Red Army Faction – a German leftist organization – between the years of 1967 and 1977? How is this work being received in Canada and what is its repercussion in Germany?*

LF: My friend Karin Bauer, Director of the German Department at McGill University in Montreal, has been researching the RAF, its members, their textual production, and especially the repercussions of their activities in European letters and artwork. She invited me to translate a selection of the journalistic articles that Meinhof had published, mainly in the journal *Konkret*, between 1959 and 1969, i.e. before she went underground in 1970. Meinhof was one of the most important voices of the ‘APO’ (extra-parliamentary opposition) at a time when there was no opposition party and the coalition of the CDU (Centre-right party) and the SPD (Centre-left party) ruled West Germany. For me this was a wonderful opportunity to again make the work of an important and influential woman available in English – where she has only ever been cited in the same short repeated fragments. The fact that she became a criminal did not bother me at all! I know of other criminals whose work is studied and translated – notably one revered contemporary French philosopher who killed his wife, and continues to be read in various languages and in various philosophy departments. What did matter though, was that this gifted and very dedicated woman, who wrote about environmentalism before it became fashionable, who was a peace activist, a libertarian, and by the mid-1960s an intelligent and thoughtful feminist, should be made available in full.

There have been largely positive and interested reviews of the book *Everybody Talks About the Weather. We Don't!* (Seven Stories Press, NYC) in English. It was launched at the Goethe Institut in Montreal to great interest but has not been reviewed

in German. Nor would the Goethe-Institut (Germany) finance the translations.

*CT: What motivated you to publish an anthology of Eastern-European women writers in Canada?*

*LF:* My family comes from Eastern Europe (the former GDR), and arrived in Canada as refugees after 1945. This aspect of my family history always made Eastern Europe interesting for me, and between 1986 and 1989 I spent many months studying in East Berlin, and meeting writers, environmentalists, and would-be democratic politicians there, who were all waiting for the Berlin Wall to fall. I translated some of the young authors, who couldn't get published for political reasons, and organized a large exhibition of paintings and other art by East Germans, which travelled through the US and Canada. This interest broadened into other East Bloc countries, and when the Wall fell, I was curious how this would reflect in women's texts. They had always had a rather ambivalent attitude toward Western feminisms. The project which became *The Third Shore* was basically an attempt to see how and whether the changes that swept through the former East Bloc after 1989 were dealt with by women writers.

*CT: Could you tell us about the project "Canada in Latin America"? What are the main objectives and steps of this project and what is its time focus? Does this project include a corpus in English and another in French?*

*LF:* "Canada in Latin America" is my current research project: an attempt to trace the transfer of Canadian writing into the

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22 different countries that make up Latin America. I have two Canadian collaborators – Marc Charron (UOttawa) and Hugh Hazelton (Concordia U) and a number of Latin American associates: Miguel Montezanti in La Plata Argentina, Eloina Prato dos Santos in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and Claudia Lucotti in Mexico City. We are assembling an enormous database with as much information as possible on the translations into Spanish and Portuguese of all types of Canadian writing in English and French – and other source languages if we come across them: fiction, drama, poetry, children’s literature, non-fiction, academic works, essays, and so on. We have also collected a vast amount of reception materials – mainly articles and reviews and announcements from many different newspapers and feuilletons in Latin America. These are organized according to author, or as a general text on Canadian literature. The next step is to make this material available to Latin American colleagues who wish to participate in the research and writing, and produce a book on the subject.

*CT: What are the political motivations behind such project?*

*LF:* The political motivations of this project are rather minor: my purpose is to trace translation, and thereby demonstrate the power and the importance of this activity in international relations, i.e. as part of public diplomacy. Translation has been overlooked in the academy, in business and in government institutions for far too long, and such a project draws attention to it. Further, it is of great interest to see how Canadian government support for translation and dissemination works out. Does it actually help? To what extent? Or do the importing cultures make their decisions in other ways. Finally, what are the ‘colonial’ implications of the powerful Spanish publishing industry which seems to select, translate and disseminate more than 90% of such translation. And

what are the effects of the much greater balance in the case of Brazil and Portugal.

*CT: You have already coordinated a similar project, which resulted in the book *Translating Canada: The Institutions and Influences of Cultural Transfer – Canadian Writing in Germany*. Which were the most interesting or more surprising results from this research?*

*LF:* One of the most interesting results of this research was the importance of Canadian Studies programs. German academics who had been to Canada, and whose students read Canadian texts (instead of just American or British work) became the most important multipliers of the work. The research showed that the Canadian Studies aspects of Canada's cultural diplomacy were in fact very successful.

Other interesting findings were that German publishers often translated and published according to local tastes and needs rather than Canadian directives. In the 1980s, for instance, after the ongoing success of Atwood books, a large quantity of other books by women flowed into Germany – fulfilling the reading needs of a large middle-class stay-at-home female readership. In that decade 50% more books by Canadian women than by Canadian men were imported, translated and distributed. In the next decade, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, things changed, and books by Canada's multicultural writers (Ondaatje, Mistry, Shyam, Chen and others) travelled to Germany. And reviewers often wrote about the importance of making such texts available to a German public that needed to learn to tolerate strangers in its midst. In other words, the local conditions in Germany were very important for the selection of books.

*CT: Based on the results from your research in Germany, what are your hypotheses for the project Canada in Latin America? Are there any differences in the conception and organizations of these two projects?*

*LF: There are important differences between these two projects: first, the Latin American space is very different from the German. Canadian books are being exported to a series of very different cultures, not to one relatively homogeneous one. That, we suspect, will be interesting, and perhaps difficult to grasp. Second, there are numerous parallels between Canada and the Latin American space: a colonial history of European settlement, strong indigenous cultures, wide-open spacious territories that are under-populated, multicultural diversity in the cities and towns, etc. We expect some of this ‘americanité’ to play into the types of work selected and disseminated. Third, the Spanish and Portuguese publishing houses are a kind of wild card. How strong is their influence? Do they choose for distribution in Latin America? Are there some materials that are never distributed?*

*CT: In which countries in Latin America have you already found partners for this project? Which Latin American country would possibly have a stronger Canadian presence?*

*LF: After a first mailing to find possible collaborators, we have received enthusiastic responses from academics in Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Columbia and Mexico.*

*CT: How will the results of your research be made available?*

*LF:* We expect to disseminate our research findings at conferences, in journals, but most importantly through the production of a collection of articles, written by Canadian and Latin American scholars.

Entrevista concedida a Luciana Wrege Rassier &  
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## ANEXO

## Publicações de Luise von Flotow

## Livros

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*Translating Canada: The Institutions and Influences of Cultural Transfer.* Canadian Writing in German/y. eds. Luise von Flotow and Reingard Nischik, University of Ottawa Press, 2007.

*The Third Shore.* Women's Fiction from East/Central Europe (co-editor with Agatha Schwartz), Northwestern University Press, 2006.

*The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,* co-editor with Daniel Russell and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, University of Ottawa Press, 2001.

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“The Strain of Cultural Transfer: A Brazilian Critic of Canadian and Other Feminisms” in *Perspectivas Transnacionais*, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, UFMG, 2005, 31-41.

“Telling Canada’s ‘Story’ in German: Soft Diplomacy at Work”, in *Translating Canada*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Reingard Nischik, 2007, 9-26.

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„Women’s Desiring Voices from Québec: Nicole Brossard, Anne Dandurand and Claire Dé“, in *Us/Them. Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Literary Cultures*, ed. Gordon Collier, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 1992, 109-119.

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Special issue of *TTR. Traduction Terminologie Redaction*, Vol. XIII, No.1 Topic: *Translation and Ideology*, 2001.

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