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HOMER REVISITED:
ANNE LE FÈVRE DACIER'S PREFACE TO HER PROSE
TRANSLATION OF THE *ILIAD*
IN EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

ANCIENTS VS. MODERNS

In his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697), Charles Perrault stages a dialogue between "le Président," a learned defender of antiquity, and two advocates of the superiority of the Moderns, "le chevalier" (a nobleman) and an abbot. After an examination of art and eloquence in the first three dialogues, the debate turns to poetry and demonstrates the following: "si les Poètes Anciens sont excellens, comme on ne peut pas en disconvenir, les Modernes ne leur cedent en rien, & les surpassent mesme en bien des choses" ("if ancient poets are excellent, as one cannot disagree, the Moderns hold their own and even surpass them in many respects"; 195).¹ Seconded by the *chevalier*, the abbot appraises Homer's poetry, criticizing its weak subject matter, indecent morals, and rough diction. The President, in turn, defends each item with erudite references to authorities (204-28). The abbot then announces to his companions that he has a better means of evaluating Homer's poetry: translating into prose three purple passages (the descriptions of the Greek army, of Achilles's shield, and of Alcinous's gardens) and comparing them with a prose rendering of celebrated modern epic poems (227-8). There is no further mention of this comparative analysis until Perrault's preface to the next volume of his *Parallèle*, in which he admits abandoning the comparison "pour l'amour de la Paix" ("for the love of Peace"; 282). Nevertheless, the reader still gets an idea of the project as the three characters resume their quarrel and the abbot reads aloud his literal prose translation of the beginning of the *Iliad* to prove Homer's lack of harmony (287). To the incensed President, this demonstration is but a proof of the abbot's ignorance and lack of taste. The mundane *chevalier* retorts that "un amant ne trouve jamais le portrait de sa Maitresse assez beau ny assez ressemblant" ("a lover will never find the portrait of his mistress to be beautiful or resembling enough"; 287-8). The metaphor exposes the nature of a translator's relationship with his original text as a love affair, in which the translator is not only frustrated in his efforts to capture the features of the beloved original but is also often blind to its imper-

fections. For the rationalist Moderns, the translator should be free of passion and retain a critical attitude toward the original in order better to amend it. Thus ends the discussion on Homer's poetry, the participants abruptly turning toward science, which easily draws a consensus in favor of the Moderns' superiority.

As is well known, Perrault's provocative *Parallèle* drew defensive responses from Boileau, Racine, Pierre-Daniel Huet, and André Dacier (later to become Anne Le Fèvre's husband), who laid blame on faulty translations for perpetuating misunderstandings of the ancients. When Boileau died in 1711, the concern for accurate translations of the classics long had been swept away by the Moderns' tireless promotion of contemporary literature. The same year, however, Anne Le Fèvre Dacier published a prose translation of the *Iliad*, professing to offer the most faithful translation to date and thereby finally to reveal the essence of Homeric poetry to all French readers who did not know Greek. Instead, the result was a fiery revival of the quarrel:² as she provided them with the means of reading the *Iliad* at long last, the Moderns could examine it more closely and could carry on their offensive with renewed vigor.³

Dacier's contemporaries embraced the translation of the poem with few reservations, and thirteen editions appeared between 1712 and 1826 (Hepp 659-60).⁴ Yet her preface and critical commentaries exasperated her detractors. The preface implicitly refuted Perrault's disparagement of Homer's poetry, as well as his misleading word-by-word prose translation, which sought to mimic the purported crudeness of the content. Dacier's theory of translation, like Perrault's, evolved from her interpretation of Homer, but her views contradicted Perrault's: in her opinion, the sacred nature of the poet and his sublime style should dictate an inspired translation. The disputable resemblance Dacier found between Homer as a "poète divin" and the Scriptures' ideas and style paradoxically led to a novel view of translation. Unfortunately, the questionable nature of this association overshadowed the validity of her theory of translation. Although attention has been paid mostly to her views on Homer, I would argue that her approach to translation marked a very important step in the history of translation, as well as in the interface of prose and poetry in eighteenth-century France.⁵ By succeeding in conveying Homer's poetry through prose, Dacier's translation challenged fiction writers to question the boundaries of prose and poetry and to explore their intersection, the better to renew the faded poetic spirit of the age and to expand the field of prose, which had been until then synonymous with eloquence and strictly separated from the field of poetry.

OF BEAUTY AND FIDELITY IN TRANSLATION: PERROT D'ABLANCOURT VS. HUET

Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647-1720) was raised surrounded by the classics that her father, Tanneguy Le Fèvre, a renowned teacher at the Protestant Academy of Saumur, translated and interpreted. Probably the only woman of her time—and certainly one of the few French scholars—able to read and understand ancient Greek, she published numerous translations whose quality and erudition were praised unanimously by her contemporaries.⁶ In 1684, Pierre Bayle exclaimed: "Ainsi, voilà notre sexe hautement vaincu par cette illustre savante!" ("Thus, our sex has been greatly defeated by this illustrious scholar!")⁷

In the opening sentence of her preface to Homer's *Iliad*, Dacier dismisses the long list of her publications as mere "amusements" (iii) in comparison with the enormously ambitious task of translating Homer. The challenge is very clear: she does not seek the vainglory of having translated him who is first among poets but, rather, to win back the "gens du monde" prejudiced against Homer.⁸ Since the prevalent prejudice derived from the "copies difformes" of Homer's works, Dacier wanted to offer a different kind of translation, one that would provide a medium through which readers could rediscover and appreciate anew the classic text.

The originality of Dacier's project comes to light only when read in a double context: the specific tradition of Homeric translations and the more general tradition of divergent translation practices developed in the seventeenth century. In fact, the translations of Homer published before Dacier's can serve to illustrate the dominant translation practices of her time. In both verse and prose translations, accuracy varied markedly. The *verse* translations of Homer ranged from the quite faithful version of Salomon Certon (1604)⁹ to the failed adaptations of "three traitor translators," l'abbé Régnier-Desmarais (1700), Jean Bouhier (n.d.), and La Motte (1701) (Hepp 630-2). As we will see, Dacier forcefully and unconditionally rejected verse translation as incompatible with her goal for accuracy. As far as *prose* translations of Homer were concerned, four had appeared before Dacier's: three "belles infidèles," by François Du Souhait (*Iliad*, 1614), Claude Boitet (*Odyssey*, 1617), and La Valterie (*Iliad and Odyssey*, 1681),¹⁰ and an incomplete but strikingly faithful attempt by an obscure monk, Bernard Chamony (1710).¹¹

The concern for accuracy (or lack thereof) connects these translations with the theories and practices of two translators a generation earlier than Dacier who led the dominant rival schools: Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt (1606-1664) was the acclaimed practitioner of free translation; Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721) advocated faithful translations and expounded his theory in his Latin treatise, *De Optimo Genere Interpretandi* (1661).¹² What were the theoretical tenets of Dacier's elders, and how did she position herself in her own preface? D'Ablancourt's

main concern was the development and improvement of French prose. His ambition was to emulate the eloquence of translated authors and to produce texts that would please literary tastes. Consequently, d'Ablancourt customized his translations, so to speak, to fit the tastes and fashion of his time.¹³ By contrast, Huet sought to shift the spotlight onto the original text by favoring bilingual translation, by respecting even the ambiguities of the author, and by conceding only a humble, subordinate role to the translator. While d'Ablancourt focused on the translator and saw him as an artist, Huet focused on the author and viewed the translator as a mirror.¹⁴ While d'Ablancourt emphasized art, Huet returned to the origin, to the source. In short, and to borrow Emmanuel Bury's opposition, the former was concerned mostly with "bien écrire" ("writing well") and the latter with "bien traduire" ("translating well"; 251-60). If one elaborates on the metaphor of the "belles infidèles," the beautiful though unfaithful mistress, d'Ablancourt's translation could be said to wonder, *Miroir, miroir, dis-moi si je suis belle?* whereas Huet's would question, *Miroir, miroir, dis-moi si je suis fidèle?*

Unwilling to submit to this stereotypically gendered dichotomy, Dacier seems to respond, *Belle ou fidèle, faut-il choisir?* She endorsed neither the "traduction littérale" nor the "belles infidèles" approach: the theory of prose translation developed in her preface can be situated exactly between these two poles. Defined as a "traduction élégante," it aims at producing "un second original."¹⁵ Huet's principles strongly influenced Dacier, which is not surprising, given their personal and professional ties.¹⁶ Yet, although she remained close to Huet's modern stance, Dacier's position differed in that it did not deny creativity to the translator, as we will see. Furthermore, Dacier offered yet another perspective by turning the "fidèle/infidèle" ("traduire/écrire") antithesis into a synthesis that introduced communication as the new goal. Dacier's primary objective was pedagogical: not a customization, but a popularization (or vernacularization) of the ancients. Focusing on the reader, she envisioned her translation as a bridge—spatial and temporal—from antiquity to modernity. A close analysis of Dacier's preface reveals how her intimate knowledge and admiration of Homer's poetry inspired her to spread the good word about his art to non-believers in order to convert them. Her experience of the Greek original eventually superseded her knowledge of current translation practices and prompted her search for a new path.¹⁷

NEO-CLASSICAL OR MODERN?

In her preface, Dacier summarizes the five difficulties she faced in her translation: four of them regard the content of Homer's poem; the last one regards his "diction." Aware that the incommensurate distance between Homer's time and

her own century makes it difficult to explain Homer's poetry to his modern readers, she spells out the differences between the tastes of the two periods and, clearly siding with her poet, lays bare her own likes and dislikes. Emerging from her critical discourse is the paradoxical picture of a classicist with a modernist agenda.

The first argument addresses the "fond des choses"—that is, the nature of the epic poem in general (vi). Dacier disapproves of the current taste for "vain and frivolous books" (v) where adventures are deemed interesting and touching only insofar as they are about love (vi). She lashes out against "l'amour, [qui] après avoir corrompu les mœurs, a corrompu les ouvrages. C'est l'ame de tous nos escrits" ("love, [which] after having corrupted our morals, has corrupted our works. It is the soul of all our writings"; v). Homer and Virgil, although pagan, had not "sullied" their epic poems with such "galanteries dangereuses" (v). She praises the discerning sensibility of the Homeric characters. She condemns the "faux art" that has counterfeited the art of epic poetry and produced works under that name, works that have nothing to do with the true essence of the original Greek poems. These originals, "sous l'enveloppe d'une fable ingénieusement inventée, renferment des instructions utiles" ("beneath the envelope of an ingeniously invented fable, contain useful instructions"; vi). Dacier attacks the proliferation of precious novels, such as Madeleine de Scudéry's *Cyrus* (1656) and *Clélie* (1660), and promotes the establishment of a genre that would retain a useful moral purpose—the very ideal achieved by Samuel Richardson's novels a few years later. Therefore, her argument does not represent a conservative turn against contemporary modern preferences; on the contrary, it anticipates a not-so-distant demand for a literature that combines love and morality, as well as aesthetics and ethics.¹⁸

Dacier's conservative side emerges when she probes into her second difficulty, the complexities of the *Iliad's* allegories and fables—a "thornier" ("plus épineux") problem (viii). Her argument suddenly leaps from literary to metaphysical ground. After describing the custom in Homeric times of explaining higher truths with the help of fables and parables, she concludes: "Les sages se faisoient un merite de penetrer ces mysteres & d'en decouvrir le sens; & le peuple respectoit ces sçavantes tenebres" ("Wise men were proud to penetrate these mysteries and discover their meaning; and the people respected these learned shadows"; viii). Higher truths and mysteries being of a philosophical, almost religious, nature, only sages can decipher them; therefore, the people feel respect for these "savantes ténèbres" and those who can penetrate them. By contrast, "[n]ostre siecle mesprise ces voiles & ces ombres, & n'estime que ce qui est simple & clair" ("our century despises these veils and shadows, and esteems only what is simple and clear").¹⁹ Her contemporaries' esteem for clarity and simplicity explains the prevalent, spiteful distaste for the obscurity and mystery of Homeric fables. For Dacier, the philosophical and the divine are often obscure:

such is the crucial unspoken premise of her argument. The translator, therefore, should maintain this opacity. Her view of allegory as a learned shadow masking and protecting metaphysical truths propels her to develop a long argument demonstrating that, in spite of "quelque chose d'affreux & d'impie" ("something awful and impious"; viii) at first sight, the fictions in Homer's writing present a "conformité très remarquable" ("truly remarkable conformity") with the truths of the Bible (xvii).²⁰ Dacier's demonstration rests on the questionable premise that, when Homer described the gods' unseemly behavior (lamentations, complaints, fights), he always exempted "le Dieu supreme" and attributed foibles only to inferior gods, these inferior gods begin akin to the angels (some fallen) of the Bible (xvii). The far-fetched parallels drawn between Homeric and biblical passages seem not so much an exoneration of Homer's impious fiction than an attack against the irreligious character of Dacier's century, whose philosophy of transparency erased the mysteries of Homer's fable and denied access to a higher level of truth. Huet had insisted on a translator's duty to preserve ambiguity, particularly in sacred religious texts. Linking Homer to the Bible allowed Dacier to defend the opacity of the original and, to some extent, that of the translated text.

The third difficulty Dacier tackles concerns the consensus about the primitive, and often despicable, morals and characters of heroic times. How can they be tolerated, she asks ironically, by readers "accoutumées à nos héros de Roman, à ces héros bourgeois, toujours si polis, si doucereux & si propres?" ("accustomed to the heroes of novels, to these bourgeois heroes, always so refined, so mawkish, and so clean?"; vi). This new sting against precious novels and their authors bares her contempt for the dainty, decadent mores and characters of her time.²¹ To defend the poet, she contends that the century in which men live determines their character. Had he not copied exactly the characteristics of the classical age, Homer's imitation would have been false, along with his "mere heroes of novels" ("que des héros de Roman"; xxiv). If Dacier is eager to recover the moral truths embedded in Homer's poetry, she now subtly distinguishes this intrinsic moral content from the enterprise of moralization conducted for centuries, be it the "Ovide moralisé" (in the fourteenth century) with its superimposed Christian values, or Houdar de la Motte's morally correct Homeric characters in his 1714 adaptation, *Iliade en douze chants* (181). In the fashion of Scudéry's hyper-regulated, sanitized *préciosité*, La Motte endows Homer's unruly characters with moral and linguistic propriety. From Dacier's perspective, these blatant psychological and linguistic anachronisms invalidate her opponent's interpretation.

Regretfully, Dacier does not expand on the new and important argument of historical relativism invoked to account for the conformity between Homeric heroes and their times.²² Nor does she see its contradiction with her previous criticism of the production of contemporary romances, which were, in their own right, the exact reflection of her time's preoccupation with gallantry. Her sense of historical relativism is also at fault when she finds the characters depicted in the *Iliad*

to be in conformity with those of the Bible (xxvi).²³ Noting their actions (princes preparing their own meals and working, Achilles himself performing the most servile of tasks), she goes farther back in time and associates the heroes' self-sufficiency with "... ces heureux temps où l'on ne connoissoit ni le luxe, ni la mollesse, & où l'on ne faisoit consister la gloire que dans le travail & dans la vertu; & la honte que dans la paresse & dans le vice ... c'estoit alors la coustume de se servir soy-mesme; cette coustume estoit un reste precieux de l'âge d'or" ("these happy times when one knew neither luxury nor slothfulness, and when glory consisted only in work and virtue; and shame in laziness and vice ... it was then the custom to help oneself; this custom was a precious remainder of the golden age"; xxvi-xxvii). Shifting from biblical history to a pastoral myth, Dacier reveals her own nostalgia for this long, lost golden age. Then, sliding from myth to the reality of the Sun King's *fin de règne*, she laments the coat of *dorure* (gilt) made of luxury and laziness "qui engendrent immanquablement dans l'ame une corruption generale & y font naistre un essaim de passions toutes opposées à la grandeur veritable & solide" ("that, without fail, generate in the soul a general corruption and beget therein a hive of passions all opposed to true and solid grandeur"; xxviii). Born out of a corrupted sense of the true, primitive values of Homer's age, this false golden age parallels the *faux art* that has been generated by a misunderstanding of epic poetry.

Dacier's praise of, and escape into, the golden age ties in with an aristocratic strand woven into her preface. The disparaging terms "héros bourgeois" and "héros de Roman" contrast with the noble phrases describing Homer as "le poète des Roys" ("the poet of kings"; xiii), "le Prince des philosophes" ("the prince of philosophers"; xiv). It is as if the disappearance of genuine epic poetry and the proliferation of novels and of "héros bourgeois" anticipated the future demise of the aristocracy and the emergence of an increasingly powerful bourgeoisie. Dacier's nostalgic turn toward the lost golden age seems to indicate a premonitory feeling of the defeat to come for the aristocracy.

The fourth difficulty Dacier faces in her defense of Homer stems from the perceived exaggeration and "defaut de vray-semblance" ("lack of verisimilitude") of some of his fictions (vii). She readily admits the implausibility—even the impossibility—of his tales. But she quickly settles the matter by arguing that these marvels simply demonstrate the infinite power of the gods. In her turn accusing Homer's detractors of a "lack of verisimilitude," she blames poets and writers for creating human characters who accomplish deeds above human nature without help from the gods. Dacier's Christian faith clashes once again here with an increasingly secular age and the consequential growing empowerment of man at the expense of God.

PROSE TRANSLATION

Addressing her fifth and last difficulty, Homer's diction, Dacier's tone, vocabulary, and attitude instantly change. She faces now what she believes to be her most daring enterprise: the very act of translating Homer in the vernacular. The reader had been made privy to her fears in the opening pages of the preface:

... la cinquième [difficulté] enfin, qui est celle qui m'a le plus effrayée, c'est la grandeur, la noblesse & l'harmonie de la diction, dont personne n'a approché, & qui est non seulement *audessus de mes forces*, mais peut-estre mesme audessus de celles de nostre langue. (vii; emphasis added)
 ... the fifth [difficulty], finally, which is the one that frightened me the most, is the grandeur, nobility and harmony of the diction, which no one has approached, and which is not only above my strength, but perhaps even above that of our language.

After twenty or so pages spent on justifying her poet, time has come to justify herself and her choice of prose. Dacier begins: "Mais voicy pour moy *l'endroit terrible*, c'est la diction" ("But here is for me the terrible place: diction"; xxix, emphasis added). What is the link between this (tantalizing) terrible site and Dacier's prose translation? After pages of a thorough, detailed, organized, and confident argument, she lapses again into self-deprecation:

J'advouë que de ce costé là je n'ay point de bonne apologie. Mon entreprise paroistra avec raison *la plus temeraire, ou plustost la plus folle* qu'on puisse faire en ce genre d'escire. (xxix; emphasis added)
 I admit that, on this count, I do not have any good excuse. My enterprise will seem with reason the most daring, or rather the most foolish, that one can undertake in this genre of writing.

The folly is to have tried to convey the unsurpassable beauties of the *Iliad* through the medium of a French language that is for the most part inadequate. From the bridge of her translation, Dacier now contemplates the vertiginous gulf between the original and the French tongue. Summarizing Homer's superior beauties in a few striking pages, she unveils a genuine understanding of the Homeric text. She describes the liveliness of Greek verse through the organic metaphor of the poem as a living, animated body into which Homer, "cet ouvrier merveilleux" ("this marvelous craftsman"), breathes life and fire. His first asset consists in the use of technical vocabulary, to which he must resort as he tackles the minutia of everyday life, but that he enhances through a harmony of sounds and delicate or noble adjectives. Dacier gives as an example the long

"Catalogue of the Ships" at the end of Book II. In and of themselves, these names lack harmony, but they are enlivened and harmonious in Homer's poetry, which she compares to music and its transmutation of rough individual notes into a melodic ensemble. Homer's second asset derives from his use of "mots propres" ("common words") as opposed to paraphrases: they allow a "composition meslée" ("a mixed composition"), a hybrid of high and low, "un heureux mélange" ("a felicitous combination"), since unmatched (xxxii-xxxiv)—in other words, the successful marriage of art and nature.

A translation into French cannot but fail to match the boldness and beauty of Homer's style. Here, the fault lies not with the translator but with her mother tongue. Dacier asks:

Que doit-on attendre, d'une traduction en une langue comme la nostre toujours sage, ou plustost toujours timide, & dans laquelle il n'y a presque point d'heureuse hardiesse, parce que toujours prisonniere dans ses usages, elle n'a pas la moindre liberté? (xxx)
 What should one expect of a translation in a language such as ours always proper, or rather always shy, and in which there is hardly any welcome boldness, because, always a prisoner to its usage, it does not have the slightest freedom?

The restraining chains of propriety have so tied the language that it can neither integrate low vocabulary nor tolerate its coexistence with noble words, hence its literal and literary incapacity to render the harmonious yet composite whole of Homeric poetry. Dacier thus concludes her negative assessment: "Voilà ma condamnation" (xxiv). Although a first reading takes this to mean her condemnation of the inadequacies of the French language, the rest of the sentence makes clear that *she* is the condemned, thereby superimposing her fate as a woman onto the confined state of the language. Indeed, it is hard not to read her evaluation of the French language (the feminine-gendered "langue") as a metaphor for the increasingly unsatisfactory, stultifying condition of an educated woman such as Dacier, "toujours sage, ou plutôt toujours timide, & dans laquelle il n'y a presque point d'heureuse hardiesse, parce que toujours prisonnière dans ses usages, elle n'a pas la moindre liberté" ("always proper, or rather always shy, and in which there is hardly any welcome boldness, because, always a prisoner to [her] usage, [she] does not have the slightest freedom"). Dacier, for one, breaks her chains by publishing her prose translation. The French mother tongue is an obstacle and yet an ally for the woman who shares its restricted freedom: only *she* knows how to negotiate her way around these linguistic boundaries so similar to the patriarchal boundaries imposed upon her sex.

After admitting her fear, then her temerity and folly, she eventually gives her reasons for her translation/rebellion, hoping they will present "une excuse assez

valable" ("a suitable enough excuse"). As in the beginning of the preface, her reasons associate the aesthetic and the ethical. Closely following Huet, for whom "semantic and lexical accuracy are even more important than stylistic fidelity" (DeLater 9), Dacier's guiding principle and belief is that content is superior to form, the core of ideas superior to the surface of expression. However marvelous Homer's style, the greatness of his poetry comes above all from "la grandeur de ses idées, la majesté de son sujet, cette belle nature qui regne dans toutes ses parties, & la surprenante variété de ses caracteres" ("the loftiness of his ideas, the majesty of his subject, the beautiful nature that reigns throughout every part, and the surprising variety of his characters"; xxxv). However inadequate, the French language can succeed in transmitting the spirit of the original. On the one hand, Dacier shared d'Ablancourt's confidence in the potential of French prose, but she would not endorse his betrayal of translated authors to realize this potential. On the other hand, she struggled to reconcile her respect for Huet's translation principles, with which she agreed for the most part, and their difficult application to the vernacular, still far from rivaling Latin in refinement and elevation in the minds of most scholars.

Dacier's second "excuse" for her endeavor is the urgent need for a useful translation with a critical commentary for uninitiated readers who must understand as well as hear ("entendre") the life within Homer's poetry.²⁴ This concern is notably absent from d'Ablancourt's and Huet's works, but for different reasons: the former succeeded in popularizing a great number of classical authors, but did so through imitations rather than through accurate and reliable translations; the latter dwelt on the intimacy between author and translator and all but forgot the reader.²⁵

The paradox emerging from Dacier's preface so far lies in the tension between the aristocratic classicist anxious to maintain the pure and sacred character of primitive poetry and the bourgeois modernist eager to disseminate the Word through prose.²⁶ This conflict explains why Dacier can at the same time condemn romance novels featuring "bourgeois" heroes, such as Scudéry's, and advocate a "bourgeois" mode of translating verse: prose. This dream of accessibility is absent from Huet's erudite treatise, written in Latin, about Latin translations, and for scholars only. It is reminiscent, however, of Luther's effort to reach out to the masses with a more prosaic translation of the Bible. But, if Dacier's preface emulates the spirit of Luther's translation, her own translation plays a different foundational role in French letters. It cannot be categorized as an "historical" translation for the reason that it did not evolve into a literary landmark (such as Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad*) or create a new French language (unlike Luther's masterpiece, which became the cornerstone of a new German language). Instead, it represents a "mediating translation" (Berman 43-60), one that seeks to establish a liaison, a dialogue between antiquity and the modern reader.

Before coming to the very heart of her translation (the choice of prose over verse), Dacier interrupts her critical defense and allows herself a metaphor:

Supposons donc qu'Helene mourut en Egypte, qu'elle y fut embaumée avec tout l'art des Egyptiens, & que son corps, conservé jusqu'à nostre temps, est porté aujourd'huy en France. Cette mumie [sic] n'attirera pas toute l'attention qu'Helene vivante attira à son retour de Troye ... mais elle ne laissera pas d'exciter quelque curiosité, & et de faire un certain plaisir; on n'y verra pas ces yeux pleins de feu, ce teint animé des couleurs les plus naturelles & les plus vives, cette grace, ce charme, qui faisoit naistre tant d'amours, & qui se faisoit sentir aux glaces mesme de la vieillesse; mais on y reconnoitra encore la justesse et la beauté de ses traits, on y demeslera la grandeur de ses yeux, la petitesse de la bouche, l'arc de ses beaux sourcils, & l'on y découvrira sa taille noble et majestueuse.... (xxxvii-xxxvii)

Let us suppose that Helen died in Egypt, that she was embalmed with all the skill of the Egyptians, and that her body, preserved until our times, is today brought to France. The mummy will not attract all the attention that a live Helen attracted upon her return from Troye ... but it will nevertheless stir some curiosity and cause a certain pleasure; one will not see the eyes full of fire, the complexion animated by the most natural and brightest colors, the grace, the charm, that gave birth to so many loves and that was felt even by icy old age; but one will still recognize the perfection and beauty of her features, one will discern her wide eyes, her small mouth, the arc of her beautiful eyebrows, and one will discover her noble and majestic waist....

Dacier introduces the unusual concept of translation as mummification: the translated text, like Helen's mummified body, is neither disfigured nor corpse-like. It is not alive, yet it has a certain kind of life: the "strength, grace, life, charm, and fire" are gone, but, mysteriously, there remains beauty—a death-defying beauty. Translation is its vector of transcendence through time and space. Dacier's metaphor would have reminded contemporary readers of her elders' two contrasting comparisons. D'Ablancourt had sharply criticized scrupulous translators who turned the "living body" of a text into a "carcass." By contrast, Huet had compared the translated poet to "a tree whose leaves have indeed been blown off by winter storms, yet whose branches, trunk, and roots have been spared," and thereby acknowledged a loss inherent in the process of translating poetry (DeLater 44). Dacier's own image of the translated poem as the mummy of a queen retains the life-in-death quality present in Huet's comparison of a tree in the dead of winter, but it is more ambitious in its belief of an aesthetic continuity between the original and its translation.

As Dacier admits, the metaphor of Helen's mummified body might not be a flattering one for her enterprise: for what is beauty without life? She inquires further: can verse *alone* retain the fire of poetry, as her opponents firmly believe? In the strongest and most original pages of her preface, Dacier develops her answer to this question in a novel theory of prose translation. The fear and hesitations are gone: her defense moves on forcefully, convincingly, in a tone not only confident but assertive and bold.

She reaffirms her long-held conviction that it is impossible to succeed in a verse translation.²⁷ The premise of her conviction is twofold: 1) verse cannot say it all; 2) poets translated in verse cease to be poets.²⁸ Each statement, however, is contextualized: "our" tongue requires the versifiers to edit, augment, and delete from the original; "our" verse is not capable of reaching Homer's elevation. French verse can weave only a "tissu faible" ("weak fabric").²⁹ A seasoned practitioner of translating poets into French prose, Dacier held a much more radical perspective than Huet on this particular question. Huet simply relegated verse-to-verse translation to the category of imitation "because the excessive dissimilarity between languages does not allow that verse can be made to flow into verse without violating those rules of translating I have established."³⁰ In other words, Huet believed that verse-to-verse translation arose from the theoretical realm of translation; for Dacier, it arose from the realm of possibility.

By contrast, prose is able to accomplish all that verse cannot:

... elle peut suivre toutes les idées du poëte, conserver la beauté de ses images, dire tout ce qu'il a dit; & si quelquefois, elle est forcée de luy prester, ce qu'elle ne doit faire que tres rarement, car cela est dangereux, c'est de luy-mesme qu'elle emprunte ce qu'elle luy preste; & dans sa simplicité & dans sa médiocrité mesme elle ne laisse pas de se soustenir. Je ne dis pas que la mienne ait fait tout cela, je dis seulement que la prose le peut faire. (xxxix-xl)

... [prose] can follow all of the poet's ideas, keep the beauty of his images, say all that he said; and, if sometimes it is obliged to lend him something, which it should do only rarely for this is very dangerous, it is from the poet himself that it borrows what it lends him; and in its simplicity and even its mediocrity, it manages to sustain itself. I am not saying that mine did all this; I am only saying that prose can do it.

Prose "follows" the original, yet prose is free to move across the spectrum of expression: it has the flexibility, the adaptability, and the range that verse lacks.

Dacier draws to her side Aristotle and Plato. From Aristotle, she retains the idea that verse and prose can coexist in epic poetry; from Plato, she mentions a prose translation of the beginning of the *Iliad* in the third book of *The Republic*, although she wishes he had not used the indirect style of the historian but the

direct style (xl). Then, returning once more to the Bible—this time as a literary source—she focuses on a concrete example (the only one to be employed), the prose of the Hebrews: "[Ils] ont fait de leur prose une sorte de poësie par un langage plus orné, plus vif & plus figuré" ("[they] made of their prose a kind of poetry with a language more ornate, livelier, and more figurative"; xl). The "golden" language of Hebrew prose, revealed primarily in the Songs, the Psalms, and the Prophets, mirrors the golden age earlier celebrated by Dacier. "[U]ne prose soustenuë & composée avec art" ("an elevated prose composed with art"; xl) defines for Dacier the kind of prose that is closest to poetry. Unlike d'Ablancourt's refined "prose d'art," which improves with time and the progress of letters, Dacier's own "prose d'art" looks toward the past and aims at recovering the lost eloquence of primitive times.

Interestingly, Dacier avoids the phrase "prose mesurée," which was being used at the time to account for Fénelon's style in the widely successful *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699). Dacier stays away from this slippery expression that conflates prose with poetry. She does not want to introduce measure into prose; rather, she calls for concentration and artistic composition. French prose is vindicated as a superior mode of translation:

Mais je ne me contente pas de dire que la prose peut approcher de la poësie, je vais plus loin, & je dis qu'en fait de traduction, dont il s'agit icy, il y a souvent dans la prose une precision, une beauté & une force, dont la poësie ne peut approcher. (li)

But I am not just saying that prose can get close to poetry, I go further still and say that, as far as translation is concerned, which is what is under discussion here, there is often in prose a precision, a beauty, and a force that poetry cannot approximate.

Dacier develops her conception of prose translation not as "servile" but as "generous and noble," that is, generous in being open to a larger number of words across a wider semantic field, and noble in its independence and creativity and in its freedom to seek metaphors "sans compter les mots" ("without counting the words"; xli)—the petty task of the verse translator.

Dacier is more conventional in her discussion of "la lettre et l'esprit," two commonly used metonymies for the form (*littera*) and the content (*sententia*) of a text. A verse translation, bound by "too scrupulous" a fidelity to form, will retain the letter to the detriment of the spirit ("elle ruine l'esprit"); whereas a prose translation, by following the spirit first, eventually will seize the letter. Unfortunately, Dacier's precept remains rather vague and general, contrary to Huet's rigorous hierarchy of the translator's six priorities: "scrupulous care in the thoughts, fidelity in the words, and solicitude for the stylistic coloring; ... exceptional clarity, beauty, and what Jerome calls the 'vernacular' and I myself call the

'natural to itself'" (DeLater 99-100). More attractive and original is Dacier's depiction of the process of translation and of the translator's task. Too "scrupulous" a fidelity will engender infidelity, whereas a measure of freedom will produce not only fidelity to the text but a "second original" (xlii). Departing from the prevailing approach of translation as *imitatio*, "où la fleur de l'esprit et l'imagination n'ont point de part" ("in which the beauties of the mind and the imagination have no part"), Dacier envisions translation as a creation. She pairs her vindication of this *productive* aspect of translation with a reevaluation of the translator, who must be a "génie solide, noble & fécond" ("solid, noble, and fertile genius"), if he is to create, as opposed to the "froid & stérile génie" ("cold and sterile genius"; emphasis added) who imitates.³¹

Accordingly, Dacier rejects the common association between translating and copying a painting. The only appropriate parallel is that in which the translator is an artist in his or her own right: he or she resembles the sculptor creating from a painter's work, or the painter creating from a sculptor's statue, or the writer working from a marble masterpiece (e.g. Virgil describing the Laocoon). Dacier's analogies do not blur the differences between the various artistic media but, rather, emphasize the parallelism between the creative processes at work. What, then, should the translator's state of mind be when facing the original?

... il faut que l'ame pleine des beautez qu'elle veut imiter, & ennyvrée des heureuses vapeurs qui s'élevent de ces sources fécondes, se laisse ravir & transporter par cet enthousiasme estranger; qu'elle se le rende propre, & qu'elle produise ainsi des expressions & des images tres differentes, quoyque semblables. (xlii-xliii)

... the soul, filled with the beauties it wishes to imitate, and drunk from the spirited vapors rising from these fecund sources, must let itself be ravished and transported by this foreign enthusiasm; must make it its own, and thus produce phrases and images very different, albeit similar.

Inspiration, drunkenness, rapture, enthusiasm, and re-appropriation of the familiar text will lead to the creation of an utterly new text. Implied throughout is the conviction that only prose is capable of producing this similar other, as well as the conviction that, because prose is free, it alone can fulfill the dream of a noble translation. The voice of the translator must be prose, not verse, if the original composition is to be sung with spirit and *brio*. In a radical move, Dacier turns away from the prevalent Horatian principle *ut pictura poesis* to invent one of her own in the filigree of her preface: *ut musica prosa*. Dacier extols prose as creation in contradistinction with poetry as imitation; she envisions prose as music in contradistinction with poetry as painting.³² Furthermore, this remarkable shift of ground occurs in France throughout the eighteenth century in the works of all those (authors and translators) who turned away from verse without want-

ing to abandon poetry (Fénelon, Marmontel, Rousseau, Le Tourneur, Mercier, Chateaubriand).³³

CONCLUSION

Being at the origin of all poetry, Homer held for Dacier the place of the Creator: her critical discourse is above all a profession of faith, a tribute to her veneration. It annoyed Montesquieu, who saw this excessive fervor as detrimental to its object and goal: he compared Dacier to "ces prêtresses superstitieuses qui déshonoraient le dieu qu'elles révéraient, et qui diminuaient la religion à force d'augmenter le culte" ("these superstitious priestesses who dishonored the god they revered and diminished religion while constantly increasing their worship").³⁴ Yet her admiration, in all its excess, helped her produce a faithful translation. In contrast to Montesquieu, Pope pays tribute to *Madam Dacier's* achievement:

She has made a farther attempt than her predecessors to discover the beauties of the Poet; tho' we have often only her general praises and exclamations instead of reasons. But her remarks all together are the most judicious collection extant of the scatter'd observations of the ancients and moderns, as her preface is excellent, and her translation equally careful and elegant. (47-8)

The compliment opens Pope's "Reflections on the First Book" in his annotated translation of the *Iliad*, itself produced with the help of Dacier's prose translation and critical notes.³⁵ This nuanced yet positive assessment was to remain unknown to Dacier, who, when she read a translated version of his preface, mistook Pope for yet another foe set on diminishing Homer's poetry.³⁶ She strongly objected to Pope's metaphor of Homeric poetry as a "jardin brute" ("a rugged garden"; a mistranslation of "Wild Paradise"), as "un amas confus de beautez qui n'ont ni ordre ni symmetrie" ("a jumbled heap of beauties without order nor symmetry"; a mistaken paraphrase of Pope's translation: "Wild Paradise, where if we cannot see all the Beauties so distinctly as in an order'd Garden, it is only because the Number of them is infinitely greater").³⁷ Whereas Pope's metaphor was a defense of Homer's fertile genius, Dacier misunderstood it as condoning the Moderns' charges against a flawed *Iliad*. Projecting onto Homeric poetry the aesthetic principles of classicism, she wanted its perfection of form and content always to be emphasized (Hepp 643). She also probably resented the one equivocal reference to her work in his preface.³⁸ Although he respectfully quoted her name in almost every page of his notes, Pope, irked and offended by her criticism, all but erased her as an authority in the final version of his preface. On the one hand,

Pope's symbolic erasure of "Madam Dacier" anticipates her misconstrued legacy. On the other hand, Dacier's misunderstanding of Pope marks the limit, one could even say the paradox, of her own vision: she remained a neo-classicist all the while succeeding in her modernization of the Ancients.

How can one account for the success met by Dacier's translation? Hers simply turned out to be the only available faithful translation of the Greek text into French, as acknowledged by her own adversaries, and later by Voltaire and the critic Sainte-Beuve.³⁹ It had attained the goal of rendering Homer accessible to the majority by producing for the first time in the French vernacular a complete and accurate translation in lieu of yet another fanciful adaptation of Homer's poetry.⁴⁰ Clearly undermining the Moderns' efforts to bury the classics, Dacier's translation countered their proselytizing in favor of progress, clarity, and modernity in the arts. The Moderns suspected that a faithful translation might reveal time-defying beauties, long buried and distorted by multiple adaptations. By undoing the layered tapestry of time, Dacier revealed a spectacularly fresh canvas and used her provocative scholarship to reclaim Homer as a true poet. A lover of antiquity and a *femme des Lumières* nonetheless, Dacier pioneered prose translations inspired by a newly recovered poetic enthusiasm to recapture the lost beauty of poetry, the first step towards re-attaining, if not a golden, at least a better age.

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NOTES

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. I have preserved the original spelling and syntax of all citations.

² In trying to "determine just why and how it was that the poetry of Homer should become the next great concern of the two sides in the battle of the books and how it was that the young poet [Pope] was involved," Levine devotes his fourth chapter to the French *querelle*, which "was more extravagant than the English battle of the books and ... was followed closely across the Channel" (122-4).

³ In 1714, the Academy member Houdar de La Motte published an *Iliad* in twelve songs with a "Discours sur Homère." On February 1, 1715, Dacier responded with *Des Causes de la Corruption du Goust*, "the first cannon strike" (Hepp 699). In 1715 appeared successively La Motte's *Reflexions sur la Critique*. Gacon's *Homère vengé*, Jean Boivin's *Apologie d'Homère et bouclier d'Achille*, P. Buffier's *Homère en arbitrage*, and Jean Terrasson's *Dissertation critique sur l'Illiade*. In 1716, the debate continued with Etienne Fourmont's *Examen pacifique de la querelle de Madame Dacier et de Monsieur de La Motte sur Homère* and Hardouin's *Apologie d'Homère, où l'on explique le véritable dessein de son Iliade, et sa Théomythologie*. Dacier immediately published a rebuttal, *Homère défendu contre l'Apologie du P. Hardouin. Ou suite des causes de la corruption du goust*. The same year, the young Marivaux wrote a parody, *Homère travesti ou l'Iliade en vers burlesques*. The reconciliation between Dacier and La Motte took place at a dinner reception on April 5, 1716. The same year, Dacier published her translation of the *Odyssey*. "The whole affair was followed enthusiastically across the Channel, but while each side had partisans in England, the temptation there was to condemn both parties as too extreme" (Levine 144).

⁴ A year after its publication in 1712, Dacier's translation was, in turn, translated into English by John Ozell.

⁵ For Zuber (19), Dacier and her husband translated the classics "en savants philologues, non en écrivains à la recherche d'une inspiration ou d'une rhétorique" ("as learned philologists, not as writers in search of inspiration or a rhetoric"). This affirmation should be nuanced: Dacier's creative mission as a translator and "learned philologist" was to rekindle the faded poetic spirit of her contemporaries, thereby redefining the very role of translators as mediators rather than as writers.

⁶ After her father's death, Anne Le Fèvre moved to Paris and was asked to collaborate in the prestigious Delphin series, produced between 1674 and 1698 under the patronage of the King to educate the Dauphin. Out of the sixty-four volumes of the series, she edited five: Florus (1674); Callimachus (1675); Dictys Cretensis and Dares (1680); Aurelius Victor (1681); and Eutropius (1682). Farnham emphasizes that "[s]he was the only woman among the numerous editors to whom the work was assigned, and the only single editor to undertake and complete so many volumes and such a varied assortment of authors. Her work is unique, also, in that it includes the only Greek author in the whole series" (49). Simultaneously, Dacier published a translation of Anacreon and Sappho (1781), a translation in three volumes of three plays by Plautus—*Amphitryon*, *Rudens*, and *Epidicus*—(1683), then of two plays by Aristophanes—*Plutus* and *Clouds*—(1684), and finally the complete works of Terence (1688). In 1691, a translation of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* was published—the fruit of her collaboration with André Dacier, whom she married in 1683.

⁷ Quoted by Hepp, 634.

⁸ "... je ne l'ay pas traduit pour m'attirer la vaine louange d'avoir mis en nostre langue le premier & le plus grand des poëtes, je l'ay traduit pour faire, si je puis, un ouvrage utile" ("... I did not translate him to attract upon myself the vainglory of having put into our language the first and the greatest of poets; I translated him to make, if I could, a useful work"; xi).

⁹ See Hepp, 151-176.

¹⁰ On Du Souhait and Boitet, see Hepp, 177-233. On La Valterie, see Hepp, 435-65.

¹¹ See Hepp, 630-2.

¹² The famous phrase *belles infidèles* "seems to have been applied by Huet's friend, Gilles Ménage (1613-92), to d'Ablancourt's attractive but free translation.... Ménage is said to have described d'Ablancourt's translations in the following way: 'Elles me rappellent une femme que j'ai beaucoup aimée à Tours, et qui était belle mais infidèle' ("They remind me of a woman at Tours I loved very much, who was beautiful but unfaithful"; DeLater, 14).

¹³ See d'Ablancourt's famous manifesto in the preface of his translation of *Lucien* (1654):

Je ne m'attache ... pas toujours aux paroles ni aux pensées de cet Auteur; et demeurant dans son but, j'agence les choses à nostre air et à nostre façon. Les divers temps veulent non seulement des paroles, mais des pensées différentes; et les Ambassadeurs ont coutume de s'habiller à la mode du país où l'on les envoie, de peur d'estre ridicules à ceux à qui ils tâchent de plaire. Cependant, cela n'est pas proprement de la Traduction; mais cela vaut mieux que la Traduction. (186)

I do not always hold exactly to the words or thoughts of this author; and, while keeping his purpose, I suit things to our tastes and our ways. Different times ask not only for different words, but also for different thoughts. Thus, ambassadors are accustomed to dress in the fashion of the country where they are sent, for fear of looking ridiculous to those they are trying to please. Therefore, this is not translation proper, yet it is better than translation.

¹⁴ Huet's treatise begins with the precept that the faithful translator is to "exert his industry not exercise his eloquence ... and not fashion a deceit for the ears by the sweetness of his style, but rather, to exhibit the author whose translation he is working on as an author to be looked at in his own words—as it were in a mirror and a reflection—and to remove all ornamentation foreign to the original, like a cover, or as it were, to wipe off paint laid over natural coloring" (DeLater 25).

¹⁵ Dacier repeats here almost word for word a passage from her preface (xij-xijj):

J'ay dit que la Traduction Littérale est une Traduction servile, qui par une fidélité trop scrupuleuse, devient tres infidelle, car pour conserver la lettre, elle ruine l'esprit, ce qui est l'ouvrage d'un froid & sterile genie; au lieu que la Traduction Elegante est une Traduction généreuse

et noble, qui s'en attachant fortement aux idées de son Original, cherche les beautez de sa Langue, & rend ses images sans compter les mots; qui ne s'appliquant principalement qu'à conserver l'esprit, ne laisse pas dans ses plus grandes libertez de conserver aussi la lettre, & qui par ses traits hardis, & toujours vrais, devient non seulement la fidelle copie de son original, mais un second original mesme, ce qui ne peut estre executé que par un genie noble & fécond. (*Des Causes* 329; Trans. DeLater 119)

I have said that a Literal translation is a servile Translation, which by an overly scrupulous fidelity becomes very much unfaithful, because, in order to preserve the letter, it ruins the spirit, which is the work of a cold and sterile nature; whereas an Elegant Translation is a generous and noble Translation, which by clinging constantly to the ideas of its Original, searches for the beauties of the Language, and renders its figures without counting words; which, in chiefly applying itself to preserving the spirit, does not cease in its great freedoms to preserve the letter as well, and which by its bold and constant features, becomes not only the faithful copy of its original, but even a second original, which can only be accomplished by a noble and prolific genius.

¹⁶ Huet is better known for his seminal "Traité de l'origine des romans" (1670). Huet was a friend of Dacier's father and helped her secure the position of editor/translator in the Delphin series. The first and only existing complete translation of Huet's Latin treatise (published in 1661, 1680, and 1682-3) is in English, remarkably rendered by James DeLater in an as-yet-unpublished dissertation. I am indebted to his introduction, translation, and abundant critical notes for situating Dacier *vis-à-vis* Huet.

¹⁷ Dacier's preface is in the lineage of a well-established discursive genre, the translator's "discours préfaciel" theorizing the practice of translation. Zuber's seminal study of the "belles infidèles" is one of the first to take into account the prefaces of translated works "qui contribuent de manière intéressante à définir l'objectif littéraire de ce temps-là" ("that contribute in an interesting way to defining the literary objective of the times"; 11).

¹⁸ The evolution of the novel in eighteenth-century French literature commands a nuanced approach to Dacier's attack on the romances of her times. Joan DeJean reads Dacier's "vitriolic outpouring" against the "new prominence of the novel" as indicative of the fear that "[u]nless its reign is checked ... the novel will threaten both the social stratification and the manly virtues upon which, the Ancients constantly proclaimed, French society depended for its strength" (98). Had the epic genre already been carried into a less precious type of novel, with more natural characters—as it would in the course of the eighteenth century—Dacier could have heralded the new genre as being in the Homeric lineage. Indeed, her silence about Madame de LaFayette contrasts with her attack against Scudéry, indicating her concern with a very specific, that is 'precious, representation of love—not with love or interiority themselves, as DeJean argues (99).

¹⁹ The sentence captures the philosophy of the "siècle des Lumières."

²⁰ Dacier's argument focuses mainly on the need to "effacer la tache que la censure de Platon a imprimée à sa poésie" ("erase the stain that Plato's censorship has imprinted on his [Homer's] poetry"; ix), and refutes Plato's condemnation against Homer. Dacier describes Homer as a "theologian poet" who distributed among different gods the attributes of God's "simple and unique essence," as a "physician poet" who made gods out of natural causes, and as a "moral poet" who made gods out of human virtues and vices (ix-xxiii).

²¹ The fact that Dacier, as "the only woman ever to assume the active role of producer of discourse, rather than being assigned the passive one of subject for debate" (DeJean 98-9), turned against the woman writers who produced romances should not be read as a paradox, nor should it come as a disappointment: why should Dacier have joined a sisterhood that seemed to play right into gender stereotypes when her role as a learned translator commanding not only production but also reproduction was far more provocative and subversive?

²² This new notion of historical relativism would be better and more thoroughly exploited by critics such as Jean Boivin in *Apologie d'Homère et bouclier d'Achille* (1715) and Antoine Fourmont in his *Examen Pacifique de la querelle de Madame Dacier et de Monsieur de la Motte sur Homère* (1716).

²³ She warns that to deride and criticize Homer's characters is by the same token to expose the Bible to the "railleries des libertins & des athés" ("the mockeries of libertines and atheists"; xxvi). This is her second denunciation of the irreverent and irreligious nature of the criticism against Homer.

²⁴ "... je n'escriis pas pour les sçavants qui lisent Homère en sa langue; ils le connoissent mieux que moy; j'escriis pour ceux qui ne le connoissent point, c'est à dire, pour le plus grand nombre à l'égard desquels ce poète est comme mort; & j'escriis encore pour ceux qui commencent à le lire, & qui doivent travailler à l'entendre, avant qu'ils puissent estre en estat d'en sentir les beautez" ("I do not write for the scholars who read Homer in the original; they know him better than I do; I write for those who know him not, that is for the largest number for whom the poet is as if dead; and I write too for those who are beginning to read him, and who must work to understand him before they can be ready to perceive what is beautiful in him"; xxxv-xxxvi).

²⁵ Obviously, readers were on the horizon of Huet's treatise. However, as he considered free translations to be "a disservice to the translator's trusting readers," his immediate concern was to put an end to the bad translating practices of his rivals and establish a solid *theory* of accurate translation (see DeLater, 14). In the perspective of Dacier's *pedagogy* of translation, the reader is central to her enterprise of redeeming corrupted tastes and morals through exposure to the Ancients. See her lengthy book, *Des causes de la corruption du goust*.

²⁶ My capitalization of "Word" signals the quasi-religious nature of Dacier's crusade. Moreover, Dacier's religion plays an important part in this inner tension between classicism and modernism: although she converted to Catholicism, one could say that, culturally, Dacier remained a Protestant.

²⁷ In the preface of her translation of Anacreon's poetry, she writes that previous translations of Anacreon (in French by Rémi Belleau, in Latin by Etienne and Andreas), *because* they were in verse, were respectively "peu fidèles" ("not very faithful") and "souvent fort obscures" ("often quite obscure"; *Les Poesies d'Anacréon*, Preface).

²⁸ For Levine, "if the result was a translation that did make Homer accessible and recognizable, it was also, alas, a Homer in prose. And this, unfortunately, gave away too much to the opposition; the moderns were still being asked to accept on faith what they had denied out of ignorance, the merit of Homer as poetry" (138). In fact, Dacier's strong belief in the dissociation of verse from poetry makes her a Modern ahead of her time and of her adversaries who considered verse the *sine qua non* condition of poetry.

²⁹ The Earl of Roscommon already had condemned the French language in his 1684 *Essay on Translated Verse*:

Vain are our Neighbours' Hopes, and Vain their Cares,
The Fault is more their Languages than theirs:
'Tis courtly, florid, and abounds in words,
Of softer sound than ours perhaps affords;
But who did ever in French authors see
The comprehensive English Energy? (76)

The English translator of Dacier's translation, John Ozell, attributes Dacier's choice of prose to the inadequacy of the French language, which "in matters of cookery indeed ... abounds beyond any other" but is "the unfittest for heroic subject." Quoted in Audra, 196.

³⁰ "As one might expect, verse to verse translating inevitably runs out to greater length than the original and wanders away more than is proper into areas remote and different from the original.... In the case of verse to prose translating, there is no reason why verse cannot be rendered word for word. For after we have disregarded the constraints of poetic diction that verse requires, and that must be given up, it follows that we may keep at least the order and number of words" (Huet. Trans. by DeLater, 44).

³¹ Once again, Dacier's position oscillates between her elders' precepts, as DeLater observes: Although Mme Dacier's adoption of prose in rendering Homer into French accords with Huet's precept for translating the ancient poets by means of prose rather than imitating them in verse ..., and she is concerned above all to preserve the 'ideas' and 'genius' of the original ... in deference to the ancients, what might be called her 're-creative' method of translating contrasts with what

might be called Huet's 'reconstructive' method. Furthermore, her censure of 'over-scrupulous fidelity' in translating seems to accord with d'Ablancourt's 'belles infidèles' position. (119)

³² Dacier turns to music to explain the achievements of a prose translation in the following comparison:

On voit tous les jours des musiciens, qui, tres sçavants dans leur art, chantent exactement & rigoureusement la note des airs qu'on leur présente, il n'y font pas la moindre faute; mais le tout est une faute, parce que dépourvûs de genie & froids, il ne saisissent pas l'esprit dans lequel ces airs ont esté composez. . . : au lieu qu'on en voit d'autres, qui plus vifs & dotiez d'un plus heureux genie chantent ces airs dans l'esprit ou ils ont esté composez, leur conservent toute leur beauté, & les font paroistre tres differents, quoyqu'ils soient les mesmes. (xliii)

Every day, one sees musicians who, very learned in their art, sing exactly and rigorously the notes of the tunes with which they are presented, and do not make the slightest mistake; but the whole is a mistake because devoid of genius and cold, they do not grasp the spirit in which these tunes were composed; by contrast, there are others who, more lively and endowed with a more favorable genius, sing the tunes in the spirit in which they were composed, keep all their beauty, and make them seem very different, although they are the same.

³³ It is logical that prose writers feared more the disappearance of music than of images: the latter could easily be incorporated, given that most poetic images at the time were not metaphors but allegories. Music was the key element that writers of poetic prose feared losing and that they constantly sought to re-appropriate.

³⁴ Quoted by Hepp, 660.

³⁵ Dacier is the contemporary critic whom Pope quotes the most in his abundant notes to his translation of the *Iliad*.

³⁶ Farnham briefly analyses Dacier's "last combat" as a missed dialogue with Pope (180-4), whereas Levine focuses on Pope's ambivalent attitude towards Dacier's translation in a close analysis of his convergent and divergent translation of the *Iliad* (209-10). See also Audra, 59-64 and 235-310.

³⁷ See Shankman, 83-84.

³⁸ "It must be a strange partiality to antiquity, to think with Madam Dacier, 'that those times and manners are so much the more excellent as they are more contrary to ours.' Who can be so prejudiced in their favour as to magnify the felicity of those ages, when a spirit of revenge and cruelty, join'd with the practice of Rapine and Robbery, reign'd thro the world . . ." (12-13).

³⁹ According to Voltaire, "Nous devons à Mme Dacier la traduction d'Homère la plus fidèle par le style quoiqu'elle manque de force, et la plus instructive par les notes, quoiqu'on y désire la finesse du goût . . . Mme Dacier est un prodige du siècle de Louis XIV" ("We owe to Mme Dacier the translation of Homer that is the most stylistically faithful, although it lacks strength, and the most instructive in terms of notes, although one misses a refinement in taste . . . Mme Dacier is a prodigy of Louis XIV's century"; quoted in Santangelo, 193). For Sainte-Beuve (491), "[M]adame Dacier [est] encore aujourd'hui peut-être, pour l'ensemble, le traducteur qui donne le plus l'idée de son Homère" ("On the whole, madame Dacier perhaps [is] still today the translator who best expresses the idea of her Homer").

⁴⁰ DeJean's analysis concludes La Motte's superiority over Dacier's in their respective legacies to modern readers (108). However, her argument focuses exclusively on Dacier's and La Motte's theoretical debates and not on their *practice* as translators, thereby ignoring the literary quality and lasting impact of Dacier's prose translation versus the mediocrity (to say the least) of La Motte's soon forgotten adaptation.

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