

# Introduction

## *Rethinking Neoclassical Translation*

In 1638, Paris publisher Jean Camusat created a stir by bringing out a handsome quarto volume that was immediately understood to be an anonymous manifesto for the literary and cultural ambitions of the recently formed Académie française. The work, *Huit oraisons de Cicéron*, was a set of translations from Cicero; the translators were known to be four young intellectuals attached to Valentin Conrart, the “father” of the Académie. Chief contributor to the enterprise was Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt; educated at the Collège de Sedan and, like Conrart, a Protestant, he went on to become the leading translator of the day. The *Huit oraisons* volume proposed a French style of eloquence equal to that of the great Roman orator; it signaled a national project dedicated to promoting the preeminence of the French language. The *Huit oraisons* also opened a chapter in the history of translation in the West. By emphasizing both the literary values of their audience and the freedom of their approach, d’Ablancourt and his colleagues reshaped “ancienne Eloquence” to modern sensibilities and struck a profound chord with readers.<sup>1</sup> Such “neoclassical” translations would become one of the principal vectors not just for the understanding of the classics

but also for the development of a national literature in both France and Britain, providing the basis for an ongoing series of debates on translation, authorship, language, and culture for over a century to come.

#### TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATORS

Translation is one of the key means by which the singularity of the literary event becomes absorbed into cultural practice. Translation makes language visible, reminding us that the bridges between cultures can never be taken for granted, but instead require patient probing and an openness to otherness and difference. The history of translation helps us to put contemporary issues within a larger perspective, to enlarge our experience, and to understand our alternatives. In recent decades, the rise of translation studies as an independent discipline at the confluence of philosophy, historical linguistics, and literary studies, as well as the calls for “global awareness” in popular culture and public life, have produced a vibrant, interdisciplinary, and timely field of inquiry. Through translation studies we examine our place within language, culture, and history, and our ability to communicate that reality and to understand the realities of others.

These are the broader concerns animating my study of the work of translators in France and Britain throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period of intense intercultural dialogue between the two countries, during which translation and the critical reflection inspired by it provided a framework for crucial features of the transition to modernity. Among the questions confronted by translators are the shifting relation to the classical past and the working-through of the loss of that past, the consolidation of national identity as represented in the national language, the construction of multiple approaches to authorial identity as well as a variety of techniques for expressing individual subjectivities in writing, and the creation of new conceptual spaces for imagining otherness, dialogue, and cultural change. These themes emerge across several spheres of activity. Translations from the Greek and Latin classics afforded sources of inspiration and emulation that enabled the vernacular literature to develop its own voice; translations from the Christian scriptures (and sacred writings from other traditions) provided new ways of experiencing one’s faith and new avenues for exploring the relationship between language, truth, and meaning, and translations from recent and contemporary works in the modern

languages have broadened cross-cultural communication and expanded the republic of letters.

While vernacular translations played a significant role throughout Europe from the Middle Ages onward, I focus on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England not only because of the significant place each country had in the other's political and social imagination, creating a cross-channel dialogue that would become a crucial feature of the European Enlightenment, but also because during this period translators in the two countries were extremely aware of each other's practice. An implicit conversation on *how* and *why* to translate mirrored the exchange of ideas in the literary, philosophical, and scientific communities.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the 1640s, exiled English royalist men of letters at the court of France, such as John Denham and Abraham Cowley, came into contact with the work of d'Ablancourt and his circle. The neoclassical translators were best known for translations characterized by strong literary values and highly adaptative or "localizing" translation strategies aimed at making the original author "speak French" according to the standards of taste of the day. While not without controversy, such translations—dubbed *les belles infidèles* (lovely unfaithful ones)—proved extremely popular in both countries and set the standard for literary translation. The intensity of the cross-channel dialogue continued to increase throughout the eighteenth century. Not only did the French and British translate each other's works extensively, but French and British translators also read each other's work, commenting on it—and sometimes borrowing from it. The mutual translations and commentaries bespeak a broad and extremely complex pattern of identity and difference, emulation and rivalry, *anglomanie* and *anglophobie*, Francophilia and Francophobia throughout the period.<sup>3</sup>

Why did the translations of d'Ablancourt and his friends constitute such an important shift in translation theory and practice? To answer this question, let us turn briefly to the background and immediate context of their work. In some accounts of the *longue durée* of the history of translation in Europe, little happens between Cicero's announcement in *De optimo genere oratorum* that he has endeavored to translate "not as an interpreter, but as an orator" and the advent of Romanticism.<sup>4</sup> Certainly there were important continuities over the centuries in the practice of, and especially in the critical reflection on, translation: discussions on the separability and relative importance of word and meaning, or *verba* and *res*, on the translator's degree of "freedom" or "servitude"; on the relative roles of grammar and rhetoric;

on the relationship between translation and hermeneutics. The recurrence of familiar topoi and classical references—Cicero, Horace, Jerome—reinforces the sense of a continuous conversation. Thus, it has been argued, we can trace an unwavering line from Cicero’s presumed recommendation not to translate word for word (*non verbum pro verbo*) through certain key lines from Horace’s *Ars poetica* to Saint Jerome, who quotes from both predecessors in his Epistle 57 when claiming to translate “not word for word, but sense for sense” (*non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu*). Words and meaning, freely detached from one another, can be exchanged, “weighted,” and made to compensate for one another. This configuration is only strengthened by an overlay of platonizing Christianity, in which “meaning” is cast as immaterial and spiritualized, while “words” remain corporeal, material, earthbound.<sup>5</sup>

While it is undeniable that these notions run through much of the discussion of translation from antiquity to early modernity, the discussion itself is far more complex. Saint Jerome’s respectful citations notwithstanding, his reading of Cicero, like that of other patristic figures, downplays or even erases the Roman orator’s emphasis on translation as invention and resignification.<sup>6</sup> Horace’s role in early modern translation theory is even more complicated, given the long history of contradictory readings of the words from *Ars poetica*, “nec verbo verbum curabis reddere fidus / interpres.” As cited in this fragmentary manner, Horace could appear to be suggesting that the “faithful translator” should *not* render word for word; in context, however, the passage is an injunction to poets. It is they who are enjoined not to imitate “in the manner of the faithful translator,” suggesting that faithful translators, for their part, *should* adhere closely to their texts. Throughout the Renaissance, in particular, such “corrective Horatianism” among the Humanists emphasized the importance of literalist practice.<sup>7</sup> D’Ablancourt and his friends broke with this tendency. Horace’s lines appear on the final page of the *Huit oraisons* to underscore the work’s function as a polemical statement on translation. But by citing the verses out of context and taking advantage of the ambiguities of Latin syntax, the translators claimed Horace for their side and condemned a word-for-word approach. Their citational strategy was thus as free as their versions of Cicero—and would offer a target for later critics such as Pierre-Daniel Huet.<sup>8</sup>

During the Renaissance, translation had often been caught up in debates concerning the nature of imitation—its appropriateness in different contexts, its potential for either enriching the national culture or sapping it

of authenticity. For Joachim Du Bellay, translation played a key role in the advancement of learning, but it could not ultimately infuse new riches into the vernacular. Other forms of imitation are required, he argued, “to lift our vernacular to be the equal and Paragon of more celebrated Languages.”<sup>9</sup> Throughout the period, the terms *imitation* and *translation*, and the etymological variants *translater* and *traduire*, suggest a variety of understandings of the links among words, things, and ideas.<sup>10</sup> As the word *traduction* replaced *translation* as the primary term in French, emphasizing the translator’s active intervention rather than the neutral circulation of texts, translation emerged as an increasingly autonomous activity, susceptible to theorization and separate from interpretation and imitation. Etienne Dolet’s short treatise *La Maniere de bien traduire d’une langue en autre* (1540) offers not simply a set of procedures for producing correct translations but a more thorough intellectual grounding of the translator’s work.<sup>11</sup> The rise of theoretical reflection, as well as the increased attention to the development of vernacular culture, contributes to enhancing the status of translation and, as Luce Guillerm has argued, to endowing the translator with a new authority. The translator’s authority is not the authority of the author (to which the distinction between author and translator contributes), but the authority conferred on those who, like the sovereign, augment the national treasure and enhance the national language.<sup>12</sup>

Several elements that spurred the development of neoclassical translation were thus in place by the early decades of the seventeenth century: a new prominence for translators in the world of letters; an attentiveness to the enrichment and development of the vernacular; a significant body of critical reflection, with classical antecedents, situating translation with respect to language, imitation, and poetic creation. These factors alone, however, did not render subsequent developments automatic. Three years before the publication of the *Huit oraisons*, Claude Favre de Vaugelas, the arbiter of elegant French, read aloud a treatise by an absent colleague at one of the earliest meetings of the Académie française. The work, Claude-Gaspar Bachet de Meziriac’s *De la traduction*, has been called the earliest rigorously systematic analysis of translation practice; it was also a blistering critique of one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Renaissance translation, Jacques Amyot’s version of Plutarch (1559), long regarded as a model of style. For Meziriac, however, “the beauty of the language alone cannot suffice to render a translation estimable. . . . [Rather,] the essential quality in a translation is fidelity.”<sup>13</sup> Meziriac died soon after the reading, however, and his

treatise would not be published for nearly a century. Vaugelas would model his own translation practice not on Meziriac's recommendations but on the work of d'Ablancourt.

D'Ablancourt produced half of the translations in the *Huit oraisons*, he was joined by Pierre Du Ryer, better known to literary history as a dramatist, but also one of the most prolific translators of the day, Louis Giry, best known for translations of religious texts; and Olivier Patru, a close friend of d'Ablancourt's and a model of eloquence and *l'usage* as respected as Vaugelas. (Du Ryer produced two of the Cicero translations; Giry and Patru, one apiece.) Critics, particularly Antoine Furetière, would cast d'Ablancourt as the "captain" of the group that he himself referred to simply as "somewhat free" (*un peu libres*) translators.<sup>14</sup> The movement received a more telling name in a quip by Gilles Ménage, who affected innocent surprise both at the term's popularity and at its negative acceptance, and the translations have been known as "les belles infidèles" ever since.<sup>15</sup> At the moment of the publication of the *Huit oraisons*, d'Ablancourt and his friends were poised—by personal connections and talent, as well as by the confluence of political, institutional, and aesthetic developments bound up in the founding of the Academy—to play a key role in the making of French classical taste.<sup>16</sup>

The "belles infidèles" occasioned considerable debate in their day. Neoclassical translation practice actually involved a range of approaches to issues of freedom versus fidelity, the relation of past to present, and the capacity of language to represent other cultural realities. Nevertheless, beginning with Germaine de Staël and the Romantics, there has been a tendency to lump all the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' translators together and to condemn translation "in the French manner" as overly restricted to the confines of local taste and unavailable to authentic cultural dialogue.<sup>17</sup> This critique has been amplified in the work of recent theorists such as Antoine Berman and Lawrence Venuti, who qualify French and English neoclassical translation practice as "ethnocentric" and "hegemonizing." While I believe that such critiques have provoked useful discussion of the norms appropriate for translators today, I also believe that we need a clearer, more nuanced understanding of the past. Certainly, inasmuch as the work of neoclassical translators subtends broader cultural projects such as the centralization and purification of the national language to the exclusion of regional variants and other local languages, it too has its darker side, its affiliation with nationalism and internal colonization.<sup>18</sup> Bible translation, to cite another example, can be viewed in relation to expansionism and the rise of impe-

rialism during the period studied here. My principal aim, however, is to sort out the multiple agendas and projects that compose the “neoclassical school,” through a careful reading of the translators’ own words.

By “the translators’ own words,” I mean, quite literally, their statements on the meaning and methods of their projects, contained for the most part in their prefaces. Although I do examine certain individual translations, I am primarily concerned with the ways in which the translators conceived their projects and presented them to the world. My study takes into account bibliographic research on translation and follows the careers of a number of individual translators, but it is first and foremost an attempt to come to terms with these often quite complex texts through sustained close reading. Sometimes polemical, sometimes philosophical, sometimes deeply personal, prefaces and related materials provide us with a “translation theory” that is deeply contextualized, situated variously in terms of the work of other translators, the patronage system, the literary marketplace, and the world of ideas.

#### QUESTIONS OF METHOD

##### *Reading Prefaces*

If the relation of a translation to its source text slices across frames of reference that include linguistic choices, critical hermeneutics, and differing modes of literary reception, the relationship of the translator’s preface to the translated text (and to its original) adds an additional layer of complexity. As a genre, the critical preface—often, indeed, a translator’s preface—arose in Italy and France in the Renaissance and became popular in England in the course of the seventeenth century. The freedom of the translator’s preface is surely one of the genre’s most appealing qualities: content and tone may vary from elegy to political satire, from autobiography to *explication de texte*. Gérard Genette’s typology of literary prefaces in *Seuils* (authentic or fictive, authorial or “allographic,” and so on) does not capture the peculiar position of the preface written by a translator, who both is and is not the author of the text being presented; whose motives for translating may be pedagogical, spiritual, commercial, or oppositional; who may aim to influence the standard of taste, to shock—*épater le bourgeois!*—or to warn of a perceived danger.<sup>19</sup> As in other prefaces, the writer/translator offers a pact to the reader; unlike other prefaces, that pact includes a relationship with

a third party, the original author, and frequently others, such as patrons and other translators (past, present, or future). The preface is furthermore the site of a transaction that is difficult to locate in time. It represents a completed reading of a work that we as readers have yet to encounter; it dislocates original authors from their place in history. One of the most commonly recurring topoi in neoclassical prefaces is the translator's desire to "make the author speak" as if he or she were alive before us, sharing our language. As Glyn Norton notes in his perspicacious study of Renaissance translators' prefaces, the translator "embarks on an act of deconstruction," setting forth the historical and personal contexts of reading and interpretation, the problems of meaning, interpretation, and cultural equivalency.<sup>20</sup>

It is tempting to sketch the outlines of a typology of translators' prefaces. Leaving aside fictive translators' prefaces to many a novel, one would need to take into account the function of the preface in different genres and disciplines—such as literature, history, philosophy, science, and travel writing—and the different functions performed by the preface: historical background, explanation, justification, and what Genette calls the "lightning rod" (ranging from the topos of modesty to apparent condemnation, as in the prefaces to the 1647 French version and the 1649 English version of the Qur'ān). The preface may discuss the origins of the source text (Pierre Le Tourneur's eighteenth-century prefaces to Young and Shakespeare) or those of the translation (William Gifford's Juvenal [1802]); anti-prefaces lampoon the genre (numerous prefaces of Roger L'Estrange); dueling prefaces attack one another (Silhouette's and Resnel's prefaces to their rival translations of Pope's *Essay on Man* in the 1730s). A translator's preface can also become juxtaposed to a translated author's preface (Aphra Behn's Fontenelle of 1688) or metamorphose into an editor's preface (Pierre Du Ryer's 1653 preface to Vaugelas's *Quinte-Curce*). And of course many of these texts involve sustained reflections on aesthetics, the relative merits of prose and verse, questions of language and meaning, national character, and so on.

Only recently have these densely textured, nuanced texts been fully recognized as significant contributions to the history of reading and criticism. George Steiner, for example, characterized all statements by translators prior to Schleiermacher as having only an "immediate empirical focus," in contrast to a "second stage . . . of theory and hermeneutic inquiry" arising after 1800.<sup>21</sup> More recently, critics such as Michel Ballard and Lieven d'Hulst have argued that the juxtaposition of "empirical" prefaces and "theoretical" treatises is faulty and anachronistic, and a growing number of anthologies



of prefaces points toward a new appreciation for their place in literary history.<sup>22</sup> While I hope that the readings that follow will bear out the theoretical significance of many of these pieces, I also hope to show that they contain moments of beauty and drama as well.

### *Constructing a Corpus*

We lack a complete bibliography of translations into English and French during this period, although there are a number of useful bibliographic studies of specific genres or of individual writers in translation. The two best-known bibliographic tools, by J.-A.-R. Séguin and Charles Rochedieu, survey translations from French to English and from English to French, respectively, but they are organized by completely different principles and are impossible to compare for the purpose of estimating the relative flow of translations back and forth across the Channel.<sup>23</sup> Nor can such studies tell us a great deal about the literary marketplace for translation (from the classics or from other modern languages) in general. Working with selected years from the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), Mary Helen McMurrin estimates that French novels and romances accounted for 15–30 percent on average, and rising as high as 36 percent, of the prose fiction published in Britain between 1660 and 1770.<sup>24</sup> Séguin's bibliography of works translated from French to English shows a general rise, with some fluctuations, from an average of 30–40 titles per year in the 1730s to more than twice that number in the 1750s. Although there was a slight decline during the politically tense years of the 1760s, 1766 yielded the highest number of translations of any year surveyed, with 108 titles; then 60–80 titles continued to appear each year till the onset of the Revolution. Such figures correspond to what is generally known about the importance of French-English intellectual and cultural exchange during the Enlightenment.<sup>25</sup> One can also glean some sense of the relative presence of other national literatures through period compilations such as the abbé Goujet's *Bibliothèque française* (1740), but much work remains to be done to complete the picture. While one can imagine, given the availability of online library catalogues, databases such as ESTC or Research Libraries Information Network, the Centre d'études de la traduction database at Metz, and so on, that a "technical solution" to the question could be realized, we are far from possessing a tool that would allow a statistical study of the place of translations from both modern and classical languages in the literary

marketplace, an “atlas of translation” along the lines of Franco Moretti’s work on the transnational evolution of the novel.

I have been less ambitious than these data-driven projects in some ways and more ambitious in others. My basic corpus consists of 450–500 works, not all of which, ultimately, are cited, but whose existence often guided my readings and research. The texts include primarily translators’ prefaces, but also polemical writings, treatises, pedagogical manuals, and other relevant documents from the end of the sixteenth century through the 1790s. The corpus is about equally distributed between French and English imprints and writers/translators, including approximately ninety French individual figures and the same number of English figures. Women make up 10 percent of both groups. The corpus also includes a dozen or so anonymous translations in each language. Given the thousands of works, not only in *belles lettres* but also in philosophy, religion, natural science, and political science, that were translated during this period into English and French, not only from each other but from other modern and classical languages, my corpus lays no claim to statistical representativeness.

Instead, I have been concerned with finding prefaces (and other texts that take up translation-related issues) that go beyond a schematic rehearsal of the matter at hand; that offer some form of self-reflexive, critical gesture; that point toward larger philosophical and cultural goals intersecting the act of translation. I soon realized that such critical reflections were often to be found beyond the obvious list, usually occurring toward the end of the translator’s preface, of the “difficulties encountered” by the translator or the “rules of translation” offered in a treatise. Other questions—historical, philosophical, literary-critical, or even autobiographical—were often woven in as well, and these threads contributed to the density of the argument.

One corollary of this approach is that the corpus is weighted heavily toward translations from Greek and Latin. Latin, of course, was part of the intellectual equipment of all educated men, so many translations from the Latin classics are aimed at readers who can read the original and appreciate the translator’s choices. With Greek and especially Hebrew, however, we enter the realm of “erudition.” Such translations more often appear with prefatory remarks and notes. In both France and England, the cultural prestige of translations from the ancient languages may explain in part why such works are more often accompanied by a full-fledged critical apparatus than translations from the modern languages; I will also be suggesting that

classicists found themselves forced to come to terms with matters of historical and cultural “difference” and linguistic undecidability that were not as immediately apparent to translators from modern languages. Certainly these are crucial issues in biblical criticism and translation, hotly debated during the period examined here. Revealingly, even though his *Bibliothèque française* includes discussions of works from English, Spanish, and Italian, the abbé Goujet understands the word *traduction* as pertaining to translation from Greek and Latin; he feels compelled to justify his use of the term with respect to the modern European languages, whose temporal proximity would appear to render them to some degree “transparent” in his perception. Over the course of the eighteenth century, especially in France, we will see an increasing number of writers’ works accorded the status of “modern classics,” with full formal treatment in elegant editions with critical prefaces: Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Samuel Richardson, and Edward Young.

The predominance of classicists in the corpus explains in part the smaller number of women, despite the importance of translation as a road to print for women writers and intellectuals and, indeed, the significant place women translators occupied in the literary marketplace. Classical scholar Anne Dacier, a powerful figure both institutionally and intellectually in England as much as in France, is an exception. Works produced in response to the “marketplace”—translations of modern novels, for example—do not, as a rule, receive the formal treatment. Eliza Haywood, though a prolific translator of French novels, rarely offers extensive prefaces. To the extent that the discourse on translation throughout the period is informed primarily by theoretical reflection rather than by observations on practice, translations appearing without a critical apparatus do not play as large a role in this book as they did in the publishing world. (Writing at the end of the eighteenth century, Alexander Tytler structures a significant part of his treatise on translation in terms of examples drawn from actual translations, but even so, much of his discussion remains a dialogue with critical writing.) Yet the numbers of women translators and the importance of gender as a category informing their self-presentation and discussion of translation merit particular study.

So far I have emphasized some of the limitations of the corpus and the ways in which it does not “represent” certain aspects of translation during this period. Other limitations are built into the nature of academic work, with its multiple demands of teaching, scholarship, advising, and administration. One can only spend so much time in research libraries and rare-book

rooms, or even checking the online resources of Early English Books Online (EEBO) and Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO). It would be physically impossible (for this working academic parent, in any event) to call up and examine all of the translations from Greek and Latin published in French and English over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is somewhat easier to come to terms with translations of individual texts, especially those by modern authors. One can, without too much difficulty, examine all the early French and English translations of *Don Quixote*, for example. Much valuable work on the reception of individual writers has been carried out in this manner. But the “brute force” approach, calling up all the Virgil translations in the Bibliothèque nationale, is not necessarily the most productive, if we are seeking to give an account of what was at stake—culturally, aesthetically, politically, and personally—for those men and women who found themselves poised at the edge of one linguistic and cultural experience, contemplating another.

Instead, I have relied to a great extent on the translators themselves for my direction. Implicit in much of the text to follow are what I call “citation networks”: translators who refer to other translators, books that refer to other books. While Dryden, Pope, and d’Alembert have ever been clearly present to literary and intellectual history, others, like Anne Dacier, Roger L’Estrange, or the abbé Desfontaines, are more the province of period specialists. The more one reads of prefaces, critical commentaries, or pedagogical reflection, however, the more one encounters their names, or those of figures such as Jacques de Tournel, the abbé Delille, or George Campbell, major figures in their own day without whom the picture could not be complete. Citations and other references help remind us of the importance of networks and affiliations among translators: d’Ablancourt’s followers, English royalists, Ancients and Moderns, Huguenot exiles.<sup>26</sup> The collective translations produced at the Jansenist retreat at Port-Royal are a vivid example of a tightly knit network, but the Port-Royal translators were also in dialogue with other men of letters and biblical scholars. “Completeness,” in the sense of some Borgesian Total Library, or a map as large as its country, or, most tellingly, the perfect translation-as-replication (which is always different from itself) of Pierre Menard, is not to be found, and probably not to be wished for. But there is a compelling and necessary story to be told through a careful reading of these related texts. I would be remiss, however, if I did not give credit to earlier literary historians and scholars whose reception studies, histories of translation, and anthologies of writings on

translation often guided my search, as my bibliography shows. For every profoundly interesting preface or dedicatory epistle that I rejoiced in finding on my own, I was pointed to numerous others through the work of colleagues past and present.

At the heart of this collection of texts, the works to which I will be attending the most closely, is a set of substantial reflections on language and literary traditions, poetics, semiotics, national cultures, readerships, writing and reading, and, frequently, other translators: either previous translators of a particular text whose work now appears insufficient to the needs of the present or translators whose own critical statements inspire or serve to justify the present translator's enterprise. The critical canon undergoes a radical change: for centuries, translators had justified their choices through references to particular passages in Cicero, Horace, and Jerome; many continue to do so, but now they also refer to recent and contemporary authorities such as Anne Dacier, Jacques de Tournell, and Jean Bouhier in France, and John Denham, John Dryden, and the Earl of Roscommon in England. Roscommon's *Essay on Translated Verse* crosses the Channel and is cited on both sides of the debate over French translations of Pope. Translation is a prime site for discussion of the historicity of language and the evolution of literary traditions—and, indeed, the historicity of translation practice itself. In other words, we have before us a key component in the emergence of literary criticism and literary theory as a discourse, if not yet a discipline. The emergence of the word *literature* in both English and French as referring to something more specific than all writing and as distinct from *belles lettres* is coterminous with this shift.

### *Writing the History of Translation*

In a lively and thought-provoking discussion of methodological issues in translation history, Anthony Pym argues that “even if everything that has preceded us were absolute rubbish . . . we should be able to say why what has been done is rubbish, according to what methodological faults, and how our future non-rubbish is going to correct those faults.”<sup>27</sup> Contemporary translation studies is too vast a field for me to give more than the briefest summary of those threads—rubbish or not—that have the most bearing on the present project. My intellectual debts are apparent from the bibliography. As I have already indicated, however, while scholars of translation history such as George Steiner, Louis Kelly, or Frederick Rener have the great

virtue of recognizing the rich interconnections among older statements on translation, their tendency to conflate the *longue durée* into a single moment or set of issues erases their historicity. I have already mentioned Steiner's decision to designate nearly all writing on translation before Schleiermacher as "pre-hermeneutic." All three tend to organize their analyses along structural or thematic lines, as if historical moment had no bearing on the question. Kelly's discussion of the topos of the translator's "struggle" cites within a single paragraph Henri Meschonnic, Saint Jerome, Cecil Day Lewis, Yves Bonnefoy, Philo Judaeus, Roger Bacon, Vladimir Nabokov, and Walter Benjamin (132); Rener refers to the eighteen hundred years from Cicero to Alexander Tytler as a single "period" with a single "theory of language" (13). Of course, translation theory has its continuities, both temporal and transnational—but it is also situated in time and place. Etienne Dolet was burned at the stake and Perrot d'Ablancourt elevated to the Académie française within a century of each other.

A great deal has been written on "polysystem theory" in translation studies, a movement that is geographically scattered but still most closely associated with the work of Gideon Toury, Itamar Even-Zohar, and the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics at Tel Aviv University and its journal *Poetics Today*.<sup>28</sup> Toury's best-known work emphasizes the need to determine the "norms" according to which a translation (or other literary work) functions within a literary system: What is linguistically or culturally acceptable? What function does the presence or absence of the author's or translator's name have in the publication and reception of the work? While Toury's interest in "universals of translational behavior" encompasses transhistorical questions, others have offered interesting accounts of specific, historically situated literary systems as well as of systems changing over time. Descriptivist translation studies dovetails with other sociologically oriented approaches in literary studies, such as the examinations of the "literary field" inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Thus historians such as Alain Viala and Gregory Brown have examined the categories by which works were judged and literary careers were made in the Ancien Régime.<sup>29</sup> The fact that "strategies for success" for writers and translators were very different in 1630 and 1790 should warn us from too easy a conflation of similar-sounding translation theories from those years. (Is that not indeed the lesson learned from Pierre Menard?) Who our translators were by birth, where they were educated, what faith they professed, what other forms of writing they engaged in, what sources of income and what

forms of patronage they benefited from, what salons, academies, epistolary networks, and political activities they participated in—all of these elements infuse and have a bearing on the meaning of their work.

For Bourdieu and other literary sociologists, as for the polysystems theorists, the aim is to understand the cultural reality of a moment in terms of “success”: how does the system operate so that certain works meet with approval, certain attitudes and positions achieve recognition and capital (whether cultural or real), while others do not? In such a view, the literary field is a “force-field” in which “position-takings (works, political manifestos or demonstrations, and so on), which one may and should treat for analytical purposes as a ‘system’ of oppositions, are not the result of some kind of objective collusion, but rather the product and the stake of a permanent conflict.”<sup>30</sup> While I have endeavored to keep aspects of this agonistic literary “system” and of translators’ socioeconomic status, relative prestige, and so forth in mind in the readings ahead, it will quickly become clear that my main purpose lies not in determining what produced “success” in the field of translation. Here the aims and methods of a literary scholarship infused by philosophy and the history of ideas part ways with a more sociological approach. Hence I will be less concerned with describing the translation practices that best appealed to the reading publics—who won or lost the *Querelle d’Homère* or even the English Civil War, and who achieved or lost status thereby—than with exploring the texture of the ideas voiced, the sometimes surprising connections and disjunctions with each other and with ongoing debates in our own day. Instead of a demystifying “history of the present” laying bare the origins of contemporary practices, my focus here is the reconsideration of roads not taken, possibilities left unfulfilled. The past, like a text waiting to be translated, offers alternative readings, re-translations, that may stimulate new questions for the present.

Although the “history of translation” cannot be undertaken without attention to its location in time and place, it nevertheless continues to pose questions that remain urgent for us today. Recognition of the historicity of these texts does not therefore preclude engaging them on our own contemporary intellectual terrain. Indeed, such dialogue between past and present is not only inevitable but desirable. And this leads me to the third moment in my rapid methodological overview, the role neoclassical translation theory and practice have played in what could be termed the “ethical turn” in recent histories of translation.