



Literature in Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647–1720)

John J. Conley

Loyola University of Maryland

An eminent classicist, Anne Dacier defended the moral pedagogy of literature, especially of the Latin and Greek classics. Homer, whose *Iliad* and *Odyssey* she translated into French, is her test case. Against contemporary critics who claimed that Homer had certain immoral passages, Dacier contends that Homer showed the full spectrum of virtue and vice possible in the human condition. Rather than being a role model, Achilles is a cautionary tale on the damage pride can wreak upon the individual and the state. Similarly, Dacier refutes Christian critics who reject Homer on the basis of his polytheism and alleged idolatry. Dacier argues that behind the surface polytheism Homer's epics depict a religious universe compatible with Christian doctrine: one supreme god who rules over the pantheon of gods; an immortal human soul; a balance between predestination (divine initiative) and human freedom; an after-life built on rewards and punishments for one's use of free will. Rather than representing a danger for the moral life of the Christian, classical literature powerfully encourages virtue and discourages vice through the persuasive quality of its rhetoric and idealized examples. Rather than contradicting the Christian creed, it can serve as a propaedeutic to Christian faith.

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Keywords:

classicism, decadence, humanism, literature, morality, taste, epic, Homer, polytheism, christianity, free will determinism, predestination