



Taste in Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647–1720)

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A distinguished classicist, Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647–1720) lamented the decline of taste which she detected in contemporary French society. A partisan of the ancients in the simmering literary quarrel between the *anciens* and *modernes*, Dacier insisted that modern literature has declined from the standard set by its biblical and classical Greco-Roman ancestors. As evidence of this decline in taste she points to the contemporary vogue of licentious poetry and sentimental novels. This literary decadence both reflects and contributes to the moral decline of the society which is producing and consuming such mediocre, prurient works. The epic heroism of the saints and ancient Greek warriors no longer has currency in such a debased culture. Madame Dacier argues that the only solution to this regression in taste and morals lies in a renewed humanistic education where the study, translation, and imitation of classical texts enjoys pride of place.

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