TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE FOR *THE FABLE OF THE BEES*

Since I began to live with myself, and to pay attention to the price of time, to the brevity of life, to the uselessness of the things one spends one's time with in the world, I have wondered at my former behavior: at taking extreme care of my teeth, of my hair and at neglecting my mind and my understanding. I have observed that the mind rusts more easily than iron, and that it is even more difficult to restore to its first polish.

Such sensible reflections do not, however, give the soul back that flexibility it lost from lack of exercise when one is no longer in the first flush of youth. The fakirs of the East Indies lose the use of the muscles in their arms, because those are always in the same position and are not used at all. Thus do we lose our own ideas when we neglect to cultivate them. It is a fire that dies if one does not continually give it the wood needed to maintain it. So, wishing if it is possible to make up for such a great mistake, and to make it bear the fruits that I can still look forward to, I sought for some kind of occupation that could, in focusing my mind, give it that firmness (if I can put it that way) that can never be acquired unless one has chosen a goal for one's studies. One must conduct oneself as in everyday life; one must know what one wants to be. In the latter endeavors irresolution produces false steps, and in the life of the mind confused ideas.

Those who have received very decided talent from nature can give themselves up to the force that impels their genius, but there are few such souls[26] which nature leads by the hand through the field that they must clear for cultivation or improvement. Even fewer are sublime geniuses, who have in them the seeds of all talents and whose superiority can embrace and perform everything. Those, however, who have most claim to this universal monarchy of the fine arts attain perfection in one particular field with more facility and make it their favorite. M. de Voltaire, for example, although a great metaphysician, great historian, great philosopher, etc. has given preference to poetry. And the epithet of France's greatest poet, as well as that of "universal man," will be his distinctive characteristic.

It sometimes happens that work and study force genius to declare itself, like the fruits that art produces in a soil where nature did not intend it, but these efforts of art are nearly as rare as natural genius itself. The vast majority of thinking men—the others, the geniuses, are in a class of their own—

26. Du Châtelet is using the word *soul* in the Cartesian sense of *mind* or *spirit* as separate from the body. René Descartes (1596–1650) was the principal authority in France on philosophy in its broad eighteenth-century meaning.

need to search within themselves for their talent. They know the difficulties of each art, and the mistakes of those who engage in each one, but they lack the courage that is not disheartened by such reflections, and the superiority that would enable them to overcome such difficulties. Mediocrity is, even among the elect,[27] the lot of the greatest number. Some are busy removing the thorns that slow the true geniuses in their course, and it is they who supply us with so many dictionaries, and similar works which are so useful in literature. The colors of the great painters must be ground by someone. Others periodically report to the public all that happens in the Republic of Letters. Lastly, others convey from one country to another the discoveries and thoughts of great men, and remedy, to the best of their abilities, the misfortune of the multiplicity of languages, so often deplored by true lovers of learning.

I know that obtaining for one's country riches drawn from its own resources does it a greater service than informing it of foreign discoveries; Van Robés has been more useful to France than the man who first brought imported cloth from England.[28] But one must cultivate the portion one has received and not give in to despair, because one has only two *arpents* of land while others have ten *lieues* of land.[29]

This passage from the Gospels can be applied to the arts; according to the Evangelists: *sunt plures mansiones in domo patris mei*.[30] It is certainly more valuable to give a good translation of an esteemed English or Italian book than to write a bad French one.

27. *Élus* in French means the *elect*. Du Châtelet uses the word here to designate those "chosen" by blood, the elite, her privileged circle.

28. Joseph Van Robais (ca. 1630–1685), born in Courtrai, came to France from what is now Belgium as part of Louis XIV's principal minister Colbert's policy to encourage French manufactures. Von Robais established a cloth factory at Abbeville that became competitive with English cloth manufacturers and ended French dependence on English imports. The king awarded him and his workers naturalization and dispensation as Protestants.

29. French measurements in Du Châtelet's day can only be approximated. The basic length was a *pied du roi* (roughly 32.48 cm). Twelve *pouces* made up one *pied* and were roughly 27.07 mm. A *toise*, like the English fathom, was six *pieds* (1.95 m). A *lieue*, or "league," was 2,000 *toises*, or 3.9 km. An *arpent* could indicate length and was equivalent to 200 *pieds* (64.97 m) or area (4,221 m^2) when it was roughly equivalent to an English acre. Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_units_of_measurement#Length, accessed 19 November 2007.

30. *In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt*; "In my Father's house there are many mansions," John 14:2. The Bible used by Du Châtelet was the Latin Vulgate, St. Jerome's translation from Greek. The English translation of the Latin Vulgate was the standard translation into English until the mid-twentieth century for Roman Catholics. The translation above is the one used in that translation. See *The Holy Bible*, translated from the Latin Vulgate (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1899, repr. 1971).

Translators are the entrepreneurs of the Republic of Letters,[31] and they should at least be praised for perceiving and knowing their limitations and for not undertaking to produce works themselves, and thus attempting to carry a burden under which they would succumb. Besides, if their work does not require creative genius, which no doubt holds the first rank in the empire of the fine arts, it calls for an application for which they must be even more grateful, as they can expect less glory from it.

Of all works, those of discursive thought seem to me the most susceptible to a good translation. Reason and morals know no country. The genius of a language, the curse of translators, is less to be felt in works where ideas are the only things to be conveyed, and where the graces of style are not the main merit. By contrast, works of imagination can rarely be transmitted from people to people, because to translate a good poet, one must be almost as good a poet as the author.

But while it is impossible to have faithful records of men's poetic imagination in many languages, it is not impossible to have those of their reason; for this we are indebted to translators. Thus, if human nature, in general, is indebted to the wise M. Locke for enabling it to know its own noblest part, namely, its understanding, the French are without doubt indebted to M. Coste, for having made known to them this great philosopher.[32] For so many men, even among the readers of Locke, cannot master the English language. Furthermore, very few among those who have learned the language of modern philosophy would be able to understand M. Locke in English, and thus to overcome both the difficulties of the language and those of the subject matter.

No doubt, before deciding to translate one must convince oneself that it is commentators, not translators, who are made to say in the "Temple of Taste":

> Taste is nothing, we are accustomed
> To write out at length, idea to idea,
> What others think, but we don't think at all.[33]

31. Du Châtelet uses the word "négociant," which in her day meant a merchant who introduced exotic products from one culture to another, such as a member of the Company of the Indies; thus "entrepreneur" rather than merchant seems a good translation. See *Le Dictionnaire de la l'Académie française* (Paris, 1694), 2.115.

32. She is referring to John Locke (1632–1704), the English philosopher and author of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690), translated into French by Pierre Coste (1668–1747) as *L'Essai sur l'entendement humain* (1700).

33. "Le Temple du goût" is a long satiric poem by Voltaire, published in 1733. Du Châtelet has chosen a section mocking commentators and their lengthy tomes.

The judicious author of these charming lines of verse has appreciated the difference between writing thick volumes on a passage from Dictys of Crete[34] that one does not understand at all, and is of no use to us, and making available for one's country the works and the discoveries of others.

But as any opportunity can be misused, the desire to make money and to be published has produced almost as many bad translations as bad books.

If making a good translation is not without some difficulty, at least, it ought to be easy to choose a good book as the object of one's work. However, translations often appear when the original work has already been forgotten. The English fall into this kind of error more often than we do. There are scarcely any bad French books that they do not translate, witness Sethos and so many others.[35] Yet the profound genius of the English ought to make them less avid for our books, which for the most part, are frivolous in comparison to theirs. It seems to me that one could apply to French books what the count of Roscomon said of our poetry: that all the gold of an English line made into a French wire would fill several pages.

> The weighti [*sic*] bullion of one sterling line
> Drawn to a French wire would through all pages shine.
> (The word *line* in English means both *ligne* [line] and
> *vers* [line of poetry])[36]

I believe that translation is more widespread in England because, since French is part of the education of Englishmen, more among them are able to translate.

There are many unfaithful translators, some translating word for word because they are afraid to be unfaithful to the original. Others, because their author's meaning is difficult to grasp, just miss it and obscure a brilliant thought of which their mind has had only a glimpse. As for those who

> Le goût n'est rien, nous avons l'habitude
> De rédiger au long, de point en point
> Ce qu'on pensa, mais nous ne pensons point.

34. Dictys of Crete was the supposed author of a Latin narrative of the Trojan War that probably was a source of Greek legends for medieval Europe.

35. Sethos is perhaps a reference to Abbé Jean Terrasson (1670–1750), a classicist who translated a book of Egyptian myths and legends into French. The book was titled *Sethos* (1731). I am grateful to Penny Arthur of the Graffigny Project at the University of Toronto for this reference.

36. Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon (1633–1685), an Irish nobleman, minor poet, and translator. Du Châtelet is quoting from his "An Essay on Translated Verse," lines 53–54, available at http://www.hn.psu.edu/Faculty/KKemmerer/poets/roscommon/default.html, accessed 13 September 2003.

substitute their absurdities for those of the author they translate, I look on them as similar to the travelers who take advantage of the proverb: *long ways, long lies*.[37] I believe that only translators of works in oriental languages have fallen into this excess.

The difficulties of each art are for artists what the circumstances of the smallest events are for their contemporaries. The interest that both groups take in their endeavors and the point of view from which they consider events magnify the objects for the former and the latter. Posterity and the public judge very differently. Thus, while it is true to say that a good translation requires application and labor, it is, nonetheless, at best, a very mediocre work.

However mediocre this kind of work, it may be thought that it is audacious for a woman to aspire to do it.

I feel the full weight of prejudice that excludes us [women] so universally from the sciences,[38] this being one of the contradictions of this world, which has always astonished me, as there are great countries whose laws allow us to decide their destiny, but none where we are brought up to think.

Another observation that one can make about this prejudice, which is odd enough, is that acting is the only occupation requiring some study and a trained mind to which women are admitted, and it is at the same time the only one that regards its professionals as infamous.[39]

Let us reflect briefly on why for so many centuries, not one good tragedy, one good poem, one esteemed history, one beautiful painting, one good book of physics, has come from the hands of women. Why do these creatures whose understanding appears in all things equal to that of men, seem, for all that, to be stopped by an invincible force on this side of a barrier;[40] let someone give me some explanation, if there is one. I leave it to naturalists to find a physical explanation, but until that happens, women will be entitled to protest against their education. As for me, I confess that if I were king I would wish to make this scientific experiment. I would reform an abuse that

37. "To lie well goes a long way" would be a more complete version of this proverb. Du Châtelet often liked to use proverbs to make a point, even in her writings on natural philosophy.

38. "Sciences" had a broad meaning in the eighteenth century. However, Du Châtelet and her contemporaries gave it the Aristotelian connotation of "certain knowledge," similar to our idea of quantifiable, demonstrable fact ascertained through the subjective observation of our senses.

39. In her era, actors were excommunicated by definition.

40. Du Châtelet often uses words that had meanings in mathematics and mechanics; for example, "semblable" is the word she uses for "equal," a geometric term to express equivalency; and "force," used in eighteenth-century physics to mean the impetus for motion.

cuts out, so to speak, half of humanity. I would allow women to share in all the rights of humanity, and most of all those of the mind. Women seem to have been born to deceive, and their soul is scarcely allowed any other exercise. This new system of education that I propose would in all respects be beneficial to the human species. Women would be more valuable beings, men would thereby gain a new object of emulation, and our social interchanges which, in refining women's minds in the past, too often weakened and narrowed them, would now only serve to extend their knowledge. Some will probably recommend that I ask M. the abbé of St. Pierre to combine this project with his.[41] Mine will perhaps seem as difficult to put into practice, even though it may be more reasonable.

I am convinced that many women are either ignorant of their talents, because of the flaws in their education, or bury them out of prejudice and for lack of a bold spirit. What I have experienced myself confirms me in this opinion. Chance led me to become acquainted with men of letters, I gained their friendship, and I saw with extreme surprise that they valued this amity.[42] I began to believe that I was a thinking creature. But I only glimpsed this, and the world, the dissipation, for which alone I believed I had been born, carried away all my time and all my soul. I only believed in earnest in my capacity to think at an age when there was still time to become reasonable, but when it was too late to acquire talents.

Being aware of that has not discouraged me at all. I hold myself quite fortunate to have renounced in mid-course frivolous things that occupy most women all their lives, and I want to use what time remains to cultivate my soul. Feeling that nature has refused me the creative genius that discovers new truths, I have done justice to myself, and I am content to render with clarity the truths others have discovered, and which the diversity of languages renders useless for most readers.

Having decided upon this kind of work, my esteem for the English, and the taste that I have always had for the free and virile way of thinking and expressing themselves of this philosophical people, caused me to prefer their books to those of other nations. I have chosen this book titled *The Fable of the Bees*, among all those I could have translated, because it appears to be, of all the books in the world, one of those most designed for humanity

41. Charles-Irénée Castel, Abbé de St. Pierre (1658–1743), wrote a number of well-known treatises on education, including one that advocated *collèges* for girls with a course of study similar to that for boys.

42. "L'amitié," the French word used here, means more than simple friendship and carries the connotation of affection and concern.

in general. It is, I believe, the best book of ethics ever written, that is to say, the one that most leads men to the true source of the feelings to which they abandon themselves almost all without examining them. Mandeville,*[43] who is the author of it, could be called the Montaigne of the English if it were not for the fact that he has more method and healthier ideas about things than Montaigne.[44]

I do not, however, have for my author the idolatrous respect of all translators. I acknowledge that his work is written badly enough in English. Parts of it are too long, and it sometimes goes too far, as when it says, for example, *that a thief is as useful to society as a bishop who gives alms, and that there is no merit in saving from a fire an infant about to be engulfed*. And in many other places it advances several things which are not true and could be dangerous. I have taken care to add a corrective statement in those places in order to prevent them from having dangerous consequences. I have taken the liberty of pruning the author's style in a number of places, and of cutting out all that was directed to the English and which is therefore too specific to their customs.

I also took the liberty of adding my own reflections, when the material on which I was working suggested them to me, reflections that I believed deserved to be included. But, in order that the reader could discern them, I have taken care to indicate them with quotation marks.[45]

The reader will find in this book thoughts that may seem a little bold, but before making this judgment it is only a matter, I believe, of examining whether they are accurate. For, if they are true, and if they teach men how to know themselves, they cannot fail to be useful to those thinking men, and it is for those only that this book is destined. *Odi prophanum vulgus et arceo.*[46]

I admit that, having had the temerity to undertake this work, I have the temerity to wish to succeed. I believe myself all the more obligated to give it all my most careful attention as success alone can justify the undertaking. The unfairness of men in excluding us women from the sciences should at least be of use in preventing us from writing bad books. Let us try to enjoy this advantage over them, so that this tyranny will be a happy necessity for us, leaving nothing for them to condemn in our works but our names.

43. Du Châtelet adds her own note here: "*He was the son of a French refugee. He proves by his example that French minds need to be transplanted to England to acquire power." In fact, Du Châtelet was mistaken about Mandeville's origins. He was a Dutch refugee.

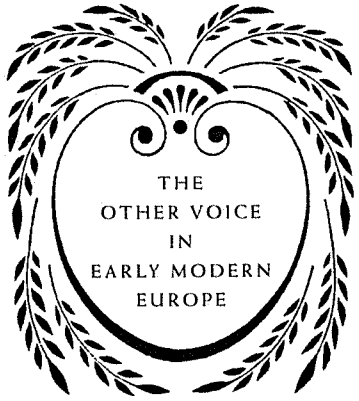
44. Du Châtelet is referring to Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), and his *Essais* (1588); Montaigne was also a favorite of Mandeville. When she suggests that Mandeville had more "method," she means that his reasoning was more systematic.

45. French translators of the eighteenth century often made additions, but Du Châtelet is unusual in her desire to set them apart in this way.

46. "I hate the vulgar rabble and drive them away," Horace *Odes*, III, 1,1.

TABLE OF DU CHÂTELET'S CHOICES FOR TRANSLATION FROM BERNARD MANDEVILLE'S *THE FABLE OF THE BEES*

Du Châtelet's Translation	Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*
Preface du Traducteur	[No equivalent in Mandeville]
Avertissement du Traducteur	[No equivalent in Mandeville]
[Not translated]	The Preface
[Not translated]	The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest
Preface de l'Autheur	The Introduction
Chapitre 1er: De l'Origine des Vertus Morales	An Inquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue
Chapitre 2e: Du Choix des Différentes Professions	A. Whilst others follow'd Mysteries To which few Folks bind 'Prentices;
Chapitre 3e: Des Négocians	B. These were call'd Knaves, But bar the Name, The grave Industrious were the same.
Chapitre 4e: De l'Honneur et de la Honte	C. The Soldiers that were forc'd to fight, If they surviv'd, got Honour by't.
Chapitre 5e: Des Marchands en Detail	D. For there was not a Bee but would Get more, I won't say, than he should; But than, etc.
Chapitre 6e: Des Jouëurs	E. —As your Gamesters do, Who, tho' at fair Play, ne'er will own Before the Losers what they've won.
Chapitre 7e: Des Professions Fondées sur les Vices des Hommes	F. And Virtue, who from Politicks Had learn'd a thousand cunning Tricks, Was, by their happy Influence, Made Friends with Vice.
Chapitre 8e: Que les Plus Méchants Sont Encore Utiles à la Societé, et Principalement les Cabaretiers	G. The worst of all the Multitude Did something for the Common Good.
Chapitre 9e: Des Musicos d'Hollande	H. Parties directly opposite, Assist each other, as 'twere for spight.
Chapitre 10e: De l'Avarice	I. The Root of Evil, Avarice, That damn'd ill-natur'd baneful Vice, Was Slave to Prodigality. [No J. exists in the Mandeville]
Chapitre 11e: De la Prodigalité	K. That noble Sin—
Chapitre 12e: Du Luxe	L. —While Luxury Employ'd a Million of the Poor, &c. [Remarks M.-T., V., X., and Y. not translated; no U or Z exist.]



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