



Interview with Angela Hunter & Rebecca Wilkin 2024 Translation Prize Nonfiction Co-Winners

- 1. Your winning translation of Louise Dupin's works is the first of its kind. What inspired you to translate her work on women, and what purpose do you hope this translation serves? Are there any similarities and differences you see between Louise Dupin and American feminists of her time?**

Angela: When I first encountered pieces of Dupin's *Work on Women* at the Harry Ransom Center, I knew that it needed to be published and shared widely so that Dupin could take her place in the history of philosophy and the history of feminism (although I didn't know at the time that I would end up undertaking that project and making a book of translated selections with Rebecca!). When we teamed up, we agreed that many scholars and readers of history, philosophy, and gender studies in the U.S. would find this work to be a valuable and exciting contribution to their fields, and that there would likely be broader appeal as well. We also knew that Frédéric Marty was working on a French edition (now available as *Des femmes* via Classiques Garnier), and we geared our translation, based on our separate reconstruction of the work, to be accessible to readers who might have no prior knowledge of Dupin's social and intellectual context. This translation thus provides a pathway for anglophones to engage with Dupin's thought – some of which would still be considered radical by today's standards – and to revise their understanding of the French Enlightenment and expand the historical account of feminism. I hope that readers appreciate the voluminous research that Dupin carried out, the innovation of her arguments at the time, the keen eye she employed in critiquing her own society, and her witty ripostes. We were dedicated to capturing her wit and preserving the ironic stance that she sometimes takes in relation to the subjects and people under scrutiny.



Rebecca: At first, I had no intention of translating Dupin's work. I wanted to write an article about Dupin, but I didn't have anything to work with. There was no book! So I started collecting and transcribing pieces of it. I eventually came to terms with the fact that editing and translating Dupin would be a huge service to other scholars: a Very Important Project. A VIP firstly because of the inherent intellectual value of the work. I knew of no other early modern feminist who sought to demonstrate that men invisibilize women in all areas of knowledge and that the laws that impoverished women through ever more restrictive property rights were a recent invention with an ancient patina. A VIP secondly because the story of Dupin's *Work on Women* is not just compelling, but accessible[, too]. Anyone can understand that the neglect of a text by a woman, about women results from sexist bias, and anyone can see that a text to which Jean-Jacques Rousseau served as secretary likely holds interesting answers to questions long unposed. The possibility of collaborating with Angela was the practical inspiration for translating and editing this text; it made the labor look not just doable but appealing [as well]. Without Angela's smarts, stamina, and sense of humor, I would have long ago given up on drowning in a morass of messy Google Docs.

I hope this translation of Louise Dupin's *Work on Women* will lead instructors in various fields to revise syllabi and scholars to reconsider narratives about the intellectual history of the Enlightenment, particularly in relation to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but not just; there is so much great material to exploit regarding mid-eighteenth-century science. I also hope Dupin's work will spur reflection on the biases that are baked into historical methodologies. The importance of a book from this time period is usually measured in terms of print runs, numbers of editions, and translations. How do we construe the importance of a work that was not published and that therefore had no contemporary reception – which was the case far more often for women than men? In terms of contemporary feminist debates, I hope people will dig into Dupin's analyses of how power is consolidated and manifested in social



situations, and what her Enlightenment feminism can tell us about French universalism and white feminism today.

2. What does winning the French-American Foundation Translation Prize mean to you?

Angela: Winning this prize means so much – it really is more than I dared dream. Rebecca and I agonized over so many details in the translation and pushed ourselves in new directions – just one example is the staggering amount of arcane legal vocabulary related to inheritance – and we spent a year tracking down references and writing footnotes to provide context for the work and for our translation choices. This prize is a wonderful recognition of the value of that labor for readers [and] a testament to the success of our collaboration. I could have never done any of this without Rebecca: she expertly wove the scholarly web that kept us focused on the importance of Dupin’s arguments and the contexts necessary to showcase them.

Rebecca: So much. It was so unexpected. We were thrilled to have reached the finalist stage and had no illusions of winning when we saw our competition. Wow! We were in amazing company and that was a prize in itself. So I almost fell over when I got Angela’s text message telling us we had in fact won. I could not process it. Of course, now that we have had a chance to absorb the good news, we could not be happier about the publicity that the French-American Foundation Translation Prize brings to Louise Dupin. After 250 years of scholarly neglect, she is finally having her moment. It feels like historical justice. As Angela mentioned, it feels particularly wonderful to be recognized for a collaborative endeavor; being on Angela’s team has been the highlight of my scholarly career, and celebrating this prize with her is the icing on a very big cake.



3. What initially drew you to French language and literature? Do you remember your very first encounter with French? If so, what was it, and in what ways did it impact you?

Angela: Family lore has it that I heard some French speakers at a shopping mall when I was very little and was fascinated by them, even trying to follow them around. (Although I have no memory of this, it fits my sense of self quite well!) I took French in high school and was really taken with the language and what I learned of the culture. In college, I chose Comparative Literature as a major, and that's where I encountered the Italian adage "*traduttore, traditore*" (translator, traitor) and began to think a bit about the practice of translation. My studies in French-dominated structuralist and post-structuralist thought further helped me appreciate the way that language conditions all sorts of possibilities for meaning, identities, and the like. From there, I chose to complete a master's degree at NYU because they have a campus in Paris and I knew that I needed a real immersion experience both linguistically and culturally. The year I spent studying in Paris solidified my connection to the French language, deepened my love of French literature, and started me on the journey I'm still on today in terms of research and translation interests.

Rebecca: I grew up speaking French. My father was a French professor at the College of Wooster; later my mother would teach French at a local high school. We didn't speak French at home, but my first year of school occurred during my dad's first sabbatical. I was a kindergartner at a little Catholic school in the 17th arrondissement of Paris. I remember simple things: rollerskating at the Square des Batignolles; dressing as Maid Marian (with my brother as Robinhood) for Carnaval in costumes handsewn by my mom; boys peeing behind a wall in the *cours de récréation*; men wildly yelling "Bravo!" after a ballet (*Sleeping Beauty?*) at the Opéra; mushrooms growing on the ceiling of our apartment. Back in Ohio, my dad took me out of school



once a week for lunch at La Table Française. Nevertheless, I probably would have forgotten French were it not for his second sabbatical during my fifth-grade year – more of a coming-of-age time. In a suburb of Toulouse, I played a lot of *élastique*, got pretty good at *dictées*, and acquired *l'accent du midi*. Then I learned my verb tenses and conjugations in high school with Madame Mathys like everybody else and majored in French at Brown. The clincher was probably my junior year abroad with Wellesley-in-Aix. After a 5-week art history boot camp in Paris, I took French literature classes with stellar scholars in Aix. From then on, my path was clear. French [was] not just be a feature of my identity; it was my professional vocation.

4. In an article from 2023, you [Rebecca] described having to translate Dupin's work from her handwritten manuscripts. What challenges did this present, and how did you approach them?

Angela: Working from manuscripts added extra layers of labor because we first had to verify that our transcriptions were accurate. This involved a double reading of each folio for accuracy and, occasionally, further consultation with librarians or other transcribers to verify difficult bits. In addition to deciphering messy handwriting (Dupin's, not Rousseau's – his is very neat), we had to learn to read the revisions and additions that Dupin sometimes squeezed in between lines all over the page (she used an efficient two-column system). This was further complicated by the fact that there are multiple drafts of some chapters of the *Work on Women*, so we needed to determine which were the most advanced and, in some cases, how the folios all fit together to form a coherent chapter (since they had been dispersed at auction to various repositories). Generally, though, the manuscripts are in good shape and transcribing them was possible with time and care; this is something we had both started on independently before we came together for the book project. Once we felt confident about the actual wording of the text in French, we were able to begin our



three-step translation process: one of us would produce an initial translation of a passage and the other would work through it and suggest alternatives, and then we'd deliberate together to arrive at the final version, continuously referring back to the original. The positive outcome of all of that pre-translation work is that we each gained a deep familiarity with Dupin's ideas and their development before we started translating, even though it was only through translation that we really nailed down the meaning of her most compact and allusive passages. This whole process created a unique intimacy with the text.

Rebecca: What she said!

- 5. Our Translation Prize is the only prize of its kind to solely reward the translator. In your own words, why is it crucial for translators to be recognized for their craft?**

Angela: Translation is a practice that in some ways tries to render itself invisible: ideally, the reader of a translated text feels that they're seamlessly receiving the content from the writer without any focus on the intermediary. Yet translation is its own form of creation, and having a prize to recognize this craft is extremely important.

Rebecca: There are indeed so few honors that recognize the discernment and labor involved in translation. As Angela said, a good translation is invisible, and so translation tends to be an invisible, underappreciated art, to the point that translators are routinely left out of bibliographic citations. That invisibility has been exacerbated by tools such as Google Translate, which creates the impression that translation is simply a matter of pasting words into a textbox and clicking a button. These tools are beneficial in many circumstances, of course. But the French-American Foundation



Translation Prize celebrates translation as a linguistic practice involving a deep understanding of cultural context, historical knowledge, as well as stylistic sensitivity. Especially in the age of AI efficiency (and mediocrity), it is beyond gratifying to think that a community of humans – the jurors – took the time to pore over our word choices and to deliberate together about the text, the challenges we faced, and how well we handled them. [Both the Prize and the ceremony] brin[g] the art of translation into the light and declar[e] it to matter.