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Scipion Dupleix, *Liberté de la langue française dans sa pureté*, ed. Douglas Kibbee and Marcus Keller. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018. 634 pp. Critical introduction, notes, bibliography, and index. 67,00 € (pb). ISBN 978-2-406-07130-3.

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The third volume of Ferdinand Brunot's *Histoire de la langue française* (1966), dedicated to *La formation de la langue classique 1600-1660*, largely focuses on early seventeenth-century attempts to reform and regulate the French language. A central figure in this drama was the Savoyard, Claude Favre de Vaugelas (1585-1650), whose *Remarques sur la langue Française* (1647), with its emphasis on discriminating 'good usage' from bad, quickly became and has ever since remained a touchstone for linguistic prescriptivism.

If the publication of Vaugelas's *Remarques* is remembered alongside the creation in 1635 of the *Académie française* as a key episode in the classical development of normative attitudes to the language, the appearance in 1651 of Scipion Dupleix's *Liberté de la langue française dans sa pureté*, which ran to 704 in-quarto pages, has received much less scholarly attention. While Brunot devoted a chapter each to Vaugelas and the Academy, he gave to Dupleix fewer than three pages, concluding that, in his enterprise to counter Vaugelas, Dupleix "failed."^[1]

The work under review is the first critical edition of Dupleix's volume on language and includes a long introduction by Douglas Kibbee and Marcus Keller. It is the second volume in the Classiques Garnier collection, *Descriptions et théories de la langue française*, which promises "editions (including introductions, annotations and indexing) of great French linguistic texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."^[2] Digital copies of both the 1651 edition and a 1973 Slatkin facsimile reprint of it are available for download from the *Bibliothèque Nationale* and one might ask whether a new print edition is needed.^[3] The editors do not directly address this question, but they do argue that there is some virtue in "examining the work of the loser" of a past quarrel because dichotomies such as those between winners and losers or purists and anti-purists fail to capture complexities of societies in transition (p. 8).

In making the case for studying Dupleix's long and frequently tedious responses to Vaugelas's remarks on 'good usage,' the editors situate Dupleix's work in the context of the rise of courtly society and the centralization of political power. They rehearse historiography about venality of offices, nobility, and absolutism to note that disputes over correct usage "interested the increasingly centralized power... Cardinal Richelieu considered culture in general and language in particular to be essential to the construction of the state. When Richelieu proposed the ideal

formation of the elite, the French language was at the heart of teaching. The idea of ‘usage’ was thus closely tied to the centralization of power” (p. 31). The editors accordingly frame the volume as a contribution to reconsiderations of the politics of the standardization and codification of European vernaculars (a field to which Kibbee himself has contributed some notable work).[4] The editors argue, along with H el ene Merlin-Kajman and Wendy Ayres-Bennett, that tendencies to emphasize Vaugelas’s apparent support for a hard normative approach to reforming the language have contributed to maintaining myths about seventeenth-century French language theory. They call, therefore, for more nuanced understanding of the political, cultural and intellectual contexts of this ‘remarks’ genre.[5]

Kibbee and Keller present debates about usage as being tied to the establishment of the French Academy, ideas about translation, and a series of literary quarrels (pp. 43-58). After sketching the political and literary history of early seventeenth-century France, the editors turn more directly to Dupleix’s life and career (pp. 59-96). By the appearance in 1651 of his *Libert e de la langue Fran oise*, Dupleix was eighty-one years old and had already published voluminously in law and philosophy. Kibbee and Keller note that the early seventeenth century was a time of transitions in France. Dupleix’s career and modes of thinking testify to his having one foot in each of two contrasting worlds. One of these was disappearing: a world dominated by the nobility of the sword, scholasticism, Renaissance erudition, and genuflecting to the authority of classical Greece and Rome. The other was a world in which these were being supplanted: the world of the bureaucratic administrative state, royal absolutism, the nobility of the robe, vernacular publishing, and concerns for improving vernaculars (p. 96). Given such tensions, it should not surprise that Dupleix and his volume have not left much of a mark.

While Dupleix’s work may still merit its relative obscurity—relative, for instance, to Vaugelas’s *Remarques*—and may not deserve a new critical edition, the editors offer some worthy commentary. The two final sections of the introduction (pp. 96-165), in which the editors review and analyze Dupleix’s disagreements with Vaugelas and the linguistic issues that motivated quarrels over usage, contribute the most to our understanding of seventeenth-century French ideas about language. The editors note that, even though Dupleix is remembered as one of Vaugelas’s opponents, there was significant overlap in their assessments of usage. “Dupleix,” they write, “criticizes less than half of Vaugelas’s remarks, and often his criticisms do not focus on the main point, but rather on a minor one” (p. 97).

While both Vaugelas and Dupleix were “purists,” Kibbee and Keller note that “the source of the norm for Vaugelas was to be found in contemporary usage, however irrational it might be, and for Dupleix in a usage that appealed to the literary tradition and to grammatical reason” (p. 97). Dupleix’s main objection was that the power to determine good usage had been usurped. As the editors succinctly put it, “the dispute between Vaugelas and Dupleix is not between purist and anti-purist, but rather between a defender of the absolute and capricious power of an irrational usage and a defender of a more variable usage, whose limits are determined by a less exclusive group” (p. 98).

Given his claims about the source of any power to set linguistic norms—rejecting contemporary courtly usage and embracing classical literature and grammar—one might well expect that Dupleix was hostile to the power wielded by courtly women. This was a manifestation of a common early modern form of misogyny that Kibbee and Keller also find in Dupleix’s other works, noting that he “did not only reject women’s opinions because they didn’t know the ancient

language, but also because of an incontestable misogyny” (p. 103n222). As the editors note, Dupleix not only condemned Vaugelas for deferring to courtly women who were ignorant of Greek and Latin and the niceties of grammar, he also criticized Vaugelas for his own lack of knowledge in these subjects (pp. 104-19). Concerns about women’s influence on the French language, as some scholars have noted, played a role in a number of debates in the following decades.[6]

A highlight of the editorial introduction is the discussion of what contemporaries called ‘neatness’ (*netteté*) which implicated phonetic, lexical and syntactic matters (pp. 146-165). If elite women could be celebrated by some for the way in which they enriched the lexicon and softened and sweetened its sounds, these were things that Dupleix condemned in the name of neatness. While there are good studies of the early modern interest in the SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) order—what contemporaries called the ‘natural word order’—little historical attention has been paid to the notion of linguistic neatness.[7] According to both Vaugelas and Dupleix, neatness contributes to communicative clarity. Certainly, word order was implicated in neatness. In fact, Frain du Tremblay’s *Traité des langues* (1703) devotes a chapter, titled “*De la netteté du discours,*” to the distinct clarity of SVO languages, like French, and in doing so follows Vaugelas’s leading claim that “the main vice opposed to the neatness of style is the incorrect position of words.”[8] The editors note that “Dupleix often agrees with Vaugelas in his judgements about the order of words” (p. 148). Vaugelas also insisted, in a separate remark titled *Des equivoques* (Of Ambiguities), that “the biggest of all the vices against neatness, are ambiguities.”[9] The editorial introduction reviews the arguments presented by Vaugelas and Dupleix to deal with various forms of potential ambiguity in contemporary French usage (pp. 150-165).

This final section of the introductory essay should be instructive for scholars interested in understanding the importance of early modern concerns with ambiguity in language and its broader cultural implications. For example, if one were to look at how French acquired a reputation for being a, if not *the*, language of diplomacy, one would notice that contemporaries were concerned with clearing ambiguities from diplomatic communications during treaty negotiations.[10] Arguments like the one made by François Charpentier (1620-1702) in his *De l’excellence de la langue françoise* (1683) that “the French language... possesses par excellence Neatness and Clarity,” might well have contributed to the emergence of a belief that French was inherently suited to diplomacy. And yet, the persistent idea that the lexical limitations of French led to ambiguities was also pressed into serving very different claims that French lent itself to diplomacy. Charpentier could therefore also insist that, in part because of its proliferation of equivocal expressions, when one had to express oneself on a delicate matter, the French language could express thoughts “in a way that one can always allow that the speaker meant to say something else.”[11] Charpentier thus could draw on the tensions inherent in contemporary claims about French neatness and ambiguity to suggest, in apparently contradictory ways, that French lent itself particularly well to diplomacy.

Despite the editors’ insistence that paying attention to the losers of past quarrels can provide one with more nuanced understandings of the past, it might still be hard to shake the sense that Dupleix’s work was the lament of an octogenarian pedant complaining that new fashions in the language were signs of a broader cultural degeneration. The volume’s introduction, however, shows that Dupleix was also fighting against what were sometimes misinformed and misguided attempts to impose the usage of a coterie of courtiers on French speakers at large. This is why Dupleix so frequently insisted that certain choices of usage ought to be left to “the liberty of each

and every one" (*la liberté d'un chacun*). The introduction usefully highlights a number of other tensions in early modern ideas about the language. These tensions and their implications for more broadly understanding early modern French intellectual, literary, and cultural history make the volume worthy of some attention.

NOTES

[1] Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française, des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1966), vol. 3, p. 60.

[2] Quoted from "Classiques Garnier, CATALOGUE Août 2019," p. 92; <https://classiques-garnier.com/catalog/pdf/all>; accessed 8/20/2019.

[3] <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k50579n.r=scipion%20dupleix%20liberte%20langue?rk=150215;2> and <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k24764.r=scipion%20dupleix%20liberte%20langue?rk=128756;0>; accessed 8/20/2019.

[4] See, for example, Douglas Kibbee, "Les métaphores politico-juridiques dans l'histoire de la linguistique prescriptive du français au XVIIe siècle," *Langages*, 182, no. 2 (2011): 97-109.

[5] See, among others, Hélène Merlin-Kajman, *La langue est-elle fasciste? Langue, pouvoir, enseignement* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2003) and Wendy Ayres-Bennett, "From *l'usage* to *le bon usage* and back: Norms and usage in seventeenth-century France," in Gijsbert Rutten, Rik Vosters, and Wim Vandenbussche eds., *Norms and Usage in Language History, 1600–1900: A sociolinguistic and comparative perspective* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), pp. 173-200.

[6] See, among others, Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996) and Matthew Lauzon, *Signs of Light: French and British Theories of Linguistic Communication, 1648-1789* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[7] See, among others, Ulrich Ricken, *Grammaire et philosophie au siècle des Lumières: Controverse sur l'ordre naturel et la clarté du français* (Lille: Publications de l'Université de Lille III, 1978).

[8] Jean Frain du Tremblay, *Traité des langues, où l'on donne des principes & des règles pour juger du mérite & de l'excellence de chaque langue, & en particulier de la langue française* (Paris: chez Jean-Baptiste Delespine, 1703), pp. 125-133; Claude Favre de Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française* (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1654), pp. 693-4.

[9] Vaugelas, p. 699.

[10] See, for instance, Louis XIV's 1647 memorandum to the Duc de Longueville and the Comte d'Avaux, two French plenipotentiaries at the Peace of Westphalia, in which he reminded them that "it is of the greatest importance that Mylords... take care even of the least words and syllables..., so that there will be no speech with a double meaning nor any ambiguity [équivoque]...." Reproduced in Guido Braun, ed., *Acta Pacis Westphalicae*, Series II, Section B,

Volume 5, Part 2 (Munster: Aschendorff, 2002), p. 1031. See also Ferdinand Brunot, "Le Français dans la Diplomatie," in his *Histoire de la langue française, des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1966), vol. 5, pp. 387-431, esp. 402-3.

[11] François Charpentier, *De l'excellence de la langue françoise* (Paris: Bilaine, 1683), vol. 2, 610, 612.

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