MICHAEL P. FITZSIMMONS

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To T.T.F.

R.N.Z.

M.G.W.

Who could have imagined that the French language, of which its own writers complained as being jejune and barren of words, and which Voltaire has styled *une gueuse fière, à qui il faut faire l'aumône malgré elle* [a proud beggar who must be constrained to receive alms], should, in so short a space of time have made the acquisition of such a multitude of new words and phrases, beyond the example of any language, ancient or modern? Who could have thought that a language under the castigation and correction of an academy for more than a century, and to which that great writer before mentioned did not dare in his numerous compositions to add a word or expression, or even to hazard one of a preceding author, however approved, because it had not the sanction of the academy, should break through these restraints, assert its freedom, and establish its liberty, to the wonder of the present times, and, in all probability, the admiration of future ages?

—WILLIAM DUPRÉ, *Lexicographia-Neologica Gallica* (1801)

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A NOTE ON USAGE AND DATES

To European and British readers the term academy has a certain meaning and the type of institution to which it refers is clear. It signifies a learned body situated at the apex of knowledge in a field. The United States has a National Academy of Sciences and a National Academy of Medicine, which are somewhat comparable to the British or European models, but for Americans the word has an additional meaning. A broader and more recognized usage is for private secondary schools, with the word academy often used to demarcate them from public high schools. Although it may be rooted in an American linguistic idiosyncrasy and limited to American readers, French academy in many respects more readily evokes the sense of an elite secondary school rather than the Parisian institution the translation intends to convey. Consequently, Académie Française or the abbreviated form of Académie has been retained throughout.

To a lesser extent, the same is true for the word institute, although in this instance its other meaning in the United States falls within higher rather than secondary education. The parent institution of the author, Auburn University, began as Alabama Polytechnic Institute and nearby Tuskegee University as Tuskegee Institute, so Institut national and Institut have again been utilized to designate the French institution. French usage in both instances will also maintain consistency and readers should have no trouble recognizing either body in its unambiguous French rendering.

In 1635 the *lettres patentes* that established the body referred to it as the Académie Françoise and the first five editions of its dictionary carried the title *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*. The institution has long been known as the Académie Française, however, and the brief history of the Académie on its official web page states that the name adopted in 1634 was Académie Française, apparently indicating its own preference. Although generally using the more familiar Académie Française, this study follows the usage employed by the body or an individual at the time.

Readers acquainted with the French Revolution will be familiar with the Republican calendar, but others may not. In October 1793, the National Convention sought to eliminate Christian influence on public life in France and one component of its effort was a reordering of time. It retroactively established the beginning of the new calendar to the first day of the French Republic, September 22, 1792, which became day one of the year I, with years almost always rendered in Roman numerals as a tribute to the ancient Roman republic. The Republican calendar divided the year into twelve months of thirty days each, with five complementary days at the end or six in a leap year. Each month corresponded to natural phenomena of the four seasons and was divided into three ten-day periods, or "weeks," known as *décades*. The new calendar became the basis of all official acts, such as legislation, court dates, and the like, and newspapers followed it as well. It was used until December 31, 1805, after which, on January 1, 1806, the restoration of the Gregorian calendar by Napoleon Bonaparte became effective. This study uses the Republican date for the period in which it was in force, followed in parentheses by the date on the Gregorian calendar to which it corresponds to provide a more familiar chronological orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Although the Académie Française was a prominent institution under the Old Regime, its history during the French Revolution and Napoleonic era remains largely neglected. The lack of attention is all the more surprising because its primary responsibility, the composition of a dictionary of the French language, intersected with major undercurrents of the Revolution and continued to have significance during the Napoleonic period and into the Restoration. To date, the fifth edition of its dictionary, which appeared in 1798, has been the object of only two excellent, but brief, examinations. A larger study is overdue.[1]

For all of the stature and prestige it would attain by the late eighteenth century, the beginnings of what would become the Académie Française were modest. It began around 1629 as an informal group of young Parisian men who rotated meetings among their residences to discuss literature or occasionally to present their own work for criticism. Their gatherings had not been approved by the Crown, however, which made them illegal and led the members to shroud the meetings in secrecy. Despite this precaution, a few years later the first minister, Armand Jean du Plessis, cardinal-duc de Richelieu, learned of the circle's existence and offered it official status as a body, which would allow it to meet legally. Although there was disagreement during the discussion of the offer, the group ultimately accepted Richelieu's invitation, and he instructed them to determine the form of the body as well as its ordinances.

The members completed the regulations and submitted them to the Crown, which in January 1635 issued *lettres patentes* establishing the Académie Française. The statutes were fifty articles in length, but the most significant were articles XXIV and XXVI. The former stipulated that the body would provide fixed rules for the French language to make it more capable of dealing with the arts and sciences and the latter that it would create a dictionary, a grammar, and guides for rhetoric and poetry. Of the responsibilities enumerated in article XXVI, however, the Académie ultimately undertook only that of producing the dictionary. The fifth edition of that dictionary is the primary focus of this study, which covers the

period from the beginning of its preparation after the appearance of the fourth edition in 1762 to the publication of the sixth edition in 1835. Throughout this period, the dictionary of the Académie figured critically in the manner in which the French government viewed the role of language in the polity.

At the time of the dictionary's founding, the commissioning of such a work mirrored the larger program of the Crown. The French language was fluid during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with few fixed rules, which was part of the rationale for article XXIV. The Académie provided a foundation from which it would be possible to bestow consistency and uniformity on the French language, reflecting the intent of the Crown to impose unity and direction on French society as a whole. A major purpose of the dictionary was to serve as a vehicle to achieve state power over language by entrusting its composition to a learned body under royal protection and granting it a monopoly on the publication of dictionaries.

The creation of a dictionary took longer than anticipated, and the first edition did not appear until 1694, nearly sixty years after the founding of the body. With the position of the Crown more secure in 1694 than it had been during the time of Richelieu, the dictionary served to promote the ideals of absolute monarchy. Criticism of the first edition, however, led the Académie to decide that its primary responsibility should be revision of the dictionary, and this became a pattern that led to a second edition in 1718, a third in 1740, and a fourth in 1762.

The Académie became a cultural ornament for the Bourbon monarchy, and as the power of the French state grew, so too did the prestige of the Académie because of its close association with the Crown. In addition, by the late eighteenth century its standing was further enhanced by the growing use of the French language across the courts and polite society of Europe. There can be little doubt that its dictionary was an unqualified success. By the latter part of the eighteenth century, a recognizably mannered, formal French language, purged of coarseness and governed by widely recognized rules of usage, had come into existence, in large measure because of the efforts of the Académie. The fifth edition of the dictionary was in an advanced state of preparation when the French Revolution began in 1789.

The abolition of privilege by the National Assembly on August 4, 1789, left the Académie and its sister institutions—the Académie des Sciences, the Académie des Beaux-Arts, and the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres—in an uncertain position because of their unquestionable status as privileged corporate bodies—just the type that the assembly was seeking to eradicate in pursuit of its new vision of France. Some deputies sought to suppress the academies when the issue of their funding came before the Assembly during 1790, and the debate brought out particular animus for the Académie Française, but they survived, allowing work

on the dictionary to continue. The overthrow of the monarchy in August 1792, however, left the Académie in an untenable position because of its close association with the monarch, who was its protector, and led to its abolition, along with its companion bodies in Paris and all provincial academies a year later. The National Convention took custody of the edited version of the dictionary on which the Académie had been working.

Although it had suppressed the Académie, the Convention attached great significance to the appearance of a dictionary. Just as the monarchy had viewed the dictionary as a means to achieve dominance over language and convey the values of absolute monarchy, so the Convention desired a dictionary that would promote the principles of the Revolution. That objective led it, during 1794, to solicit the creation of dictionaries from men of letters and the public. The importance given to the production of a dictionary also reflected a change in language policy by the Convention. Whereas the monarchy had been tolerant of patois and, in many respects, viewed French principally as the language of the court and educated elite and the National Assembly had been accommodating of patois in its desire to be as inclusive as possible in its concept of the polity, the Convention came to view the French language as a common cultural patrimony, a demonstration of patriotism, and a defining element of citizenship, making it hostile toward patois and leading it at one point to seek to extinguish its use.

After its solicitation of a dictionary produced little response, shortly before it disbanded the Convention commissioned a new edition from a publishing partnership that the Convention itself formed to which it entrusted the annotated volumes of the fourth edition that were in its custody. The partnership was composed of Jean-Joseph Smits and Claude-François Maradan, two Parisian publishers who had each approached the Convention separately seeking to publish the dictionary, and the terms of the agreement revealed not only the sense of urgency but also the hopes invested in the project. The legislation stipulated that Smits and Maradan were to hire men of letters and to complete the work within ten months. The law further mandated that fifteen thousand copies of the dictionary, an extraordinarily large number, be published, of which one hundred would be provided to the government for distribution to the libraries of the *écoles centrales*, the highest-level educational institution at the time, as well as to other public libraries.

Smits and Maradan, however, failed to meet the deadline set by the Convention; the dictionary did not appear until three years later, during the year VI (1798). It immediately became an object of controversy, beginning with its title, *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*, because the Académie had been suppressed five years earlier. Even worse in the view of critics, far from serving as a vehicle to highlight the achievements of the Revolution, the dictionary barely took note of it. The main body of the work contained present-tense definitions

of numerous abolished institutions and repudiated ideals of the Old Regime, and it relegated words generated by the Revolution to a brief supplement at the end of the second volume. At only 11 pages and 418 words in length, the supplement appeared to many people to be a wholly inadequate, even deprecatory, presentation of an event already regarded by contemporaries as of world-historical importance. Both the main body of the dictionary and the supplement were heavily criticized.

During the following year, 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte took power after a military coup, and one of his primary objectives was "ending" the Revolution by reconciling both those who supported it and those who opposed it to his rule. For each group, the fifth edition was a polarizing work, which led Bonaparte to pursue the creation of a new edition of the dictionary, expunged of revolutionary words. While allowing the holders of the rights to the fifth edition to continue to possess them, the Consular regime entrusted the preparation of the sixth edition to a committee of members of the Institut national, and Bonaparte met personally with the committee to discuss the dictionary's contents. Furthermore, in an effort to maintain oversight of the process, when a new dictionary not approved by the government unexpectedly appeared, the regime aided the holders of the rights to the fifth edition in their legal case against the publishers of the new dictionary. The dispute resulted in six separate trials, during which the regime officially asserted its control over language before it was resolved with the outcome that the government desired. The unauthorized dictionary was withdrawn from the market, ensuring that the government would have greater oversight of language. Bonaparte was eager to see the new edition appear, and the regime committed significant resources to the project and established a timetable seeking to ensure its conclusion within five years. Despite its attempt to facilitate the completion of the dictionary, however, the Napoleonic regime fell before the work was finished.

The return of the Bourbons saw a more relaxed attitude with respect to oversight of language and the dictionary, including allowing the publication of a dictionary by an author who had earlier been denied permission by the Bonapartist government. The bitter reaction that followed Bonaparte's brief return to power in 1815, however, led to an unprecedented purge of the membership of the Académie the following year. Many members who had supported Bonaparte were expelled by the Bourbon government, including one who belonged to the commission working on the sixth edition, and the turmoil slowed work on the dictionary. Although it completed the letter "z" in late 1825, the Académie decided to revise the first volume and was working on the letter "i" when the July Revolution overthrew the Bourbon monarchy in 1830. The sixth edition appeared only in 1835 and rarely mentioned the Revolution or the Napoleonic era explicitly, but instead frequently obscured it with the phrase "at a certain epoch."

The experience of the Académie Française during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period and the publishing history of the fifth edition of its dictionary have significance of their own, but a close analysis provides particular insight into the importance attached to language and the strong desire for a tangible representation of the meaning of the French Revolution by the French republic. In addition, examination of the fifth edition offers understanding of the means through which the Napoleonic regime saw the dictionary as an instrument in its effort to forge a post-revolutionary settlement and the degree to which it sought to control language in pursuit of this goal.

It is a testament to their enduring quality and complexity that questions concerning language and its role in the state that arose during the French Revolution have reverberated to the present day. Under the current Fifth Republic the issue of national language has been elevated to constitutional status. The Fifth Republic has adopted a stance closely resembling that to which the First Republic aspired, even as the Académie, which has inserted itself into language policy, continues work on the ninth edition of the dictionary.

THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE AND ITS DICTIONARY UNDER THE OLD REGIME

XXIV. The principal duty of the Académie will be to work, with all possible care and diligence, to confer settled rules on our language and to render it more eloquent and more capable of dealing with the arts and sciences.

XXVI. On the observations of the Académie, there will be formed a dictionary, a grammar, a rhetoric, and a poetic.

— Articles XXIV and XXVI of the founding statutes and regulations of the Académie Française (1635)

1 THE FOUNDING OF THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Despite its humble beginnings, by the late eighteenth century the Académie Française was among the most prestigious institutions in France. The establishment of the Académie proved somewhat difficult for the Crown and its development during the seventeenth century was halting and uncertain, in large measure because of the dilatory manner in which it undertook its primary task, the composition of a dictionary of the French language.

The Origins of the Académie Française

For all of the eminence it attained, the origins of the Académie Française were modest and its success was by no means assured. There had been academies during the reign of Henri III, but they had died out, and his successor, Henri IV, was temperamentally disinclined to start another. After the assassination of Henri IV, Florence Rivault, the chief tutor to the young Louis XIII, prepared a detailed plan for an academy at the royal court that he sought to launch on May 6, 1612, but it did not take hold. Rivault's plan may have served as one inspiration for the Académie Française, but there were others as well.[1]

What would ultimately become the Académie Française began around 1629 as an informal weekly gathering of young men in Paris who met to discuss literary matters. According to the earliest reliable history of the Académie, there were nine in the original assemblage, and they resided in different parts of Paris. Two of the men, Valentin Conrart and Jean Chapelain, emerged as critical figures.[2] Gatherings of this kind were fashionable,[3] and the company was one of many operating in Paris during this period, including erudite groups, literary circles, "libertine" groups, and organized meetings and programs.[4]

These groups were not exclusive in nature—Chapelain and others participated in circles other than that associated with Conrart and himself.[5] Although some of these other groups subsequently claimed that they were the precursor to the Académie Française, there is no doubt that the circle led by Conrart and Chapelain served as the foundation for the body.[6]

Initially, the nine-member group rotated the site of its meetings among the domiciles of each member but ultimately settled on meeting at the home of Conrart, who was the most centrally located among the members of the company.[7] Conrart was a Parisian and Calvinist and his father had sought to direct him toward a career in government, particularly in finance. Conrart did go to work for the Crown, but he made literature his avocation and became particularly interested in the study of contemporary writers.[8] Although members of the circle conversed about current affairs, they concentrated especially on informal discussion of books and authors and often read their own compositions to the group to solicit criticism or suggestions.[9]

Because the meetings had not been approved by the Crown, however, they were illegal, which led its members to pledge to maintain secrecy. They successfully preserved this secrecy for several years until one member, Claude de Malleville, divulged the existence of the group when he invited Nicolas Faret, who had recently published a translation of a Roman work, to its gatherings. Faret further compromised the group's secrecy when he mentioned the meetings to Jean Desmarets and François le Métel de Boisrobert, and all three were admitted.[10] Boisrobert was closely tied to Armand Jean du Plessis, cardinal-duc de Richelieu, and in early 1634 Boisrobert told Richelieu of the gatherings. Richelieu asked Boisrobert whether the group would like to receive official status as a body, allowing it to assemble regularly under public authority. Boisrobert replied that he believed the invitation would be enthusiastically received, leading Richelieu to offer his personal protection to the group, which would be officially established through *lettres patentes*.

Several motives underlay the founding of the Académie Française. One was to elevate the standing of the French language during a time in which the cultured elite of France still felt a degree of cultural inferiority with respect to Italy—in fact, the Académie Française emulated the Accademia della Crusca of Florence, which had been established in 1582.[11] Although the advancement of French cultural prestige was an important element in the founding of the Académie, there was also a significant political dimension. Richelieu, a master intriguer, had assembled a number of deferential writers, including Boisrobert and Chapelain, as part of his effort to produce pamphlets in support of his policies or to advance the interests of the Crown. In part, Richelieu's establishment of the Académie Française represented the institutionalization of his promotional undertakings,

and only those submissive to Richelieu would be admitted to the Académie.[12] In this respect, apart from the affiliation of Boisrobert with the circle, the intended promotional purpose may also have determined Richelieu's choice. Richelieu must have been aware that the previous year Chapelain had composed and published an obsequious sixteen-page homage to Richelieu written in poetic verse.[13] Richelieu's founding of the Académie was another component of what one scholar contended was a "growth from assertion of his personal position to a sense of royal and national mission" and it would be expressed through language.[14] Another argued that if a codification of language was to occur, Richelieu almost certainly realized that it was the language of power that should establish the norm.[15] Yet a third stated even more directly that the establishment of the Académie enabled Richelieu to exert monarchical authority over both written and spoken French.[16]

When Boisrobert conveyed Richelieu's offer to his colleagues, the reaction was considerably different from the expectation as described to Richelieu. All were dismayed, and two members, Malleville and Jacques de Serisay, both associated with families hostile to Richelieu, maintained that the offer should be refused altogether. Despite vigorous arguments on their part, in the spirited discussion that followed, counterarguments by Chapelain prevailed and the company accepted Richelieu's proposal. Chapelain had contended that it would be imprudent to offend a powerful minister and further argued that because their meetings had been prohibited and were now known to the Crown, to refuse the proposal would mean the end of a society that they all had hoped would be perpetual.[17] The discussion concluded with the group authorizing Boisrobert to convey its gratitude to Richelieu and accept his offer. Pleased with their reply, Richelieu told Boisrobert to notify members that they could continue to meet as usual, that they could increase their membership to whatever number they deemed appropriate, and that they should deliberate among themselves on the form and regulations that they believed would be useful for the body in the future.[18]

During this time Conrart had married, and the members decided that it would no longer be appropriate to meet at his residence. They shifted the site of their meetings to the home of Desmarets and began to plan the establishment of the body that would become the Académie. To impart a sense of order to the process, the company elected three officers—a director, a chancellor, and a secretary. The first two positions were to be chosen by lot and rotate among the membership, whereas that of secretary would be elective and permanent. The group initially chose Serisay as director, Desmarets as chancellor, and Conrart, who was elected in absentia, as secretary. The members also decided to create a library and to keep minutes of their official meetings, which began on March 13, 1634.[19]

An early issue, taken up at the second meeting, was the institutional name to be adopted by the group. After considering Académie des Beaux Esprits, Académie de l'Éloquence, and Académie Éminente, an allusion to the standing of its protector, Richelieu, members settled on Académie Françoise, which later evolved to *Française*, which is still in use today and is the form that will be used here. As the company discussed the name it would take, it also debated the duties to be assumed and the statutes by which the institution would be governed; throughout the process the officers consulted with Richelieu.[20] Also at the second meeting, in an indication of the reason that the group settled on the name that it did, Chapelain suggested that the body ought to work toward the "purity" of the French language and to render it capable of the highest eloquence. To achieve this goal, Chapelain, in all probability at the instigation of Richelieu, proposed the creation of a dictionary and a precise grammar as well as the composition of rules for writing in verse and prose. His colleagues responded favorably and asked him to devise a work plan for a dictionary and grammar.[21]

With respect to the statutes, the company assigned Paul Hay du Chastelet, a councilor of state, the task of preparing a draft that would be considered by the group.[22] Although they agreed to keep the process secret, any member could submit a proposed set of bylaws to Chastelet, as well as three other colleagues, who would appropriate the best features from each set, after which Conrart, as secretary, would distill them and unite them into a single document.[23] The statutes were then to be read, discussed, and approved by the entire company. At this formative stage, citing the example of the Academy of Padua and others, the Académie considered admitting women, but the proposal did not pass.[24]

In November 1634, Conrart had also been given the task of drafting the *lettres patentes* that would legally and formally establish the Académie. After they were read to the entire membership, the group sent them to the Keeper of the Seals, the equivalent of a minister of justice, and to Richelieu.[25] The Crown promulgated the *lettres patentes* on January 29, 1635, but they also needed to be registered by the parlement of Paris.[26] The parlement, however, delayed their registration and remained unmoved by requests from Desmarets, Boisrobert, and others to register them.[27] After nearly a year, on December 6, 1635, an exasperated Richelieu wrote a polite letter to the first president of the parlement asking that the *lettres patentes* establishing the Académie be registered.[28] Richelieu's letter also had no effect, which led him at the end of the month to procure three *lettres de cachet* from the monarch for use against the parlement, although he never put them into force. Rather, Richelieu appears to have obtained the *lettres de cachet* as leverage as he continued to press for registration.[29] The parlement assigned the examination of the *lettres patentes* to a magistrate who fell ill and

later died, which meant that their consideration had to be reassigned; as a result, they were not ultimately registered until July 10, 1637.[30] Even as it awaited the sanction of the parlement, the Académie functioned and made adjustments in its procedures, including a significant change in the method of election, from a voice vote to ballots.[31] Even after the registration of the *lettres patentes*, the Académie had not yet reached its full complement of forty members, and by late 1637 three members, including Chastelet, had died,[32] so the body did not achieve its full membership until 1639.[33] Nevertheless, the Académie dates its existence from 1635, the year in which it concluded and received approval for its statutes.

The resistance of the magistrates to the creation of the Académie stemmed from both personal and institutional factors. As a creation of Richelieu, the parlement closely identified the Académie with him and some of the increase in royal authority that Richelieu had accomplished had come at its expense, so the parlement not only regarded the Académie as a threatening innovation but also sought to thwart Richelieu. Furthermore, a provision of the charter potentially infringed on a specific area of authority of the parlement, which also led to the perception that the Académie could be a potential threat to the parlement. Article XXIII conferred on the Académie and its members the right to publish without prior submission to censorship, but the parlement had traditionally enjoyed a dominant role in that jurisdiction through its supervision of the secular book trade.[34]

Another source of division was rooted in a stylistic difference between the two bodies, with the men of the Académie deriding the legal parlance of the parlement.[35] Indeed, the mutual contempt and sense of rivalry between the parlement and the Académie at the founding of the latter is evident in an anecdote from Charles-Jean-François Hénault, who became a member of both bodies. One of the members of the parlement involved in the registration of the *lettres patentes* establishing the Académie opined that to gather the parlement for so frivolous a purpose reminded him of the story of the Roman emperor who assembled the Senate to ask what sauce he should pour over his fish. Hénault noted that this tone only increased and that many epigrams had been launched at the expense of the Académie.[36]

The statutes and regulations of the Académie contained fifty articles, the first of which indicated how closely associated the Académie was with Richelieu. Before specifying the qualities necessary to become a member, including good morals and reputation as well as a keen mind appropriate to academic duties, the statutes stipulated that anyone who did not have the assent of the protector could not be admitted. Article II stated that the official wax seal for the Académie would have the image of Richelieu in it. In a reflection of the unrest of the period,

article XXI prohibited any discussion of religious matters, and any consideration of political or moral questions had to conform to political and legal authority.

Articles XXIV and XXVI outlined the primary duties of the Académie. The former specified that the company would work with all possible care and diligence to provide fixed rules for the French language to confer greater eloquence on it and to render it more capable of dealing with the arts and sciences, domains in which Latin had been dominant, signaling Richelieu's goal to have French supersede Latin as the universal language of learning. The mandate sought to emulate the fixed character of Latin and Italian because a codification of French would potentially enable the language to gain greater prestige and usage outside France.[37] Article XXVI stipulated that the Académie would create a dictionary, a grammar, and guides for rhetoric and poetry. Of the responsibilities specified in the article, however, the Académie consistently pursued only the creation of the dictionary.[38] The narrow responsibilities of the body disappointed those who had hoped for the more expansive goal of a body that would seek to advance the ideal of the unity of knowledge.[39]

The Beginning of Deliberations by the Académie

With its establishment fully sanctioned and its duties clearly delineated, it was expected that the Académie would begin its tasks, and almost immediately pamphlets appeared satirizing its members as working maniacally and capriciously to create or suppress words.[40] At this juncture, however, Richelieu diverted the body from its specified responsibilities when he asked it to undertake a critical consideration of *Le Cid*, by Pierre Corneille.[41] *Le Cid*, which appeared early in 1637, had been highly acclaimed, but Richelieu, who had had a difficult relationship with Corneille, wanted the Académie to issue an unfavorable review of the work, leading the company to devote five months to preparing a report, which was critical of the play for its violations of dramatic convention.[42]

Although those loyal to Richelieu believed that Corneille had been ungrateful to Richelieu, a former patron, there was a deeper aspect to the incident. Richelieu's use of the Académie to undercut Corneille and *Le Cid* was an element of his struggle with the princes as he sought to consolidate royal power. *Le Cid*, as Orest Ranum argued, "boldly set forth an ethic of conduct for the princes that placed them virtually above royal law as they pursued a heroic ideal." Having already experienced rebellions by the princes prior to the success of *Le Cid*, Richelieu "could not permit such a powerful statement about the behavior of the *grandes âmes* to go unanswered." Ranum asserted that Richelieu saw the Académie as a "permanent, institutionalized instrument" through which he could "maintain royal dominance over the political culture" and that its creation

enabled Richelieu to establish "a counterforce against the domination of the political culture by the heterodox yet competing great nobles."[43]

The Académie had been reluctant to undertake the report on *Le Cid* and would never again undertake a similar assignment,[44] with the episode demonstrating the tension between the political and scholarly dimensions of the Académie. Although Richelieu almost certainly shared the scholarly and literary values of the members of the Académie, for him its political usefulness was paramount. Conversely, although the membership of the Académie was made up of Richelieu loyalists who realized that it might have a political function, for most members its scholarly and linguistic roles were primary. To produce an anonymous pamphlet in support of an action by Richelieu was altogether different from being asked to assail and undercut a talented literary figure such as Corneille, which was disheartening. Indeed, Paul Pellisson characterized the episode as an unexpected blow and dealt with it at length in his history.[45]

One scholar of Corneille observed that the incident with *Le Cid* revealed the close association between literature and politics under Richelieu and argued that members of the Académie realized that they were expected to elaborate and impose a literary order that included a less political dimension to literature and poetry.[46] In a similar vein, G. R. R. Treasure discerned an additional political purpose behind the body and its dictionary. Against a backdrop in which a growing number of Frenchmen believed disorder to be dangerous, the Académie was to impose "purity and discipline in language" because Richelieu deplored disorder in the arts, as he did in politics.[47] The French language had, in fact, traditionally been fluid. During the reign of Louis XIII's father, Henri IV, the official poet, François de Malherbe, advocated greater clarity and rigor for the language, but his quest was largely personal. However influential his efforts may have been,[48] the Académie, with its dictionary as a definitive authority, would provide an institutional framework to confer consistency and order on language, just as the Crown bestowed unity and direction on society.

Work on the Dictionary Commences

After issuing the report on *Le Cid*, the Académie sought to focus more "seriously" on the dictionary,[49] and Claude Favre de Vaugelas and Chapelain were charged with creating a plan for the best manner in which to compile it.[50] Each man prepared a separate proposal, and although Chapelain's won the endorsement of members, Vaugelas subsequently took the lead in the project.[51] Indicative of the fact that the Académie had not yet achieved a preeminent position, Chapelain would not offer his plan for the dictionary to the Académie until it had received

approval from the cabinet Du Puy, another scholarly body of which Chapelain was a member that lasted until 1661.[52]

Work on the dictionary advanced somewhat after June 1639, when Boisrobert advised Richelieu that the best means to accelerate its completion would be to give primary responsibility to Vaugelas, leading Richelieu to provide Vaugelas with a 2,000-*livres* stipend to take charge of it.[53] Ultimately, Vaugelas would become a critical figure in creating an underlying legacy of the dictionary, particularly the association of correctness of language with polite society and the notion of superiority that accompanied it, making language an indicator of social standing. He accorded primacy to spoken over written language and gave preeminence to the royal court, which meant that for Vaugelas, language usage by the elite of society and correctness of language were synonymous.[54] Shortly after Richelieu vested Vaugelas with primary responsibility for the dictionary, the Académie decided to devote an additional day each week to its creation.[55] The Académie had begun the letter "a" on February 7, 1639, and completed it on October 17, 1639, but thereafter progress slowed considerably. A division of labor into multiple committees was one cause of delay,[56] but the more critical factors were the death of Richelieu in 1642 and that of Vaugelas in 1650.

Richelieu's death led to a period of doubt and uncertainty for the Académie, and it was compounded by the death of Louis XIII months later. Because of criticisms of both Richelieu and Louis XIII after their deaths, as well as the slow rate of progress on the dictionary, members were concerned that there would be little support for continuation of the body. The new protector was Pierre Séguier, who, as Keeper of the Seals, had sought to gain registration of the *lettres patentes* founding the Académie, to which he had been elected in 1635. In December 1635, he became chancellor, but he was dismissed in 1650, during the Fronde. Séguier did not have the stature of Richelieu and, although he provided the Académie with a meeting place at his residence, his time as protector proved problematic. Indeed, his dismissal as chancellor occurred because he was seen as complicit with Frondeurs and his compromised position could only have weakened the status of the Académie.[57]

Moreover, in the spring of 1652 Séguier had used his position to compel the Académie to elect his grandson, Armand de Camboust, marquis de Coislin, who was also the great nephew of Richelieu through his mother. Although Séguier made the request in a nonthreatening fashion, asking for it as a favor, the election proved contentious. Coislin was only sixteen years old and not well educated—Séguier wanted the experience of the Académie to develop and refine him.[58] Undoubtedly aware of the unusual nature of his election, Coislin afterward sent a brief but gracious, even humble, compliment to the Académie. He acknowledged his shortcomings, noting that the kindness that the company had shown him

surpassed his abilities and that he would have to be among them for a long time to give appropriate thanks and to find words proportional to his gratitude.[59] For its part, almost certainly seeking to avoid the unprecedented situation of a break with its protector, the Académie went as a body to Séguier to thank him for the honor he had shown the group.[60] Nevertheless, discord continued, and in the spring of 1659 the perpetual secretary, François Eudes de Mézeray, wrote a letter to Séguier thanking him for a statement that he had made to the company in which he said that he wanted to end the divisions troubling it. Twenty-two other academicians signed the letter.[61]

Richelieu had been vigilant in overseeing the Académie and had been particularly interested in the progress of the dictionary. Séguier was dedicated and conscientious, but did not superintend the Académie, and especially the progress of its dictionary, with the same degree of vigor as his predecessor.[62] Indeed, in 1649 Boisrobert published a biting verse that upbraided his fellow academicians, often by name, for their punctiliousness and the glacial pace of the project. Its tenor is apparent in the first three lines:

> Nosseigneurs Académiques
> Nosseigneurs les Hypercritiques
> Sou[v]erains Arbitres des mots;

The piece continued in this vein for eleven pages.[63]

The death of Vaugelas in 1650 also had a significant effect on the progress of the dictionary. Vaugelas was not affluent and at his death creditors seized his effects, including his manuscripts, among which was his preparatory work on the dictionary. After extended litigation, a judgment of the Châtelet on May 17, 1651, returned the material related to the dictionary to the Académie. Although members agreed to meet twice a week to work on it,[64] the dictionary advanced in a painfully slow fashion; by the 1650s, the Académie was only at the letter "i" and doubts about its completion began to arise.[65] In his 1652 history, in gratitude for which the Académie promised Pellisson that he would receive the next available place, which he did in 1653, Pellisson felt it necessary to give encouragement to the body by extolling the prospective value of the dictionary.[66]

The Growing Prestige of the Académie

In January 1672, Séguier died, and the Académie gained a significant boost in status when the monarch, Louis XIV, became its protector. Some in the company had believed it presumptuous to approach the king, but other members overcame their reservations and charged the academician regarded as the most eloquent

among them, François de Harlay de Champvallon, the archbishop of Paris, to make the request, to which Louis readily agreed.[67] The association with a rising young monarch who was expanding the kingdom and whose reign was as yet unsullied by military defeat was an enormous gain in prestige for the Académie.

The assumption of the role of protector by Louis XIV initiated an evolution of the institution. When Richelieu had been its protector, the Académie had been loyal and submissive, with its members consistently seeking to advance his political interests and agenda.[68] Under Louis XIV, it became obsequious and much more closely tied to the monarchy—in the words of a scholar of the subject, the Académie made a transition in which "as an institution the Company participated more and more closely in official celebration of the grandeur of the king,"[69] and encomiums to the monarch became a new and regular feature in the 1670s. Indeed, on one occasion in 1699 Louis found the proposed poetry prize subject so excessive in its flattery that he refused to approve it and asked it to be changed, which the Académie did.[70] The company's subservience and devotion to the monarch would find expression in the dictionary as well, which emphasized the model of divine-right absolute monarchy.

As a sign of his favor, Louis gave the body a meeting place, providing it with a room at the Louvre, with a medal struck to commemorate the event.[71] The Académie continued to meet in this location until its suppression in 1793. Louis also ordered his controller general of finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, to allocate funds to meet the Académie's ordinary expenses.[72] Colbert, himself a member, also made arrangements in July 1673 to draw 660 volumes from the library of the king to form a library for the Académie.[73]

Colbert also inaugurated a protocol that would long exist, the use of tokens (*jetons*) to credit members with attendance at meetings.[74] Colbert was eager to see completion of the dictionary, on which the Académie had been working for decades, but there were remarkably few regulations governing the task. There was no dedicated time for discussions; during deliberations, some academicians arrived early, others arrived late, and members entered or left freely. Occasionally they did not deal with the dictionary at all and instead discussed news or rumors.[75] Colbert's desire to expedite the project was well known. When Charles Perrault suggested opening meetings devoted to work on the dictionary to the public, it was assumed that he was speaking on behalf of Colbert. Perrault, in fact, observed that the public was unaware of the complexities involved in compiling the dictionary, which led to disputes and sometimes even anger.[76]

Colbert's intent in implementing tokens was to hasten the completion of the dictionary. Under prodding from Colbert, the company decided that at each meeting they would begin work on the dictionary at three o'clock in the afternoon and conclude at five o'clock; to ensure exactitude in compliance, Colbert