

VIENNOT, ÉLIANE, et al. *L'Académie contre la langue française: le dossier "féminisation"*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016. ISBN 979-10-90062-33-7. Pp. 216.

Viennot et al. trace a thirty-year war in France conducted, not on the borders of Alsace or Normandy, but within the esteemed halls of the French Academy. This book narrates “une croisade contre la ‘féminisation’, en dépit des besoins langagiers d’une société où l’égalité des sexes progresse” (back cover). The authors organize their argument via the metaphor of religion. Viennot and colleagues commence by outlining the history of the “Saint-Siège,” established by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635. Though charged with assuring the purity of the language in order to render it capable of the greatest elegance, the Academy’s only significant activity by 1672 became awarding prizes for exceptional literature. The Academy’s first *Dictionnaire*, explicitly called for as early as the second gathering, finally appeared in 1694, some sixty years after the organization’s founding. Since then, “les Immortels” have managed to publish an average of two revisions each century—each, according to Viennot et al., obsolete upon arrival. The authors call into question the composition of the esteemed assembly from its genesis. Richelieu chose many who knew little about literature, assigning *fauteuils* to those whom he wished to thank or hoped to win over. Disbanded during the Revolution and reinstated under Napoleon, the Academy remained devoted to conservative inclinations, its members, to their own interests. The few dictionaries that did emerge, according to Viennot, reflected *only* the language of conservatives (24). It was not until 1980 that a woman was finally invited to join the group. Since then, only seven have been elected: seven women and fifty-seven men. The Academy’s murky, monarchical origins and misogynistic heritage cast a dark shadow on the historically-revered institution. The authors’ indictment against *l’Académie française* is clear: “[D]onner des règles sûres’ à la langue française pour beaucoup consisté à la masculiniser” (25). The remainder of the book builds a case for this contention. Viennot and contributors record the official positions penned by some of the Academy’s most notable crusaders alongside their refutations of the same. The book concludes with a summary of this “guerre sainte menée contre l’égalité des sexes et contre la langue française” (11). The volume contains a useful chronology of events related to the feminization of the French language. An extensive bibliography is helpfully divided into the subheadings “Études sur la langue française,” “Études sur l’Académie française,” and other cited sources. Appendices include guides to the French language from Belgium, Canada, France, Switzerland and UNESCO. The book provides a plethora of evidence that casts suspicion on both the enshrined organization and its willingness to come of age. While the authors’ impassioned tone, well-suited to the extended metaphor of religious zeal, rings on occasion with rancor and sarcasm, their argument needs no such raillery to win converts. This volume will prove stimulating to linguists, teachers, and scholarly Francophiles everywhere.