

Introduction

The Other Voice

In 1668, during the reign of Louis XIV, in the midst of the cultural and artistic activity that was to give France's *Grand Siècle* its epithet, Marguerite Buffet published her *New Observations on the French Language, with Praises of Illustrious Learned Women, Past and Present* in Paris.¹ Buffet's is an all but forgotten feminist work,² written by a woman about whom we know next to nothing. Although we have scant information concerning the life story of the author, Buffet's only published work is a unique contribution to the centuries-long debate concerning the status of women known as the *querelle des femmes*. The 342-page duodecimo volume joins together genres never found before in a single text: first, *observations*, or remarks, on the French language, and second, *éloges*, or praises, of famous women.³ Buffet's work is of interest, therefore, not only for its conscious annexing of these two radically different genres—linguistic and epideictic—but also for its late seventeenth-century pro-woman reworking of both.⁴

The first two-thirds of Buffet's text, *New Observations on the French Language*, describes common errors in contemporary language usage, then gives examples of correct expression for both speaking and writing. The remaining

1. The full title is *New Observations on the French Language, Treating of Old and Archaic Terms, and the Proper Use of New Expressions, with Praises of Illustrious Learned Women, Past and Present (Nouvelles Observations sur la langue françoise; où il est traité des termes anciens et inusitez, et du bel usage des mots nouveaux. Avec les Eloges des illustres sçavantes, tant anciennes que modernes)*, published in Paris by Jean Cusson, 1668. The French text may be found online at Gallica: <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k50480k>>. No subsequent editions were published. *New Observations on the French Language* will be referred to as "*Observations*" throughout this Introduction and in the notes; *Praises of Illustrious Learned Women* will be referred to as "*Praises*." Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French, both of primary and secondary sources, are my own.

2. In calling Buffet's work "feminist," I am taking up Joan Kelly's argument that within the context of the history of French feminism, which has traditionally identified Christine de Pizan (1364–ca. 1430) as the first feminist thinker, the word "feminist" is appropriate to describe "a 400-year-old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French Revolution." See Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400–1789," *Signs* 8 (1982): 4–28, at p. 5; see also Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 6.

3. In the original French text, the *Observations* are on pages 1–198 and the *Eloges* on pages 199–342.

4. Aristotle describes epideictic declamation as the rhetoric of "praise or blame," one of the three major types of rhetoric along with deliberative and forensic (*Art of Rhetoric*, 1.3). Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese, rev. Gisela Striker (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 33.

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third, *Praises of Illustrious Learned Women*, opens with a defense of the female sex, followed by a catalogue of illustrious women, both living and dead, who are noteworthy not as epitomes of the cardinal virtues but specifically as exemplars of women's learning, or *savoir*.⁵ Buffet's *Observations* belongs to a genre very much in vogue in the latter half of the seventeenth century: remarks on aspects of the French language—such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and style—not covered in traditional grammars. Her *Praises* belongs to the so-called *de claribus* tradition of catalogues of renowned women, of which there was no lack of contemporary seventeenth-century French specimens. What distinguishes Buffet's work is her decision to pair these two fashionable but seemingly unrelated genres in order to exhort French women to excel in their native language and to emulate the female paragons of learning whose biographies Buffet provides at the end of her volume.

In her *Observations* Buffet unites pertinent examples of the language of daily life, whether from the world of fashion, or the world of love, courtship, and *galanterie*.⁶ The work thus offers rare glimpses into the habits and language of women of various backgrounds at the time.⁷ Buffet takes care to mention the benefits that accrue to women who study the art of conversation and the companion art of letter-writing. She exhorts women to learn how to manage their time more efficiently so that they may spend their many leisure hours in the pursuit of a greater knowledge of their own language, of speaking and writing it well, instead of wasting time in idleness or, presumably, gambling and card-playing. In the *Praises*, Buffet argues for the equality of the sexes by highlighting women's aptitude for learning, praising the abilities of a number of her and her readers' contemporaries. These exemplars are exhibited as living proofs of the power

5. The four cardinal virtues, set out in antiquity and specifically identified in early Christianity, are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Concerning early modern humanist treatises in defense of women, Constance Jordan writes: "Treatises of this class typically argue that the cardinal virtues, celebrated in antiquity and represented in classical philosophy and history, have been (and can be) as well exemplified by women as men." See her "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's Defence of Good Women," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 242.

6. *Galanterie* is a complex notion in French. The source of the English "gallant" and "gallantry," the word possesses a wide range of meanings in French, including noble or chivalrous, flirtatious, and charming. See Delphine Denis, *Le Parnasse galant: Institution d'une catégorie littéraire au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001), and Alain Viala, *La France galante: Essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu'à la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008).

7. Regarding social classes in France during the *Ancien Régime* see Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France, 1500–1640: An Essay in Historical Psychology*, trans. R.E. Hallmark (London: Edward Arnold, 1975), originally published as *Introduction à la France moderne, 1500–1640: Essai de psychologie historique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1961).

wielded by educated women. In the *Observations* Buffet actively encourages her women readers to leave aside their *bagatelles*, or trifling concerns, in favour of the more profound pleasures of disciplined study, or, at the very least, the satisfaction of knowing how and when to join in or leave a conversation.⁸ In the *Praises* she subsequently draws portraits of women writing in their *cabinets*, or studies, and speaking in public forums. Nowhere does Buffet explicitly say, “If you follow my rules of good speaking and writing, you too can become another Madeleine de Scudéry or Anna Maria van Schurman,” but readers would have come to this conclusion themselves, given the way the biographies echo the lessons taught in the linguistic treatise. Better self-expression would naturally place Buffet’s readers—as it did Buffet herself—among members of that group of women proficient in the arts taught in the *Observations*. Buffet promotes education as the means of elevating women in society as well as its role in a woman’s path to glory.

Buffet’s unusual hybrid work emerges out of specific historical and literary contexts. The first is the founding in 1635 of the *Académie Française*, or the French Academy, by Cardinal Richelieu, chief minister for Louis XIII. With the founding of the Academy was inaugurated an official program to rehabilitate the French language. The new Academy was charged with the task of purifying the language, ridding it, for instance, of what it considered archaic and regional terms, and making it the fitting reflection of a modern nation and civilized culture.⁹ Article 24 of the Statutes of the French Academy states that its principal mission would be to provide French with fixed rules to render it pure, eloquent, and suitable for expressing the arts and the sciences.¹⁰ The first major work to codify such fixed rules was written by Claude Favre de Vaugelas (1585–1650) and published

8. The importance of the art of conversation in the salons and in the novels of seventeenth-century France cannot be overstated. See “De la Conversation,” in Madeleine de Scudéry’s *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 2 vols. (Paris: Billaine, 1680), 1:1–35, for its insight into debates surrounding the exact rules to which the best conversation should adhere. For secondary sources on the subject see Faith E. Beasley, “Changing the Conversation: Re-positioning the French Seventeenth-Century Salon,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 60 (2020): 34–46; Peter Burke, *The Art of Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); Benedetta Craveri, *L’Age de la conversation*, trans. Eliane Deschamps-Pria (Paris: Gallimard, 2002); Delphine Denis, *La Muse galante: Poétique de la conversation dans l’œuvre de Madeleine de Scudéry* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997); Emmanuel Godo, *La Conversation: Une utopie de l’éphémère* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); and David Randall, *The Concept of Conversation: From Cicero’s Sermo to the Grand Siècle’s Conversation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

9. Later, during the reign of Louis XIV, the Academy would aim to make French a universal language, replacing Latin, so that the glory of the Sun King would never disappear from memory.

10. See *Statuts et règlements* of the Académie Française: <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/statuts_af_0.pdf>.

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in 1647: *Remarques sur la langue française, utiles à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien écrire* (Remarks on the French Language, Useful to Those Who Wish to Speak and Write Well).¹¹ Buffet's *New Observations on the French Language* was directly influenced by Vaugelas's work, as were similar works by Scipion Dupleix, Gilles Ménage, Dominique Bouhours, and Paul Tallemant, among others.¹² All of these books aimed to help readers distinguish archaic and provincial terms from those terms acceptable in polite and proper usage. Among the books in this new genre, Buffet's *New Observations on the French Language* is the only volume in the corpus addressed specifically to a female public.¹³

The second important context for Buffet's work is the so-called "woman question." Treatises and pamphlets actively defending women from traditional misogynist arguments, along with catalogues and galleries of renowned women or "women worthies," constituted an integral part of the *querelle des femmes*.¹⁴ Buffet's *Praises* appears after a veritable seventeenth-century explosion of lists of women notable for their piety, heroism, or military genius, as well as for their learning.¹⁵ Buffet's work is distinctive in that she focuses exclusively on learning as a criterion for all the women in her gallery: she dedicates the first half of the section to celebrating nineteen contemporary women at length as living exemplars of such learning before cataloguing the intellectual achievements of women from the recent and ancient past in the second half.

The contemporary women Buffet chooses to elevate in her *Praises*—some of whom are remembered today only because Buffet wrote about them—are central to grasping the final important context for her work, namely the culture

11. Claude Favre de Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française, utiles à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien écrire* (Paris: Pierre le Petit, 1647; rpt., Paris: Editions Ivrea, 1996).

12. Scipion Dupleix, *Liberté de la langue Françoise dans sa pureté* (Paris: Denys Bechet, 1651); Gilles Ménage, *Observations de Monsieur Ménage sur la langue françoise* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1672; 2nd ed., Paris: Claude Barbin, 1675), and *Observations de Monsieur Ménage sur la langue françoise. Seconde partie* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1676); Dominique Bouhours, *Remarques nouvelles sur la langue françoise* (Paris: Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1675; rpt., Paris: Georges and Louis Josse, 1692), and *Suite des Remarques nouvelles sur la langue françoise* (Paris: Georges and Louis Josse, 1692; rpt., 1693); and Paul Tallemant, *Remarques et décisions de l'Académie françoise* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1698). For a complete list see the *Corpus des remarques sur la langue française (XVIIe siècle)* published by Classiques Garnier online (<<https://classiques-garnier.com/corpus-des-remarques-sur-la-langue-francaise-xviiie-siecle.html>>).

13. Buffet emphasizes that she is writing explicitly for women. "I have taken a completely different approach from that of other guides," she says in the prologue to the First Part, "by choosing to work primarily for women" (*Observations*, 50).

14. See Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 83–103, at p. 83.

15. See Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 26–32, and Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 76–77.

of the Parisian salon. Most of Buffet's women were connected to various salons, places where assemblies of cultivated men and women interested in literature and polite conversation gathered together.¹⁶ What we now call "salons" (i.e., rooms) were known at the time by architectural terms designating certain spaces in the house such as *chambre*, *ruelle*, *alcove*, or *réduit*.¹⁷ Joan DeJean describes the ways in which the culture of the salon helped transform the terms of the *querelle des femmes* in France, opening up a unique space for women to express themselves:

The beginning of the seventeenth century . . . marks a decisive turning point in the history of French feminism, an evolution that generates innovative types of writing about women that reflect new realities and mark an important departure from the treatises produced in conjunction with the *Querelle*. To the nearly simultaneous inceptions of the regency of Marie de' Medici (1610) and the equally absolute reign in the socio-literary sphere of another Italian, . . . [the] Marquise de Rambouillet, founder of the French salon tradition, may be traced the origin of a golden age of activity that is not only femi-
nocratic but also feminist.¹⁸

Marguerite Buffet's work emerges from this culture of the seventeenth-century salon. Her linguistic treatise, as well as her gallery of women, hint that it was a world with which Buffet was intimately familiar. The salon of Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet (1588–1665), located in her residence between the Louvre and the Tuileries palaces, was known as the *chambre bleue* for the room in which it took place. Regular attendees here included Vaugelas, as well as the Jesuit priest and grammarian Dominique Bouhours (1628–1702) and the lawyer Guillaume Colletet (1598–1659), French translator of Anna Maria van Schurman.¹⁹ The novelist Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), one of the contemporary women immortalized in Buffet's *Praises*, was also an early *habitué*. In the early 1650s, Scudéry would go on to found her own salon, known as her *samedis* for the day of the week on which gatherings took place. Karen Newman provides us with the following description:

At Scudéry's *samedis*, contemporaries read aloud and discussed literature, invented and played literary games, and apparently collaborated—Scudéry's famous *carte de tendre*, which presents a

16. Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 141.

17. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 21.

18. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 19.

19. For Colletet, see Anne R. Larsen, *Anna Maria van Schurman, "The Star of Utrecht": The Educational Vision and Reception of a Savante* (London: Routledge, 2016), 119.

psychology of love as movement through geographical space, is said to have originated out of a game or *jeu d'esprit* among her friends. Like Sapho, Scudéry presided over her “court,” guided its conversations, and was its arbiter of taste.²⁰

Buffet's *Observations* invites close comparison with Scudéry's work, and the *Praises* an examination of the person of Scudéry herself, one of the most popular literary figures of the time. Scudéry's Sapho—resurrected from the classical past and placed, as an arbiter of taste and an expert conversationalist, in a *salon* of mid-seventeenth-century France—may well have served Buffet as a model for her own voice in the *Observations*. And Scudéry's “Histoire de Sapho,” inserted in her novel *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus* (1649–1653), may be fruitfully mined for passages and ideas taken up by Buffet. The comparison between Sapho and the pedantic Damophile in Scudéry's fiction is particularly apt with regard to Buffet's project—shared by other authors of linguistic *remarques*—of promulgating a certain worldly or *mondaine* attitude toward language use, as opposed to a more academic or *docte* (i.e., learned) one.²¹ As Newman notes, “Damophile's cardinal sin is that she advertises her learning; in contemporary parlance, she is a show-off, always seeking to be seen with erudite men and to discuss learned topics. . . . Sapho, on the other hand, hides her learning, discourages those who would praise it, and presents her verses as no more than an amusement.”²² In this seventeenth-century linguistic quarrel between ancients and moderns, between the defenders of a neoclassical style (such as Nicolas Boileau, Jean Racine, and Molière) and the proponents of a modern, spoken style (such as Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, Claude Favre de Vaugelas, and Vincent Voiture), Buffet advocates the more worldly image of cultivated women as *sçavantes sans la paroistre*, or “learned without showing it.”²³ Buffet celebrates Scudéry, and women accomplished for their literary and conversational acumen as versions of the *femme forte*, or heroic woman, a kind of literary amazon.

Buffet's *Observations* and her *Praises* may be seen as having emerged out of salon culture and “the flowering of *préciosité* as a literary-linguistic model.”²⁴ By 1668, however, Buffet may have also been responding to a backlash against women's role in the salon as arbiters of what constituted good literature. Faith Beasley reminds us that in the three most well-known and detailed descriptions

20. Karen Newman, introduction to Madeleine de Scudéry, *The Story of Sapho*, trans. Karen Newman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.

21. See Scudéry, *The Story of Sapho*, 22–23.

22. Newman, introduction to Scudéry, *The Story of Sapho*, 7.

23. Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 152.

24. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 51.

of activities of the salons—Michel de Pure’s *La Précieuse, ou Le Mystère de ruelles* (1656), Antoine Baudeau de Somaize’s *Grand dictionnaire des Précieuses* (1660), and, most infamously, Molière’s *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659)—the rule of women in the salons was satirized and openly interrogated in a manner reminiscent of the old *querelle des femmes*: “The 1650s and 1660s witnessed intense debate regarding what if any influence the worldly arena should exert on the literary field.”²⁵ Joan DeJean argues that the year 1661, the beginning of the absolute reign of Louis XIV, marked the end of the salons’ feminocentric cultural dominance.²⁶ Nicholas Paige speaks to the growing unease with the very structure of the salon and the relative power of the women in them: “In works like Molière’s *The Precious Damsels*, salon women were characterized as ridiculous and passé. Aside from their evident misogyny, attacks like these were motivated by the need to destroy these bastions of a proud independent aristocracy and to pull everyone who counted into the ambit of the monarchy.”²⁷ The shift of literary power away from the salon and the women who dominated them may perhaps already be visible in Buffet’s *Eloges*—praising paragons of an oral and literary culture that was already on the wane.

Buffet’s voice—encouraging and supportive of her readers, but always firm, even opinionated—comes through in her plain, direct, and pedagogical style. Her book is highly readable even for us today. Buffet applies to her own writing the lessons of economy and clarity she promulgates. Yet her work is also important for us as a history of its own time: “Protoliterary histories, in particular Marguerite Buffet’s *Eloge des illustres savantes* (1668), demonstrate that in the salon era conversational brilliance was just as likely to be rewarded with literary status as the written production that is today the sole measure of talent.”²⁸ Historians on both sides of the Atlantic are now acknowledging the intellectual and cultural stakes of the conversations held in the *ruelles* and the influence of the salons on the literature produced in and through them by both the women and men who frequented them. The world of the salons and the women who ran them are being seen as having influenced canonical authors and thinkers of the seventeenth century, and Buffet and many of the women she praises are now seen as *bona fide* members of the Republic of Letters.²⁹ Buffet occupies a unique position in this history both as

25. Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 41 and 42–43.

26. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 12.

27. Nicholas D. Paige, introduction to Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette, *Zayde: A Spanish Romance*, ed. and trans. Nicholas D. Paige (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 8.

28. DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 59.

29. Beasley, “Changing the Conversation,” 36.

a participant in, and historian of, the intellectual and social world of the salon. The time is ripe for both a modern edition of her work in French and a translation of her work into English, so that she may be read and appreciated for the glimpse she offers into a world that has been recognized as vital to French literature and culture.

Life and Work

Very little is known about Marguerite Buffet's life. She was born after 1600, and the consensus is that she died in or around 1680. According to the few historical records that mention her, Marguerite Buffet was a Parisian woman of letters and a tutor of French. One source of information on Buffet, and many other women, is the *Dictionnaire* of Fortunée Briquet (1782–1815), published in 1804. This ambitious compendium of more than five hundred French women connected with the world of letters has the very briefest of entries for Buffet:

BUFFET, (MARGUERITE) of Paris, lived in the 17th century. She was the author of the following work: *New Observations on the French Language*, which treats terms fallen into disuse and the correct use of new words, with *Praises of Illustrious Learned Women*. Paris, Cusson, 1668, one vol. in-12.³⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, when this entry was written, a little more than a century after her death, this was all that was known about Marguerite Buffet with any certainty. It is assumed that she was born, lived, and died in Paris. Most of what is known about her must be gleaned from her sole remaining work. Hers is a biography by inference.

From the title page of her book we learn that its author, Marguerite Buffet, was a *demoiselle*, or gentlewoman, “exercising the profession of guiding Ladies in the art of speaking and writing well on all subjects, with French Spelling according

30. Fortunée Briquet, *Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique des françaises, et des étrangères naturalisées en France, connues par leurs écrits, ou par la protection qu'elles ont accordée aux gens de lettres, depuis l'établissement de la monarchie jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Treuttel and Würtz, 1804), 71. Briquet's ambitious compilation lists more than five hundred francophone women who, as stated in the book's full title, “were known for their writings or for the patronage they gave to people of letters.” Briquet's entry is not the first for Buffet. For instance, Jean-François de La Croix mentions her in the same brief manner in his *Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres: Contenant l'histoire des femmes savantes, des actrices, et généralement des dames qui se sont rendues fameuses dans tous les siècles par leurs aventures, les talents, l'esprit et le courage. Nouvelle édition revue et considérablement augmentée*, vol. 1 (Paris: Belin, 1778), 442. For more on the reception of Buffet's work, see the section “Reception and Afterlife” in the Introduction, 33–38.

to the rules.”³¹ Most probably a woman of good, perhaps even noble birth, Buffet taught women of a certain social status both spoken and written French.³² The description of the author on the title page of her book—perhaps at the behest of the publisher or the bookseller to introduce her to the public—is repeated in Buffet’s description of herself in her dedicatory epistle to Marie-Thérèse, queen consort to Louis XIV, as *une fille de condition*, or a well-born woman, “obliged to support herself by teaching the French language.”³³ Buffet was thus an unmarried woman, and almost certainly without an inheritance. As to her profession, she gives us additional indications throughout her linguistic treatise as to the kind of teaching she did to support herself, referring, for example, to teaching correct French pronunciation to foreigners “who have understood the rules quite well and made few mistakes.”³⁴ With regard to her lessons on the arts of conversation and letter-writing, she writes, “My principal employment in life is to teach these precepts to those Ladies who honor me by calling on me.”³⁵ Statements such as these lead us to believe that Buffet may have been a kind of private tutor of aristocratic or bourgeois ladies, as individuals or perhaps in small groups.

In her *Observations*, Buffet refers more than once to “my book of spelling rules, which I give to the women I teach, consisting of a very easy method for learning in very little time.”³⁶ She also makes a brief allusion to providing other women, in the future, with certain “tools . . . in written form” of her method, which she notes she has used with her students to such good effect in the past.³⁷ Buffet may have provided her students with learning materials in manuscript form, one of which she calls a book. None of these linguistic tools or aids were published; of her linguistic pedagogy, only the *Observations* made it into print.³⁸

Was Marguerite Buffet’s motive in publishing her *Observations* to enlarge the clientele for her tutoring business? Two critics have suggested that this might

31. “Par Damoiselle MARGUERITE BUFFET, faisant profession d’enseigner aux Dames l’art de bien parler & de bien écrire sur tous sujets, avec l’Orthographe Française par regles.” See Marguerite Buffet, *Observations*, 42.

32. Buffet’s good birth seems likely, borne out by the fact that she was extremely well-read; her treatise testifies to her learning, containing references to classical authors such as Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle, and Ovid, as well as Saint Augustine. References to Numa Pompilius, Cato the Elder, Sulla, and the Roman girl Tutula are from Plutarch’s *Lives*; the section on the history of the alphabet is from the *Annals* of Tacitus.

33. Buffet, *Observations*, 45.

34. Buffet, *Observations*, 76.

35. Buffet, *Observations*, 77.

36. Buffet, *Observations*, 52.

37. Buffet, *Observations*, 76.

38. For more on spelling in the period, see Dena Goodman, “L’Ortografie des Dames: Gender and Language in the Old Regime,” *French Historical Studies* 25 (2002): 191–223.

be the case.³⁹ Buffet does seem to be actively advertising her method at various junctures in her linguistic treatise by reminding her readers of her success in teaching women. At the same time, since her *Praises* seek to immortalize illustrious women of learning, her ambition in the *Observations* appears to be loftier. Buffet seems to have aimed to change the cultural perception of the female sex, and she was also clearly interested in being an author. A visible sign of her quest for authorship appears in the last two pages of her work, in which we find the *Extrait du Privilège du Roy* and learn that Buffet, following in the footsteps of other French women authors of the period, obtained a *privilège* from the king to publish her book under her own name:

By the grace and Privilege of the King, given in Paris the 17th day of February 1667. Permission is given to MARGUERITE BUFFET, Gentlewoman, to print a Book entitled, *New Observations on the French Language, Treating of Old and Archaic Terms and the Proper Use of New Expressions, with Praises of Illustrious Learned Women, Past and Present.*⁴⁰

Like earlier women writers such as Louise Labé and Marie de Gournay, and, closer to her own time, Marie-Catherine Desjardins, Madame de Villegieu, Buffet obtained a *privilège d'auteur*, or a royal privilege in her own name, to publish her manuscript.⁴¹ Seeking and obtaining such a privilege was both a sign of a desire for public recognition and a sign that she was recognized. At the same time, many important women writers, such as the novelists Madeleine de Scudéry and Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette (1634–1693), did not attach their own names to their privileges, yet were recognized by the public as the authors of their books. Edwige Keller-Rahbé explains that when female authors chose to remain anonymous, the *privilège* would be in the name of their bookseller. In other cases, a woman author's *privilège* would be given to

39. Linda Timmermans and Cinthia Meli both suggest that publicity for her teaching may have been at least one of Buffet's aims, if not the primary one. See Linda Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture sous l'Ancien Régime (1598–1715)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), 277, and Cinthia Meli, "Un bien dire à l'usage des bourgeois: *Les Nouvelles Observations sur la langue françoise* (1668) de Marguerite Buffet," in *Femmes, rhétorique et éloquence sous l'Ancien Régime*, ed. Claude La Charité and Roxanne Roy (Saint Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2012), 90.

40. Buffet's privilege appears on p. 123 of the present volume.

41. Louise Labé (ca. 1524–1566), daughter of a Lyon ropemaker, was well educated, and an accomplished rider and archer. Before writing poetry, she had hosted a literary salon whose attendees included numerous members of the Lyonnais literati. In 1555, Henri II granted her a privilege protecting her right to publish her own works for five years. On Marie de Gournay (1565–1645), see the second part of *Praises*, 107, and note 61; on Marie-Catherine Desjardins (1640–1683), see Buffet's biography in *Praises*, 103, and note 47.

another person, a man, as was the case with Madeleine de Scudéry, whose works were often published under the name of her brother Georges de Scudéry. Less frequently, the name of the female author would appear side by side with that of her bookseller, indicating that the author was not trying to hide her identity, but not completely conceding to the act of publication either. Finally, in the rarest of all practices, the name of the female author—as in Buffet’s case—would appear alone in the *privilège*, showing active consent to the act of publication.⁴²

Well-born, but a teacher, ambitious to make her mark, but a woman, Buffet avows that she feels she has done something “extraordinary” in daring to dedicate her book to the queen. But while she claims it to be an extraordinary act, Buffet appears to have been in a position to address herself to the queen. Her references in the *Observations* as to what words were in or out of fashion at court hint that she may have had first-hand experience of court life under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. Buffet does represent herself as someone associated with this world, seeking the patronage of the queen, and obtaining a privilege for herself as an author.

Buffet’s epistle “To the Reader”—*Au Lecteur*, implying both male and female readers, since the collective noun in French is masculine—portrays the author as surprisingly conversant with the world of print publication. She opens her epistle with a modesty *topos* perfectly befitting her womanhood—“I am eternally obliged to my sex and my temperament for my innate shyness”—but this timidity is at cross-currents with the whole of her address, which is punctuated by references to the danger, risk, and public humiliation associated with putting a book into print.⁴³ While humbly denying any desire to take such risks, Buffet’s discourse speaks precisely to the thrill of such danger. She writes of the hazardous pleasure of “holding a high place at the court of Apollo,” in other words, the court of Louis XIV as patron of the arts, by breezily recounting the public humiliation of one of the greatest of court wits and writers of the day, Vincent Voiture (1597–1648):

[T]his hazardous recreation [i.e., being a writer at court] seems just as unpleasant as that trick played on the late Monsieur Voiture. This is why I am in the habit of comparing the risk of appearing in print to being tossed in a blanket, or flying up and down on a swing, because

42. Edwige Keller-Rahbé, “Pratiques et usages du privilège d’auteur chez Mme de Villedieu et quelques autres femmes de lettres du XVIIe siècle,” *Œuvres et Critiques* 35 (2010): 69–94, at pp. 72–73. For more on the subject of *privilège d’auteur* see Michèle Clément and Edwige Keller-Rahbé, eds., *Privilèges d’auteurs et d’autrices en France (XVIe–XVIIe siècles): Anthologie Critique* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017). Faith Beasley, Joan DeJean, and Erica Harth, among others, have discussed the *privilège d’auteur* for writers later in the century.

43. Buffet, *Observations*. 46. Faith Beasley discusses this passage and Buffet’s work in detail in *Salons*, 50–66. For another perspective on this opening passage, see Leah L. Chang, “Les Précautions ridicules: Textspin in 17th-century France,” *Romance Notes* 38 (1998): 333–41, at pp. 334–37.

of the danger that goes hand in hand with the amusement we get out of it.⁴⁴

Buffet refers here to the renowned Voiture being tossed in a blanket, or “*berné*,” as punishment for not having succeeded in making one of the court ladies laugh. This incident was one of the many pranks routinely played by members of the court on each other, and is recorded with zest by Voiture himself in his own correspondence.⁴⁵

Why does Buffet include this incident in her address to the reader? She appears to wish to place the name of Vincent Voiture at the threshold of her book, as a kind of *imprimatur*, testifying to her intimacy with the salon and literary matters. She speaks of the incident familiarly, using the French impersonal pronoun *on*, which could mean “the trick *we* played on Monsieur Voiture” as well as “the trick played on Monsieur Voiture.” I have translated it as the latter so that the reader of the English version of Buffet’s work is not tempted to imagine Buffet herself holding one of the blanket’s corners at court the day Voiture was unceremoniously tossed; but her use of the pronoun *on* leaves open the possibility of a certain insider knowledge, and it is this insider status that she may well wish to convey to her readers. Buffet follows up on her reservations concerning the dangers, but also the amusements, of print publication, claiming by way again of the modesty or humility *topos* current in such prefaces that she has exposed herself in

44. See “To the Reader,” 46. In making a reference to Apollo and the Muses, Buffet may also be alluding to the ceiling fresco painted for the gallery of Cardinal Mazarin’s palace by Gian Francesco Romanelli: *Les Précieuses parisiennes entourant Apollon*, or *The Parisian Précieuses surrounding Apollo* (1646–47). According to Joan DeJean, “each of the muses has the face of a woman intellectual prominent at the court”; see *Tender Geographies*, 35. Ian Maclean discusses this and other paintings of galleries of women in *Woman Triumphant*, chap. 7, “Feminist Literature and the Visual Arts,” 209–32 and 211n9. The Galerie Mazarine, and Romanelli’s fresco, are now part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

45. Voiture recounts the incident in a letter to Anne Geneviève de Bourbon, sister of the duc d’Enghien (the *Grand Condé*) and later the duchesse de Longueville. He writes that because he had not been able to make her laugh in the time that had been allotted him, Madame de Rambouillet (the *salonnière* Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet) had ordered that he be punished by being tossed in a blanket, an allusion, perhaps, to Sancho Panza’s being tossed in a blanket in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. Voiture’s letter is a classic example of the *galanterie* in speech and in writing for which its author was famed in his time. The incident described by Voiture—to make the twelve-year-old Mademoiselle de Bourbon laugh—describes the kinds of games played in the *chambre bleue*. Voiture’s letter is one of the first in the two-volume edition of his correspondence. See Vincent Voiture, *Lettres*, ed. Octave Uzanne, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1880), Letter 9 (pages 30–34). For more on these games see Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le Roi-machine: Spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981), 55–58; see also Charles Sorel, *Les Récréations galantes* (Paris: Estienne Loyson, 1671), for descriptions of games of the period.

print practically against her will and only at the urging of “learned friends.” Buffet reveals her ambition to her readers even as she covers it up.

One of these friends may have been a certain Bruslé, writer of a commendatory epistle, “To Mademoiselle Buffet, on her Book,” which follows Buffet’s own epistles to the queen and to the reader. We know nothing of Bruslé except that he was “a Lawyer at Parliament,” as we see from his signature at the end of his epistle. Bruslé may well have been chosen to examine, and vet, Buffet’s book for the obtaining of the privilege. Regarding her book, he does affirm, “I have examined it with pleasure,” and expresses his satisfaction that she has decided to publish it.⁴⁶ Such language raises questions as to Bruslé’s connection to Buffet or perhaps to her publisher, Jean Cusson. Whether Bruslé was the official examiner of Buffet’s book or not, his letter in the front matter is clearly intended to serve as a kind of seal of approval as to the seriousness of the work and as personal testimony to the character of its female author.

Bruslé writes glowingly of Buffet in the hyperbole customary in such liminal epistles; his letter can be seen as an expert exercise in the commendatory line. He speaks of her “glory” and the esteem she enjoys among a certain group of *habiles*, or experts, in *belles lettres*, or good literature. He calls her another Tullia, a reference to Cicero’s beloved daughter, whom Buffet, in imitation of a number of other compilers of famous women, includes in her gallery of learned women from antiquity.⁴⁷ Bruslé claims that the heroic women in Buffet’s *Praises* would be thrilled to have her not only among them, but as a kind of crowning glory who would “add . . . the final touches of perfection” to their own works.⁴⁸ He thus places her at the head of the very women she praises, as a shining exemplar of the learning she has lauded in others. Finally, he seems to outdo himself in confiding how Buffet’s book has made him jealous, and specifically jealous of women. He envies the good Buffet is doing for her sex in writing such “reasonable and easy lessons,” all the while avoiding “those obscure and impenetrable terms the fair sex cannot tolerate.”⁴⁹ Given the hyperbole of such epistles, we must read this letter with care, not to exaggerate Buffet’s fame among her contemporaries or even Bruslé’s own regard for the work. Nevertheless, Buffet’s decision to dedicate her work to the queen, and the mere fact of a lawyer’s letter in her favour, argue for a woman who is not without friends in high places and who has gained a reputation, perhaps even at court, in her chosen domain—namely, as a tutor of French.

46. Buffet, *Observations*, 47.

47. Certain women, mostly ancient, were standard in galleries of women after Boccaccio’s *De Claris Mulieribus* (*On Famous Women*, discussed later); Tullia, the daughter of Cicero, was one of the most mentioned.

48. Buffet, *Observations*, 48.

49. Buffet, *Observations*, 47.