

Gender Performance in Seventeenth-century Dramatic Dialogue: From the Salon to the Classroom

by
Theresa V. Kennedy

As early as the Renaissance, the dialogue served as an important forum for debating questions related to the female condition: “the issues of women’s equality with men; the appropriate education for women; and the ways that men and women should imagine and treat each other, in marriage or in other relationships” (Smarr 106). Yet, even into the seventeenth century, the majority of dialogues continued to exclude female interlocutors.¹ Steeped in the erudite, humanist culture of antiquity, the dialogue employed rhetoric or debate as a strategy to dismiss women participants, who were discouraged from learning the art of rhetoric (Smarr 11).² Madeleine de Scudéry redirected the dialogue genre with the publication of her conversations, featuring both male and female interlocutors with equal opportunities to express their views on a variety of different topics.³ Other women authors beginning with Marguerite de Navarre, Marie Le Gendre, Helisenne de Crenne, and Catherine des Roches found their voice in the convergence between dialogue and drama.⁴ The dramatic dialogue, exemplified by Plato and Erasmus, was written in a simple dialogic form, and intended to be acted aloud by male pupils. Female authors, who had been intimidated by the traditional, highly ornamental forms of the dialogue, found a fruitful ground for their writing in the dramatic dialogue. The dramatic dialogue was particularly successful in the seventeenth-century salons. Unlike Scudéry’s conversations, the narrator did not

¹ The Chevalier de Méré’s conversations for instance feature exchanges between the Mareschal de C. and the Chevalier. In fact, the *dames* present are not considered worthy participants of their exchange. See the very first conversation in *Œuvres complètes* in which the Mareschal expresses to the Chevalier his desire to converse with him without the distraction of women: “J’ai mieux aimé vous entretenir [...], que de jouer avec ces Dames. Nous discourons de certaines choses, qui ne s’apprennent point dans le commerce du monde” (8). It is suggested that the women would have little to contribute to their exchange.

² According to Alain Viala, seventeenth-century writers of this category of literature began to disassociate themselves with overly rhetorical or obscure language (See 63, 55 respectively).

³ Scudéry published ten volumes of conversations between 1680 and 1692: *Conversations sur divers sujets* (1680); *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets* (1684); *Conversations morales* (ou *La Morale du monde*) (1686); *Nouvelles conversations de morale* (1688) and *Entretiens de morale* (1692).

⁴ Anne Larsen describes Catherine des Roches’ second volume of dialogues as “proches du théâtre lu” (40).

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

interrupt the characters' exchanges, and dialogues could be read aloud or dramatized in a shorter period of time. Since the *salonniers* did not always have access to a private stage or costumes in order to put on a full-fledged professional production, the dramatic dialogue proved to be an enjoyable source of entertainment for both male and female participants. Thus, by re-appropriating the dialogue, Scudéry and her female predecessors directly questioned the exclusivity of a genre traditionally associated with masculine voices and allowed the female interlocutor to join the conversation.⁵ Yet, these female writers continued to write with both men and women in mind.

Catherine Durand, a prolific writer of dramatic texts, and the Marquise de Maintenon, *institutrice* of Saint-Cyr, were among the first to exclusively express a woman's point of view in the dramatic dialogue. Their writing followed two strategies: first, both Durand's and Maintenon's dialogues feature only female interlocutors; secondly, they emphasize how women should conduct themselves. Thus, by exploiting the dramatic dialogue as a means of expression, Maintenon and Durand provided a forum in which women were able to discuss and rehearse their roles for the stage of life.

At the same time, Durand's and Maintenon's dialogues teach us about the shifting codes of conduct for women at the end of the seventeenth century. As these dramatic dialogues move from the salon to the classroom, one is made distinctly aware of a cultural battle between a secular, *mondaine* society that rejects morality, and the State, which subscribes to more traditional, Christian values. They both seek to make women more aware of the importance of safeguarding their reputations in a society that privileges men.

Yet, while Durand does not discourage women from engaging in *galanterie*, Maintenon—who supports the State's objectives⁶—claims that women remain above reproach only by rejecting the *vie mondaine* and embracing domesticity. The language used in their dialogues reflects their divergent interests: The informal and at times uncouth language in Durand's dialogues is intended to entertain. On the other hand, the more polished, formal speech featured in Maintenon's dialogues reveals a

⁵ Claire Cazanave demonstrates that the dialogue, which favors the strongest voices, is essentially masculine in nature (44).

⁶ "Society's elites have an obligation to set an example for the lower classes, and the state-sponsored education of future aristocratic mothers will not only help to instill the nobility with virtues beneficial to the crown, but it will also tie them more closely to the king" (Qtd. in Goldsmith 66).

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

moral, didactic purpose. Maintenon's dialogues reject the life of ease and pleasures to which young aristocratic women had formerly been accustomed. The worsening economic conditions were forcing young women to reconsider their priorities, and thus gallantry as a way of life became less of an option for women.

Catherine Durand

Although there is little known about the life of Durand, she was a prolific and celebrated author of her time. The printer of a collection of her works published posthumously under the title *Oeuvres de Madame Durand* (1757) refers to Durand in his *avertissement* as one who "s'est distinguée par ses écrits et dont l'auteur de la Bibliothèque des Romans parle avec éloge." The variety of works in this collection—including the dramatic dialogues in question, the libretto for her opera *Adraste*, a poem entitled "La Vengeance contre soi-même," a short story taken from *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, and an ode dedicated to the King which won an award from the French Academy in 1701—demonstrates that Durand, like other writers of gallant works, experimented with hybrid literary genres.⁷ The author also published a number of novels and semi-historical works.⁸ In the eighteenth century she is credited with having invented the genre of the dramatic proverb by the Comtesse de Genlis in her introduction to Carmentel's proverbs and comedies.⁹ Catherine Durand's *Comédies en*

⁷ Alain Viala states that the blending of genres is characteristic of writers who contributed to *la littérature galante*: "Plutôt que de séparer les genres, elle les réunit, voire rêve de les fondre ensemble" (51). Also see Allison Stedman who argues that Durand, who incorporates various salon pastimes into her hybrid novels, is a major contributor to the rococo period's "aesthetic apex" (12).

⁸ *La Comtesse de Mortane* (Paris, 1699); *Mémoires de la cour de Charles VII*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1700); *Oeuvres mêlées* (Paris, 1701); *Le comte de Cardonne, ou la Constance victorieuse, histoire sicilienne* (Paris, 1702); *Les Belles Grecques, ou l'Histoire des plus fameuses courtisanes de la Grèce* (Paris, 1712); *Henri, duc des Vandales* (Paris, 1714); and *Les Petits soupers d'été*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1733).

⁹ In her introduction to Carmentel's *Proverbes and comédies* Genlis states: "Cette idée [de prendre pour base de ses petites pièces un proverbe qu'il mettait en action] n'était point de son invention; très-longtemps avant Carmentel, une personne nommée Mme Durand avoit fait imprimer un petit recueil de Proverbes dramatiques, mais qui tomba promptement dans l'oubli, parce que toutes ces petites pièces étoient de la plus grande insipidité." While Genlis is critical of them, it would appear that Durand's plays hadn't entirely been forgotten since Genlis knew of them and perhaps had even read them.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

proverbes were printed as an appendix to the Comtesse de Murat's novel *Le Voyage de Campagne* (Paris, 1699).¹⁰

Like many of Scudéry's conversations, Durand's *Dialogues des galantes modernes* imitate an agonal model in which interlocutors discuss their opposing viewpoints. In the end, the interlocutors either maintain their initial positions or one interlocutor succeeds in convincing the other to change her viewpoint.¹¹ It is significant that Durand's dialogues are diphonic as opposed to polyphonic. While Scudéry's interlocutors must choose their words carefully according to the "bienséance" of their polite company,¹² Durand's female interlocutors may speak without reserve in the company of women. Durand exploits this formerly pedantic genre to discuss women's role in the art of gallantry, all the while intentionally excluding male interlocutors.¹³ As we shall observe, without a distracting male presence, her female interlocutors can speak more frankly.

Like Scudéry's conversations, Durand's *Dialogues des galantes modernes* reflect the salon culture which "demonstrated a blatant contempt of heterosexual sex and marriage" (Legault 128)—both obstacles to *la vie mondaine* and the pursuit of loftier goals such as cultivating one's mind. Yet, gallantry, loosely defined as the art of courtship,¹⁴ is permitted within the context of polite society. Throughout her dialogues, Durand maintains that women may engage in gallantry as long as they do not risk their reputations. The voice of reason, or the *porte-parole*, is the *dame galante* who remains in control of her male suitors and enjoys a pleasant and active social life. Her foil, on the other hand, is foolishly willing to ruin her reputation for an amorous conquest or an undeserving lover. Durand pat-

¹⁰ For a recent edition of this work in translation see *A Trip to the Country* by Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, *Comtesse de Murat*, ed. and trans. Perry Gethner and Allison Stedman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

¹¹ See Cazanave 81–83 for more information on categories of interlocution. The agonal model is initially associated with the writings of Aristotle, but would be imitated by authors in other centuries. Although Scudéry's conversations were polyphonic, many of them employed the agonal model. See also Smarr 27.

¹² Delphine Denis states that *l'air galant* is directly associated with *la bienséance*: "conduit par le jugement," il "doit être partout proportionné à ce qu'on est et à ce qu'on fait" (48).

¹³ Her dialogues respond to those of her male counterparts, such as the conversations of the Chevalier de Méré in which the two interlocutors discuss among other things the ways in which a *galant homme* might court a young lady. For instance, see 20–21. There are few dialogues that examine the various situations in which a *dame galante* might respond to or refuse a young man's attempts to engage her.

¹⁴ Furetière describes galanterie as "Ce qui est galant; & se dit des actions et des choses" and as "l'attache qu'on a à courtiser les Dames" (138).

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

terms her foil of the model *dame galante* after that described by Sapho in Scudéry's conversation "De l'air galant":

Mais le mal est que les femmes qui se mettent la galanterie de travers dans la tête, s'imaginent qu'à force d'être indulgentes à leurs galants, elles les conservent: et toutes celles dont j'entends parler ne songent ni à leur réputation, ni même à l'avantage de leur propre galanterie, mais seulement à ôter un amant à celle-ci; à attirer celui-là; à conserver cet autre; et à en engager mille si elles peuvent. Il y en a même, ajouta-t-elle, qui font encore pis: et qui par un intérêt avare font cent intrigues au lieu d'un. (Scudéry 56)

In this passage, Sapho criticizes women who become obsessed with pursuing lovers. These women not only jeopardize their reputations, but also their self-respect. Durand's dialogues put Sapho's lessons into practice. The reader is made to identify with the *dame galante*, who practices restraint and good judgment with regard to her potential suitors. Her foil, on the other hand, who makes poor choices, instructs as well as amuses the reader.

In the first dialogue, Amarante, the voice of reason, attempts to correct her foil, Julie, a married woman who risks her reputation by indulging in innocent flirtations with men other than her husband. Julie complains to Amarante that she cannot escape her doting husband whom she married solely for financial security:

JULIE. Ah, que j'ai bien un plus grand sujet de douleur! Ce mari que j'ai pris pour faire ma fortune, & pour avoir de la liberté, s'avise d'avoir une passion à ne me laisser aucun repos....

AMARANTE. Je ne m'étonne plus de votre affliction: Un mari qui vous aime! C'est un prodige dans la nature: il faut le faire cesser.

JULIE. Vous riez impitoyablement de mon état; je voudrais vous y voir. Quoi, depuis le matin jusqu'au soir, & depuis le soir jusqu'au matin, ne cesser de voir un homme toujours empressé, toujours amoureux! Je ne puis faire un pas sans lui! Il me suit au Bal, à la Comédie, à l'Opéra.... (30)¹⁵

¹⁵ All quotations will be taken from the 1757 edition of *Oeuvres de Madame Durand*.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

While Amarante identifies with Julie's desire to "se divertir avec liberté" and to "suivre le torrent" (32), she scolds Amarante's complete disregard of her marital status. Amarante reminds her friend that if she were to make her husband jealous and if they were to separate, society would quickly find fault with the woman's actions. Just as Sapho warns, a woman who jumps headlong into a passionate love affair without thinking of her reputation risks losing the esteem of others:

AMARANTE. A la fin, la tête tourne, la crainte du blâme est déjà levée, on n'en dira pas davantage quand l'embarquement sera sérieux; ainsi, de degrés en degrés, on se jette dans l'abîme où chacun vous accable de mépris.
(33)

Amarante depicts the worst case scenario in which Julie may find herself if she continues down her treacherous path. In the end, Amarante's pessimistic vision surprises Julie, since she has "encore bien du chemin à faire avant que d'en venir là" (33). The intimate setting of this private discussion between women is what permits Amarante's brutal honesty. Through Amarante, Durand transmits a serious warning to married women who compromise their reputations by indulging in love affairs.

Likewise, in Dialogue VI, Araminte, a *dame galante*, plays the voice of reason by warning her friend Clarice of the double standards that restrict the behavior of a married woman. While Araminte spends her time gallivanting, her friend Clarice compares her own life of solitude to that of an Anchorite. Clarice bemoans her overprotective husband who confines her to the home. When Araminte asks her why her husband is so strict, Clarice explains that he wishes to honor his mother's recommendations for the proper household. Araminte accuses Clarice's husband of perhaps using his mother as an excuse to keep her under his thumb:

ARAMINTE. Ils sont ravis, les maris, d'avoir un prétexte pour tenir leurs femmes éloignées du monde.... (52)

Note that, once again, the privacy of their exchange allows Araminte to comment negatively about tyrannical husbands—observations that she would less likely voice around male interlocutors. The openness of their discussion leads Araminte to ask her friend more intimate questions. When Araminte asks what Clarice would do if she discovered that her husband was unfaithful to her, Clarice shockingly replies that she would take a lover herself. Araminte is surprised that her friend would abandon her reputation in order to seek vengeance. She reminds Clarice that society

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

is quick to judge a woman who is unfaithful to her spouse, even if he is unfaithful himself:

ARAMINTE. La moindre chose ternit notre réputation; tandis que nos maris n'en font pas moins estimés, pour nous contraindre ou pour nous tromper. (56)

Note that, although Araminte is truthful, she sympathizes with Clarice. In fact, Araminte is happy to realize that her friend is of a similar mindset and has not withdrawn from *la vie mondaine* because of a desire to live a life of inimitable virtue, but because she has been made a prisoner in her own household. Through Araminte's foil, Durand paints a dismal picture of married life, which may negatively affect one's ability to maintain a *mondaine* lifestyle.

Unmarried women are less restricted in their movements, but they are likewise advised to be selective in their interactions with men. In Dialogue VII, Dorimene describes her freedom as a *dame galante*:

DORIMENE. Coquette si vous voulez, c'est un joli métier que celui que je fais. Je dors, je mange, je me réjouis, mes yeux sont toujours brillants, mon humeur toujours égale; je recois tout ce qui se présente, je ne cours point après ce qui fuit.... (59)

While Dorimene never pursues men, Cephise, her foil, consistently pines away after a cruel lover who leaves her void of any pleasure in life:

CEPHISE. Sensible jusqu'à l'excès, je pleure, je gémis, je veille; le trouble me saisit, le cœur me bat, sitôt qu'il s'agit de Dorilas; mais aussi, que je goûte de véritables plaisirs quand j'ai lieu d'en être contente! Qu'un moment de calme me paye libéralement de toutes mes agitations! (60)

In the end, Dorimene cannot convince Cephise that throwing herself at the feet of her lover is a wise choice. Dorimene leaves her in mid-sentence:

CEPHISE. Arrêtez; encore un petit mot. Quoi! Vous ne voulez pas m'entendre? (61)

Similarly, in Dialogue VIII, Celinde, a *dame galante*, criticizes Doris, who pursues an indifferent lover rather than allow herself to be wooed by as many suitors as possible. Celinde believes Doris would be more in control of her situation if she took a less aggressive stance:

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

CELINDE. C'est une étrange personnage que celui
d'une femme qui se jette à la tête! Prenez une autre voye;
montrez-vous souvent suivie de vos anciennes conquêtes.
(65)

Yet Doris insists upon chasing the object of her affections, stating: "J'aimerois mieux aimer toute seule, que d'être poursuivie par un homme difficile à rebuter, pour qui je n'aurois aucune inclination" (68). Once again, the voice of reason fails to convince her friend that she is running towards destruction.

In addition to resisting men who do not return their sentiment, other *dames galantes* discourage their female friends from pursuing men who do not appreciate them for their wit and intelligence. In Dialogue V, Constance tries to talk Orphise, her foil, out of obsessing over an unworthy lover, especially since he does not respect Orphise. Orphise, however, believes that women can only gain the affections of men through beauty:

ORPHISE. Mais telle est notre condition. Livrées à la
bagatelle dès notre enfance, on ne nous admet à rien de sérieux; plaire est notre grande affaire. (47)

Constance condemns this attitude, affirming that women should be judged by their minds: "Mais pourquoi ne faisons-nous pas nos efforts pour nous rendre souhaitables par notre esprit" (48)? Through Constance, Durand encourages women to reject unworthy suitors who do not admire them for their intelligence and wit. Women who value themselves as intelligent, independent beings, live more satisfactory lives.

Dialogue III portrays the financial problems that plague single women of aristocratic families and the ruses to which they resort in order to maintain their lifestyle. It features a young woman, Mariane, who brags to her friend Hortense about how she exploited an older gentleman who was in love with her, just to have money to buy the latest styles in clothing. Hortense, unable to convince her friend of her wrongdoing, has the last word:

HORTENSE. Tu as raison. Dès qu'on a franchi les
bornes de la pudeur, rien ne coûte que l'indigence. (42)

It is clear that the voice of reason, Hortense, does not find Mariane's actions the least bit amusing. Instead, Hortense accuses Mariane of abandoning her self-respect. At the same time, she seems rather unsurprised, as if this was a kind of repeat performance that she had observed often among women of her station.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

The anecdote described above would not have been a suitable conversation topic for a group of both men and women. Through the appropriated dialogic form, women were able to openly discuss their points of view in an intimate setting without the presence of a male interlocutor. Through her female interlocutors, Durand encourages both unmarried and married women who have active social lives to make wise choices if they engage in gallantry. The female interlocutors who act as a foil to the voice of reason serve as a warning to other women who neglect their reputations. They emphasize that, even in polite society, women are judged more harshly than men, and that women should take care not to compromise their reputations for a romantic fling.

Durand's gallant dialogues are reflective of the *mondaine* lifestyle which advocated the art of gallantry. Yet many young women from impoverished families of nobility could no longer pursue this way of life. The Hortense/Mariane dialogue showcases a young woman sacrificing her virtue to maintain an aristocratic lifestyle. This contrasts the lessons found in the writings of Maintenon, who sought to keep young aristocratic women born into poor aristocratic families from making similar choices.

Madame de Maintenon

While Durand makes the argument that women will have more agency in their active social lives when they respect the rules of gallantry, Maintenon claims that women will have more agency and earn the respect of their husbands if they reject *la vie mondaine*. While Maintenon was also quick to point out women's less-than-favorable position in society to the female pupils of Saint-Cyr, she emphasized how to navigate a social system that no longer guaranteed a life of ease to women of noble families. Her own life served as a model for the young *Saint-Cyriennes* in whom she attempted to instill such values as hard work and modesty.

Maintenon, otherwise known as Françoise d'Aubigné, was born November 24, 1635 in the prison of Niort to the son of the great Huguenot poet Agrippa d'Aubigné. Because of their extreme poverty, Maintenon was raised by relatives and educated in an Ursuline convent in Paris. A relative's connections in Paris allowed her to meet the poet Paul Scarron, whose marriage proposal Françoise accepted in 1652. In 1669, Mme Scarron, made a pauper by her deceased husband's debt, accepted a position as governess to Mme de Montespan and Louis XIV's illegitimate children. As the relationship with his mistress deteriorated, the king grew fond of Mme Scarron, and he gave her an aristocratic title, after which she became known as Mme de Maintenon. Following the queen's death in

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

1683, Maintenon and the king were secretly married. He and Maintenon built Saint-Cyr, a boarding school for daughters of poor aristocratic families, which she directed until her death there in 1719.¹⁶

Inspired by the conversations written by Mlle de Scudéry, Maintenon's dialogues targeted the older *Saint-Cyriennes* preparing for marriage.¹⁷ Rejecting the gallant nature of Scudéry's conversations,¹⁸ Maintenon wrote to Mme de Montfort, Dame de Saint Louis, in a letter dated September 20, 1691:

Élevez vos filles bien humblement; ne songez qu'à les instruire dans le religion; n'élevez pas leur cœur et leur esprit par des maximes païennes: parlez-leur de celles de l'Évangile. Ne leur apprenez pas les Conversations que j'avois demandées; laissez tomber toutes ces choses là sans en rien dire. (*Lettres* 1: 175–76)

In lieu of Scudéry's conversations, Maintenon wrote her own simple dialogues, able to be dramatized by her female pupils. They were never intended to be performed in public, but on some occasions the King and members of the court were present for private performances.¹⁹ Maintenon referred to her dramatic dialogues as "conversations," a genre Furetière associated not only with Scudéry herself, but also with the act of educating youth.²⁰ Maintenon's goals in writing her dramatic dialogues were not only to entertain her female pupils, but also to give them the occasion to practice their pronunciation (in a society that had traditionally placed such emphasis on their silence):

¹⁶ For more biographical information, see Buckley.

¹⁷ The two volumes of conversations published in the 1688 *Nouvelles conversations de morale* were written specifically for the female students at Saint-Cyr.

¹⁸ Most *salonnières* adhered to the teaching of Saint-François de Sales, who in the *Introduction à la vie dévote* represented "a radical change of position by proposing the compatibility of devout and worldly ways of life" (Craveri 20). This kind of philosophy was much appreciated by many of the *mondaines*. Maintenon would posit the idea that these two lives were not compatible, and thus stopped frequenting the salon altogether.

¹⁹ Gréard writes: "Elles les apprennent de mémoire et les récitent entre elles. Le roi goûtait beaucoup cet exercice. Il aimait à entendre ces conversations; il avait un très grand plaisir à les voir réciter par les demoiselles, et Mme de Maintenon ne manquait pas de les préparer de telle sorte qu'elles servaient même sans affectation à l'instruction des princes et des princesses qui avaient l'honneur de l'accompagner Sa Majesté et des officiers qui formaient sa suite" (100).

²⁰ According to Furetière, the conversation "[...] se dit dans le même sens des assemblées de plusieurs personnes sçavantes & polies. Les conversations des Sçavants instruisent beaucoup: celles des Dames polissent la jeunesse. Mademoiselle de Scudéri, le Chevalier de Méré, ont fait imprimer de belles conversations" (Qtd in Viala 62).

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

J'ai cru qu'il était raisonnable et nécessaire de divertir les enfants, et je l'ai vu pratiquer dans tous les lieux où l'on en a rassemblé; mais j'ai voulu en divertissant celles de Saint-Cyr remplir leur esprit de belles choses dont elles ne seront point honteuses dans le monde, leur apprendre à prononcer, les occuper pour les retirer de la conversation qu'elles ont entre elles, et amuser surtout les grandes qui, depuis quinze jusqu'à vingt ans, s'ennuient un peu de la vie de Saint-Cyr.²¹

Maintenon's dialogues, like Scudéry's, feature three to six characters.²² Maintenon's however, only feature female voices as opposed to the mixed company appearing in Scudéry's conversations. Maintenon's dialogues, like those of her female counterparts, imitate an agonal model, in which one female pupil, representing the voice of reason, opposes the viewpoints of her classmates.

While Scudéry's conversations feature lengthy narration and were intended to be read, Maintenon's dramatic dialogues were intended to be memorized and dramatized in the classroom. Maintenon viewed the dramatic arts as a useful and entertaining pedagogical tool. Between "l'oral" and "l'écrit," Maintenon's dialogues were intended to exploit "le plaisir d'un jeu théâtral" and "l'utilité d'une réflexion ou du moins de connaissances morales." In terms of form, Maintenon's dialogues oscillate between "dialogue théâtral" and "le catéchisme;" between "manuel édifiant" and "analyse psychologique..." (Plagnol-Diéval 55). Maintenon's dramatic dialogues mark a significant contribution to female education. Maintenon further develops the dramatic dialogue genre by assigning it a pedagogical purpose. In her book on *théâtre d'éducation* in the eighteenth-century, Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval credits Madame de Maintenon with having invented a genre later taken up by the Comtesse de Genlis and Madame Campan. Yet, let us not forget that the dramatic dialogue first developed in the salon. The fact that Maintenon also wrote dramatic proverbs gives credence to the idea that she may have been introduced to Durand's dramatic writings through acquaintances that frequented the salon of the Marquise de Lambert.²³

²¹ Letter from Madame de Maintenon à Madame Du Pérou dated February 21, 1701.

²² According to Stefano Guazzo, who wrote *La civil conversazione* (1574), there were to be no more than the number of Muses, and no less than the number of Graces. See Fumaroli 13.

²³ Durand's friend, La Comtesse de Murat, attended the salon of the Marquise de Lambert. Her salon, noted for its focus on literature and the arts, was held twice a week at

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

Though Maintenon's dramatic dialogues mirror Durand's emphasis on the female point of view, they differ philosophically. Originally used to entertain the *salonniers*, Maintenon later transformed the dramatic dialogue, ironically, to preach against the *mondaine* world. Like Durand, Maintenon notes the double standards that place women at a disadvantage. Yet Maintenon encourages women to embrace the private sphere and find satisfaction in the home rather than in society.²⁴ Throughout her dialogues, Maintenon persuades the young *Saint-Cyriennes* to forgo the diversion that dictates the lives of *mondaines*. For instance, in "Sur le travail," the girls discuss the sense of satisfaction that can only result from hard work:

MLLE CLÉMENTINE. J'aime, à la vérité, à me divertir, mais je trouve plus de plaisir à travailler qu'à jouer.

MLLE ODILE. Oh! quel plaisir peut-on prendre à travailler?

MLLE CLÉMENTINE. Celui de faire quelque chose, de ne pas perdre son tems, de s'accoutumer à se passer de divertissemens, et de n'avoir rien à se reprocher. (214-5)²⁵

Mlle Hortense states that a woman's sex confines her to the private sphere. At the same time, she emphasizes the satisfaction that may be found in domestic work:

MLLE HORTENSE. En effet, que peut faire une personne de notre sexe qui ne peut demeurer chez elle, ni trouver son plaisir dans les devoirs de son ménage. Il ne lui reste plus qu'à les chercher dans le jeu des compagnies, les spectacles: y a-t-il rien de si dangereux, non seulement pour la piété, mais même pour la réputation? (216-7)

Hortense indirectly criticizes the *mondaines* who damage their reputations by participating in inappropriate activities. This contrasts with Durand, who advocates an active social life as long as one does not risk compromising one's reputation. In the end, Mlle Hortense is unsuccessful in converting Mlle Odile, who is more interested in imitating the *mondaines*.

the *Hôtel Nevers*. Maintenon's niece, the Comtesse de Caylus, and Fenélon also frequented this salon. For a recent study on Maintenon's dramatic proverbs see Kennedy 2010.

²⁴ As John Conley states in the introduction to *Dialogues and Addresses*, "Maintenon's works transfer the empowerment of women to their own distinctive culture....Women must engender a language, a code of virtue, an ensemble of practical skills, and a method of education that bear the irreducible stamp of the feminine sex" (13-14).

²⁵ All quotations have been taken from the 2011 edition of *Les Loisirs*.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

This dialogue illustrates the difficulty that Maintenon had in convincing the *Saint-Cyriennes* to accept work values that they must have more or less associated with the bourgeoisie, and even with their servants.

Unlike her contemporary Durand, Maintenon does not advise women to engage in gallantry or to find pleasure in the company of men. She does however encourage young women to speak wisely and with confidence in their presence. In “*Sur la bonne contenance*,” Maintenon dismisses the notion that women must speak to men with lowered gazes, so as to assume a position of inferiority:

MLLE MARCELLE. Je croyais que la modestie étoit d’avoir les yeux baissés.

MLLE FLORIDE. C’est un effet de la modestie, mais elle doit être encore plus dans l’esprit que dans l’extérieur.

MLLE MARCELLE. Vous permettriez donc qu’on levât les yeux?

MLLE FLORIDE. Oui, certainement, il faut les lever quand on veut voir quelque chose, et c’est même un manque de respect de ne pas regarder ceux à qui on parle.

MLLE VALÉRIE. On peut regarder un homme, si on a envie de le voir?

MLLE IRÈNE. Il seroit à désirer qu’on n’en ait jamais envie, et je vous avoue que je suis toujours choquée quand j’entends dire à une personne de notre sexe: Un tel est agréable, ou affreux, il a les yeux beaux, la bouche grande, le nez bien fait, etc. (255–6)

All four characters conclude that timidity is unadvisable in social situations, and that one should speak with confidence to the opposite sex. At the same time, it is clear that gallantry is strictly forbidden. Addressing these young women of impoverished noble families, Maintenon sets out to remind them that they must hold fast to the only thing that remains—their honor.

In “*Sur la réputation*,” Maintenon warns of young men who seek to seduce young women:

VALÉRIE. Quoi! Si un homme vous dit qu’il est charmé de vous, vous le croirez par charité?

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

ANASTASIE. Il faut que je le croie ou que je l'accuse de mensonge.

VALÉRIE. Oui Mademoiselle, c'est un mensonge; il n'est point charmé de vous; il vous le dit pour vous gagner et pour vous perdre ensuite.

PLACIDE. Vous faites les hommes bien méchants.

VALÉRIE. Ils le sont en effet...(321)

While Durand depicts a successful society woman as one who engages in gallantry, here Maintenon proposes that women will always fall prey to ill-intentioned men.

Whereas many of Durand's female interlocutors promote the idea that marriage should give them a license to gallivant, Maintenon constantly reminds the *Saint-Cyriennes* of their station and the fact that they cannot afford the same freedoms enjoyed by their male counterparts. In "Sur la lecture," Maintenon stresses the fact that married women should attempt to please their husbands, rather than entertain themselves. She discourages those *Saint-Cyriennes* who wrongly associate marriage with freedom:

LUCIE. En quoi consiste ce soin de plaire à son mari? Faut-il passer son temps à s'ajuster?

GABRIELLE. Le mariage est quelque chose de plus sérieux: Les moyens de plaire à son mari sont d'étudier ses goûts et de s'y conformer, de faire sa volonté et jamais la nôtre. (357)

Yet Maintenon softens the blow in "Sur le murmure" by reminding the *Saint-Cyriennes* that everyone is subject to someone else:

ANTOINETTE. C'est la dépendance qui porte au murmure; on est libre quand on a atteint un certain âge.

ZOÉ. Et qui est-ce qui est libre? non seulement notre sexe dépend toujours, mais les hommes même dépendent les uns des autres. (361)

As emphasized in "Sur le bon esprit," the ideal married woman does not develop her reputation in society, but instead finds contentment in the home:

MLLE CÉLESTINE. Ah! Comment pouvez-vous vous plaire à travailler depuis le matin jusqu'au soir à un ouvrage où l'on fait toujours la même chose....

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

MLLE AGATHINE. Et moi, Mademoiselle, j'y prends beaucoup de plaisir: lorsque je suis à mon métier je n'ai point l'esprit inquiet des affaires d'autrui, j'ai le contentement de voir avancer mon ouvrage, et la satisfaction quand il est achevé, d'avoir fait quelque chose: je ne suis point exposée à des conversations satyriques, qui me pourroient faire offenser Dieu; je ne suis point dans une oisiveté qui me causeroit de l'ennui, et lorsque je repasse dans mon esprit ce que j'ai fait, je suis tres contente de n'avoir ni la paresse, ni les discours inutiles à me reprocher: je me couche contente et je dors sans inquiétude. (93)

In the end, Mlle Agathine fails to convince Mlle Célestine that domesticated life makes one happy. Mlle Célestine represents the attitude of most *Saint-Cyriennes*, who clung to the notion that marriage offered financial stability and the freedom to pursue the pleasures of *mondaineté*—a misconception perpetuated by some of Durand's female interlocutors. While Durand depicted marriage as a stumbling block for *mondaines*, Maintenon believed that women would find a sense of peace and a sense of self-worth only in their domestic lives. Maintenon's ideas support the goals of the state, namely strengthening the familial structures of the aristocracy.

Conclusion

Maintenon and Durand merit our attention as the first women writers to use the dramatic dialogue to address the question of women's behavior from an exclusively female point of view. The dramatic dialogue offered women an intimate forum in which they could discuss the female condition. Their dialogic format allowed women to discuss and rehearse the codes of conduct. These women writers also merit our attention since they participate in the development of new genres. Both Durand's and Maintenon's appropriation of the dramatic dialogue represent a significant contribution to women's writing in the context of the salon at the end of the seventeenth century. As Delphine Denis states, there is a need in the university and academic settings today to understand the *culture mondaine* and acknowledge its collaborative contribution to the belles-lettres (11). Maintenon's writings represent a major contribution to female education. Her use of salon-inspired dialogue and role play would continue as a tradition well into the eighteenth century, moving such women as Madame

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

de Genlis to write educational plays for use in the home.²⁶ Young women thus continued to benefit from a more engaging instructional experience. Yet, as the dramatic dialogue on female comportment was translated from “salon” to “classroom,” it became a vehicle for increasingly conservative notions of female behavior that dominated the eighteenth century. Maintenon’s pedagogical drama advocating bourgeois values such as domesticity signals the end of gallantry both as a form of literature and as a way of life for aristocratic women.

Baylor University

²⁶ See for instance *Théâtre à l’usage des jeunes personnes en quatre tomes* (1779–1780) and *Théâtre de société* (1781).

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

Works Cited

- Buckley, Veronica. *Madame de Maintenon: The Secret Wife of Louis XIV*. London: Bloomsbury, 2008.
- Carmontelle. *Proverbes et comédies posthumes de Carmontel précédés d'une notice par Madame La Comtesse de Genlis*. Paris: Chez Ladvocat, 1825.
- Cazanave, Claire. *Le Dialogue à l'âge classique*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007.
- Craveri, Benedetta. *The Age of Conversation*. New York: New York Review Books, 2005.
- DeJean, Joan. *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Des Roches, Catherine. *Les Secondes œuvres*. Ed. Anne Larsen. Genève: Droz, 1998.
- Durand, Catherine. *Œuvres de Madame Durand*. 6 vols. Paris: Prault, 1757.
- Fumaroli, Marc. *Le Genre des genres littéraires français: la conversation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Furetière, Antoine. *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement les mots français tant vieux que modernes*. Tome Second. Paris: La Haye et Rotterdam; A.&R. Leers, 1690.
- Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.
- Gréard, Octave. "Saint-Cyr." *Le Nouveau Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'Instruction primaire*. Ed. F. Buisson. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1911. Institut français de l'éducation. <<http://www.inrp.fr/edition-electronique/lodel/dictionnaire-ferdinand-buisson/document.php?id=3572>>.
- Kennedy, Theresa. "Madame de Maintenon's proverbes inédits: Words to live by." *Women in French Studies Journal* 18 (2010): 29–42.

GENDER PERFORMANCE IN DIALOGUE

- Lambert, Anne Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, marquise de. *Avis d'une mère à sa fille: Suivis des réflexions sur les femmes*. Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages, 2007.
- Lazard, Madeleine. *Le Théâtre en France au XVIe siècle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980.
- Legault, Marianne. *Female Intimacies in Seventeenth-Century French Literature*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.
- Maintenon, Madame de. *Dialogues and Addresses*. Ed. and trans. John. J. Conley, S.J. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- . *Lettres historiques et édifiantes*. Ed. Th. Lavallée. Vol. 1. Paris: Charpentier, 1856.
- . *Les Loisirs de Madame de Maintenon*. Édition de Constant Venesoen. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011.
- Méré, Antoine Gombaud, Chevalier de. *Œuvres complètes du chevalier de Méré*. Vol. 1, Paris: F. Roches, 1930.
- Plagnol-Diéval, Marie-Emmanuelle. *Madame de Genlis et le théâtre d'éducation au XVIIIe siècle*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997.
- Scudéry, Madeleine de. *De l'air galant et autres conversations: Pour une étude de l'archive galante*. Ed. Delphine Denis. Paris: Champion, 1998.
- Smarr, Janet Levarie. *Joining the Conversation: Dialogues by Renaissance Women*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Stedman, Allison. *Rococo Fiction in France, 1600–1715: Seditious Frivolity*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013.
- Viala, Alain. *La France galante*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008.