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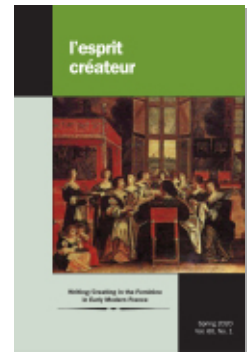
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Changing the Conversation: Re-positioning the French Seventeenth-Century Salon

Faith E. Beasley

SINCE THE 1970S, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have devoted considerable critical ink to illuminating the role of women writers in early modern France, and to examining the cultural institution they inhabited, the *ruelle* or salon. In 1983, *L'Esprit Créateur*, often at the forefront of scholarly trends, published its first issue devoted entirely to women writers. "Women's Writing in 17th-century France," edited by Joan DeJean, was a seminal and influential collection of articles that was the first of its kind on either side of the Atlantic.¹ Each article was devoted to an individual woman writer with the primary purpose of resurrecting these female literary voices from the shadows of France's canonical *Grand Siècle*. This volume was a revelation and an inspiration to a host of early modern scholars who subsequently joined in these efforts to rediscover women writers and analyze their literary contributions. The following years witnessed the development of conferences and panels devoted to Villedieu, Lafayette, d'Aulnoy, and Scudéry, among others, the emergence of dissertations and myriad historical and literary studies, and the creation of book series, teaching manuals, and courses devoted to women writers. The French classical literary landscape was permanently altered by this resurrection of female-authored works. Today the early modern women writers who appeared in that first *L'Esprit Créateur* issue are accepted as artists whose works can be taught alongside Corneille, Racine, and Molière. In the space of a generation, survey courses of seventeenth-century French literature have been transformed. One can hardly imagine a colleague offering a course on France's *Grand Siècle* devoted exclusively to the male-authored canon, a course that was a centerpiece of the French literature curriculum in the not-so-distant past.

The publication of this current issue of *L'Esprit Créateur* almost forty years later seems an appropriate moment to reflect on how scholarship on women in the early modern period has changed in the intervening years and the effect that this scholarship has had on early modern literary studies. Perhaps the most far-reaching development has been the integration of women writers into 'mainstream' survey courses and scholarship of this canonical period. Scholars and teachers have moved from a focus on individual women

writers and courses dedicated solely to female-authored texts to reinserting these works into their literary and cultural contexts and exploring women writers' influence on the cultural sphere. Others have gone a step further and have focused on the engagements between women writers and their celebrated male contemporaries. In *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Women Writers*, for example, each contributor creates a conversation between a woman writer and their contemporaries, usually male, from the traditional French pantheon of 'great writers' to illustrate how women's voices and texts were an integral component of literary culture.² Such work restores women to the position that, in the opinion of many scholars, they occupied in early modern literary culture: women were not separate, distinct voices, nor were their works simply admired as interesting curiosities. Rather, women were considered valued interlocutors on a par with the writers today judged to be among the most revered in French literary history. This reinsertion of women into the very fabric of literary culture has led scholars to reexamine the Corneilles, Racines, and Molières of France's literary past, and to advance a perspective that would have been dismissed as preposterous not too long ago: in order to understand the well-known male canon of French literary history one must read their works in a complex context that was created by both genders.

This re-insertion of seventeenth-century women writers into the French classical literary canon has necessitated a re-evaluation of the location of literary creativity most identified with women, the *ruelle* or salon. The study of the transformation in the conception and depiction of salon culture illustrates the trajectory of feminist scholarship since the 1980s and the profound changes that new interpretive strategies have brought to our understanding of France's *Grand Siècle*. Scholars such as myself who have studied seventeenth-century French salon culture since the 1980s have often had to confront the prevailing stereotypes surrounding the *ruelles* that were propagated by the likes of Molière and subsequently ingrained in cultural memory.³ I once had a colleague equate seventeenth-century salons with Oprah Winfrey's book clubs, viewing them as places where a non-intellectual female public could imitate their more learned contemporaries, who were assumed to be male, and converse about literature. According to this perspective, salon sociability consisted of discussions around minor literary genres, parlor games, food, and were feminocentric. Salon culture, like Oprah's book clubs, thus had only an ephemeral value and influence on the world of 'real' ideas and knowledge. According to this assessment, the women who inhabit these social spaces are passive consumers, often in need of guidance from a male luminary, in the

case of the *ruelles*, or study questions such as those found in many books catering to audiences of book clubs. Even today many scholars contend that salons of the Ancien Régime had no serious influence on the Republic of Letters or French thought because they were, in these scholars' estimation, private, elite gatherings that produced minor literature.⁴ Real knowledge may have been generated through conversation, but the agents of such meaningful and truly influential conversation gathered not in the *hôtels particuliers* of a Madeleine de Scudéry but in the *cabinets* and *cercles* composed of the real gifts to French thought, its male philosophers and thinkers. According to critical coinage, salon culture is monolithic; there is little difference between its incarnation in the seventeenth century and its eighteenth-century avatar. In both manifestations, women are hostesses, not producers of either valuable literature or ideas. Historians often characterize *ruelles* as private extensions of elite court culture, divorced from the scholarly world, or even from reality.

Particularly outside of the Hexagon, historians and literary scholars have worked productively across disciplinary boundaries to reshape our understanding of the classical literary field by including gender as a key force in the Republic of Letters. There has been a methodological shift away from the study of authors as individuals to a focus on how literature is produced through collaborative networks, which has led to innovative ways to unearth and reevaluate women's participation in the production of literature and knowledge. This shift away from the primacy of the author and his/her text to an exploration of how literature was produced, and knowledge transmitted and created, has required scholars to recognize that the literary realm functioned differently during the early modern period. Creative spaces as well as literature's creators were not only those that succeeding generations deemed the most influential or valuable. When we shine light on the experience of literature, when we examine literature and the emergence of ideas as products of collaboration rather than individual creative genius, it becomes apparent that the Republic of Letters was not governed solely by men for men. Seventeenth-century France bears a remarkable female imprint.

The evolution of feminist scholarship on the early modern period, combined with new methodologies developed in concert with cultural historians of print and the history of ideas, has led scholars to challenge the way salons have been inscribed in cultural memory. As cultural historians have reexamined how knowledge was produced and how the texts that transmitted this knowledge came into existence, they have illuminated how women contributed to the shaping of the Republic of Letters. Female agency has surfaced in the various networks that scholars have carefully reconstituted, as well as

in studies devoted to the history of reading and textual production.⁵ As scholars such as Roger Chartier remind us, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, there were modes of interacting with ideas, texts, and books that we no longer experience or appreciate. While an individual engaging with and enjoying a text alone and silently was becoming more common, the early modern public was more likely to encounter texts in small groups, often orally, reading passages aloud together as authors composed them, and sharing letters received. Engagement with a text in the early modern period was often a very social activity.⁶ Given that in seventeenth-century France much of this activity occurred in the salon, the institution created and dominated by women, these recent scholarly trends must take gender into account. Salons have received renewed attention as loci of networks and foyers for literary innovation and reception.

In order to continue to revise the stereotypical view of the salon that became ingrained in cultural memory, we must go a step further in our recuperation of women's voices and reexamine not just the textual remnants bequeathed to us from the salons; we must reconceptualize and restore to its central place the primary vehicle women used to have an impact on literary culture and the history of ideas: conversation. If salons and their impact have been misunderstood or erased, it is due in large measure to our methodology as historians as well as literary critics. We have not considered conversation to have the same potential as the printed word to illuminate and understand the past. This valorization of print over oral methods of transmission and the inability to consider conversation a tool in the creation of knowledge and not simply a product of a narrowly defined concept of sociability have contributed to the tendency to deny salon culture a defining role and influence on the Republic of Letters and on the history of ideas. The same scholarly practices that devalue orality relegate spaces such as salons to the realm of the private. In both instances, the practices and loci most identified with women are assigned to the margins and have distorted our understanding of the working of seventeenth-century French culture and women's place in this world.

While scholars can all concur that conversation was a central cultural practice of early modern intellectual exchanges through the Enlightenment, and that French salon culture was the foyer that developed the rules for engagement in this art, as well as the spaces in which conversation flourished, we have tended to regard conversation as a form of sociability, and *salonnières* as hostesses who facilitated these exchanges. Even recent scholars such as Marc Fumaroli, Bernadette Craveri, and Emmanuel Godo, to name only a few who have acknowledged the importance of conversation and its speci-

ficity to French culture, do not regard worldly conversation, especially as developed by women in a salon context, as a vehicle for the production of knowledge, nor have they explored the influence these conversations may have had on literary and cultural production and the history of thought.⁷ Seventeenth-century France provides the most fertile terrain for re-conceptualizing conversation as a tool wielded by women to create knowledge. *Le Grand Siècle* marks both the beginnings of the association between French cultural identity and in many ways the apogee of the art of conversation. Emmanuel Godo characterizes the seventeenth century as the time when conversation reigns supreme.⁸ The confluence of the development of the salons and the art of conversation produced a particular form of this art in France, an art that was associated, like the *ruelles*, with a particular gender.⁹ Godo explains that conversation during this period defines itself as a “feminine art,” one that is practiced by women and men alike, but one in which women are considered the masters and men are encouraged to emulate them. But like many scholars, Godo distinguishes worldly conversation associated with salons from the more intellectual exchanges that occurred in academies. According to this genealogy, *salonnières* benefited from their enlightened male guests but did not add their own light to the conversations that occurred in the salons. Salon conversations are an attribute of sociability but do not contribute to knowledge creation. While this sociability is acknowledged as having resulted in collaborative literary ventures—especially works by women who, according to this familiar script, would not have been able to produce their texts without the precious aid of their male collaborators—we have rarely examined how the production of any text in the salon milieu benefited from and was influenced by the collaborative reading and resulting conversations that were the hallmark of salon sociability.

My own recent work on France’s encounter with India during *le Grand Siècle* has led me to challenge these prevailing views of salon culture and its relationship to the creation of knowledge and literature. As I reconstructed the networks that created the century’s perception of India, associations and exchanges that were united in a prominent salon of the period, and sought to reconstruct how India entered the French imaginary during the period of France’s first sustained interactions with India, it became clear that perceptions of India were created within and not simply transmitted by salon culture. This unveiling of women’s participation in the history of ideas required, however, a different conceptualization of salon culture and of conversation. Sociability and its mode of interaction, conversation, generated a way of thinking about and perceiving this unknown culture. It became clear to me that when

we take into account how texts were experienced, how people created the new ideas that surface in the written artifacts we possess, how salon interlocutors engaged with them and discussed them, this active encounter with texts, especially in salons, generated new and influential ideas. In constructing our intellectual history, we have undervalued and underexplored the power and influence of the sociability of literary culture on the history of thought because we have valorized and privileged the written word, but a written word divorced from the dynamic context that produced it, a context in which women and conversation played a crucial role.

Interrogating the primary tool of seventeenth-century French sociability, conversation, opens new avenues for a reconsideration of salon culture, women's texts and female agency, and the influence all three have had in the history of ideas. Through conversation, women exert influence on literary creation, in addition to adding to the world of knowledge through their own writings. The intellectual collaboration that occurred in salons had profound effects that have often remained in the shadows due to our preconceptions concerning salons and conversation. Conversation is of course ephemeral; one could argue that we can never know what salon interlocutors were saying in reaction to a specific text, nor what members of a salon, for example, were thinking or arguing. But it is possible to resurrect hypothetical conversations by following the traces and references left in the texts we know were produced at the same time and elaborated when their authors were participating in a particular space. If we construct a conversation between the written artifacts, such as correspondences, philosophical texts, novels, fables, and memoirs that we know were produced in a particular salon milieu, we can reconstitute hypothetical but plausible conversations. When we read texts as discrete entities emerging from the seventeenth century in general, we get one reading. But a different reading is often possible if we read works as products of conversations in a specific salon milieu.

A fascinating story of France's engagement with India comes to light when one uses the approach to history and textual analysis I am proposing. This story illustrates the dynamics of seventeenth-century salon culture, the influential role women played, and the possibilities for a reconsideration of our ideas concerning the workings of early modern culture when we are liberated from the prejudices developed around salons, conversation, and female agency in the years following the seventeenth century. Intellectual collaboration through the art of conversation influenced the creation not only of texts but of knowledge, in this case of India.¹⁰ There was one salon that served as a clearing house for knowledge about India in seventeenth-century France, the

salon of Marguerite de La Sablière. In the historical record, La Sablière exists primarily as the *mécène* to Jean de La Fontaine, who lived with her beginning in the 1670s. One historian expresses the sentiments of many when he writes that this relationship to a great male writer was enough to ensure La Sablière's immortality: "pour se survivre [...] il lui a suffi d'avoir été l'amie fidèle et dévouée de La Fontaine."¹¹ As is common in most historical portraits of salon women, La Sablière's personal travaux with love are usually foregrounded. Her life is summed up succinctly: she "fut une jolie femme spirituelle et savante, [...] on lui presta des aventures; elle eut une grande passion; elle se convertit et mourut pénitente" (Hallays 49). Bernadette Craveri in her *L'âge de la conversation* subtitles her chapter on La Sablière "L'absolu du sentiment" and opens her account with the following description:

La personnalité de Mme de la Sablière se distinguait par une adhésion totale aux lois de l'instinct et du goût. Mais chez la plus charmante des dames du Grand Siècle, ces deux termes n'évoquaient pas seulement une supériorité esthétique et morale; ils annonçaient une nouvelle sensibilité encline à privilégier les émotions et les élans du cœur.¹²

While Craveri does enumerate all the personalities who attended La Sablière's salon through the 1670s, she nonetheless devotes a large part of her chapter to La Sablière's love affair with Charles Auguste de la Fare, which Craveri identifies as the event that led La Sablière to renounce the world and eventually to convert to Catholicism and retreat to the Hospice des incurables to do good works under the tutelage of the abbé de Rancé to order to atone for her amorous transgressions.¹³

This biography of La Sablière shapes the image of this woman into someone who conforms to the gender stereotypes that are more acceptable to the collective memory, as it relegates salon activity safely to the realm of the private. But when we approach La Sablière's salon differently, as a public space for the experience and creation of literature and ideas, we can hear another story that illustrates the capacity of salon sociability to produce knowledge through conversation. Missing from conventional descriptions of La Sablière and her salon is a sense of how those who participated in her salon engaged in the practice of literature and ideas, and what effect their engagement had on early modern French thought. During her lifetime, La Sablière was acknowledged to be one of the most learned women of her era.¹⁴ Like many *salonnières*, she drew together leading intellectuals, religious leaders, writers, politicians, and travelers, such as Charles Perrault, Paul Pellisson, Conrart, Fontenelle, the marquise de Lambert, Huet, Testu, and Bouhours. La Sablière's brother, Pierre Hessein, who frequented her salon, was friends with

Racine and Boileau. Her closest female friends were Lafayette and Sévigné. Other salon habitués included Scudéry, Chapelle, and scientists such as Roberval and Sauveur. She had a telescope on her roof. This milieu was thus diverse, influential, intrigued by new ideas, and prolific. Some of France's most celebrated texts were composed when their authors were meeting at La Sablière's, works such as Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, La Fontaine's second volume of *Fables*, and Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. And many of these texts have traces of the encounter with India.

This curious common characteristic can be explained by the fact that the central figure in La Sablière's salon, and her mentor and tutor, was not La Fontaine but François Bernier, a philosopher often characterized as a libertine intellectual who spent twelve years in India. Bernier's connection to La Sablière has been almost erased from history, even though he dedicated many of his works to her and corresponded with her on a variety of topics. Upon his return from India, he actually lived with La Sablière, like La Fontaine, and was a fixture in her salon where "le mogol," as he was known, regaled his interlocutors with stories about his experiences in India.

Bernier was the first European intellectual to go to India and return to write and publish his knowledge about a culture few of his compatriots had yet encountered. He was not a merchant, nor was he part of any diplomatic mission. He went solely out of curiosity. His texts are not travel narratives but rather a history of and reflections on India. They had a different status than any other narratives on India because his French contemporaries respected Bernier as a trusted and impartial interlocutor. These texts influenced how Europe perceived India through the eighteenth century and beyond. As I argue in *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal*, Bernier's texts were influential, but it was the conversations he had especially with the members of La Sablière's salon that helped shape the way France viewed India.¹⁵ Bernier's knowledge of India circulated in both written form and through conversations in the most important literary, scientific, and philosophical circles of Europe, many of whose participants were united throughout the 1670's in La Sablière's salon.

When we analyze Bernier's works in the salon context in which they were received, as illustrations of the worldly encounters and conversations elaborated in salon culture, we obtain a much clearer sense of what these ideas actually were. Traditionally, scholars focus on only one letter and try to determine Bernier's opinion of India. It is clear when one reads the whole corpus, however, that this knowledge of India and the texts that convey it were created in conversation with worldly salon culture, and not just for the male intellectual elite. Bernier experienced and wrote about India differently because he was in

contact with this milieu while in India and when he composed his texts. The conversations about these texts and Bernier's experiences that took place in La Sablière's salon following his return from India then affected how India was perceived, shaped the mindset of his contemporaries, and became inscribed in the works they composed. This new contextualization of one of the most influential accounts of India reveals a different Bernier, but also a different conception of India held by his contemporaries.

What is the India that emerges from these texts? How does Bernier's India indicate a conversation between France and India mediated through salon culture? Bernier designed his texts not just to be read silently, but to be discussed, to launch new ideas. There is a conversation that develops among his various texts on India, one that I maintain was supplemented by salon conversation. By piecing together references to India across texts produced by members of La Sablière's salon, and by reading these texts in light of Bernier's own texts, one can recreate these hypothetical but plausible conversations. Bernier's texts contain details, themes, and information that other works devoted to India, such as those by Thomas Roe and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, do not. Many of these characteristics can be explained by the fact that Bernier was engaging with the worldly milieu unique to seventeenth-century France.

In *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal*, I reconstruct some of these conversations. One thread that emerges, for example, is Bernier's interest in women's position and agency at the Indian Mughal court. Like seventeenth-century *nouvelles historiques*, Bernier highlights women's participation in Mughal history.¹⁶ Bernier includes the princesses, wives, life in the seraglio, and women's religious practices, both Hindu and Muslim. He inscribes women who lived long before he arrived in India, women like Nur Jahan, who was the powerful wife of Jahangir, who ruled at the beginning of the century. Describing the influence of the reigning emperor Aurangzeb's sisters, Bernier writes:

J'ai cru même ne devoir pas oublier ces deux princesses, [Jahanara and Raushanara,] parce qu'elles ont été des plus importants personnages de la tragédie, les femmes dans les Indes ayant fort souvent, [...] la meilleure part dans ce qui se passe de plus grand quoique bien souvent on n'y prenne pas garde et qu'on se rompe la tête à en chercher d'autres causes.¹⁷

These references allude to plausible conversations that might have occurred in salons about women's roles in society, and they illustrate Bernier's desire to address and draw the interest of a worldly public in his texts in India. The India conveyed through conversation and Bernier's texts that inspired these conversations cannot be conflated with the exoticized, Orientalized, Eastern world we have come to associate with western views of the

East. In concert with his salon public, he offers a different vision of India, even of the seraglio, than we have come to expect. It is a place that has affinities with seventeenth-century France where women were a force to be reckoned with and influenced history and culture.

This is how Lafayette, for example, could have understood India thanks to her experience with Bernier, his texts, and their probable conversations in La Sablière's salon. While a member of this salon, Lafayette composed her famous novel *La Princesse de Clèves*. Like Bernier's account of the Mughal court, Lafayette's portrayal of the court of Henri II stresses female influence on the ambiance of the court as well as on the political events that unfold. The celebrated author inscribes India into some of the most important scenes of her innovative and controversial novel. In the famous reverie scene, Lafayette chose "une canne des Indes" as a prop for her princess's most creative, introspective, and provocative moment. When read in the context of Lafayette's engagement with India in La Sablière's salon, the author can be seen as signalling her intent for this scene to be read as part of the conversations about India taking place, especially at La Sablière's salon. She has her fictional princess use a "canne des Indes" to create a world of passion that she herself can control.¹⁸ Inspired by the conversations about India initiated by Bernier, Lafayette teaches her readers that one must look outside the familiar for inspiration in order to create something exceptional and new. She instructs her readers to interpret the princess's actions as forceful acts of female empowerment. Lafayette uses her "canne des Indes" as a powerful tool that connotes female agency as it points to the existence of other worlds as well as alternative ways of existing in one's own world.

Interpreting Lafayette's provocative text through Bernier's works and in light of the conversations he plausibly inspired endows this celebrated novel with new meaning. The princess's actions have often been interpreted as a renunciation of happiness in favor of duty to the memory of her dead husband. But Lafayette can be seen as instructing us to read her princess through the lens of India as depicted by Bernier, an India with strong female agency. Arguably Lafayette's contemporaries, particularly those who were present in La Sablière's salon and who engaged with Bernier and his texts, would have perceived these allusions to India much more easily than readers in succeeding centuries.

Marguerite de La Sablière, as well as other members of her celebrated although now forgotten salon would have taken issue with Germaine de Staël's later description of the art of conversation, particularly with her statement that "les idées ni les connaissances qu'on peut y développer n'en sont

pas le principal intérêt; c'est une certaine manière d'agir les uns sur les autres [...] de parler aussitôt qu'on pense."¹⁹ For La Sablière and her interlocutors, ideas and “connaissances” were the raw materials, the threads, that allowed conversation to occur. The pleasure of salon conversation and sociability in seventeenth-century France lay not only in the act of conversing, but in the weaving of the individual threads of experience, knowledge, texts, and ideas that each contributor brought to the conversation. The end product was not simply the pleasure of social interaction so prized by Staël, but rather the new knowledge, the innovative and complex tapestry of ideas woven out of these threads. Form was important and pleasurable, but the participants in La Sablière's salon valued the content of the conversation, the new fabrics woven from these new threads, over all else. When we listen to the voices that have often been suppressed over the years and understand sociability and conversation as modes of creating knowledge, salon culture and the women who created and dominated this world regain their agency in literary culture and in the history of ideas. Reconstructing the conversations that occurred around literature and ideas revives how texts were produced, lived, and received. When we revive the practice of literature and include the full range of publics rather than only the male intellectual elite, we can construct a new history of literature and of *mentalités*. We can change the conversation.

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Notes

1. *L'Esprit Créateur*, “Women's Writing in 17th-century France,” Joan DeJean, ed., 23:2 (1983). It should be noted that the initial recovery of seventeenth-century French women's voices was a phenomenon that occurred outside of the Hexagon and was led primarily by American scholars such as Joan DeJean, Nancy K. Miller, Domna Stanton, and Gabrielle Verdier.
2. Faith E. Beasley, ed., *Teaching Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Women Writers* (New York: MLA, 2011).
3. I devoted an entire book to revising the concept of seventeenth-century salon culture and its influence on the Republic of Letters: *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).
4. Antoine Lilti adopts this position in his *Le monde des salons*, which has recently been translated into English and published by Oxford. See Elena Russo's critique of this position. Review of *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, by Antoine Lilti. *Reviews in History*, 2041 (2016), <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/2041>.
5. There have been several conferences devoted to early modern networks, such as the annual meeting of the North American Society for Seventeenth-Century French Literature organized by Michèle Longino and Ellen Welch at Duke and the University of North Carolina in spring 2014. Some of the proceedings of that conference are now available in print. See *Networks, Interconnection, Connectivity*, Michèle Longino and Ellen Welch, eds., *Biblio 17* (Tübingen: Narr Verlag, 2015).

6. In “Loisir et sociability,” for example, Roger Chartier examines the ways in which reading aloud remained an essential part of both elite and popular culture, even as the solitary enjoyment of a text was gaining popularity among the elite. “Loisir et sociabilité: Lire à haute voix dans l’Europe moderne,” *Littératures classiques*, 12 (1990): 127–47.
7. In *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*, I explore the evolution and influence of conversation on the development of literary form as well as literary criticism, focusing on the particular formulations of conversation in the *ruelles* of seventeenth-century France. See especially chapter one. In the present study, however, I am suggesting that we go farther and develop a methodology that reconstitutes conversations and works to determine their influence on *mentalités* and knowledge production, instead of focusing solely on how the form influenced print culture.
8. The title of the chapter devoted to the seventeenth century is “Le XVII^e siècle ou la conversation souveraine,” in *Une histoire de la conversation* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015). See Godo’s work for an excellent discussion of the development of conversation and its influences. It should be underscored that Godo and others distinguish conversation as practiced in the seventeenth century from the form it took in the eighteenth century, a position that underscores the need to distinguish between the salons and their use of conversation in the two centuries.
9. See Marc Fumaroli for a discussion of the development of conversation in France in “La conversation,” in *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 3, Pierre Nora, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). I offer an alternative view that contrasts with Fumaroli’s in *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*, especially pp.303–6. In his history of conversation, Godo grants the *ruelles/salons* more importance than does Fumaroli for the development of France’s particular brand of conversation.
10. What follows here is a very brief summary of the approach to salon culture that I used in *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal* (Toronto: Toronto U P, 2018).
11. André Hallays, “Le salon de Mme de la Sablière,” *Les grands salons littéraires* (Paris: Payot, 1928), 49.
12. Bernadette Craveri, *L’âge de la conversation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 311.
13. John Conley’s portrait in his *Suspicion of Virtue* is focused on this final chapter of La Sablière’s existence and the penitent writings that document the mind of this woman in her final years, texts that offer a portrait of a woman that conforms more to posterity’s view of what was an acceptable life for a woman, but a portrait that is in stark contrast with La Sablière’s life as the century’s most intellectual *salonnière*. *The Suspicion of Virtue: Women Philosophers in Neoclassical France* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 2002), 76. Historians often repeat the marquise de Lambert’s description, taken out of context, that La Sablière “n’a jamais pensé [...] elle n’a fait que sentir.”
14. When La Sablière’s mother died in 1649, her uncle Antoine Menjot and her cousin, Madeleine Gaudon de la Raillière, marquise de Saint-Aignon, took responsibility for her education. She studied Greek and Latin, math, and especially science and astronomy. Corbinelli even said of her, “She understands Homer as well as we understand Virgil” (cited in Conley, *Suspicion of Virtue*, 76). Conley states that “Several histories of science cite Mme de la Sablière’s pioneering role as a woman astronomer” (77).
15. In 1670, Bernier published with Barbin (Lafayette’s publisher) his *Histoire de la dernière révolution des états du Grand Mogol*, and later that same year *Les événements particuliers*, which details the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s court, and his *Lettre de l’étendue de l’Hindoustan* addressed to Colbert. In 1671, the *Suite des mémoires du Sieur Bernier sur l’empire du Grand Mogol* was published by Barbin, which contains letters to La Mothe le Vayer, Chapelain, and Chapelle, and an account of his trip to Kashmir with the emperor, which takes the form of nine letters to M. de Merveilles. Twenty-five years later the editor Paul Marret in Amsterdam published all the writings under the title *Voyages de François Bernier*.
16. Jean Chapelain was a public intellectual who was equally at home in the scholarly world, the court, and salon culture. He wrote to Bernier in 1661 when the traveler was in India and instructed him to be especially attentive to the status of women at the Mughal court: “Cela me fait souvenir de ce qui m’avait échappé, de la manière dont on traite là les femmes; si elles y sont en plus grande considération que dans la Turquie et dans la Perse, et si elles y

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reçoivent les visites d'autres que de ceux de leur maison, car cela sert fort à rendre les langues polies, à cause qu'on leur veut plaire, et à cause que, dans la communication avec elles, les hommes apprennent à adoucir la rudesse de la prononciation, que la mollesse naturelle des organes des femmes amollit et facilite insensiblement. C'est encore un article à ne pas laisser sans le toucher." *Correspondance*, Tamizey de Larroque, ed. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1783), 2:169.

17. François Bernier, *Voyages, 1671–1672; Un libertin dans l'Inde Moghole: Les voyages de François Bernier (1656–1669)*, Frédéric Tinguely, ed. (Paris: Chandeigne, 2008), 53.
18. See chapter two of my *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal* for a complete reading of Lafayette's novel in this context.
19. "De l'esprit de conversation," *De l'Allemagne* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), 102.