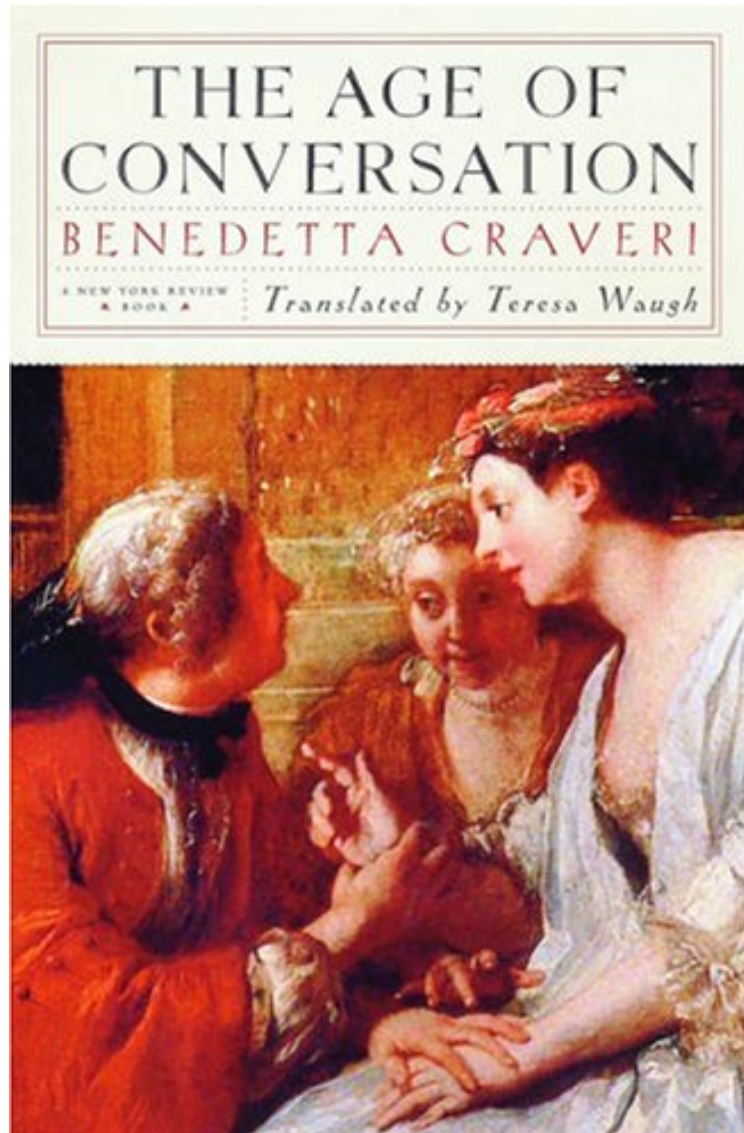


The Age of Conversation

Benedetta Craveri

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Benedetta Craveri : The Age of Conversation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Age of Conversation:

21 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Noble talkingBy Csar Gonzlez RoucoThe description on the synopsis of the book provided by the "Book reviews" is fairly accurate. Therefore, I will only point out that the book is no very engaging, but it is not dry either. It can be savoured by the professional historian, and by the educated layperson too. Therefore, my rating is 5 (content) and 3/4 (pleasure). In addition to this work, other books that I would

recommend reading would be 1) "Nobilities in Transition 1550-1700 : Courtiers and Rebels in Britain and Europe" by Ronald G. Asch; 2 and 3) "Myths of Power. Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court " and "Vienna and Versailles : The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780 (New Studies in European History)" by Jeroen Duindam (whose books present a more accurate view of monarchy, nobility, the court and the state contrary to that provided by Elias's "The Court Society"); and 4) "The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century" by John Brewer.

Here, in the first English edition of Benedetta Craveri's recent scholarly study, *Civiltà della conversazione*, he describes the world of women and French salons in the 17th and 18th centuries. Salons brought together not only intellectuals (Voltaire was a frequent and much sought-after guest) and socialites, but also members of the political and military worlds. The salons allowed differences between these various powerful sectors to be resolved through the art of conversation rather than through the art of war. This book describes in nonacademic writing the women and the salons, the guests, the conversations, and the political and social environments of the ancien régime.

From Publishers Weekly Craveri's account of the French aristocratic circles in which conversation emerged as an art offers a rich blend of personalities, anecdotes, scandal and genuinely amusing letters to flesh out an intellectual argument leading from early 17th-century aristocratic entertainment to the Enlightenment salon. Craveri, a contributor to the New York of Books, develops her theme by examining the careers of several prominent women who carved social and intellectual space for themselves in their homes and served as models for successive generations. The Marquise de Rambouillet set the stage when she retreated from Louis XIII's inhospitable court to build her famed Blue Room, designed specifically for refined entertainment. Even in this early phase, says Craveri, an emphasis on style and wit led to some blurring of class distinctions. A generation of women who had gathered under Rambouillet's roof continued the fashion, shaped by literary interests, religion, delicately and passionately expressed tastes, love affairs and female friendships and rivalries. By the next century, the British identified wit and elegance, developed in the salons, as the quintessential French quality that allowed all manner of ideas to be expressed. This intriguing book is peppered with untranslatable words that miraculously don't weigh it down. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From The New Yorker Craveri argues that when, in the sixteen-twenties, the Marquise de Rambouillet offered her home as a place for the French nobility to gather she was unwittingly fermenting a revolution. The next century and a half constituted the golden age of conversation, which allowed the aristocracy to establish a new order, based not on the strictures of church or crown but on manners. Craveri's narrative paints a series of brilliant portraits of those (mostly women) who presided over the new sphere. Her thesis that the politesse of the nobility was the foundation of galit is subtly provocative, but it ignores the legions who were excluded from the salons, and who took up arms against the bantering classes. For Craveri, the aristocracy is elegant, witty, and honorable to the end, when salons were held in prison as the conversationalists awaited the guillotine. Copyright 2005 The New Yorker From Booklist Noble society in seventeenth-century France held in highest esteem the talent of its members to carry on enlightened conversations about matters mundane, intellectual, and spiritual. Practitioners of this mannered discourse, the polar opposite of idle chatter or gossip, invested so much energy, thought, and expression in the way they spoke that mere words were freighted with immeasurable consequence. For women of the era, mastery of conversational art offered a path to transcend their legal and social inferiority and gain some measure of control over their own and others' lives. Craveri focuses her estimable social history on this art's finest and best-known practitioners: Madame de Longueville, the Marquise de Sable, Madame de Sevigne, and their circles. Craveri's summary essay on the seduction, deception, and power of the spoken word shows how this movement among France's noble classes laid groundwork for the coming revolution. Readers not already well versed in this historical era may need the aid of a biographical dictionary, since the author demands more than a little familiarity with the personalities of the age. Mark Knoblach Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved