



The Age of Conversation

Benedetta Craveri

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The Age of Conversation Benedetta Craveri

Now in paperback, an award-winning look at French salons and the women who presided over them

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, between the reign of Louis XIII and the Revolution, French aristocratic society developed an art of living based on a refined code of good manners.

Conversation, which began as a way of passing time, eventually became the central ritual of social life. In the salons, freed from the rigidity of court life, it was women who dictated the rules and presided over exchanges among socialites, writers, theologians, and statesmen. They contributed decisively to the development of the modern French language, new literary forms, and debates over philosophical and scientific ideas.

With a cast of characters both famous and unknown, ranging from the Marquise de Rambouillet to Madame de Staël, and including figures like Ninon de Lenclos, the Marquise de Sevigne, and Madame de Lafayette, as well as Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Diderot, and Voltaire, Benedetta Craveri traces the history of this worldly society that carried the art of sociability to its supreme perfection—and ultimately helped bring on the Revolution that swept it all away.

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