



# Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France

*Professor Anne C. Vila*

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In *Enlightenment and Pathology* Anne Vila surveys the various understandings of sensibility that passed back and forth between different professional modes of discourse in eighteenth-century France. The thrills of the nervous system, the delectations of taste, and the pangs of the heart mattered as much in the laboratory as in literature. Vila shows that the multiple junctures between the body and the mind promoted a steady commerce between science and the salons.

Vila looks deeply into that commerce and its changing purposes in the course of the eighteenth century. She examines key works by influential authors -- Diderot, Rousseau, de Laclos, Sade -- to determine the significance of the sentimentality which they both absorbed and helped to define. But she also steps beyond belles lettres and investigates the medical, biological, and philosophical literature of the period to reveal deep and continuous interrelations. If moods are as contagious as colds, and wickedness is as debilitating as a bad diet, the inquiries of the eighteenth century still have much to tell.

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