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Anne. C. Vila, *Suffering Scholars: Pathologies of the Intellectual in Enlightenment France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. vii + 267 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-0-8122-4992-7.

Response by Anne Vila, University of Wisconsin-Madison

To begin, I'd like to thank to Andrew Curran for organizing this forum. It is an extraordinary honor and privilege to have my work discussed in such thoughtful detail by four expert readers—and to be able to respond to them.

In different ways, each of these reviewers raises a set of issues with which all of us must grapple when we write wide-ranging monographs: what authors and texts should we include to demonstrate our argument? How do we tie them together? And according to what criteria do we set other authors and texts aside, perhaps to explore them in another project, or perhaps in the hope that another scholar will investigate them? As Philippe Robichaud notes, storytelling was one of the tools I used to weave together the many and varied texts in my primary corpus. Clearly, however, certain stories were left out of *Suffering Scholars*. J.B. Shank offers a marvelous series of case studies from the world of Enlightenment mathematics, where the tensions between mind and body, and between health and intellectual exertion, were just as prominent as for the literary authors on whom I focused. Joanna Stalnaker sketches the ways in which illness and identity intertwined in the case of Marie Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, marquise du Deffand, an eminent woman of letters whom I treated only in passing. Caroline Warman points out that the marquis de Sade (whom I did not address in this monograph) regarded his voracious reading habits as sustaining rather than health-sapping, particularly when he was imprisoned. It may be that Sade had less in common with the medicalized persona of the sickly scholar than with a figure like Isabelle de Charrière, who resisted her friends' warnings that her zealous literary work was exacerbating her vapors (p. 128). And Philippe Robichaud calls for an extra chapter on "the material culture surrounding the sickly Enlightenment intellectual persona," to drive home the importance that was given to the body's environment in determining wellness or unwellness.

These essays also offer an intriguing range of perspectives on the question of what embodiment—or resistance to embodiment—meant, especially for learned sorts, during the period I studied (approximately 1720 to 1840). Joanna Stalnaker reminds us of the importance of staying attuned to the "literary analogue of the body in eighteenth-century texts: literary form, genre, imagery and language." Using my book as a springboard for a critique of Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la clinique*, Philippe Robichaud stresses that to understand the complex "evolution of discourses on the body" between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we must venture beyond medical discourse proper into the network of fields connected to it. Although I certainly agree with that argument, I don't think his critique applies as well to Foucault's later work on the body (*Anormaux*, for example). [1] J.B. Shank makes the extremely important point that serious thinkers of the Enlightenment wrestled with the tension between their bodies and

their minds/*esprit*, between the material and the transcendently immaterial, "something beyond themselves and their mortal flesh."

All four reviewers express misgivings about the terms "scholar" and "intellectual," which the book's title seems to present as defining categories for the monograph as a whole. Perhaps it would have been best to use the French term *gens de lettres* throughout to avoid anachronism, and to capture the multiplicity of "terms of definition available to eighteenth-century learned men and women" (to quote J.B. Shank). The word *savant* which Philippe Robichaud suggested as a replacement for "scholar" in the title could make native English speakers think of a form of autism, which this book was not about. My original title started with "Singular Beings," but that was deemed too abstract. As for my reliance on "intellectual," I never meant it to be normalizing, in the sense that Caroline Warman evokes of something that makes us "lose our sense of the specificity of this period which in fact had no concept of the public intellectual." My book was designed precisely to underscore the historical specificity of the long period of French culture I was considering. If I sometimes used "intellectual" as synonymous with "thinker" or "cerebralist," it was simply an effort to be clear and accessible to a wide readership. In any case, this book was not a study in historical semantics à la Leo Spitzer.

J.B. Shank seemed mildly bothered by the inconsistency he saw between my remark that "the link between mental endeavor and disorder was embraced with particular vigor" in French-speaking Europe (p. 2), and the pan-European corpus of medical works that I considered in Chapter 1. To clarify, my claim of French specificity did not apply to the ailing scholar syndrome per se; I was also referring there to the more metaphorical pathologies that each side of the pro- versus anti-*philosophe* movement made about each other. My current reading of Ronald Schechter's book *A Genealogy of Terror in Eighteenth-Century France* reminds me that one cannot talk about any major thread in this period's medical discourse without taking into account the broader, trans-national context in which physicians worked and wrote. That was true of eighteenth-century medical notions of "pathogenic" or "salutary" terror Shechter explores in one of his chapters, and it was just as true of medical concern over the health risks of sustained mental application. [2]

To make a few more clarifications: when I said that the discursive basis of eighteenth-century medicine was often found in epistolary correspondences, I was referring to medical consultation by letter (p. 18)—not to the personal correspondences that Joanna Stalnaker stresses in her review. And while I may not have paid as much attention as she would have liked to issues of gender as they affected *femmes de lettres*, I did explore in depth the fragile masculinity of male intellectuals (especially in Chapter 6). What prompted me to feature literary luminaries in the book's central chapters had to do with the dialogue I wanted to set up between medicine and literature: with the important exception of Diderot, the writers on whom I focused in Chapters 4 and 5 were appropriated by medical theorists during their lifetime or in the next century, either as prototypes of an ailment tied to mental exertion or (in the case of Staël) as an expert observer of the melancholy to which superior minds were held susceptible.

As J.B. Shank remarks, there is a tonal difference between this book's middle chapters and its diachronic framing narrative, which dominates in Chapters 1, 6, and the epilogue. If, as Joanna Stalnaker notes, I don't deal much with questions of literary form, genre, and language in the

book's more historically oriented sections, that is because I am preoccupied there with other questions: for example, the circulation of ideas and terms between different discursive fields. There has always been an essential tension in my work: close textual reading is (to cite J.B. Shank) my fundamental "interpretive analytic," but I engage in other sorts of interpretation--including stadiol historical explanation--when I examine topics like the rise and fall of the *maladies des gens de lettres*, or the cultural implications of the singularity that some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists attributed to people devoted to the life of the mind. I am flattered by Philippe Robichaud's suggestion that my "seismological" genealogy of the suffering scholar syndrome can be seen as a counter-point to Michel Foucault's mode of conceptual archeology. I also enjoyed his deft interweaving of passages from Dr. Samuel-Auguste Tissot's *De la santé des gens de lettres* into his remarks about *Suffering Scholars*: the final leg of my work on this monograph was deeply intertwined with the critical edition that Ronan Chalmin and I recently published of Tissot's book.

Caroline Warman raises two interesting questions related to Tissot: is solitude, or physical isolation in one's *cabinet*, the real problem underlying over-study as he described it? And is there "a possible religious origin or resonance" to the view that Tissot (like Rousseau before him, and Chateaubriand afterwards) put forth of the anti-social lone scholar? To answer, I will draw on two discoveries that Ronan Chalmin and I made when we painstakingly compared the first and third editions of Tissot's *De la santé des gens de lettres* (1768 and 1775, respectively). First, Tissot pulled back very significantly in 1775 from a Rousseauistic moral condemnation of scholarly solitude. Second, he added a long and very touching eulogy to one particular *homme de lettres*, his recently deceased friend Jacques Abram Daniel Clavel de Brenles, who was not an anti-social solitary, but a lawyer and juris consult whom Tissot depicted as a heroically engaged writer/intellectual. Ronan Chalmin makes this clear in an analysis he wrote for our introduction to *De la santé*:

Si Tissot met particulièrement bien en lumière la responsabilité du travail (intellectuel) dans la cause du décès, il n'en interroge pas moins la valeur même de ce travail. Car ce travail répété et intensif de la tête, cet « abus de la pensée » qui conduit à la mort en provoquant un affaiblissement du corps, a un but collectif. Autrement dit, si M. de Brenles meurt, c'est pour le bien de la société, et non dans un souci de reconnaissance personnelle. Cela donne alors au récit de cette perte inestimable un ton hagiographique surprenant. Le portrait exécuté par Tissot de cet homme d'exception a tout du saint. Il s'agit du récit de la vie d'un « saint » laïc, que le long martyr vient conclure. [3]

The religious resonance here leads in the direction of redemption, not condemnation. Moreover, as I argued in *Suffering Scholars*, Tissot and his physician friend Johann-Georg Zimmermann admired and felt sympathy for Rousseau, but they "ultimately adopted a more Voltairian perspective that glorified the toll [intellectual] work took on health" (p. 44). That said, Tissot did make a few intriguing connections between knowledge-seekers who became overly absorbed in their meditations, and people who fell victim to religious melancholy or "dévotion outrée." The culprit here was not solitude, *per se*: the pathology, as Tissot described it, derived from "une tension forte de l'âme" caused by focusing the imagination too intensely on a single idea. [4]

I would love to be in the position of Tissot, who revised and expanded many of his books in response to readers and new works he'd read after publishing the initial edition. I don't, however, expect to do a reedition of *Suffering Scholars*: just getting this version of the book written and published was a long and laborious process.

As scholars of the eighteenth century, we are all highly attuned to the contours of its print culture; yet we don't always address how institutional and economic imperatives and constraints affect our own research and publications. While researching *Suffering Scholars*, I had the good fortune of access to some exceptional library resources: my home institution, whose rich, browsable print collections were invaluable for many chapters, and rare book collections in France and North America. Getting the manuscript published was more challenging, because its interdisciplinary nature made it tricky to place. J.B. Shank is spot-on in detecting two books within the covers of *Suffering Scholars*: I originally conceived of it as a two-volume project. Volume I was going to be more historical, whereas Volume II would have presented four in-depth literary case studies, including an entire chapter on multiple *femmes de lettres*. I pitched the project in this form in 2014 to a major North American press, whose acquisitions editors suggested that I reduce my literary analyses to interludes within a single book oriented toward science studies.

This response made me realize two things: first, I had to tighten the book into a single monograph in order to get it published; second, I had to market it as intellectual history, because that seemed the best way to retain the literary material I didn't want to sacrifice. Once I had made those cuts and revisions, I discovered the recently inaugurated series on "Intellectual History of the Modern Age" at the University of Pennsylvania Press. I feel very lucky to have placed *Suffering Scholars* there--and equally lucky to have it featured in this review forum.

Notes

[1] Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux. Cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*. Edition établie sous la direction de François Ewald et Alessandro Fontana, par Valerio Marchetti et Antonella Salomoni (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999).

[2] See Chapter 6, "Terror and Medicine," in Ronald Schechter, *A Genealogy of Terror in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 124-141.

[3] Samuel-Auguste Tissot, *De la santé des gens de lettres*, édition critique par Anne Vila et Ronan Chalmin (Paris, Editions Classiques Garnier, 2018), 32.

[4] *Ibid.*, article 50, pp. 121-22.

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