



Telling the Flesh: Life Writing, Citizenship, and the Body in the Letters to Samuel Auguste Tissot (McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, H)

Sonja Boon

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In the second half of the eighteenth century, celebrated Swiss physician Samuel Auguste Tissot (1728-1797) received over 1,200 medical consultation letters from across Europe and beyond. Written by individuals seeking respite from a range of ailments, these letters offer valuable insight into the nature of physical suffering. Plaintive, desperate, querulous, fearful, frustrated, and sometimes arrogant and self-interested in tone, the letters to Tissot not only express the struggle of individuals to understand the body and its workings, but also reveal the close connections between embodiment and politics. Through the process of writing letters to describe their ailments, the correspondents created textual versions of themselves, articulating identities shaped by their physical experiences. Using these identities and experiences as examples, Sonja Boon argues that the complaints voiced in the letters were intimately linked to broader social and political discourses of citizenship in the late eighteenth century, a period beset with concerns about depopulation, moral depravity, and corporeal excess, and organized around intricate rules of propriety. Contributing to the fields of literary criticism, history, gender and sexuality studies, and history of medicine, *Telling the Flesh* establishes a compelling argument about the connections between health, politics, and identity.



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