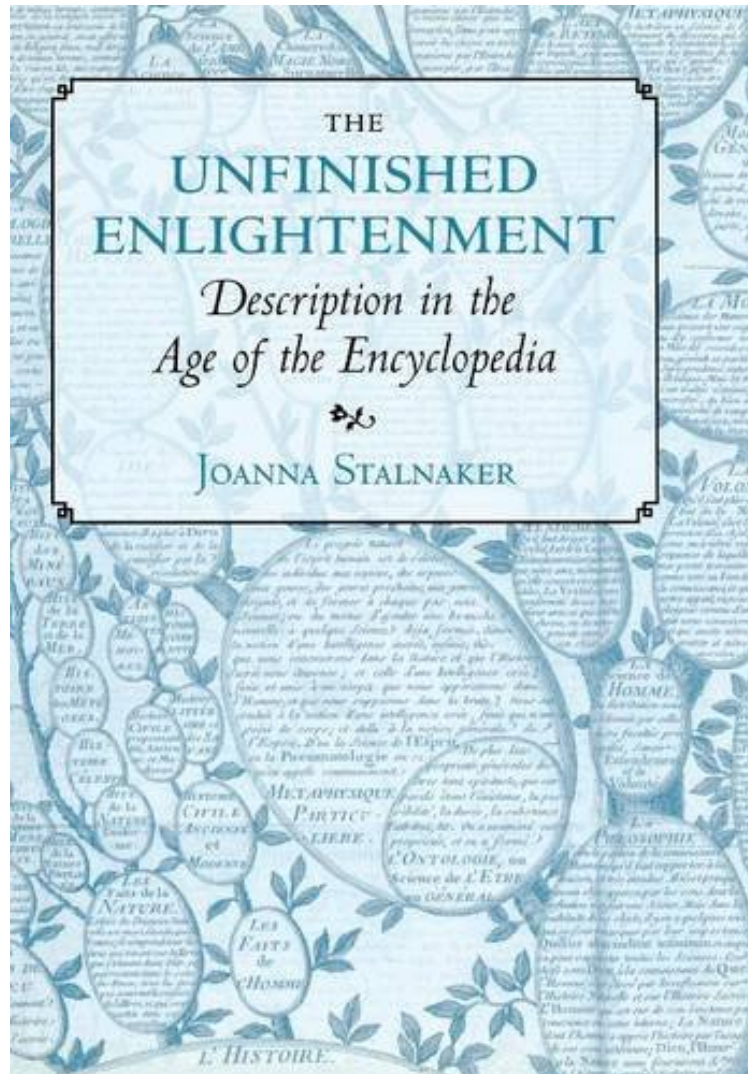


(Download ebook) The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia

The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia

Joanna Stalnakier

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Joanna Stalnakier : The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Unfinished Enlightenment: Description in the Age of the Encyclopedia:

In *The Unfinished Enlightenment*, Joanna Stalnaker offers a fresh look at the French Enlightenment by focusing on the era's vast, collective attempt to compile an ongoing and provisional description of the world. Through a series of readings of natural histories, encyclopedias, scientific poetry, and urban topographies, the book uncovers the deep epistemological and literary tensions that made description a central preoccupation for authors such as Buffon, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Diderot, Delille, and Mercier. Stalnaker argues that Enlightenment description was the site of competing truth claims that would eventually resolve themselves in the modern polarity between literature and science. By the mid-nineteenth century, the now habitual association between description and the novel was already firmly anchored in French culture, but just a century earlier, in the diverse network of articles on description in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* and in the works derived from it, there was not a single mention of the novel. Instead, we find articles on description in natural history, geometry, belles-lettres, and poetry. Stalnaker builds on the premise that the tendency to view description as the inevitable (and subservient) partner of narration rather than as a universal tool for making sense of knowledge in all fields has obscured the central place of description in Enlightenment discourse. As a result, we have neglected some of the most original and experimental works of the eighteenth century.

"In this beautifully organized and fascinating book, Joanna Stalnaker takes on the pronouncement by mile Zola that detailed, objectively framed, 'scientific' description in the novel was a distinctly 'modern' phenomenon employed only since the mid-nineteenth-century work of Flaubert and Balzac. *The Unfinished Enlightenment* is a pleasure to read clearly written, with an impressive combination of persuasive larger arguments fortified by compelling close readings and will be valuable to all literary and cultural critics and historians of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries." Cynthia Wall, University of Virginia

"*The Unfinished Enlightenment* is a rare example of genuine interdisciplinary work. Joanna Stalnaker's focus on the theory and practice of description in late eighteenth-century France allows her first to illuminate in a highly original way the rhetorical and poetic dimensions of natural scientific discourse in the period. At the same time, she emphasizes the very important role natural philosophy and encyclopedic epistemologies played in the formation of a modern literary descriptive tradition. Literary historians and intellectual historians alike will be forced to rethink their understanding of the period after reading this book. *The Unfinished Enlightenment* is also exceptionally well written: consistently clear, elegantly expressed, nicely paced, and penetrating in its analysis." David Bates, University of California, Berkeley