The Atheist’s Bible
Diderot and the Éléments de physiologie
Caroline Warman

In offering the first book-length study of the ‘Éléments de physiologie’, Warman raises the stakes high: she wants to show that, far from being a long-unknown draft, it is a powerful philosophical work whose hidden presence was visible in certain circles from the Revolution on. And it works! Warman’s study is original and stimulating, a historical investigation that is both rigorous and fascinating.

—François Pépin, École normale supérieure, Lyon

This is high-quality intellectual and literary history, the erudition and close argument suffused by a wit and humour Diderot himself would surely have appreciated.

—Michael Moriarty, University of Cambridge

In ‘The Atheist’s Bible’, Caroline Warman applies deft, tenacious and often wittily textual detective work to the case, as she explores the shadowy passage and influence of Diderot’s materialist writings in manuscript samizdat-like form from the Revolutionary era through to the Restoration.

—Colin Jones, Queen Mary University of London

‘Love is harder to explain than hunger, for a piece of fruit does not feel the desire to be eaten’: Denis Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie presents a world in flux, turning on the relationship between man, matter and mind. In this late work, Diderot delves playfully into the relationship between bodily sensation, emotion and perception, and asks his readers what it means to be human in the absence of a soul.

The Atheist’s Bible challenges prevailing scholarly views on Diderot’s Éléments, asserting its contemporary philosophical importance and prompting its readers to inspect more closely this little-known and little-studied work. This book is accompanied by a digital edition of Jacques-André Naigeon’s Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot (1823), a work which, Warman argues, represents the first publication of Diderot’s Éléments, long before its official publication date of 1875.

The Atheist’s Bible constitutes a major contribution to the field of Diderot studies, and is of further interest to scholars and students of materialist natural philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment and beyond.
This person appears to have been called ‘le citoyen Garron’. We know of his existence from the 1837 catalogue of Parisian bookseller Pierre Leblanc. In a letter dated ‘Germinal quartidi 4, l’an II de la République’, that is, 24 March 1794, he presented a manuscript of the *Éléments de physiologie* to the Comité d’instruction publique [Committee for Public Education] of the Convention nationale. Leblanc was selling both the presentation letter and the manuscript itself. Marvellous detective work by Maurice Tourneux established that the manuscript was still on Leblanc’s lists until 9 March 1846, when it disappeared; in 1954, Jean Pommier discovered that the manuscript had been sold only three days later, on Thursday 12 March 1846, for the quite high sum of 220 francs, to a certain ‘pottier’. Editor of the *Éléments*, Jean Mayer, who records these transactions in such beautifully precise detail, was not able to trace the manuscript any further, and nor was Paolo Quintili in his edition of 2004.\(^1\) It remains unlocated, yet it seems unlikely that

it has been destroyed, given its identity as an expensively-acquired manuscript with documented provenance and a supremely famous author, and also given well-worn traditions within families of wealth stewardship and transmission. Let us hope that it emerges from a strong box some day.

This manuscript was described in some detail by Hippolyte Walferdin (1795–1880), a native of Langres like Denis Diderot, a politician, sometime inventor, and one of the editors of the Brière edition of Diderot’s works in twenty-two volumes (1821–23), of which Jacques-André Naigeon’s Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot was the last volume, and also, separately, of the Salons. Walferdin describes a manuscript entitled ‘Physiologie’ that falls into three parts, of which the first two ‘se composent de descriptions d’un organe etc...’—a description which is accurate insofar as it goes but does not express (or invite) much interest; he states that it is not until towards the end of the second part and in the third part that Diderot starts drawing any conclusions. He goes on to say that he only spent an hour examining it but that he recognises from those last two parts a number of passages, specifically the ones about the miser and the woman written about by the scientist Girolamo Fabrici d’Acquapendente, and says they come either from the Rêve de d’Alembert or the Mémoires. In fact, they are not from the Rêve but from the Mémoires, Naigeon having lifted them verbatim from the Éléments de physiologie, although it is not hard to see why Walferdin isn’t quite sure, given the way Naigeon knits them

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together in the Mémoires. How he does that will be the subject of Chapter 12. Walferdin clearly knows the Mémoires and Diderot’s writings well, and he is trying to work out where this unpublished manuscript fits; he records Naigeon’s note about Diderot having copied out extracts from Haller’s Physiologie which he burnt once he had finished writing on the subject, and he mentions a manuscript ‘des éléments de physiologie et mélanges [...] sur les passions’ [including elements of physiology and varia [...] on the passions] which Jean-Baptiste-Alexandre Paulin had not published; Walferdin notices that there is ‘quelque chose sur les passions’ in the Leblanc manuscript too.

What is interesting here is the palimpsest of different manuscripts and topics, and the confusion created by the slippage between them. What was in Naigeon’s Mémoires described merely as extensive extracts from Haller which Diderot used and then burnt once he had completed ‘les deux dialogues’ [the two dialogues], is almost imperceptibly upgraded in Walferdin’s description to ‘les mémoires sur la physiologie’ [notes on physiology] which Diderot had burnt once he finished writing Le Rêve de d’Alembert. He considers that this manuscript was the point of departure for the Rêve. He further records that the manuscript contains a crossed-out paragraph contradicting Jean-Paul Marat’s theory of the soul, noting that Marat’s work came out in 1775, and that Diderot died in 1784 (thereby unwittingly providing the evidence that the Éléments was written after the Rêve, composed in 1769), that Naigeon claims Diderot had planned to write a physiological thesis in the form of a series of letters to Naigeon himself, and that this particular manuscript bears no resemblance to a series of letters. He ends with a laconic remark that the manuscript seems to come from a certain ‘Mr Moette de Versailles’ who he believes was the translator of Lucina sine concubitu.4

There is enough information here to draw a few clear conclusions. Firstly, that this was a separate manuscript copy of the Éléments; the

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4 Note transcribed in full, Mayer DPV 270–71. Walferdin’s note is in the Bibliothèque de la ville de Reims (ms 2127), with the manuscript of Naigeon’s Mémoires sur Diderot.
two we still have did not, so far as we know, ever leave their archive repositories, and nor is the passage lambasting Marat crossed out in either version.\(^5\) Secondly, it must be a mature iteration of the work and therefore similar (if not identical) to the Vandeul full-length copy in that it is organised in three parts. Thirdly, it had readers beyond the restricted circle of those whom we know for sure had access to the manuscript in one version or another, that is, Naigeon, Diderot’s daughter and her husband, and Catherine II of Russia. These readers were the Citoyen Garron (the person who sent the manuscript), the members and/or clerks of the Comité d’instruction publique (to whom it was sent), and ‘Mr Moette de Versailles’ (in whose hands it ended up).

This ‘Mr Moette de Versailles’ and translator from English of *Lucina sine concubitu* is Jean-Pierre Moët (1721–1806). The *Lucina* was the work of Sir John Hill, a lurid mixture of medicine and prurience, as well as a satire against the Royal Society, published under the name Abraham Johnson. It examines various cases of women becoming pregnant without intercourse.\(^6\) This is a topic which Diderot examines in connection with abnormal genital configurations and pregnancies in both sexes,\(^7\) and about which Acquapendente (whose presence in this manuscript is one of the few details Walferdin noticed, as we saw) also wrote.\(^8\) What we also know about Moët is that he was a freemason of importance, having held prominent positions in the Grand Orient in the 1750s and 1760s, that he was also involved in the theatre, being co-director (with Charles Simon Favart and others) of the Opéra Comique (1757–63), that he translated Emanuel Swedenborg from Latin (his translations were published posthumously), that he was the son of a well-regarded bookseller, and that, according to the entry in Jean Sgard’s *Dictionnaire des journalistes*, ‘il se piquait d’être encyclopédiste’ [he liked to make out he was a contributor to the *Encyclopédie*].\(^9\)

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\(^5\) SP AT p. 378; DPV 334/PQ 153; Naigeon, *Mémoires historiques et philosophiques*, p. 221 (Marat is not named).


\(^8\) Girolamo Fabrici d’Acquapendente (1537–1619), author of *De formatione ovi et pulli tractatus accuratissimus* (Patavii [Padova]: A. Bencii, 1621). DPV 429/PQ 249/MT 246.

Moët was therefore a man with connections in multiple arenas of Enlightenment sociability. We do not appear to know what he was doing in the 1790s or early 1800s, but given that he was the person in whose hands the copy of the *Éléments de physiologie* sent to the Comité d’instruction publique ended up, he must be a player of some sort, while conversely, his various affiliations tell us something about the groups that might have been interested in Diderot’s work on physiology—perhaps those special readers to whom Naigeon repeatedly alluded. In this light, Moët’s connections to medical texts and to the religiously unorthodox freemasons seem particularly resonant. Furthermore, if we consider his profile, and his repeatedly collaborative roles, whether as translator or journalist or within the theatre or as a freemason, it seems unlikely that he kept himself out of circulation, detached, private. The opposite seems more likely to be the case, that is, that he came across the manuscript because of his connections, and that he would have continued to share it with kindred spirits. Speculation aside, we can add him to the list of known readers of this text. But what of the ‘citoyen Garron’ and the members of the Comité d’instruction publique? How, if it was presented to the Convention as a form of national treasure via this important Committee, did it find its way to Moët, and why?

Any answer to these questions cannot be more than hesitant, as we only have circumstantial evidence, and there is no record or trace of it in the archives of the Comité d’instruction publique, published by the remarkable scholar James Guillaume at the end of the nineteenth century.10 Guillaume himself confirmed this lacuna to Maurice

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10 *Procès-verbaux du comité d’instruction publique de la convention nationale publiés et annotés*, ed. by James Guillaume, 7 vols (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1891–1957) : vol. 4 (1891) is the specific volume, covering 21 March 1794 – 28 August 1794, it would have been mentioned in.
Tourneux. What we do know, however, is that the Comité d’instruction publique was extremely concerned about the fate of manuscripts and books, and that it published numerous decrees and instructions relating to their preservation and forbidding destruction. On 25 Ventôse an II (15 March 1794), it adopted the proposal made by its feeder committee, the Commission temporaire des arts, on ‘la manière d’inventorier et de conserver tous les objets qui peuvent servir aux arts, aux sciences et à l’enseignement’ [the methods for making an inventory and looking after all the objects that may be of use to the arts, sciences, and for teaching purposes]; it is interesting therefore, that the manuscript of the Éléments de physiologie was sent when it was, just nine days later, on 4 Germinal an II (24 March 1794). It is just possible—but of course completely unprovable—that it was offered to the Comité in direct response to that instruction. So why is it not mentioned in their records? Would they really have been so uninterested in a work on this topic, written by a figure of the stature of Diderot, that they would not have bothered even to mention it in passing?

In fact, on the contrary: there was a flurry of reports on saving and stocking books and manuscripts for the nation at exactly this moment. Prominent member of the Comité d’instruction publique, Henri Grégoire (better known as Abbé Grégoire) published his Rapport sur la bibliographie only a few weeks later on 22 Germinal an II (11 April 1794), its aim being to prevent the dispersal and loss of the books and precious objects of the nation; he describes the state of human knowledge and the steps that still need to be made, and he does so by invoking the progress already made by the ‘rédacteurs de l’Encyclopédie’ [editors of the Encyclopédie]. He talks of bringing together all these materials and

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12 See the French senate webpage recording how preserving heritage became part of governmental responsibilities: ‘Au service d’une politique nationale du patrimoine : le rôle incontournable du Centre des monuments nationaux’, https://www.senat.fr/rap/r09-599/r09-59933.html. The remit of the Commission temporaire des arts is explained here: https://data.bnf.fr/fr/13533855/france_convention_nationale__commission_des_arts/. It existed between 18 December 1793 and 19 December 1795, that is, a relatively short time, hence the ‘temporaire’ in its name.

of transmitting them to the generations of the future. His instructions were immediately sent off around France, to be adopted with immediate effect. This is not the report of a man to disregard an unpublished work by Diderot, one of those ‘rédacteurs de l’Encyclopédie’ he had explicitly mentioned. Grégoire’s report of 22 Germinal came hot on the heels of another report dated 15 Germinal (itself only nine days after the letter and manuscript were sent), specifically on how to set up a depository for manuscripts: this report was written by Félix Vicq d’Azyr, not only a key member of the Commission temporaire des arts, but one of the most prominent anatomists of the time; his recommendations were adopted. On other occasions, Vicq d’Azyr and ‘le citoyen Poirier’, that is, ex-Benedictine monk Dom Germain Poirier (1724–1803), are charged with examining and requisitioning manuscripts for the state, including those of the ‘ci-devant Académie des sciences’ [what was hitherto known as the Académie des sciences]; Vicq is recorded as announcing that ‘parmi ces manuscrits des pièces infiniment précieuses pour les sciences et les arts, notamment des lettres écrites de la main même de Descartes’ [amongst these manuscripts there are pieces which are infinitely precious for the arts and sciences, in particular letters handwritten by Descartes himself]. It seems vanishingly unlikely that a manuscript of Diderot’s on the subject of physiology would have gone unnoticed by someone like Vicq d’Azyr.

Furthermore, the Comité d’instruction publique itself was highly organised and interested in its own records: it appointed a ‘chef des archives de la Commission’ (‘committee’ and ‘commission’ seem to be used interchangeably) on the 29 Germinal an II (18 April 1794); it had a

15 Félix Vicq d’Azyr featured in Chapter 4 for his work on the brain.
18 Procès-verbaux de la commission, ed. by Tuetey, p. 175 (20 Floréal an II/9 May 1794); for another example, see 5 Floréal an II/24 April 1794, pp. 148–49.
19 This is Dagobert Eustase Broquet, aged thirty-one, with extensive experience as a private tutor in languages and literature and 18 months study of ‘l’art de guérir’: Procès-verbaux du comité, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, p. 229 (29 Germinal an II).
sub-section (distinct from the Commission des arts) with no fewer than

 ten clerks specifically tasked with bibliography and cataloguing, and
 whose bureau chief, le citoyen Bardel, receives particular congratulation
 for his tireless efforts.\footnote{\textit{Procès-verbaux du comité}, ed. by
 Guillaume, vol. 4, p. 775 (23 Messidor an II).} Meanwhile, le citoyen Mathieu reports on the
 correct internal procedures for recording items received, which, as
 Guillaume notes, was probably in response to an instruction to assess
 the secretariat’s functioning, its lapses and possible losses.\footnote{Mathieu’s report on procedures to follow within the secretariat with respect to
 recording and processing items received can be found in the \textit{Procès-verbaux du
 comité}, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, pp. 775–77, and Guillaume’s note, p. 776n. It is
 interesting therefore to note that despite all this bibliographical activity, there is no
 catalogue extant of the 12,000 books that the Comité d’instruction publique held,
 and which were transferred en masse to the library of the Assemblée nationale
 in 1796, after the termination of the Comité d’instruction publique’s activities in
 October 1795.} So even if, as we see, there is a suggestion that things may have gone missing,
 this committee is far from indifferent to that happening, and is actively
 attempting to address the issue.

 I mentioned only having circumstantial evidence to offer about what
 might have happened to this particular manuscript of the \textit{Éléments de
 physiologie}. We have simply no idea why, assuming it did actually reach
 the Comité d’instruction publique, it was not recorded and kept, or why,
 if it was disappeared on purpose, that is, either hidden or stolen, the
 letter of gift would have been preserved with it, given that that would be
 evidence of irregularity, at the very least. But what we can see from this
 rapid survey of the archiving and cataloguing operations of the Comité
 d’instruction publique and of its public statements and instructions
 about the preservation of manuscripts and books during precisely this
 period is that it is unlikely that the absence of Diderot’s manuscript was
 a simple oversight.

 The more we pore over such documentation as there is, the less
 likely the oversight option seems. Naigeon worked for the Commission
 temporaire des arts, for example. He appears not to have been a fully-
fledged member like his brother Jean-Claude (1753–1832), a painter
 known as Naigeon l’aîné, that is Naigeon senior, despite the fact that
 he was younger than Jacques-André (1735–1810). Yet, despite not being
 a fully-fledged member of the Commission temporaire des arts, our
Naigeon’s signature appears in the register of the final session. Was he working there in March 1794? An official member whose presence is not in doubt was the naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, whose *Recherches sur l’organisation des corps vivants* (1802) shared a number of the preoccupations we find in the *Éléments de physiologie*, particularly the first part, ‘Des Êtres’, and whose wary attitude to the generality of his readers as well as evocation of some superior individuals is strongly reminiscent of the attitude we have already seen Naigeon taking. So, it seems likely the *Éléments* would have found an eager reader in Lamarck, were he ever to have come across them. The secretary of the Comité d’instruction publique itself was a medical man, René-François Plaichard de la Choltière, and the records repeatedly mention medical works or questions being referred to him for review and report. Moreover, one of the tasks of the Comité d’instruction publique at this time was the setting up of medical schools. Again, it seems implausible that someone like him, with the role he had, would have been uninterested in Diderot’s *Éléments de physiologie*.

It is of course not impossible that Diderot’s manuscript was unrecorded or missed out of incompetence, but that it wasn’t simply thrown away we know from the fact that it ended up with Moët. What seems perhaps more likely is that it was intercepted, hidden, secreted or stolen, in full knowledge of its interest. By whom and at what level

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24 For reasons of space, and also because I’d already bitten off far more than I could chew, I regretfully set aside pursuing potential links with Lamarck. I go a little bit further in my article: Caroline Warman, ‘Caught between Neologism and the Unmentionable: The Politics of Naming and Non-naming in 1790s France’, *Romance Studies*, 31 (2013), 264–76, https://doi.org/10.1179/026390413Z.00000000051.

25 For example, medical works are sent to Plaichard on 11 Germinal (p. 59), 29 Prairial (p. 652), 1er Thermidor (p. 835), 27 Thermidor (p. 941). This is a representative not an exhaustive list. Guillaume records the members of the Comité d’instruction publique in his ‘Introduction’: *Procès-verbaux du comité*, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, pp. ii–x.

of seniority, again, we cannot know. Raymond Trousson, although he
does not mention the Éléments de physiologie, wonders how various
unpublished manuscripts of Diderot’s somehow made their way into
the pages of the pro-philosophe journal, the Décade philosophique. He
speculates that the most likely route for these leaks is via its own editor,
Pierre Ginguéné (1748–1816), who, as deputy to the ‘Commissaire’ of
the Comité d’instruction publique, Dominique-Joseph Garat (1749–
1833) from January 1795, and then Commissaire himself from August
1795, and finally (briefly) its Director General, before its closure, would
have had access to the depository where the confiscated papers of the
ex-editor of the Correspondance littéraire, Friedrich Melchior, Baron von
Grimm, were held.27 Something of this order seems likely to be the case,
although it could not have been Ginguéné or Garat at this point (that is,
March 1794), as they seem not yet to have been involved in the Comité
d’instruction publique. Indeed, they were both about to be arrested, and
Garat would be sentenced to death, surviving only thanks to the fall of
Maximilien Robespierre.28

This is perhaps the point at which we should remind ourselves what
was happening in Revolutionary Paris at this moment, beyond the
Comité d’instruction publique and its bibliographical instructions and
concerns. On the day the letter presenting the Éléments de physiologie
to the Comité was dated, 4 Germinal (24 March), the Hébertistes were
all executed. Georges Danton, Camille Desmoulins and others were
executed on the 16 Germinal (5 April). This is the height of the Terror,
and Diderot himself was not exempt from Robespierre’s condemnatory
attentions at this point: on 18 Floréal (7 May), four days after Ginguéné
had been arrested, Robespierre made a speech condemning the
Encyclopedists, calling them charlatans, and accusing them of having
persecuted ‘la vertu et le génie de la liberté en la personne de ce Jean-
Jacques’ [the virtue and genius of freedom as embodied in the person of

27 Raymond Trousson, Images de Diderot en France, 1784–1913 (Paris: Champion, 1997),
p. 42. See also William Murray’s Dictionnaire des journalistes entry on ‘Garat’ and Jean
Roussel’s on ‘Ginguéné’ for the exact dates of these various offices: William Murray,
‘Garat’, in Dictionnaire des journalistes, 1600-1789, ed. by Jean Sgard (Oxford: Voltaire
Foundation, 1999), http://dictionnaire-journalistes.gazettes18e.fr/journaliste/329-
dominique-garat; and Jean Roussel, ‘Ginguéné’, in Dictionnaire, http://dictionnaire-
journalistes.gazettes18e.fr/journaliste/343-pierre-ginguene.
28 See Murray, ‘Garat’ and Roussel, ‘Ginguéné’, in Dictionnaire des journalistes, ed. by
Sgard.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau]. This was not the moment for one of the most prominent committees of the Revolutionary government to be recording as a national treasure a manuscript of this condemned charlatan. Much better to keep it quiet.

Why did ‘le citoyen Garron’ send it at this point, then? Was he a blinkered idiot? Paolo Quintili suggests that it was probably because of the plans for the Écoles normales that were at that point being considered. It is true that the École des armes et des poudres (Weaponry and Gunpowder School), set up to disseminate knowledge about arms production across the embattled Republic, and thereby massively and rapidly increase it, was being presented as a new model for hyper-efficient education during precisely this period, and that the Comité d’instruction publique would pick up the baton in an announcement of 29 Floréal an II (20 May 1794) about its intention ‘à propager l’instruction publique sur le territoire entier de la République par des moyens révolutionnaires semblables à ceux qui ont été déjà employés pour les armes, la poudre et le salpêtre’ [to propagate public education across the entire territory of the Republic by the revolutionary means already employed for weaponry, gunpowder and saltpetre]. So it is possible

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30 Receiving manuscripts of Rousseau’s, however, was a cause for celebration and public announcements: see 7 Fructidor, ‘293e séance: ‘offre de manuscrits de Rousseau (par Jussieu et Girod)’, along with Gregoire’s response, *Procès-verbaux du comité*, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, p. 977.

31 Paolo Quintili writes that ‘Garron non poteva scegliere periodo peggiore’ [Garron could not choose a worse time], concluding that ‘La Convenzione non solo non s’interessò agli Éléments ma ne respinse il manoscritto senza che se ne trovi più alcuna traccia fra i procès-verbaux delle sue commissioni’ [the Convention did not only take no interest in the Elements but also rejected the manuscript without there being any trace left in the procès-verbaux of its committees]. There is no specific evidence to support the hypothesis that the Convention rejected the manuscript, other than the absence of any trace in the procès-verbaux. Paolo Quintili, ‘Diderot e la Rivoluzione francese: miti, modelli, riferimenti nel secolo XXI’, *Quaderni materialisti*, 2 (2003), 81–106 (p. 105).

32 Quintili, ‘Diderot e la Rivoluzione’, p. 105.

that plans to set up new schools for the education of the new Republic are what triggered the gift, and it is also possible that the manuscript was sent in response to the Comité’s adoption on 25 Ventôse (15 March) of the Commission temporaire des arts’ recommendation regarding ‘la manière d’inventorier et de conserver tous les objets qui peuvent servir aux arts, aux sciences et à l’enseignement’ [the methods for making an inventory and looking after all the objects that may be of use to the arts, sciences, and for teaching purposes], as already mentioned; a combination of the two is also possible. We cannot determine with any certainty why it was sent when it was, and one of the reasons for this is that we do not actually know who ‘le citoyen Garron’ is.

The sales catalogue describes the content of his letter:

At the front of the volume there is a letter dated Germinal quartidi 4, year 4 of the Republic, in which Citizen Garron presents to the Committee of Public Education this work which he was given by Citizen Diderot some time before his death as a mark of his trust and friendship.

This description sounds very much like a close paraphrase or perhaps even a quotation. We will not be far from the truth if we suppose that ‘le citoyen Garron’ said something like ‘je présente au comité d’Instruction Publique cet Ouvrage, que je reçus du citoyen Diderot quelque temps avant sa mort, comme un témoignage de sa confiance et de son amitié’ [I present to the Committee of Public Education this work which I was given by Citizen Diderot some time before his death as a mark of his trust and friendship].

It tells us two things about ‘le citoyen Garron’ therefore: firstly, he is filled with revolutionary and republican fervour, given that he is so ceremoniously making a presentation of the manuscript to the new government, and also given that Diderot has become ‘le citoyen Diderot’.

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Secondly, we learn that he is a friend of Diderot’s, someone in whom Diderot has confidence, and to whom he wishes to leave something supremely precious. We do not know of anyone by this name this close to Diderot. We are stumped. If it is a pseudonym, we do not have any answers either. However, in the section that follows, we will look at some of the possibilities for who ‘Garron’ might be.

Tourneux tersely brushes aside the name ‘Garron’, saying it is ‘vraisemblablement’ [probably] Pierre-Henri Marron (1754–1832), a French Huguenot pastor who arrived in Paris in 1782. In support of this identification, Tourneux cites the opinion of bookseller and historian Étienne Charavay (1848–99), according to whom the ‘M’ of Marron’s signature was very similar to a ‘G’. But is there any evidence Diderot and Marron ever met?

Emboldened by the notion that the name may have been mistranscribed, and by similar evidence of mistranscription in the archives of the Comité d’Instruction Publique itself, some interesting possibilities, all of which may be completely erroneous, suggest themselves. They can be divided into two camps: firstly, those whom we know knew Diderot; secondly, those who were active in the Republican government in some way.

So, Jean-Baptiste Garant or Garand (c.1730–80) has nearly the right name, and knew Diderot a bit and executed the only portrait of Diderot that Diderot himself really liked.

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35 Tourneux, Les Manuscrits de Diderot conservés en Russie, p. 28.
36 See the confusion around the collection left by the émigré of a certain ‘Jeannin Flammant’; Guillaume comments that ‘il faut probablement identifier ce ‘Jeannin Flammant’ avec le ‘Jeannin Chamblanct’ ou ‘Jallin-Chamblant’ à l’occasion duquel avait été rendu le décret du 10 octobre 1792’ [this ‘Jeannin Flammant’ should probably be identified as ‘Jeannin Chamblanc’ or ‘Jallin-Chamblant’]. Procès-verbaux du comité, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, p. 945n.
37 In his Salon de 1767, he wrote that ‘Je n’ai jamais été bien fait que par un pauvre diable appelé Garant’ [my likeness has never been done well apart from by a poor devil called Garant]: Denis Diderot, Salon de 1767, ed. by Else Marie Bukdahl, Michel Delon, and Annette Lorenceau (Paris: Hermann, 1995), p. 83. The portrait no longer exists, but the engraving commissioned by Grimm does: Denis Diderot (c. 1760), by Jean-Baptiste Garand, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Denis_Diderot_by_Jean-Baptiste_Garand.jpg.
Against Garand’s case are the fact that they did not know each other at all well, and that he had died in 1780, and could not therefore have been the author of a letter written in 1794. So it seems unlikely that it was him.

Next, we can offer Gaschon (first name and dates unknown), who seems to have been a banker of some sort, and who was a close and trusted friend of the Volland family. Roger Lewinter tells us that ‘Mme Volland et Sophie plaçaient de fortes sommes par son entremise : 8,000 livres le 31 décembre 1771, et 20,000 en 1781’ [Mme Volland and Sophie invested large sums with his help: 8,000 livres on 31 December 1771, and 20,000 in 1781].\(^3\) Diderot mentions him quite regularly and affectionately in his letters to the Vollands during the period 1759 to 1774. But could ‘sch’ really be mistaken for ‘rr’? Perhaps.

Third in this series is Dominique-Joseph Garat (1749–1833), a figure who bridges these two camps as both an acquaintance of Diderot and as someone active in the Republican government. Indeed, he has already appeared in this chapter as a Revolutionary politician on the verge of arrest and as someone who would later be involved with the very
committee to which the manuscript and dedicatory letter was sent. He was Minister of Justice after Danton, and at the latter’s recommendation, from 9 October 1792; from 14 March 1793 until his resignation on 20 August 1793 he was Minister of the Interior; arrested in September 1793, then released under house arrest, he was rearrested in 1794 and condemned to death on 2 Thermidor 1794, and not immediately released after the fall of Robespierre. He only emerged from prison at the demand of various members of the new Convention, who wanted him to be appointed Commissaire of the Comité d’instruction publique, which he duly was, as we have seen. He would go on to be a key mover in the establishment of the École normale, also lecturing there himself.

As a young journalist for the Mercure de France in 1779, he had penned a remarkable—and now famous—portrait of Diderot in a state of almost crazed exaltation, as someone who could not stop talking, who whacked Garat’s thigh for emphasis as if it were his own, and who, continually inspired, ranged from theatre to legislation to antiquity and history, whose imagination transported him to any place, subject, and time. Diderot himself, having read this portrait, declared that he was ‘point éloigné d’aimer’ [not far from loving] Garat. Garat seems like an option; an ‘r’ more or less seems insignificant, while a hasty ‘t’ can look like a messy ‘n’ without too much of a stretch, and indeed does.

Fig. 7.2 Garat’s signature from the registers of the Académie française, Dominique-Joseph Garat, ?1803, Pen and Paper, Académie française, http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/dominique-joseph-garat, CC-BY

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Against Garat being the signatory is his own celebrity or notoriety as a politician of the Revolution; would his signature not have been quite well known, and his name not recognised? Whether or not Garat owned and sent the manuscript, the lectures on the ‘analyse de l’entendement’ [analysis of the human understanding] that he went on to give at the École normale overlap strikingly at points with the third part of the Éléments de physiologie, and Garat therefore has to be part of our story. We will examine those lectures in a later section.

The first candidate clearly in our second camp, that is, those active in the Republican government, rather than straddling both like Garat, is the Assemblée nationale deputy, anti-slavery campaigner and lawyer, Jean-Philippe Garran de Coulon (1748–1816), known during the Revolutionary years as ‘Jean-Philippe Garran’. He would have been an admirer of Guillaume-Thomas Raynal’s Histoire des deux Indes (to which Diderot contributed so substantially), he had contributed to the ‘Jurisprudence’ volumes of the Encyclopédie méthodique and, as a deputy, he published on a wide number of subjects, including disasters in the colonies, the sentencing of Louis XVI, and the government of Poland. In favour of Garran is his name, his networks and interests. He would probably have considered that any substantial manuscript by Diderot would be important, without himself being particularly invested in the subject of physiology. This may be a reason supporting the idea that he would have gifted any such manuscript to the Republic. However, against him is any evidence that he knew Diderot in the slightest.

Finally, we have a homonymic ‘Caron’ who petitioned to be taken on as a clerk for the Comité d’instruction publique on 15 Messidor (3 July

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42 The Encyclopédie méthodique was divided into different subject areas (including three on philosophy, edited by Naigeon, as discussed in Chapter 6) and ran to more than 200 volumes in all.

1794) and was duly given a job on 19 Thermidor (6 August 1794). His petition has not survived, and we have no information about him, other than that he was taken on. Was he Pierre-Siméon Caron (1757–1806), a theatrical impresario and book collector who had some success with a puppet show in 1784, and who might possibly have known the Jean-Pierre Moët in whose hands the manuscript ended up. This Caron published a curious collection of 11 volumes of rare and licentious works, and he sounds more like the eponymous anti-hero of the Neveu de Rameau than a conscientious clerk. The clerk and the puppeteer/book collector/writer are quite likely to be two separate people, neither of whom had anything to do with the manuscript. And while we are on the name ‘Caron’, a more famous (and probably equally unlikely candidate) is Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–99), that is, the famous playwright, who was well-known to Diderot, but never close; there is only one (rather formal) letter from Diderot to Beaumarchais.

To summarise: there is no obvious Garron. Tourneux, on weak evidence, suggests the Protestant pastor Pierre-Henri Marron. We, in turn, and on the basis of no evidence at all, but simply working around possible mistranscriptions and homonyms of the name itself amongst those who knew Diderot, and who therefore had some claim to friendship, propose the painter Jean-Baptiste Garand (who had been dead since 1780), the Volland intimate and banker Gaschon, the journalist and Revolutionary politician Dominique-Joseph Garat or even Beaumarchais, who would have styled himself ‘le citoyen Caron’ during the Revolution. More weakly even, because we lack evidence of acquaintance of any sort, we offer Assemblée nationale deputy Garran de Coulon, who, as ‘le citoyen Garran’, at least has the merit of having almost the right name, and, finally, the unknown clerk of the Comité d’instruction publique, taken on five months after the manuscript was sent. What this tells us more than anything is that it is almost pointless to try to identify a candidate because we simply do not have enough information; we are not even in a position to suggest that it might be a

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44 Procès verbaux du comité d’instruction publique, ed. by Guillaume, vol. 4, pp. 741 and 907 respectively.
pseudonym. And how quickly our efforts descend into the farcical, with late eighteenth-century Paris turning into a caricature of itself! What? A puppeteer and publisher of lewd old books? Beaumarchais the sometime gunrunner and spy? We might as well set to writing storylines for the computer game *Assassin’s Creed*, where bibliographer, ex-Benedictine monk, and Vicq d’Azyr’s co-worker Germain Poirier does indeed feature in some exciting manner.\(^{47}\) Will some other researcher have better luck? I hope so.

Meanwhile, the name that stands out as most plausible, because the name could have been misread, because he did know Diderot, because he was clearly an admirer, and because he did go on to address very similar topics, is Garat. Whether or not the manuscript came from him, it is to him that we now turn, in order to explore the echoes between his lectures and Diderot’s text. His future position as Commissaire of the Comité d’instruction publique means, after all, that if anyone could have had access to this manuscript, it would have been him.

\(^{47}\) For example: https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Dom_Poirier.