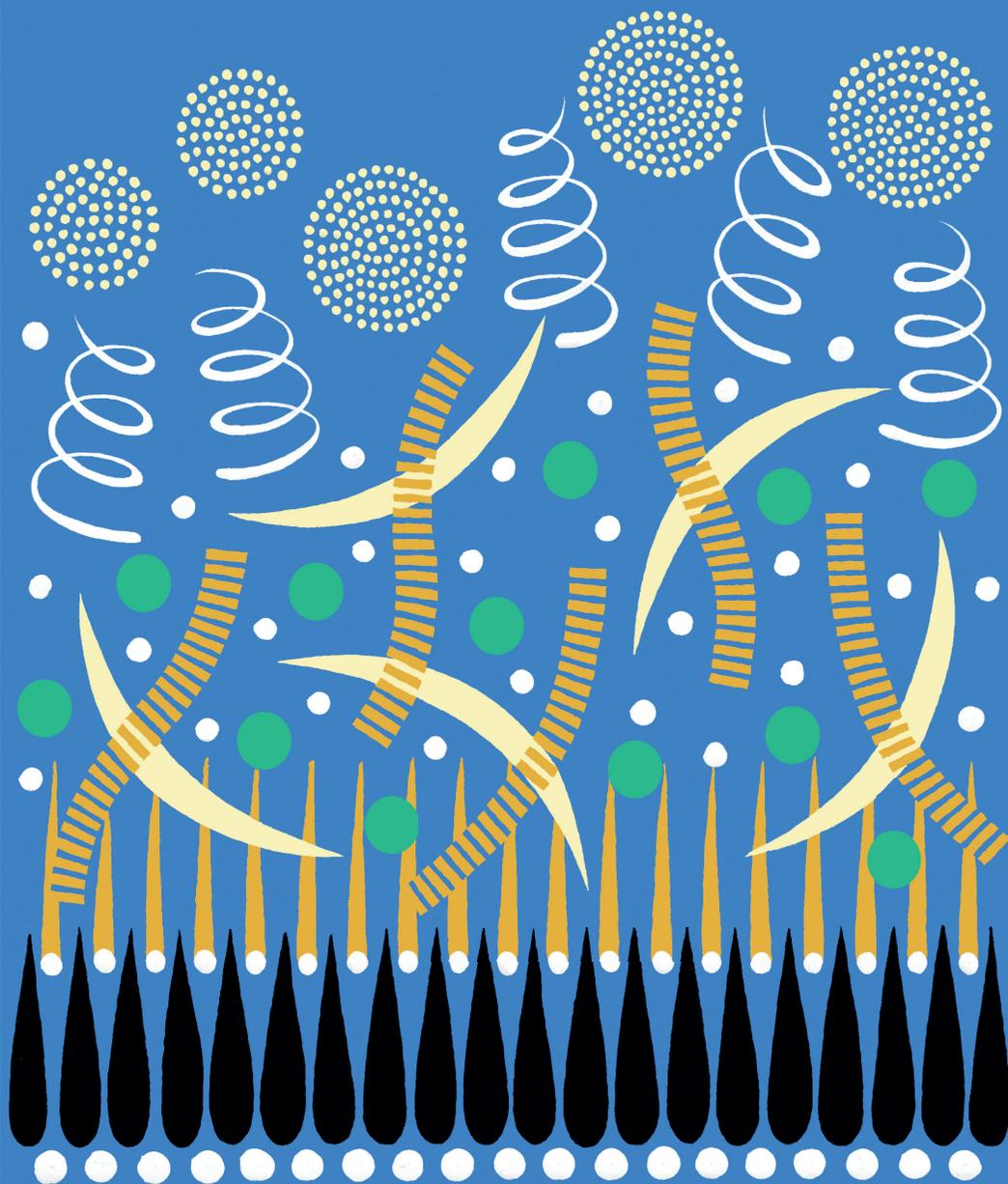


THE ATHEIST'S BIBLE

Diderot and the
Éléments de physiologie

Caroline Warman





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10. 1798, 1802: Naigeon, the *Œuvres de Diderot*, and the Censored Preface to Montaigne

We return now to Jacques-André Naigeon, member, like Dominique-Joseph Garat, Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, and Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy, of the Institut national's Sciences morales et politiques class, although his section was 'Morale', as we may remember. No lecture of his finds its way into the *Mémoires de l'Institut national*, although he is recorded as having sat on a committee charged with determining the appropriate way of acknowledging the death of one of its members.¹ In 1798, however, he brought out Diderot's *Œuvres* in fifteen volumes, with an angry preface, explaining that he had had to defer his *Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot* yet again because of the outrageous claims made about Diderot's authorship of the *Code de la nature*, and because other publishers were planning to bring out Diderot's works, replete with texts wrongly attributed to him, based on truncated versions of the texts; he is eloquent and multi-clausal in his ire.² And so out the *Œuvres* reluctantly come, with yet another headline allusion to the *Mémoires* whose composition he has

1 *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts: sciences morales et politiques* (Paris: Baudouin, Imprimeur de l'Institut national, an VII (Fructidor an VII/Aug-Sept 1799)), vol. 2, pp. 681–94.

2 Jacques-André Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Denis Diderot, *Œuvres* (Paris: Desray et Déterville, 1798), vol. 1, pp. v–xxxiii. 'Babœuf' is lambasted on pp. v–vi; other editions of Diderot's supposed *Œuvres* are lambasted on p. viii; Bouillon's faulty edition of his philosophy articles from the *Encyclopédie* are lambasted

unfortunately had to interrupt, on the first page of the 'Préface de l'éditeur' in the first volume, complete with supporting footnote; both allusion and supporting footnote are repeated only a few pages later.³ This culminates in the following virtuous declaration (which follows on from further rebuttal of Diderot's authorship of the *Code de la nature* and its false principles):

[...] je ne crus pas devoir balancer un moment [à différer encore de quelques mois l'impression d'un ouvrage souvent annoncé, trop attendu peut-être, mais qui du moins ne sera pas sans quelque intérêt pour la famille et les amis de Diderot. Rassuré par cette idée consolante, je m'occupais aussi-tôt à mettre en ordre les matériaux que j'avois déjà recueillis pour l'édition que je projetois].⁴

I thought it right not to hesitate about deferring for a further few months the publication of a work which had often been announced, and for which people had been waiting too long perhaps, but which at least will not be without some interest for the family and friends of Diderot. Reassured by this consoling idea, I turned straightaway to the materials that I had already gathered for the edition that I was planning and started putting them in order.

The order in which Naigeon presents his 'ouvrage' and the 'matériaux' is very telling, as are the words he chooses respectively for, on the one hand, the 'work' and on the other, the 'materials'. Even the syntax is a bit odd: his preceding criticism of the threat posed by these other projected *Œuvres de Diderot* with their erroneous and dangerous inclusion of the *Code de la nature*, leads one to suppose that he is saying he should not hesitate for a second to get on with his own planned (and authorised) *Œuvres de Diderot*, but no: it is that he should not hesitate for one second to put the *Mémoires* on the back-burner, despite the fact that it has frequently been announced and has perhaps been too long awaited. He does not turn to the edition of which this is supposed to be the preface until the following sentence. Everything he is saying tells us how important the *Mémoires* is, more important in his eyes than the *Œuvres* themselves. As we have already seen in relation to the article on

on pp. xxiv–xxvi. He also attacks Grimm as an editor of Diderot's work in the *Correspondance littéraire* in vol. 13, pp. vi–viii.

3 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, pp. v, vii.

4 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. ix.

Diderot he wrote for the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, he repeatedly, urgently, draws our attention to them.⁵ In an ‘avertissement de l’éditeur’ which we find in volume 12 of these *Cœuvres*, sandwiched between the main text of *La Religieuse* and what we now know as the *Préface-annexe*, but which Naigeon entitles *Extrait de la Correspondance littéraire de M***, année 1770*, he mentions them again, again with a supporting footnote, declaring that this volume ‘sera très-incessamment sous presse’ [will be published imminently].⁶ He is also telling us when he was composing the *Mémoires*, or at least when he claimed to be writing them. His written statements, from the ‘Diderot’ article of 1792 to the preface to Diderot’s *Cœuvres*, tell us that he started work on it in the six months after Diderot’s death, was busily engaged with it when writing the dictionary article, and was again busy with it in 1798, having not quite finished it (he had had to set it aside to bring out the edition, as he says in the preface), but very nearly (as he says in vol. 12). What is actually in it, of course he does not say, other than that it will deal with ‘celui de ces ouvrages qui m’a paru le plus profond’ [the particular work of his that I thought most profound].⁷ No doubt this is why he attaches so much importance to it, and spends so much time over it. Why he did not publish it soon after the edition came out as he seems to have expected does not perhaps need much commentary, given what has already been said about the unabated (or perhaps renewed) hostility of the authorities towards materialism and Diderot during these years. Yet there is something more to be said about the way Naigeon presents Diderot’s works and how he perceives his connection to them, and his role as editor and even censor.

As is already abundantly clear, Naigeon’s commitment to Diderot is total, and yet it has a certain profile: it is morally pure, frequently evocative of the tight-knit circle of family and friends, and it likes a certain sort of seriousness. Thus, Naigeon evokes (in relation to writing the *Mémoires*) ‘ce plaisir si doux, et si pur qu’on éprouve à faire une bonne action’ [this very sweet and pure pleasure that we feel when we

5 See also Naigeon, ‘Préface de l’éditeur’, in Diderot, *Cœuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. xxiii.

6 Denis Diderot, *Cœuvres* (Paris: Desray et Déterville, 1798), vol. 12, p. 261n.

7 Naigeon, ‘Diderot’, in *Encyclopédie méthodique: Philosophie ancienne et moderne*, 3 vols (Paris: Panckoucke, 1791–94), vol. 2 (1792), p. 228, quoted above in Chapter 2.

do something good],⁸ about how (again in relation to the *Mémoires*) it would not be 'sans quelque intérêt pour la famille et les amis de Diderot' [without some interest for the family and friends of Diderot],⁹ while also declaring that he is 'pour plusieurs ouvrages de Diderot, un censeur plus rigoureux que le public' [in the case of many of Diderot's works, a harsher censor than the public],¹⁰ which is, in fact, the rather odd and not merely defensive statement with which he closes his preface. This is a curiously intense combination of attitudes, the key to which is perhaps given on the penultimate page of the preface; this is the letter containing Diderot's instructions regarding his manuscripts, written in 1773 as Diderot prepared to depart for St Petersburg, and which Naigeon describes as follows: it is 'un écrit qui ne s'est jamais offert à mes yeux, sans me causer la plus tendre emotion' [a piece of writing that I was never able to look at without feeling the most tender emotion].¹¹ The mention of his eyes evokes first intellect and then tears. Giving this 'écrit' in full in a footnote, he states that he cannot deny himself the pleasure of copying out the note, the precious original of which he keeps safe, and which will transmit his name to posterity, to the 'vrais amis des lettres, et aux jeunes gens qui s'appliquent à l'étude de la philosophie rationnelle' [the true friends of letters and to those young people who apply themselves to the study of rational philosophy].¹² When we weigh up the respective gravitas of the true friends of letters and the young people who apply themselves to rational philosophy, it is clear that the prize goes to the youthful hard workers. Yet his own friendship for Diderot does not, he says, imply a lack of judgement: 'l'amitié ne m'a point fait illusion: peut-être même trouvera-t-on qu'elle m'a rendu quelquefois trop sévère' [friendship has not blinded me: perhaps people will even think that it has made me too harsh at times]; this is the statement that leads to his saying he has been a harsher censor even than the public. Clearly, then, he sees his role as one involving the exercise of judgement, understood as involving disapproval and censorship where

8 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, pp. vii–viii.

9 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. ix.

10 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. xxxiii.

11 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. xxxii.

12 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. xxxiin.

necessary. This interpretation does indeed seem to be supported by Diderot's instructions:

Comme je fais un long voyage, et que j'ignore ce que le sort me prépare, s'il arrivoit qu'il disposât de ma vie, je recommande à ma femme et à mes enfants de remettre tous mes manuscrits à monsieur Naigeon, qui aura pour un homme qu'il a tendrement aimé, et qui l'a bien payé de retour, le soin d'arranger, de revoir et de publier tout ce qui lui paroîtra ne devoir nuire ni à ma mémoire, ni à la tranquillité de personne. C'est ma volonté, et j'espère qu'elle ne trouvera aucune contradiction. A Paris, ce juin 1773. Diderot.¹³

As I am going on a long journey and do not know what fate may have in store for me, were it to happen that it took my life, I request my wife and children to hand over all my manuscripts to Mr Naigeon, who will have for a man whom he has tenderly loved, and who has amply repaid him, the task of organising, reviewing, and publishing anything which he considers will not do any damage to my memory or to anyone's security. This is my will, and I hope no one will contradict it. Paris, June 1773, Diderot

We see that the bond of love precedes (and sanctions) the bond of duty, and that Diderot does not prescribe complete publication, but only 'tout ce qui lui paroîtra ne devoir nuire ni à ma mémoire, ni à la tranquillité de personne' [anything which he considers will not do any damage to my memory or to anyone's security]. That the 'tranquillity' of Diderot's family or even Naigeon himself was in question, at whatever level of intensity, is indisputable; Diderot's reputation was already damaged, as we have seen. This edition is therefore an interpretation of Diderot's wishes that is also, one assumes, an attempt to repair that damage, restore his reputation, and ensure the tranquillity of all concerned. Certainly, Naigeon's predilection was for philosophy, as the works which he edited or co-wrote for the baron d'Holbach and during Diderot's lifetime attest. But that aspect is in any case the one he chooses to emphasise, given Diderot's instructions. And thus the fifteen-volume *Œuvres* present three volumes of philosophy, followed by one of (and on) drama, three volumes of philosophical articles

13 Naigeon, 'Préface de l'éditeur', in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 1, p. xxxiin; Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, ed. by Georges Roth and Jean Varloot (Paris: Minuit, 1965), vol. 12, p. 231 (3 June 1773).

from the *Encyclopédie*, two about Antiquity (the work on Seneca and the reigns of Claudius and Nero), three of fiction, the final three with the art criticism of the *Salons* of 1765 and 1767. The three volumes of fiction, we note, are sandwiched in towards the end. Naigeon's Diderot is the mighty philosopher, the tireless servant of the *Encyclopédie*, the dramatist, the critic. And also, as it happens, the writer of some rather tasteless fiction, which Naigeon, as his true friend and *ensor*, would have been very happy to have repressed, as he indicates on the final page and in the final note of the 'Préface': the word 'censeur' is followed by a footnote call, referring readers to the twelfth volume:

Voyez, entre autres, tome XII de cette édition, l'Avertissement de l'Editeur, imprimé à la suite de *la Religieuse*, et les notes que j'ai jointes à l'écrit qui a pour titre: *Principes de politique des souverains*.

See, amongst others, the Editor's Announcement, in volume 12 of this edition, published at the end of *The Nun*, and the notes that I have attached to the piece of writing entitled *Political Principles for Sovereigns*.

When we follow up this emphatically visible cross-reference, we find eleven pages of emphatic excoriation of the entirety of this *Extrait de la Correspondance littéraire de M***, année 1770* (or 'Préface-annexe'), the letters of which, he declares, he would have 'certainement retranchées, si j'avois été le premier éditeur de ce roman' [have certainly cut, had I been the first editor of this novel],¹⁴ because they are in bad taste and weaken the effect. Fortified by a witticism of Voltaire's, comparing publishers to sacristans who collect old rags and then get people to worship them, Naigeon sets out his own more discerning stall:

'Tous, dit [Voltaire], rassemblent des guenilles qu'ils veulent faire révéler. Mais on ne doit imprimer d'un auteur que ce qu'il a écrit de digne d'être lu. Avec cette règle honnête, il y auroit moins de livres et plus de goût dans le public.' Convaincu depuis long-tems de la vérité de cette observation, je n'ai pu voir sans peine qu'on imprimât *la Religieuse* et *Jacques le fataliste* avec tous les défauts qui les déparent plus ou moins aux yeux des lecteurs d'un goût sévère et délicat. Un éditeur qui [...] n'auroit eu pour chérir, pour respecter sa mémoire, d'autres motifs que les progrès qu'il a fait faire à la raison, à l'esprit philosophique, et la forte

14 Naigeon, in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 12, p. 255.

impulsion qu'il a donnée à son siècle [...] auroit réduit *Jacques le Fataliste* à cent pages, ou peut-être même il ne l'eût jamais publié.¹⁵

As Voltaire puts it, 'They just assemble any old bits and pieces they want people to revere. But of any given author, only what is worthy of being read should be published. If this honest rule were followed, there would be fewer books and the public would have more taste.' Long convinced of the truth of this observation, I was pained to see that *The Nun* and *Jacques the Fatalist* were being published with all the defects which tarnish them more or less in the eyes of those readers with a severe and delicate taste. An editor whose [...] only reason to hold an author dear and to respect his memory was because of the advances he made in thought and philosophical thinking and the way he pushed the whole century forward [...] would have reduced *Jacques the Fatalist* to a hundred pages, or he might not have published it at all.

However, as he grumpily points out, 'ces retranchements, que *Jacques le Fataliste* et *la Religieuse* semblent exiger' [these cuts, which *Jacques the Fatalist* and *The Nun* seem to require] are now pointless: 'la première impression, toujours si difficile à effacer, est faite' [the first impression, always so difficult to eradicate, is made].¹⁶ Interesting, here, to see the two meanings of 'impression', that is, *printing* and *impression*, both being evoked and presented in complete alignment. One may wish to suggest that Naigeon's statements about the bad taste of Diderot's fiction and the desirability of cutting the bad parts are straightforwardly strategic on Naigeon's part, made with a view to preempting any attack on Diderot's virtue, and therefore that we should not take them at face value. After all, he does actually publish *Jacques le fataliste* and *La Religieuse* in the *Œuvres*, and he publishes the more straightforwardly obscene *Bijoux indiscrets* too. This 'Avertissement' and the remarks he makes in the 'Préface', from this point of view, would simply be false protestations of virtuous restraint, which actually make it possible for him to go ahead and publish the offending works in full, works which he himself does not approve of and would never have published, works which Diderot (he says) entirely recognised were unacceptable, but works which happen already to have been published, so he might as well go ahead and give them in corrected editions anyway. It would certainly be true to say that

15 Naigeon, in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 12, p. 260.

16 Naigeon, in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 12, p. 264.

it is strategic of Naigeon to present the novels in this way, but his being strategic does not necessarily preclude his agreeing with the position he articulates, that is, that both novels are weakened by the obscenity (he objects to the mother superior's orgasm) and the lack of nobility (he disapproves of Jacques's low station and low way of speaking). Of course, we cannot know what Naigeon *really* thought, but we can read what he says and look at what he does. And in this context, some of the things he says, in particular about *Jacques le fataliste*, seem to indicate a certain view about what would have been a more effective way for Diderot to write, one which may prove helpful when considering the *Mémoires*, and we meet again the reference to the 'lecteurs d'un goût sévère et délicat' [readers with a severe and delicate taste]. He writes that it is not that we do not find here and there 'des réflexions très-fines, souvent profondes, telles enfin qu'on les peut attendre d'un esprit ferme, étendu, hardi, et qui sait généraliser ses idées' [very subtle and often profound thoughts, such as we might expect to find in a firm, expansive, and bold mind, one which knows how to generalize its ideas] and he goes on to say:

Mais ces réflexions si philosophiques, placées dans la bouche d'un valet, tel qu'il n'en exista jamais; amenées d'ailleurs peu naturellement, et n'étant point liées à un sujet grave, dont toutes les parties fortement enchaînées entre elles s'éclaircissent, se fortifient réciproquement, et forment un tout, un système UN, n'ont fait aucune sensation. Ce sont quelques paillettes d'or éparées, enfouies dans un fumier où personne assurément ne sera tenté de les chercher; et, par cela même, des idées isolées, stériles et perdues.¹⁷

But these very philosophical thoughts, being placed in the mouth of a servant such as never did exist, introduced moreover in a highly unnatural way, entirely unconnected to any serious subject in which all the parts are strongly linked together and thereby illuminate and strengthen each other to construct a whole, one system AS ONE, made no sensation of any sort. They are merely a few scattered flecks of gold buried in a midden where for sure no one will feel any temptation to go and find them, and for this reason, they are ideas which are isolated, sterile, and lost.

17 Naigeon, in Diderot, *Œuvres* (1798), vol. 12, pp. 261–62.

What he criticises is the way in which the ‘very subtle and often profound thoughts’ are scattered about, *not* brought together or interlinked, and therefore *fail* to mutually illuminate and strengthen each other or to form a whole, and so go unnoticed. These thoughts are flecks of gold buried in a midden, no one will *want* to go and look for them, and thus the ideas remain isolated, sterile and lost. This view, in conjunction with his explicit statement about getting rid of three quarters of *Jacques le fataliste*, suggest that Naigeon has a particular technique in mind; the identification and collecting of these flecks of gold or ideas, freeing them from the muck, joining them together into a clearly connected, consistently serious whole so that they stop languishing in isolation and start being productive. The mind that can do this work, the firm, far-reaching, and audacious mind, is specifically one which knows how to generalise its ideas. If generalisation and seriousness is what Naigeon prizes, no wonder he does not like the all-too-specific, class-located, and generally ungeneralisable Jacques!

The rather striking repetition and typography in the phrase ‘un système UN’, which I have translated as *one system AS ONE*, is instructive in this respect: Naigeon wants something emphatically unified and generally applicable, probably something abstract. Interestingly, this phrase is also an allusion to and an echo of a formula we find in *Jacques le fataliste*. Diderot’s phrase is in fact ‘une cause une’ (he does not appear to capitalise the second indefinite article). This same phrase also appears in the *Rêve de d’Alembert*, in the *Observations sur Hemsterhuis*, and in the *Réfutation d’Helvétius*.¹⁸ We find something similar in the *Éléments de physiologie*: ‘Sans la sensibilité et la loi de continuité dans la contexture animale, sans ces deux qualités l’animal ne peut être *un*’ [Without sensibility and the law of continuity in the intermixture of animal parts, without these two qualities the animal cannot be *one*].¹⁹ Here, as we see, the connected wholeness, the oneness, of the animal is emphasised typographically, via italicisation. Clearly, in any case, the notion of the

18 With thanks to Ruggero Sciuto for sending me these details, private correspondence, 23 August 2017.

19 Denis Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*, ed. by Jean Mayer, *CŒuvres complètes*, DPV (Paris: Hermann, 1987), vol. 17, pp. 261–574 (p. 307) [hereafter DPV]/Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*, ed. by Paolo Quintili (Paris: Champion, 2004), p. 122 [hereafter PQ]/Diderot, *Éléments de physiologie*, ed. by Motoichi Terada (Paris: Éditions Matériologiques, 2019), p. 131 [hereafter MT].

connected whole is a recurrent one, and almost certainly a very subtle and profound thought of the variety Nageon approves of, a 'paillette d'or' or fleck of gold. He uses the same syntactical emphasis when he talks elsewhere about Michel de Montaigne being 'un homme UN' [a man AS ONE].²⁰

This 'elsewhere' in which he mentions Montaigne in fact comes from the editing project he was undertaking in parallel with the *Œuvres de Diderot*, the first appearance in print of the *Essais* in what is known as the 'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', in which Montaigne added copious annotations to the 1588 edition of his *Essais*, thereby extending the text by about a third.²¹ Philippe Desan tells the story of how François de Neufchâteau (1750–1828), man of letters and politician, found out about this annotated copy in the 1770s and never forgot about it; as Minister of the Interior in 1798–99, he commanded that it be sent to Paris from the Bibliothèque publique de Bordeaux in preparation for a new edition, and it was Nageon to whom he gave the task.²² Nageon, like him, was also a member of the Institut national, although Neufchâteau was in the 'classe des Lettres'; unlike Nageon, but like Garat, Cabanis, and Destutt de Tracy, Neufchâteau was also a member of the Loge des Neuf Sœurs, and had been, from its creation. So, as we keep on finding, there are a good number of connections and overlapping relationships. Nageon's edition was ready to come out in 1802, with an extensive preface including the usual anti-clerical rants and dated 'Paris, 15 Germinal, an X' (5 April 1802), just three days before the ratification, on Easter Day (18 Germinal/8 April) of the Concordat between Napoleon Bonaparte and the Pope in which Roman Catholicism was re-established as the principal religion of France. Nageon's preface was not merely anti-clerical, it directly exhorted Napoleon to keep the priesthood under control.²³ And

20 Jacques-André Nageon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Philippe Desan, *Montaigne Studies*, 10 (Oct 1998), 35–78 (p. 36).

21 https://montaignestudies.uchicago.edu/h/bordeaux_copy/ (information in English); Nicolas Barbey, 'Comment Montaigne écrivait ses Essais : l'Exemplaire de Bordeaux', *Le Blog Gallica*, 6 July 2016, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/blog/06072016/comment-montaigne-ecrivait-ses-essais-lexemplaire-de-bordeaux> (information in French, and the digitised version).

22 Philippe Desan, 'Nageon et l'"avertissement" censuré de l'édition des *Essais* de 1802', *Montaigne Studies*, 10 (1998), 7–33 (pp. 7–13).

23 Nageon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 72. (via Voltaire: 'Qui conduit des soldats, peut gouverner des prêtres' [who leads soldiers can govern priests]);

thus the preface was suppressed, by the publisher Didot himself; of the initial preface only a few pages were kept, and of the original print-run only eight copies survived, owned by Didot, Napoleon, and some of his top officials.²⁴ Meanwhile, the new edition of Montaigne duly came out, with its much briefer and politer preface. When we consult the original, however, which we now can, thanks to Desan's critical edition, we find an absolute gold mine (rather than just a few gold flecks interspersed in a giant midden) of curious and impassioned statements about what it means to be an editor, which help prepare us for the much longer curiosity that is the *Mémoires*.

Firstly, then, Naigeon claims that his edition is 'une copie rigoureusement exacte [...] Je ne crois pas avoir oublié un mot, une syllabe, une lettre' [a strictly accurate copy [...] I do not think I missed a word, a syllable or a letter].²⁵ This is a firm statement of total adherence to the autograph, and it is absolutely false: all the way through, Naigeon altered the spelling to make it more archaic. Thus 'aucteur' for 'auteur', 'doulce' for 'douce' and so on. Philippe Desan analyses the process of archaization in some detail, speculating with Pierre Bonnet that Naigeon did this in order to intensify 'l'apparence de sincérité' [appearance of sincerity].²⁶ From our point of view, in any case, the important thing is that Naigeon utterly denies having changed even a letter, while having in fact altered the spelling in a very thorough-going way. In fact, he has quite a curious idea of what it is to be a scholar and an editor: in his view, it is not an occupation or a service so much as a life or death passion, as we see in the following portrait, which first outlines the limitations of the scholar, and then, unexpectedly, starts to describe something *more imperious*:

further anti-clerical rants: p. 44 (this is also a rant against women), 65, 71 (on p. 73 he turns against the newspapers).

24 Desan details what happened, Desan, 'Naigeon et l'"avertissement" censuré de l'édition des *Essais* de 1802', 31–33, quoting in particular Gabriel Peignot (Gabriel Peignot, *Répertoire des bibliographies spéciales, curieuses et instructives*, 1810, Paris Renouard p. 92) and H. Mazel (H. Mazel, 'La Fameuse Préface de Naigeon', *Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne*, 2.4 (1938), 28–29).

25 Naigeon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 44.

26 Desan, 'Naigeon et l'"avertissement" censuré de l'édition des *Essais* de 1802', 27. He is quoting Pierre Bonnet, 'Évolution et structure du texte des *Essais*', in *Pour une édition critique des Essais*, ed. by Marcel Françon (Cambridge: Schoenhof's Foreign Books, 1965), p. 16.

L'érudit a dans la tête plus de mots que d'idées; il est sur-tout incapable de cette attention forte et continue, qui ne suffit pas sans doute pour reculer la limite d'une science ou d'un art, mais sans laquelle on ne fait guere de découvertes ni dans l'une ni dans l'autre. Il est même assez difficile que la culture des sciences exactes et expérimentales, ou celle de la philosophie rationnelle ait pour lui un grand attrait: une passion plus impérieuse le domine et l'entraîne; il faut qu'il y cède; sa raison, sa vie même en dépend; il faut qu'il corrige, qu'il restitue des textes, qu'il collationne des manuscrits, qu'il recueille des variantes, qu'il compile, ou qu'il meure.²⁷

The man of learning has more words than ideas in his head; above all, he is incapable of that intense and continued attention which is probably not enough in itself to push at the boundaries of the sciences or arts, but without which no discovery of any sort can be made in either. Even cultivating the exact and experimental sciences is quite difficult for him, and nor does rational philosophy have any great attraction: a more imperious passion dominates and drives him; he has to yield to it; his reason, even his life depends upon it; he has to correct and restore texts, compare manuscripts, gather variants, compile, or die.

This description of the desultory scholar with more words than ideas and not a lot of concentration or even that much interest transmutes in the most surprising way into the portrait of a person who is driven and obsessed by his editorial work, utterly unable to withstand the compulsion to correct and restore texts, collate manuscripts, list variants, and just simply compile—in the case of this last verb, there is not even an object; the activity itself is the driver. And without it, he will die. Why is Naugeon saying this? Has editorial work ever been described, before or since, with such fervour? In its intensity and strangeness, this passage sticks out of its context—a discussion of Pierre Coste's edition of the *Essais*—and it cannot be simply a description (either appreciative or mocking) of Coste as an editor, as Naugeon immediately follows on with a description of his own editorial conscientiousness.²⁸ Nor does he appear to be satirising himself, although a certain ironic self-consciousness is clearly on display. It sounds like nothing so much as a

27 Naugeon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 49–50.

28 'J'ai vérifié sur le texte des meilleures éditions des auteurs classiques tous les passages cités par Montaigne' [I cross-checked in the best editions all the passages Montaigne quotes from classic authors] (Naugeon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 50).

personal avowal—a confession, perhaps—of an overmastering passion, which in revealing itself also describes itself and details its activities. First in the list of activities are correcting and restoring texts, and as we see from what he did with the hitherto unpublished *Exemplaire de Bordeaux* of Montaigne's *Essais*, correcting and restoring do not necessarily involve following the autograph exactly; they might involve restoring the text to an invented idealised archaic version. When we consider this in parallel with Naigeon's remarks about an improved version of *Jacques le fataliste*, that is, one reduced by 75%, shorn of characterisation, and retaining only the golden flecks of the 'réflexions très-fines, souvent profondes', we begin to see that he had a very specific idea of editing, one that is indeed subservient to the text in production, but whereby that text is an ideal or idealised one, not necessarily the one that the author had produced. If Naigeon decides not to amend ('restore') texts which have already been published, it is because there is no point, as 'la première impression, toujours si difficile à effacer, est faite' [the first impression, always so difficult to eradicate, is made], but in the case of texts which have never been published, as with the *Exemplaire de Bordeaux*, there is more room for manoeuvre. In fact, with Montaigne's *Essais*, he contented himself with the archaising of the spelling and some reworking of the punctuation.²⁹ But from what we have seen before, and from what he says in the following passage, we can see that he envisages more far-reaching 'corrections', ones which, he alleges, *secretly delight the author of real taste*:

Ces petites nettetés du style qui consistent, tantôt dans un simple choix d'expressions plus sonores, plus musicales, plus douces à l'oreille, ce juge si dédaigneux et superbe; tantôt dans la suppression de quelques ornements ambitieux; ici dans le soin d'éviter certaines formules dont le retour trop fréquent *manière* le style; là dans l'art d'éteindre à propos des lumières trop brillantes qui nuisent à l'harmonie, à l'effet de l'ensemble, en multipliant les effets particuliers et secondaires: toutes ces diverses corrections, plus ou moins importantes, échappent sans doute aux gens du monde, la plupart peu instruits [...]: mais un écrivain de grand goût, un auteur qui se contente, comme Horace, d'un petit nombre de lecteurs, [...] s'applaudit en secret de ces corrections très légères, minutieuses même en apparence, mais qui ajoutent d'autant plus de prix à un

29 On the question of punctuation, see Desan, 'Naigeon et l'"avertissement" censuré de l'édition des *Essais* de 1802', 26.

ouvrage, que les défauts qu'elles font disparoître étoient peu sensibles, et exigeoient, par cela même, pour être apperçus, un tact plus fin, plus sûr, et un sentiment plus exquis du beau et des convenances.³⁰

Those little stylistic touches which consist sometimes in simply choosing expressions which are more sonorous, more musical, sweeter to the ear – that proud judge who is so hard to please – sometimes in suppressing a few ambitious ornaments, here in taking care to avoid certain expressions whose over-frequent appearance *manners* the style, there in the art of purposely dimming some of the illuminations which shine too bright and disrupt the harmony and effect of the whole, by multiplying some of the specific and secondary effects: all these diverse and more or less significant corrections no doubt escape the notice of people of the world, most of whom have very little education [...]: but a writer of great taste, an author who, like Horace, is happy with just a few readers,[...] secretly applauds these very slight corrections, minuscule in appearance, but which add all the more value to a work, the defects they remove having been barely perceptible in the first place and for that very reason having required a finer and more skilful touch and a more exquisite sentiment of beauty and of what is proper.

This lyrical flight in praise of the correction of texts is just one sentence, lightly abridged for the sake of length. Yet how full it still is! How much Naigeon has to say about the aesthetically enhancing capacities of correction! What a pile-up of carefully balanced clauses! This is a paean to the corrector, not to the writer, and also, not to the re-writer; this is not a description of Montaigne re-writing his own work, and in any case, as we know, Montaigne did not rewrite existing sentences so much as add to them. So this is not about Montaigne's amplificatory work on the *Essais* or about Naigeon's editing of them, given that his alterations were limited to the archaization of the spelling and the changing of the punctuation. This is very specifically about the corrector who does not himself (definitely a *him*; Naigeon sees the world he values as masculine)³¹ generate a text but who comes along subsequently, and improves it in many ways, the corrections being 'plus ou moins importantes' [more or less significant] while remaining invisible to the

30 Naigeon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 70–71.

31 We referenced his outbursts against women as well as priests above (Naigeon, 'Avertissement de l'éditeur', ed. by Desan, 44); he has some trouble managing what he thinks about Marie de Gournay, see Desan, 'Naigeon et l'"avertissement" censuré de l'édition des *Essais* de 1802', 28–29.

largely uneducated 'gens du monde' [people of the world]; they are also 'très légères' [very slight] and yet add great value to a work. There is a sort of see-saw of opposing negating statements in operation here: corrections might be quite extensive but they are invisible; they are very light yet they add a great deal. The corrector matches the writer in terms of taste: the writer 'of great taste' is highly appreciative of the work the corrector does; the corrector himself needs the most perfect and sure touch, the most exquisite feeling for beauty and propriety to be able to do the work he does. The writer writes; the corrector perfects, and brings the text to the highest pitch of beauty, a beauty which is defined, at least in part, by its propriety. The work of the corrector seems to take place at a higher level than the work of the writer; it takes priority.

So, we know what Naigeon thinks about editing and we know how he thinks Diderot should be edited. The preface he wrote to the *Œuvres de Diderot*, in combination with the self-exculpatory 'Avertissement de l'Editeur, imprimé à la suite de *la Religieuse*' and the original 'Avertissement de l'Editeur' for Montaigne's *Essais*, all of which are dated within four years of each other (1798–1802), provide us with statements which become increasingly revealing and idiosyncratic, whether that be in relation to the judgements that they make of what a writer gets wrong (in the first two texts, the writer is explicitly Diderot) and should change (or allow to be changed), or about the overwhelming passion that is editing for Naigeon, about how far-reaching he conceives the editing role as being in the case of hitherto unpublished texts, and finally, of the great status he attributes to the editor, greater it seems even than the writer, at least in terms of taste. This truly is an odd series of statements, and the closer we look at them, the odder they seem. They will be very helpful, though, when we come to look at the *Mémoires sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot*, so often mentioned as imminent by Naigeon, and yet unpublished until 1823. This we soon will; it is the final text to consider, and the second of our final pair. Firstly, though, to Garat, whom we last heard of keeping his counsel at the Institut national.

