Caroline 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 witty 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 Eléments 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.
11. 1820: Garat’s Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe siècle

We now jump forward in time, to two memoir pieces, Dominique-Joseph Garat’s composed just prior to publication, and Jacques-André Naigeon’s published posthumously. They are, to give them their full titles, Garat’s Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe siècle of 1820, and Naigeon’s Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot, with its advertised publication date of 1821, and its actual date of 1823. We take them in chronological order of publication according to our usual pattern, and it seems satisfying to do so in this particular case, given that Garat seems to nod to the imminent appearance of Naigeon’s Mémoires, and that the Mémoires themselves are a fitting end to the book, offering what I will argue is the first publication of Denis Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie, presented in a rearranged and abridged mesh with the Rêve de d’Alembert as it is.

Garat’s Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe siècle, or Mémoires sur Suard for short, is a curious work, alternately hyperbolic and guarded. The object of this biographical memoir, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard (1732–1817), was a minor man of letters, editor and journalist; he was part of the world of the ‘philosophes’ and knew many of them, yet sometimes he represented the authorities (as ‘Censeur des théâtres’, he was responsible for banning Beaumarchais’s Mariage de Figaro). Garat’s Mémoires sur Suard are 900 pages long, split into two volumes, the first of which relates the history of French culture
through the lens of conversation, the second offering a panorama of European literature, language by language.¹ This is all framed by and interspersed with information, anecdotes, and comments about Suard’s life which are remarkable for their lack of enthusiasm. He is variously described as being lazy (1.221, 2.215), somnolent (2.213-214), writing less than his contemporaries and being less passionate (1.220), being timid (1.232), not being a very impressive speaker because of his weak voice and nervous tone (1.332), having a poor memory (2.129) and as having not written as much as he should have done (1.328). One of the most complimentary passages describes him as being capable of writing the history of France via conversation, but as not having done it (Garat is doing it instead, 1.171). Another goes so far as to say that if the hundred pieces he wrote, each separately excellent, were brought together, they would make a ‘volume digne d’une haute considération et de toutes les places académiques’ [a volume worthy of high consideration and of any academic post] (1.331). There are many other such weak compliments and barbed comments. It is understandable therefore that Suard’s widow (Amélie Panckoucke) wrote her own briefer, more focused, and more amorously subservient version to counter Garat’s, and brought it out in virtuous outrage the same year.² In sum, Suard seems to provide

¹ Dominique-Joseph Garat, Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe siècle; par Dominique-Joseph Garat, 2 vols (Paris: A. Belin, 1820). See the ‘Table analytique’, vol. 1, pp. i-xliv (p. vii): ‘Nécessité de connaître l’histoire des conversations en France depuis le dixième siècle qu’elles ont commencé pour bien apprécier celles du dix-huitième’ [Necessity of knowing the history of conversations in France from their commencement in the tenth century and onwards, in order properly to appreciate the conversations of the eighteenth]. See also 1.176 onwards.

² ‘Une plume beaucoup plus habile avoit désiré se charger de ce soin; la connaissance parfaite que cet écrivain avoit du caractère et des vertus de M. Suard, les larmes abondantes qu’il répandoit sur sa tombe, m’ont fait céder à ses voeux. Mais ni mes intentions, ni celles que je lisois dans les dernières volontés de M. Suard n’ayant été remplies par cet écrit, dont à peine quelques fragments m’ont été communiqués, des considérations tres puissantes à mes yeux et dont je ne dois compte à personne, me décident à le désavouer auprès de mes amis’ [a more skilful pen than mine had requested this task for himself; the perfect knowledge that this writer had of Mr Suard’s character and virtues, the abundant tears he shed over his tomb, made me grant his request. But neither my intentions nor those I read in the last wishes of Mr Suard having been fulfilled by this piece of writing, of which barely a few fragments have been shown to me, and owing to considerations which are very important to me, and which I need justify to no one, I have decided to tell my friends that I disavow his memoir]. Amélie Suard, Essais de mémoires sur M. Suard (Paris: Didot, 1820), pp. 2–3.
a rather desultory excuse for Garat to give an account of something, 900 pages-worth of it, that he finds more important, this something being to do, no doubt, with the other part of the title, ‘le XVIIIe siècle’ [the eighteenth century].

By the time Garat wrote the *Mémoires sur Suard*, he was no longer in the epicentre of power. The restoration of the Bourbon monarchy triggered his expulsion from the post-Revolutionary reinstated Académie française, and he returned to his native Basque country where he died in 1833, having refused an official invitation to rejoin the Académie française in 1829, although agreeing, when the Académie des sciences morales et politiques was set up in 1832 (or rather set back up, its ancestor, the ‘Classe des sciences morales et politiques’, having been closed down by Napoleon Bonaparte, as we saw in a previous chapter), to his election as member of the section ‘Morale’ (Destutt de Tracy was part of the section ‘Philosophie’). Garat never took up this seat. Suard, in fact, had been one of the key movers in determining who should be expelled from the Académie française, its own entry on Suard stating that he ‘prit une part regrettable à la réorganisation de 1816’ [he played a regrettable role in the 1816 reorganisation]. Here, then, would be one reason for Garat’s inability to praise Suard wholeheartedly: personal resentment towards the instigator of his expulsion. This, however, he denies, both at the opening of the two volumes and at their close. Indeed, he may be hoping that these magnanimous *Mémoires* will contribute to his reinstatement; his statements about how much he misses his erstwhile colleagues and his declaration that his only remaining wish is to converse with them once more would seem to tend in that direction. Also, as suggested above, he may wish his *Mémoires sur Suard* to be associated with other forthcoming *Mémoires*, possibly even Naigeon’s on Diderot. As he says, ‘beaucoup de mémoires restent encore à paraître’ [many memoirs are yet to be published]. The passage that this snippet comes from is worth quoting in its entirety for the hints

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3 Who held what seat (‘fauteuil’) and when is carefully recorded on the website of the Académie, see https://academiesciencesmoralesetpolitiques.fr/les-academiciens-de-1832-a-nos-jours/.  
that it gives of a hinterland of as-yet unknown truth. It describes Suard’s conversation, Suard who chatted much more than he wrote (‘M. Suard a beaucoup plus causé qu’il n’a écrit’ [Mr Suard conversed very much more than he wrote], 1.173):

Mais c’est dans les cercles, dans les cabinets, dans les entretiens, qu’il [Suard] les [des choses précieuses] a comme jetées; pour en apprécier le mérite et l’influence, il faudrait connaître parfaitement ce dix-huitième siècle sur lequel beaucoup de mémoires restent encore à paraître; il faudrait en comparer les conversations aux conversations des siècles qui l’ont précédé. On peut et on doit indiquer ici ces parallèles nécessaires et piquans; on ne peut les instituer; ils seraient trop longs et ne seraient pas complets; les matériaux ne manquent pas seulement; ceux que nous avons sont rarement assez sûrs.7

But it’s in small groups, in private studies, in conversations, that Suard scattered, as it were, these precious things; to appreciate their merit and influence, one would need to perfectly understand the eighteenth century, about which many memoirs are yet to be published; one would need to compare the conversations to the conversations of preceding centuries. One can and one must signal these necessary and illuminating parallels; one cannot undertake them oneself; they would be too long and would not be complete; it’s not only the materials that are missing; those we do have are rarely trustworthy enough.

How curious, this imperative to indicate parallels with other conversationalists, to compare across the eighteenth century (which one would need to know perfectly), and with previous centuries.8 How curious that these parallels are described as both necessary and ‘piquant’—a difficult term to translate—Chambaud’s French-English Dictionary in its 1815 edition suggests variously pungent, keen, sharp, biting. In modern parlance, one might perhaps say about a parallel that it was suggestive, meaningful, or revelatory. In any case, Garat declares that these parallels must be signalled but must not be spelled out. For

this, he gives various weak excuses, saying it would take too long and there is not enough material, and it is not reliable enough anyway. Or perhaps he really means that it is not safe enough. There seems to be a certain measure of wary caution in evidence here, and as we know anyway, Garat was out of favour, and probably seeking to return to it. But, as we also see, Garat is not only being prudent, he is also planting some signs here. There are quite a lot of these throughout the book.

He talks about ‘[l’art de] cacher une partie de son idée’ [the art of hiding part of one’s idea] (I.212), taught primarily by Fontenelle, about how to ‘exciter de ces surprises que la logique même est sûre de produire’ [provoke some of those surprises that logic itself is sure to produce] (I.212), about how ellipses (or gaps for that which is not made explicit) are ‘pour ainsi dire, l’algèbre moral des langues’ [the moral algebra of languages, so to say] (II.184), about how a pamphlet written by Jean-François Marmontel against Jean-Jacques Rousseau evoked him without naming him once (‘moins il le nommait, plus il le rappelait’ [the less he named him, the more he brought him to mind] (II.239)), and of the ‘travail lent et secret du dictionnaire’ [slow secret work of the dictionary], which, by ‘détermin[ant] les acceptions des mots’ [determining the meanings of words] would later come to influence ‘le cours de morale et de politique’ [the course of moral and political life] (II.421). Elsewhere, when relaying discussions that Suard had with Laurence Sterne, author of *Tristam Shandy*, Sterne purportedly gives ‘l’étude de Locke’ [the study of Locke] as one of his three main influences (along with his ‘sensibility’ and also a daily portion of the Bible). John Locke is the trigger for an outburst of praise about Locke’s contribution to developing human understanding:

[... ] cette philosophie que ceux qui savent la reconnaître où elle est, et où elle dirige tout secrètement, retrouvent et sentent dans toutes les pages, dans toutes les lignes, dans le choix de toutes les expressions; [...] cette philosophie trop religieuse pour vouloir expliquer le miracle des sensations, mais qui, avec ce miracle dont elle n’a pas la témérité de demander raison et compte à Dieu, développe tous les secrets de l’entendement [...].

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This philosophy which those who can see it and know where it is, a place moreover from which it directs everything in secret, can find and sense in every page, in every line, in the choice of every expression; [...] this philosophy which is too religious to wish to explain the miracle of sensation, but which, by means of that miracle which it does not have the effrontery to demand a reason or explanation of from God, develops all the secrets of the human understanding [...].

This is not merely praise of Locke, it is praise of ‘cette philosophie’, and a statement of its ubiquity and its secret presence and power: ‘elle dirige tout secrètement’ [it directs everything in secret]. Garat partly wraps this up in various imported sacred terms; thus the philosophy is religious, the sensations are a miracle which it (the philosophy) does not dare ask God about. Presumably these verbal fig leaves make it possible for him to deny any accusation of irreligion. But they do not hide what he is actually saying, which is that Lockean philosophy is everywhere for those readers who know how to see it, and furthermore, that it is secretly in charge. He goes on to discuss Buffon and Diderot. This book repeatedly references the great advances made in the knowledge of human understanding in the eighteenth century. And this is what the book is primarily about, where its centre of gravity is, partly because he says so, and partly because it is what he repeatedly returns to.¹⁰

Fontenelle (1657–1757), perpetual secretary of the French Académie royale des sciences (1699–1740), is frequently alluded to as a sort of uncontentious great man of French science.¹¹ Fontenelle had, of course, been the object of Garat’s prize-winning Éloge de Fontenelle (1784), so he is familiar stamping-ground for Garat.¹² And of all the things that

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¹⁰ Works on human understanding are repeatedly mentioned (sometimes Garat only gives the author or the title): Fontenelle, Traité sur l’entendement humain: 1.117–18, La Romiguère, Leçons sur la pensée: 2.36; Stewart: 1.185–86; Moses Mendelssohn’s Recherches sur les sentiments moraux, 1.58; Gatti: 2.198; Bonnet: 2.31; Bichat: 2.34; Condillac: 1.160–61; Helvetius: 1.125; d’Holbach: 1.207–14; Charles Georges Leroy, Lettres philosophiques sur l’intelligence et la perfectibilité des animaux: 1.155; Hume, Traité de la nature humaine and Recherches sur l’entendement humain: 2.153; Lavoisier (who laid out the ‘principes de l’entendement’ in his ‘plan d’instruction publique’ as skilfully as the ‘principes chimiques’): 2.327. Garat, Mémoires sur Suard.

¹¹ A non-exhaustive list of allusions to Fontenelle in the Mémoires sur Suard includes: vol. 1: 80–82; 117–22; 124–25; 212; 231.

Fontenelle was interested in, says Garat, the thing that was ‘the most intense passion of his life’ was a theory of the faculties of the human mind. Here is the passage in full where he writes about it:

Les théories de l’entendement, qui, depuis Bacon et Descartes, avaient pris dans les connaissances humaines une si grande place, et peut-être la première, avaient beaucoup occupé la jeunesse de Fontenelle; il parut long-temps y renoncer; mais la plus forte passion de sa vie, il l’eut à près de cent ans, et ce fut encore pour la métaphysique. Elle le faisait sortir de ce style fin et familier, auquel la nature probablement l’avait destiné, mais dont il se faisait aussi comme un principe du culte de la vérité. A cet âge, où toute imagination est éteinte, même dans ceux qu’elles a dominés, il peignait, par une grande image, la puissance qu’exercerait une théorie des facultés de l’esprit humain, tirée à la fois et de l’organisation humaine, et des chefs-d’œuvre créés déjà par la raison, déjà consacrés par cet assentiment universel qui ne s’accorde qu’à l’évidence. Elle sera, disait-il, le grand luminaire suspendu entre le bon sens, commun à tous les hommes, le génie des beaux-arts et le génie des sciences; elle les rapprochera, elle les unira, en leur faisant voir comment ils sortent des mêmes sources.

Des fragments assez considérables, et très-importans, d’un Traité de la raison humaine, ont été trouves dans les papiers de Fontenelle; ils ont été publiés par l’abbé Trublet. […] C’est dans ces fragmens qu’une main centenaire a déposé, la première fois, les germes de beaucoup d’idées très-lumineuses, développées depuis par les meilleurs métaphysiciens de l’Europe.¹³

The theories about [human] understanding which had, since Bacon and Descartes, become such an important, perhaps even the most important, part of human knowledge, had absorbed a great deal of Fontenelle’s youth; he gave up on them for a long period, but the strongest passion of his life came upon him when he was nearly one hundred years old, and it was again for metaphysics. It propelled him out of that subtle and familiar style that nature had probably destined him to have and which was also for him a sort of guiding principle in his worship of the truth. At that age, when all imagination has faded even in those whom it has dominated, he painted a great image of the power that a theory of the faculties of the human mind would have, one which would be drawn both from the human [bodily] organization and from the masterpieces already created by the human mind [la raison], and consecrated by that universal assent which only occurs in response to evidence. It will be, said he, a great chandelier hung between the good sense every man has, the genius

of the fine arts and the genius of the sciences; it will bring them together, it will unite them by showing them how they share common sources.

Quite lengthy and very important fragments of a Treatise of human reason were found amongst Fontenelle’s papers; they were published by the Reverend Trublet. [...] It is in these fragments that a hundred-year-old hand deposited the seeds of many deeply illuminating ideas, and which have since been taken forward by the best metaphysicians of Europe.

Here, in summary, are the claims Garat makes in this passage: the theories of human understanding may be the most important area of recent knowledge; Fontenelle thought about this topic a great deal when a young man; he returned to it in extreme old age; it was the strongest passion of his life; he wrote it in a less familiar (‘familiar’ as in ‘common’ or ‘low’ or ‘oral’) style than he habitually used, while still using striking imagery at an age when all imagination is extinguished even in those people whom it has dominated; important and extensive extracts of his treatise on this subject were found in his papers after his death, and have since been published; an old man wrote them; he planted in them the seeds of his luminous ideas which have since been developed by the best minds in Europe. Well now. Is Garat talking primarily about Fontenelle here?

Fontenelle did indeed write fragments on the human mind, which Nicolas-Charles-Joseph Trublet published in his grand edition of Fontenelle in ten volumes (1757–58). We find them in the seventh volume of Alain Niderst’s modern edition. They consist of remarks, sketches, responses. There is a ‘Fragments d’un traité de la raison humaine’ [Fragments of a treatise on human reason], some pages ‘Sur l’instinct’ [On instinct], an ‘autre fragment, la ‘loi de la pensée’ [Law of thought] et ‘De la connaissance de l’esprit humain’ [On the knowledge of the human mind], which is sub-divided into short chapters entitled ‘Fragment’, ‘Première partie: de l’origine des idées’ [First part: on the origin of ideas], and ‘Analogie de la matière et de l’esprit’ [Analogy of matter and spirit]. In all, they amount to 48 pages, of which the ‘Fragments d’un traité de la raison humaine’ make up 23 pages. In ‘De l’instinct’, Fontenelle considers the acts of thinking and walking, that is to say, he muses on actions of which we have no consciousness (and in
fact we quoted from it in an earlier chapter). In the ‘Fragments d’un traité de la raison humaine’, he explores why it is that not all ideas are conscious; in the ‘Loi de la pensée’, he differentiates the mathematical being from the physical being; he quite often seems to be replying to Leibniz. This is all serious and important work, part of and contributing to what we have described as the on-going conversation on these matters, but it does not quite live up to Garat’s write-up. It feels very much more as if Garat’s description of Fontenelle’s work is a way of signalling Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie, with its similar framing narrative of fragmentation and posthumous papers. What he says could certainly be applied to both Fontenelle and Diderot, with the main difference being that they apply better to Diderot than to Fontenelle. Perhaps this is the sort of passage where we are expected to see the hidden message that Garat said—in relation to Lockean philosophy—was so visible for those who knew how to see it. Of course, we cannot really pin Garat down, and that is no doubt the point.

In the following passage from the second volume of his Mémoires sur Suard, he again both signals and veils what he is talking about, suffusing it all with grandiose and declamatory virtue-signalling:

Ainsi, en Angleterre et en France, et dans d’autres parties de l’Europe, la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle, c’est-à-dire, un petit nombre d’hommes qui n’avaient pour toute puissance que beaucoup de goût pour la méditation et beaucoup d’amour pour l’humanité, aspiraient à faire servir le passé, le présent, l’avenir, les tombeaux, les débris des vieux empires, les forêts et les sauvages, au perfectionnement des facultés et des destinées humaines; à fonder la raison universelle sur l’analyse, la morale sur la raison, les lois sur la morale, et le suprême bonheur de tous les êtres vivants et pensants, sur la parfaite harmonie de leurs intérêts, de leurs vœux, de leurs principes d’ordre social, sur les affections et sur les actions qui rendent le plus les âmes dignes d’une immortelle félicité.

Thus, in England and France, and in some other parts of Europe, the philosophy of the eighteenth century, that is, a small number of men whose only power was in having a great deal of taste for meditation and a great deal of love for humanity, aspired to harness the past, the present, the future, tombs, the ruins of old empires, forests and savages for the improvement of human faculties and destinies, to found universal reason

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14 See Chapter 3.
on analysis, morality on reason, laws on morality, and the supreme happiness of all living and thinking beings on the perfect harmonisation of their interests, their wishes, and their principles for social order, on the affections and on the actions most likely to make souls worthy of immortal felicity.

He is alternately very generalising and very precise (as well as quite difficult to quote succinctly). On the one hand, England, France, and other parts of Europe hardly limit his focus. On the other, ‘un petit nombre d’hommes’ [a small number of men] does, although he does not name whom he is referring to. Yet the list of what this small group of men wish to deploy for the improvement of the mind and human happiness would seem to exclude most writers and thinkers, leaving only such luminaries as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot; not many others have this encyclopedic range; Condillac does not, despite the Condillacian trigger word of ‘analyse’. Arguably, Diderot fits the bill best as the person who did indeed write about every one of these aspects, from the Essai sur les règles de Claude et de Néron to the Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, the Éléments de physiologie, and so on, not omitting his contributions to Raynal’s Histoire des deux Indes. Interestingly, the passage we have been looking at immediately leads into this discussion of dissimulating meaning or declaring it openly:

Ce but, tantôt ils le signalent avec la fermeté et la hauteur qui conviennent à peine à l’evidence; tantôt ils le voilent avec la défiance bien naturelle à sa grandeur et à ses difficultés; quelquefois ils l’enveloppent et le dissimulent comme si le voeu et l’espérance du bonheur du monde était une usurpation sur les puissances; mais qu’ils l’affichent ou qu’ils le cachent, jamais ils ne l’abandonnent; ils le conservent sous la hache des bourreaux, sous les traits meme du ridicule.16

Sometimes they signal this goal with that resolution and authority which scarcely even do justice to what is evidently true; sometimes they veil it with that diffidence so natural given its importance and the difficulties surrounding it; sometimes they conceal and disguise it as if to wish and hope for the world’s happiness were in some way to encroach on the powers that be; but whether they advertise it or hide it, they never abandon it; they keep it still when confronted with the executioner’s blade, even in the face of ridicule.

This description of how ‘la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle, c’est-à-dire, un petit nombre d’hommes’ [the philosophy of the eighteenth century, that is, a small number of men] alternates between open avowal and careful masking of their meaning, yet resolves into a noble declaration that whatever they do, they never abandon their purpose or commitment, be they threatened by execution or even covered in ridicule. One may wonder whether this last part refers to himself, arrested as he had been (and threatened with execution as he mentions in the fervent salvo of his opening lecture at the École normale), and much vilified and ridiculed as he had also been. We will quote one such satirical poem towards the end of this section.

We can see, in any case, that whether Garat is talking about Suard, who was imprisoned in the 1740s, one of the few who could understand English, and whose most precious utterances never made it into print, or Fontenelle, whose conversation was also very special, and who was interested in human understanding and worked on it at the beginning and the end of his career, leaving behind fragments of inestimable value, and whose style was full of surprises, there seems to be a Diderot-shaped shadow in the background. That said, he is not only a shadow whose presence we seem to feel; Garat also discusses him explicitly, extensively, and repeatedly. However, when it comes to discussing atheism, mentioning the *Interprétation de la nature*, and alluding to the *Lettre sur les aveugles* and the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, Diderot’s name is not given, a signal of the continuing sensitivity of this topic, at least insofar as Garat is concerned. At points Garat compares Suard

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18 On Suard in prison, see Garat, *Mémoires sur Suard*, vol. 1, p. 47 (Garat in fact makes the Diderot parallel explicit by stating that Suard wished his prison companion had been Diderot rather than the mysterious Chevalier de L***); on the English-speaking, see the ‘Table analytique’, vol. 1, pp. i–xliv (p. iii); conversation: 1.173; 243.


20 Diderot is named here (probably not an exhaustive list): vol. 1: 47; 164; 207–9; 211; 213; 218; 225; 227; 235–38 (Diderot quoted on imagination); 244–45; 324; 346; vol. 2: 13–23; 157–73; 177, 197, 240; 251; 447. Garat, *Mémoires sur Suard*.

21 Diderot’s *Interprétation de la nature* is discussed but Diderot’s authorship is not mentioned (Garat, *Mémoires sur Suard*, 1:203).
and Diderot directly, such as when they each orate about imagination; Diderot’s reported speech closes with the statement that ‘Quand un philosophe a de l’imagination, je veux que l’imagination soit un peu ÉBOURIFFÉE’ [When a philosopher has imagination, I want that imagination to be a bit WINDSWEPT].22 Suard goes on to criticise Diderot for disliking order, and Garat concludes that ‘M. Suard fut moins applaudi; ses idées étaient moins originales; il fut plus approuvé; elles étaient plus conformes aux oracles du goût et de la raison dans tous les siècles’ [Mr Suard received less applause; his ideas were less original, but he received greater approval, because his ideas conformed more to the enduring oracles of taste and reason over the centuries].23 Suard gets less applause; the judgement is that he is less original, and more of a conformist. Poor Suard! Elsewhere also, attention is drawn to what he does not like about Diderot; internal contrasts show Garat using Suard’s lack of appreciation to highlight something particularly distinctive about Diderot. Thus, what is described as Suard’s typically French taste means that he ‘ne pouvait aimer ni dans Diderot, ni dans les Allemands, ces brusques voisinages d’un familier trivial et d’une inspiration trop emphatique pour être celle de la nature et des passions’ [could not appreciate either in Diderot or in the Germans those abrupt juxtapositions of the over-familiar and trivial alongside passages of inspiration which are too emphatic to belong to nature or natural passions] (2.19); the description Garat then proceeds to give of this new German literature is intensely positive, and all about how well it describes nature and passions. Furthermore, Garat later contrasts Bacon and Montaigne; Montaigne, Garat says, ‘va au but par ricochets; l’autre va sans bonds et sans détours’ [reaches his aim via skips and jumps; the former gets there smoothly and without detours] (2.45); the contrast between the bumpy disconcerting writer and the smooth and moderate one is similar, and although in this second comparison, the smooth thinker and the bumpy one are equally lauded, the terms in which Montaigne is described are very similar to the those used earlier about Diderot. The passage in which Diderot’s ‘brusques voisinages’

22 Garat, Mémoires sur Suard, vol. 1, p. 238 (italics and capitals in the original). There doesn’t appear to be a separate Diderot text to confirm that he did say this, so Garat is the source for this anecdote.

[abrupt juxtapositions] are evoked moves into a discussion of what Suard thought of Diderot’s plays, which in turn becomes a discussion of Suard and Rousseau’s opposing views of whether Diderot excelled more as a dramatist (Suard) or as a philosopher (Rousseau). This is interestingly framed, in that both Suard and Rousseau are presented as having reservations about Diderot (this is subsequent to Rousseau and Diderot’s split). So he is debated by two of his critics, who nonetheless praise him in strong terms. In this passage, Garat introduces, in eye-catching italics, Suard’s opinion of Diderot:

Voici, et dans les mêmes termes, si ma mémoire ne me trompe, ce que Suard, qui n’aimait pas beaucoup la personne de Diderot, pensait et disait de ses talents:

Qui sait a quel rang aurait pu se placer Diderot, s’il eût concentré toutes les forces de son esprit original et fécond et celles de sa brillante imagination sur les seuls objets propres à en exercer toute l’énergie?25

Here, and in the same words, if my memory is not wrong, is what Suard, who did not much like Diderot as a person, thought and said about his talents:

Who knows what level Diderot would have reached had he concentrated all the forces of his original and fertile mind as well as those of his luminous imagination on the only objects capable of bringing into play the entirety of this energy?

Garat presents this as what Suard actually said, and claims to be recalling it from memory. We know already from a few pages earlier (and as quoted above) that Suard ‘ne pouvait aimer ni dans Diderot, ni dans les Allemands, ces brusques voisinages’ [could not appreciate either in Diderot or in the Germans those abrupt juxtapositions]; here, it is Diderot himself that he does not like much (we are not told why). Perhaps the idea of presenting Suard’s supposed reservations about Diderot is to gain the trust of readers who might also have reservations about him, and to show by contrast that the fair-minded moderate conformist person, despite disliking his style and his personality, will still concede that he is extraordinarily important. The do-I-remember-it-correctly quotation, moreover, is a mixed compliment: how toweringly important he could have been had he only concentrated the forces of his

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original and fertile mind and brilliant imagination on the only objects capable of deploying all their energy. This is not the first time such a view of Diderot had been expressed. It is the wasted-opportunity Diderot. And yet it also promises a lot, even in the regret mode. What is especially interesting about this passage is that Garat repeats it verbatim in the closing pages. This is the only time (to my knowledge) that there is any such repetition in these two long volumes. Here the context is rather different. Garat is talking about Suard’s dying years, and how he took to writing down thoughts and ‘souvenirs éparpillés’ [scattered memories]. Garat copies down in its entirety one rather longer meditation, entitled ‘Du meilleur usage de l’esprit’ [On the best use of the mind]. It is from this fragment or short essay that the not-in-fact-just-a-remembered-utterance comes. Here it is again, de-italicised this time:

Qui sait a quel rang aurait pu se placer Diderot, s’il eût concentré toutes les forces de son esprit original et fécond et celles de sa brillante imagination sur les seuls objets propres à en exercer toute l’énergie?

Who knows what level Diderot would have reached if he had concentrated all the forces of his original and fertile mind as well as those of his luminous imagination on the only objects capable of bringing into play the entirety of this energy?

The framing this short essay gives is quite different from the earlier one. Here, Suard is considering how unfortunate it is to try to master ‘l’universalité des connaissances’ [the totality of knowledge], and the extent to which this tendency has prevented the truly great from truly realising their potential. Suard (supposing it is Suard) names four such

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26 Even Eusèbe Salverte’s brave encomium of Diderot’s contribution focuses more on the genius of his spontaneous and generous character than on his writings, see Éloge philosophique de Denys Diderot, lu a l’Institut National, le 7 thermidor an 8 (Paris: Chez Surosne, 1801 [an IX]), p. 67. By the time Jean-Philibert Damiron comes to write his influential assessments, Diderot has settled into being the philosophe who was very important and influential, but too lacking in self-discipline, too spontaneous (that is, too chatty), to be one of the greats, see Jean-Philibert Damiron, Mémoire sur Diderot (1852), reprinted in Mémoires sur les Encyclopédistes (Genève: Slatkine reprints, 1968), p. 2.


men who fell short: Leibniz, Pascal, d’Alembert, and Diderot. In a way, it is amusing to contemplate this roll-call of failures; the great men who might have been. But in any case, two points need to be made. Firstly, no other of these names is so lyrically described as Diderot, or even described at all. ‘Suard’ simply says Leibniz would have made greater progress in mathematics had he limited himself to its study; the same can be said with respect to Pascal about physics and mathematics (who instead plunged into theological controversy); while D’Alembert would have overtaken Leonhard Euler and Pierre-Simon Laplace as a mathematician if he had not allowed himself to get involved in literary works, in which he only succeeded to a very mediocre degree. With respect to Diderot, ‘Suard’ does not specify the area that Diderot would have shone in if only he had not done something else instead or in addition. Secondly, extrapolating from the other examples, we see that the study of the sciences is primordial, and any other activity or controversy or glory, be it theological or literary, is a waste of time and genius. We can be fairly sure, therefore, that it is Diderot the scientist that ‘Suard’ is regretting the loss of, and not Diderot the dramatist, as in the first appearance of this passage. Furthermore, the contributions of Leibniz, Pascal, and D’Alembert to the fields of mathematics and physics were in fact huge. And thus, by extension, so was Diderot’s, whatever area of the sciences it is that ‘Suard’ has in mind. We can probably assume it is something to do with the materialist investigations of nature, with the senses which Garat mentions (although without specifying Diderot’s authorship), and with the human understanding, that topic which he

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30 Mme Suard also mentions this fragment in her rival Mémoires, and it is interestingly similar and different. She lists Pascal, Leibnitz [sic], and d’Alembert as the examples of men of genius who failed to focus exclusively on science and therefore the surer route to glory. There is no mention of Diderot. And she quotes an extensive passage which is (almost) identical to Garat’s quotation, apart from a crucial cut, which is precisely where Garat’s version of Suard mentions Leibniz, Pascal, D’Alembert, and Diderot. Instead, she moves straight to the confessional part, her cut transforming Suard’s fragment into a eulogy to the happiness of those who do not aspire to glory. Mme Suard, Essais, pp. 105–06. The fragment itself, whose existence is confirmed at least in some details by Garat and Mme Suard’s extracts, seems not ever to have been published. A later commentator and author of an Éloge de Suard, François Pérennès, quotes the same chunk about Suard’s happy non-pursuit of glory that we find in both Garat and Mme Suard’s versions, calling it simply one of Suard’s ‘souvenirs épars’ [scattered memories]. François Pérennès, Éloge de Suard, secrétaire perpétuel de l’Académie Française (Besançon: Charles Deis, 1841), p. 57.
repeatedly references and claims is possibly the area in which the most important advances have been made. Perhaps therefore, he is again, as we argued before, trying to signal the existence of Diderot’s unknown thought in this area, and in particular his texts the Rêve de d’Alembert and the Éléments de physiologie.

Elsewhere, we see Garat closely associating ‘les noms renommés dans les lettres et dans les sciences’ [the famous names of letters and sciences] who attended, along with aristocratic landowners and rich men, the salon of Diderot’s friend, the financier and government administrator Jean Devaines (1735–1803); Garat goes on to list not the names of these famous men of letters and science, but the areas they worked in, that is, medecine and chemistry, and more specifically the physical mechanisms of thought, physiology, life and death. He then says this same group of names renowned in letters and science also include those who wear the laurels of eloquence and poetry, and who best upheld ‘la splendeur littéraire du siècle de Louis XIV’ [the literary splendour of the century of Louis XIV]. It looks as if he is bringing the two seemingly distinct areas of scientific research and literary glory together. One might wish to argue that the (unnamed) names of the illustrious scientists and the illustrious men of letters are kept separate here, and technically they are; however, there is also a simultaneous effect of osmosis and association. These names are renowned ‘dans les lettres et dans les sciences’, not in one or the other: the syntax brings these two areas together as attributes of the same illustrious names. And the list of areas does not follow the same order of first letters, then sciences; it inverts it. Thus, there is an almost imperceptible confusion or fusion of the two areas. Garat is suggesting that those whose rhetoric and poetry best maintained ‘la splendeur littéraire du siècle de Louis XIV’ were those who worked on ‘le mécanisme non de la pensée qui est spirituelle, mais de ses organes extérieurs, qui sont physiques’ [the mechanism not of thought which is connected to the spirit, but to its external organs, which are physical], on ‘la nouvelle médecine’ [the new sort of medicine] which bears ‘le nom de physiologie’ [the name of physiology], and those ‘philosophes devenus chimistes pour approcher de plus près la nature, pour lui arracher, la flamme à la main, les lois de la vie et celles de la mort’

[philosophers who became chemists in order to get closer to nature, to snatch from it, torch in hand, the laws of both life and death].\textsuperscript{32} This would be a huge claim about the importance of scientific writing, that it had inherited the mantle of Jean Racine and others. Furthermore, the specificity of Garat’s list would propel Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie to the front of the queue, seeing as it contains all these elements, with the Rêve de d’Alembert close behind, more poetic but less extensive in coverage. However, here as elsewhere, for all that Garat’s prose allows and encourages such a reading, it also contains elements that allow total deniability. He is simultaneously hyperbolic and nebulous.

Whether Garat is using his Mémoires sur Suard to allude to Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie or not is impossible to prove, because Garat suggests and signals but also masks and conceals; he will not be pinned down. It is tempting at this point to quote the poet Joseph Despaze’s wicked satire of Garat in Les Quatre Satires, which went through five editions in two years (1799–1801). Here, he is of course referring to an earlier and more polemical stage of Garat’s career, probably when Garat was defending himself against the accusation of complicity in the September massacres, and yet for those who try to wrestle with his prose, the portrait is recognizable. Apologies in advance for the translation which totally fails to capture the snarky rhymes of the original:

Garat, toujours rempli de frayeur et d’espoir,
A toujours le secret de dire blanc et noir:
S’exprimer franchement lui semble trop bête:
En sauvant son pays, il veut sauver sa tête.\textsuperscript{33}

Garat, always full of fear and hope,
Always knows how to explain things in both black and white:
To express himself frankly would be, he feels, too dumb:
While saving his country, he wants to save his head.

\textsuperscript{32} Garat, Mémoires sur Suard, vol. 2, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{33} Joseph Despaze, Les Quatre Satires, ou la fin du XVIIIe siècle, 3rd edn (Paris: Moller, 1799), pp. 24–25. The fifth edition (available on Gallica) has quite a number of changes, including to the section about Garat, which is much shorter, and only includes the first quatrain. We give the longer passage from the earlier edition.
Despaze waxes lyrical for another twenty-two lines on Garat’s
tergiversation, impersonating Garat in a pretend legal speech:

Mais, quant à ce discours qui vous a tant déplu,
Je ne peux le juger, car je ne l’ai pas lu.

And as for this speech which you so disliked,
I am unable to judge it as I haven’t read it.

Whatever effect Garat hoped his Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M.
Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe siècle would have, it did not bring
about his re-admission to the Académie française, it did not honour
Suard, and it did not please Mme Suard. When François Pérennès wrote
his Éloge de Suard in 1841, he did not spare Garat, criticising him for
his ‘détails puérils’ [puerile details] and ‘prolixité fatigante’ [tiresome
verbosity].

The puerile detail that Pérennès uses to exemplify this
opinion is a fascinating one. Garat, describing the cell in which Suard
was emprisoned, had talked about how the only light source was an
arrow-slit high up in the wall. He explains how Suard learnt how to use
it like a tool, to extend its reach, to see in all directions, near and far.

This, we may remember, is the specific point that Garat had particularly
insisted on in his lectures at the École normale, the need to perfect
the use of the senses, to learn to see better, to internalise the telescope
somehow. Yet here is this most ambitious aim of Garat’s, reduced by
Pérennès to the status of a puerile detail! Further bathos is introduced
when we read Garat’s account side by side with Mme Suard’s rival
version. She simply says that in order to see the sky from his miserable
cell, the young and imprisoned Suard had to stand on a chair because
the tiny window was too high up to look out of otherwise. Ah! no

34 Pérennès, Éloge de Suard, p. 4.
35 ‘A force de tourner autour de la lucarne qu’il ne pouvait faire tourner, il apprit à
la manier, comme les astrologues une lunette; il en étendit le champ; il parvint à
regarder en tout sens, à voir, à distinguer au loin et dans toutes les dimensions’ [By
dint of moving around the window since he couldn’t turn the thing itself, he learnt
to use it, like astrologers use an eye piece; he extended its range; he learnt to look
in all directions, to see, to focus on the far and near and in all dimensions] (Garat,
36 See above.
37 ‘C’était un triste lieu – pour se rétablir qu’une chambre où l’on n’apercevoit le ciel
qu’à travers une lucarne élevée, encore ne pouvait-il le voir qu’en montant sur des
chaises’ [It was a miserable place – for his living space nothing more than a room
curious description of how to manipulate an arrow-slit like a telescope here, no perfecting of the senses! Garat seems to have succeeded so well in his attempts to veil his embedded meaning that his readers thought he was talking gibberish, exhausting the patience of even, as Pérennès puts it, ‘le lecteur le plus bienveillant’ [the best-disposed reader]. And yet he has been an important figure in this story, and his bizarre mesh of reveals and conceals is not so much a judgement of his quality as a writer of confused intent, but of the ongoing inadmissibility of what it seems like he might have been trying to say. It is time, finally, to turn to Naigeon’s Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot.

[38 Pérennès, Éloge de Suard, p. 4.]

from which you could only espy the sky through a small window high up, and even then he had to get up on chairs to do so] (Mme Suard, Essais, p. 21).