The history of early debates on life and its transformations has been traditionally concerned with a handful of authors and texts. Moreover, great attention has been paid to the question of false or acceptable precursors, with a majority opinion rightly doubting that many of the candidates to the role of precursors did really fit the bill. Moreover, it is still assumed that authors such as Lamarck failed to convince contemporaries and were hardly popular with mainstream natural sciences – as if such an entity really existed. It is not my intention to rehearse the argument of Lamarck’s non-isolation. Instead, I would like to propose a brief survey of a population of authors and sources still considered as marginal and non-pertinent. It is precisely the role played by authors of journal articles or entries in popular and successful encyclopedias that I would like to consider. Authors who well knew that they did not belong to the élite of science, they were not members of the Institut nor were they attached to prestigious institutions such as the Muséum d’histoire naturelle. Yet, they claimed their right to express their views, and public opinion appeared to follow them by buying their work. They were by no means precursors of “evolution”, though many speculated on the natural means responsible for the origin of life or the succession of species. The various and varied positions they expressed invite us to consider issues of continuity-discontinuity with respect to classic controversial doctrines debated during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as well as generational and broadly political factors shaping the controversies on life and its transformations of the years 1790-1830.