

In my research, the main resource I drew my information from was Olivier Blanc's biography of de Gouges, Marie-Olympe de Gouges (2003). I also incorporated elements from Charles Monselet's Les oubliés et les dédaignés : figures littéraires de la fin du XVIIIe siècle (1857) and Leopold Lacour's Les origines du féminisme contemporain. Trois femmes de la Révolution: Olympe de Gouges, Théroigne de Méricourt, Rose Lacombe (1900). While the first book is the most factual, it was interesting to observe the different details each of the authors chose to focus on, depending on the century they wrote in.

For instance, the oldest text provided a lot more information about the men in de Gouges' life. She was the "fille naturelle" (a euphemism for illegitimate daughter) of a famous writer at the time and adversary to Voltaire: Jean Jacques Lefranc. She married at age seventeen, to Louis Aubry. Dissatisfied with her marriage, she qualified her husband as "rude and uncultured". He died from drowning three years after their marriage. Once in Paris, she maintained a long relationship with Jaques de Rozieres, but never re-married since French law forbade women to publish without their husbands' consent (Monselet).

In class, Alexandra asked how her social status influenced her education. I found that, while her father was a butcher, de Gouges' mother Anne-Olympe Mousset was a part of the bourgeoisie in Montauban. De Gouges had access to a good education in her hometown, as did most children born into relatively rich families (Blanc). Her biological father did not participate in her education. Also, after she moved to Paris in the early 1770's, de Gouges attended the free public classes and lectures offered at the Collège de France.

She started to attend the Salons, exposing her to intellectual and aristocratic relationships. Her acquaintance with Madame de Montesson and Madame de Montalembert, who owned café-theatres, provided her a platform to show her early plays. To answer Jacob's question about her

correspondence with other women, it is clear that her relationship with some influent women played a pivotal role in her literary career. De Montesson's husband, the Duc D'Orleans, recommended de Gouges for the French Comedy in 1785 for her play Zamore et Mirza ou l'hereux naufrage (Monselet). However, I did not find any recounts of a correspondence between de Gouges and other "proto feminists" of the time – more specifically with Theroigne de Mericourt. Leopold Lacour mentions many similarities between the writings of de Gouges and de Mericourt, but completely different approaches to the transmission of their respective ideas. It is not said if the two knew each other – or even if they knew of each other.

Olympe de Gouges faced a strong backlash for her work. She was even threatened multiple times with Letters of Cachet, to which she responded by writing a play, L'Homme Genereux, condemning the so-called "passe-droits" that the higher classes exerted. Most of her writings contained controversial messages for the epoch, ranging from anti-slavery to women's rights. Hence, with regards to Cindy's question on whether her life was hindered because she was a woman, I have to respond that her gender was only a part of the problem. Certainly, some critics at the time maintained that "one can't write drama without hair growing on their chin" (Blanc); she was mostly attacked because the ideas she defended were considered dangerous to the political elites, who had big interests in the colonies and the slave trade. Olympe de Gouges always signed her work with her own name, never using aliases, and her activism was uninterrupted since 1785. This courage and temerity is what ultimately lead to her beheading in September 1793, after releasing a poster called Les Trois Urnes where she broke the law (Monselet).

The playwright was mostly overlooked in the nineteenth century, and was brought back to the spotlight with the emergence of feminist currents and literature. In most of the articles released in recent years, the focus is only on de Gouge's Declaration of the Rights of Women. Ute Gerhard

and Valentine Meunier see the work of de Gouges as pioneering the field of feminism, as a first point where a woman managed to express an injustice she felt in her everyday life into a set of laws that would come as a permanent solution to these injustices.

Elizabeth Wingrove draws a parallel between Chaumette's denouncing of "impudent women who want to become men" in 1793 and today's so-called victim politics of the contemporary era labeled as "post-feminist". Wingrove argues that these reactions are exactly the same: she describes this logic as "domination via irrelevance" – or the act of treating what women say as "blab la". In this context, the author analyzes the reaction to de Gouge's Declaration of the Rights of Women, showing its role in provoking the male sex to think about women having rights (not only the same rights as men, but also gender-specific).

On the other hand, Karen Zivi's main point is that the political message of an author such as Olympe can't be reduced to a brief moment of her life, or one piece of writing. Indeed, it was de Gouge's presence and her relentless political activity that made her the author we know. Hence, politics is hard work, in the sense that it's not enough for de Gouge to write twenty bullet points on a piece of paper for her to defend her message.

This idea is ultimately what I tried to convey through my presentation: Olympe de Gouges was a humanist, who embodied the ideals of the enlightenment: improving the human condition (Blanc). She started her career by advocating for the abolition of slavery in her plays, by choosing to tell the story from the perspective of the Negro slave (for the first time in French literature). She wrote articles on divorce, which was a big debate at the time. She proposed a law whereby rich citizens could contribute financially as a percentage of their fortune. She proposed the idea of free workshops to help bolster implement, retirement homes for the elderly, maternity clinics and shelter for the homeless (Lacour). De Gouges firmly believed that revolutions didn't have to be

cemented in bloodshed to be effective, as seen when she defended Louis Capet publicly. Finally, and as she's best known for today, she was a pioneer in women's rights, writing a text that mimics Mirabeau and Lafayette's Declaration des Droits de l'Homme.