

Graduate Research Prize Essay

“Marriage is the Tomb of Trust and Love”: Marriage and Divorce in Olympe de Gouges’ Plays

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History

From the beginning of the French Revolution, in 1789, women were a driving force for social change and representatives of the voice of the people. From the Women’s March of October 1789, to the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat by Charlotte Corday in July 1793, to the creation of the *Société des Républicaines Révolutionnaires* in the fall of 1793, women were, as a group and as individuals, fully-fledged participants in the French Revolution across the political spectrum. However, despite their involvement in revolutionary events, women never escaped their prescribed role as second-class citizens. Women did not enjoy the benefits of the French Revolution’s ideas of freedom, democracy, and natural rights as expressed in the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* (1789). As “passive citizens” they remained legally under the authority of a husband, father or male relative, unable to vote or claim rights to property or inheritance.

Among female authors and activists of the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges stands as one of the most prolific writers who advocated for the extension of full rights to women. De Gouges is most famous for her *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne* (1791), modeled on the original *Déclaration*, in which she expounds on her project for women’s rights and equality of the sexes. Even though her *Déclaration* is the most relevant and most studied of her texts in the context of the French Revolution, De Gouges’ other texts, notably her plays, are often left out of the historical narrative due to the more subtle ways in which they express her

feminist ideas. As opposed to her later political pamphlets and posters, De Gouges' plays were a more accessible venue for her to express her controversial ideas. Her plays have been disregarded from a literary standpoint, yet they are valuable historical sources. They allowed De Gouges to portray non-traditional cases of marriages and relationships, to denounce the systemic abuses of women by giving her female characters agency, and to propose her own solutions. Indeed, in her plays, De Gouges expresses her vision for marriage as it relates to her ideas in the *Déclaration*, while also referencing her own life experiences. De Gouges' ideas about marriage are best expressed in *L'esclavage des noirs* (written 1784, published 1788, performed 1789), *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin* (written 1784, published 1786), *La Nécessité du divorce* (written 1790), *Le Philosophe Corrigé* (written 1787, published 1788), *Molière chez Ninon* (written 1787, published 1788), and *Les Voeux Forcés* (written 1790).

Olympe de Gouges is considered the first French feminist, yet during the French Revolution her writings had little to no influence on the political changes and advances put forth by the National Assembly. However, as Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite have argued, “the political language and the acts of women in the revolutionary capital – their political performances – cannot be dismissed simply because the implications of these words and deeds were not realized in French revolutionary politics...Rights claimed, once defined and defended, become imprinted in a political culture.” Even though De Gouges' writings did not result in the passage of laws or women citizenship, she participated in the creation of a liberal tradition in France.¹ Her writings were disregarded during the Revolution, in part, because she was a constitutional monarchist, which was not a popular position after the fall of the Monarchy in 1792. Despite her right-leaning position on the political spectrum, De Gouges was critical of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, to whom she dedicated many of her pamphlets and other

political writings. In the historiography of the French Revolution, she neither belonged with the “friends of Robespierre” or the “friends of Marie-Antoinette.”² Instead, she was marginalized and left out of the narrative. Even though she was a prolific writer, none of her works were influential at their time of publication. Her writings were criticized by her contemporaries, and later by nineteenth-century historians for “their illogical arguments, their digressive personal anecdotes, and their excessive tropes of passion and pathos.”³ Her play *L’esclavage des noirs*, which was performed at the Comédie Française in December 1789, was shut down after only three performances. Due to the misogynistic critics for *L’esclavage des noirs* published in the newspapers, the Comédie Française refused to publish or perform any of De Gouges’ plays before the Revolution and the end of censorship. Even her most famous text, the *Déclaration*, was considered “inappropriate, excessive, and scandalous” and shocked all levels of society, because the cause of women’s rights was so far removed from the current issues.⁴ She spent all of her money trying to publish her texts. While no great importance was given to her writings, what bothered Robespierre and the Jacobins was that De Gouges was a woman who was extremely vocal about her ideas. She was sentenced to the guillotine in November 1793 for seditious behavior and attempting to reinstate the monarchy. Sarah Hanley argued that for women to speak up against the injustices was an unacceptable attitude: “For French women positing arguments against loss of liberty, life and property, abduction, arrest and captivity, tyrannical governance practiced in a harem or a household was unnatural, improper, and illegal.”⁵

After the Revolution, De Gouges was put aside by the nineteenth-century bourgeois, who made sure that she was considered an “exagérés,” an extremist whose example should not be followed. She was absent from dictionaries and history books, her texts considered irrelevant; the

bourgeois thought they did not belong in the body of great works of the French Revolution.⁶ When in 1864 Charles Monselet wrote about De Gouges, in *Les Oubliés et les Dédaignés*, his biography was plagued by misogynistic ideas. He argued that De Gouges was only famous for her good looks and her life as a courtesan, and that she took up literature when her looks started to fade with her age. It was not until 1981 that Olympe de Gouges was truly rehabilitated as a writer and a feminist, by her biographer Claude Blanc. In his book *Marie-Olympe de Gouges – une Humaniste à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, Blanc became the first historian to see the value in De Gouges' writings and to correct the misogynistic narrative of her life.⁷

The issues of power in marriage and wife/husband relationships were dear to the heart of Olympe de Gouges, as illustrated in her plays. She based many stories and characters on her own experiences and/or herself. When she was sixteen years old, De Gouges was forced into a marriage to Louis-Yves Aubry, whose profession remains uncertain to this day, though he most likely came from a bourgeois family of caterers or restaurateurs. They were married on October 24th 1765, and he passed away a year later. De Gouges had a bad memory of this marriage to a man many times her age whom she did not like, which was forced upon her, and which did not bring her any advantage whatsoever.⁸ De Gouges' case was not unique: in eighteenth-century France, marriage was “viewed as an agreement toward the continuation of a family name and the settlement of property...The purpose of a marriage contract was to establish how the marriage would be regulated financially.”⁹ Many women were forced to marry men to advance their family socially or economically, and had no say whatsoever in the matter. Forced marriages are a recurring theme in De Gouges' plays; like the forced vows of nuns professing celibacy to the Catholic Church, woman's agency was disregarded in favor of men's needs.

In each of her plays, De Gouges used one of her characters to voice her feminist ideas, and another to represent episodes of her own life. In *Molière chez Ninon*, *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, and *Les Voeux Forcés*, De Gouges stages three different girls forced to marry by their families or forced to take vows and enter a convent. In *Molière chez Ninon*, the comparison to her own life is obvious—the character in question is named Olympe. When she is introduced to Ninon de l’Enclos, Olympe says “I am only sixteen years old; I am to be married to a man of sixty. I love, and am loved by a well-born young man that my parents cruelly refuse on my behalf.”¹⁰ The same situation arises in *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, where Fanchette is forced by her father to marry a man that she does not love, even though she is in love with Chérubin: “Fate has destined me to be the companion of a Peasant, and not of a man of quality.”¹¹ Through those two girls, Olympe and Fanchette, De Gouges illustrates the hardships of forced marriages, but also of her own: the two girls are miserable but accept their fate because they are given no other choice.

In 1789, an unknown author wrote that forced marriages were “a form of rape, conducted on the altar of Hymen.” However, they were the most common form of marriage during the Ancien Régime in France. Girls from the upper classes had their marriages arranged without their consent while they were still in the cloister, and usually married between the ages of 16 to 18. They did not meet their fiancé until the actual wedding day. The logic behind forced marriages was based on women’s inability to pick a suitable husband, due to their supposed lack of judgment and intelligence, and on “the degree of independence and self-assertion entailed in the selection of one’s own marriage partner [,which] was seen by many as simply not compatible with the female condition.”¹²

This is the situation De Gouges denounced because she had lived through it. In her *Mémoire de Madame Valmont*, her autobiography, she writes about her own marriage: “I was barely fourteen years old, perhaps you will remember, when I was married to a man that I did not love and who was not rich or well-born. I was sacrificed for no reason that could balance the repugnance I felt for that man.”¹³ By using the word “sacrificed,” De Gouges expresses her idea that marriage had no positive outcome for the wife, and that her agency was taken from her. In *Le Mariage de Chérubin*, De Gouges voices her opinion about forced marriage through the character Figaro, who compares it to religious vows: “the intended will say *Yes*, as if she were saying her vows.”¹⁴ Fanchette and Olympe are comparable to the character of Julie in *Les Voeux Forcés*, a sixteen-year-old orphan who is forced by her protector to take religious vows even though she is in love with the Chevalier.

Julie is also forced by a male authority figure to make life decisions with which she disagrees. In *Les Voeux Forcés*, De Gouges expresses her ideas through the character of the Curé, who tries to save Julie from a fate that she has not chosen for herself: “But when you’re sixteen, in this time of life, when you seek to know your own heart... to command the abnegation, to order the most inconceivable sacrifice, [is] to put a child in chains, blindly docile in these ties that will never break.”¹⁵ Here again De Gouges uses “sacrifice” and “chains” to show women’s inability to choose their future for themselves, and their submission to men in terms of marriage or celibacy.

De Gouges was strictly against marriage as a sort of business transaction imposed on women. Her plays reflect her own alternate vision. Through the characters of the Marquis de Clainville and Madame Pinçon in *Le Philosophe Corrigé*, and the Curé in *Les Voeux Forcés*, the reader glimpses De Gouges’ proposition for a better marriage contract and husband/wife

relationship. In *Le Philosophe Corrigé*, the Marquis de Clainville comes back to his wife after being away for months, and discovers she has a two-month old baby, even though the couple had been living separately before his departure. He believes his wife cheated on him and has given birth to an illegitimate daughter. While his relatives try to convince him to punish his wife for her infidelity, the Marquis stays stoic, refusing to take any action against his wife. He claims that in a marriage:

the woman is the man's companion, but the man must not be a tyrant... Eh! What would be your intention in setting yourself up as a despotic master? You would be completely cheated on. Your wife, not false caresses, would mislead you; not only would you be duped, but you would be dishonored in the eyes of the Public.

Freedom is a more trustworthy guardian than embarrassment. Trust me: if you become a husband, be a pacifist husband, and you will be your wife's friend... At least, they are [his ideas about marriage] more natural than our ridiculous pretensions and our rights over the weak and timid sex.¹⁶

In this conversation with his uncle, it is clear that the Marquis considers his wife his equal, and that the husband should not dominate his wife. He does not just believe in these precepts in his own marriage, but that men's authority over women is against nature. When he finally confronts his wife about her infidelity, he remains calm, and insists on treating her fairly, to her surprise:

"The Countess: But Monsieur is free, I think, to visit his wife when he pleases./ The Marquis: I have a different opinion... Be assured, Madame. I am not a tyrant, a dishonest jealous man."¹⁷

The Marquis surprises and shocks his wife and relatives because he behaves in a completely different manner than expected of a man in pre-Revolutionary France. However,

In *Les Voeux Forcés*, Julie is forced into a religious commitment that she has not agreed to but is saved by the Chevalier who wants to marry her. The Curé defends the young couple by putting forth ideas about marriage and agency: “Think that the right to freely choose a place for oneself in society belongs, not to nature, but to each thinking being.”¹⁸ For De Gouges, marriage must be performed according to the will of both husband and wife, and remains valid only as long as both parties still have feelings for each other. This idea of marriage based on sentiment and love was a fairly new notion, which was introduced in the 18th century. Enlightenment writers such as Diderot in *Le Père de Famille* or Rousseau in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, argued that happy marriages were marriages of love and affection, sources of emotional satisfaction, created by the freedom of the husband and the wife. In arguing for marriage as a social contract, De Gouges was a thinker of her time. Her ideas prevailed when in September 1791 the National Assembly affirmed the principles of civil marriage.¹⁹ She despised the 18th century version of marriage that she had had to go through herself and that submitted women to their husbands’ boundless authority. In her *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*, she proposed her own alternative. She believed marriage was supposed to be a social contract between husband and wife, based on love, and wrote the following vows to be read at a wedding: “We, *N* and *N*, moved by our own will, are united for the term of our lives, and for the duration of our mutual fondness, under the following circumstances.”²⁰

Opposed to the reality of most marriages, De Gouges depicts non-traditional relationships, where husbands’ and wives’ roles are contrary to customs. She reveals alternatives to the traditional relationship between husband and wife; often, she shows, the women’s behavior in a relationship can be superior. In *L’esclavage des noirs*, the six main characters are split into three different couples or unions based on love: Zamor and Mirza, two escaped slaves

who are lovers, Valère and Sophie, a young married couple who washed ashore on the island where the other characters live, and Monsieur and Madame Frémont, the colony's governor and his wife. In each couple, the women assume the leading role while the men happily stay behind and let their partners take action in their names. Sophie is not afraid to defy the Indians and the local authority to save Zamor and Mirza. Madame de Frémont convinces her husband to make the right choice and to spare Zamor and Mirza. Mirza takes the lead when she and Zamor have to run for their lives and hide in the forest. By breaking the traditional gender roles in a relationship, De Gouges argues that man and woman complement each other. Maryann DeJulio and Sylvie Molta argue that De Gouges “does not subscribe to a kind of complementarity that would dictate gender specific roles in the couple[;] she does not advocate the myth of two separate spheres. Her conception of complementarity helps her sustain egalitarian doctrine.”²¹

De Gouges' call for marriage reform was extremely important. Prior to the French Revolution, marriages were anything but egalitarian. According to Candice E. Proctor, “in France in 1789 the authority of a husband over the person and property of his wife was, under law, virtually absolute.” Marriage was interpreted as two spouses becoming one with the wife giving up her identity, name, property, nationality and rights.²² This idea that the husband had to rule over the wife had a direct connection with the way that France was ruled in the Ancien Régime. Under the Salic Law written in the 500s AD but still in application in the 18th century, women could not inherit the throne nor rule. The king was the all-powerful ruler of France, the queen one of his subjects. This led to what Sarah Hanley calls the “male monarchic replication,” or the phenomenon by which the husband becomes king in his own household with absolute authority over his family.²³

To advocate for men/women equality, De Gouges' female characters made their own choices. In *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, even though Fanchette is forced by her father to marry a man she does not love she makes other decisions. By the end of the play, she is in complete control of her destiny. Even though she is "the lowest ranking of women, Fanchette, with 17 per cent of the lines, is given agency: she finds her parents, she is recognized as an aristocrat, and she marries a Marquis."²⁴ If De Gouges likes to depict strong and independent women in charge of their destinies, she also likes to depict them as morally superior in relationships. In Early Modern France women were considered to be "the weak sex," more prone to their emotions. In *Molière chez Ninon* and *La Nécessité du divorce*, Ninon and Madame d'Azinval are in control of their feelings through the hardships of their relationships while the men let their emotions get the best of them. Ninon has promised to be faithful to the Marquis de la Châtre, but she realizes she has feelings for the Comte de Fiesque, who excessively and desperately expresses his feelings for Ninon, begging her to become his lover, making a fool of himself. Even though she loves the Comte, Ninon stays true to the Marquis de la Châtre and lectures the Comte about her refusal to give in to stereotypes: "I have a disposition to think, which makes me set eyes on the unequal sharing of qualities that is demanded of the two sexes. I feel the injustice, and cannot support it. I see that we [women] have been charged with everything frivolous, and that men have reserved the right for themselves to the essential qualities. At this moment, I make myself a man."²⁵ In this moment, Ninon takes on a man's typical attitude and qualities, revealing women capable of restraint.

Women's moral superiority is also portrayed in *La Nécessité du divorce*, when Madame d'Azinval realizes her husband is cheating on her. Instead of making a scene, she decides to invite the other woman to her home, to understand the situation and to let her know that

Monsieur d'Azinval is married, contrary to what he had pretended. Here Madame d'Azinval shows her moral superiority: she is very cordial with the other woman and does not blame her for her husband's infidelity. For his part, Monsieur d'Azinval is childishly hiding in a closet to witness the entire exchange.²⁶ De Gouges' depictions of non-traditional gender roles and morally superior women in relationships support her advocacy of egalitarian marriages, and argues against the common preconceived idea that women were the "weak sex," which justified the wife's submission to her husband. By clearly marking the differences between men and women in their attitudes (between Monsieur and Madame d'Azinval) while also arguing that women can have masculine qualities (Ninon), De Gouges participates in the idea that revolutionary French women had, according to Joan W. Scott, "only paradoxes to offer." In other words, to gain rights, women had to emphasize the sexual differences between men and women to show that rights were applicable to them while also denying such differences to claim equality.²⁷

De Gouges advocated for marriage as a social contract that depended on mutual inclinations, and that therefore could be ended, because she strongly believed feelings of love and affection were only temporary and did not last. In *Molière chez Ninon*, *Le Philosophe corrigé*, and *Le Mariage de Chérubin*, she stages three different characters skeptical about long-lasting promises of love. The most doubtful character, Ninon, is based on the character on Ninon de L'Enclos, a famous courtesan and seventeenth century author. She had many well known and wealthy lovers, most famously the king's cousin, the Great Condé, but prided herself on her financial independence. The character of Ninon, like the real-life Ninon, has had many of lovers, and is unable to commit to one relationship. Even when she promises the Marquis de la Châtre she will remain faithful, she develops feelings for another man. The parallels between Ninon de L'Enclos' and De Gouges' lives are evident: After her first husband passed away, De Gouges

moved to Paris and never remarried, but took several lovers over the years. Ninon is the character that best illustrates De Gouges' doubts about the lasting quality of romantic love and her reluctance to commitment and marriage. Ninon expresses her feeling about love and commitment as "a blind feeling, which does not have any merit for what creates it, and does not engage in any gratitude; in a word, a caprice whose duration does not depend on us, and is followed only by disgust and repentance." "I do not like sermons of love," she says later, "it seems that they are only delivered to be violated." Finally, she says, "Love wants to be free, and when it is chained, it escapes."²⁸ In *Le Philosophe Corrigé*, Madame Pinçon expresses similar feelings: "In truth, we are truly duped when we chain ourselves."²⁹ Finally, in *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, the Comte tries to comfort Fanchette about her upcoming arranged marriage but Figaro speaks more frankly about love: "The Comte: They say that love comes with time./ Figaro: And I insist that it goes away."³⁰ It is obvious De Gouges did not believe love lasted eternally. Marriages can be broken so women needed legal and economic protection.

It is not surprising De Gouges was a strong advocate for the right to divorce. Because she believed marriage was a social contract, it could be dissolved at any given time. Even though the idea of divorce became popular during the Enlightenment, it was not legalized until 1792. In pre-revolutionary France, "divorce was non-existent and annulment of marriage was infrequent. Legal separation was granted only on grounds of physical abuse or defamation. Neither infirmity nor sickness of her husband gave a woman any right to ask for legal separation... A husband's adultery could not be a ground for separation except under the most extreme circumstances."³¹ Such extreme limitations on one's freedom were contested during the last years of the Ancien Régime.

De Gouges was not the only one advocating for the right to divorce. On August 5th 1790, Pierre-François Gossin presented a motion to the National Assembly to allow divorce based on the following arguments: “1) the physical separation practiced by uncongenial spouses under the *Ancien Régime* lowered the birth rate; 2) the legalization of divorce would discourage married couples from wanting to divorce; 3) the possibility of divorce would encourage marriage.”³² De Gouges was aware of this reasoning. In her play *La Nécessité du divorce*, the household of Monsieur and Madame d’Azinval is in distress because Monsieur d’Azinval has not come home the previous night, leaving no doubt concerning his infidelity. Enter Rosambert, a good friend of Monsieur d’Azinval, who gives advice to his wife, who does not know how to react. Rosambert is clearly the character chosen by De Gouges to advocate for the right to divorce. In a secondary storyline, Rosambert wants to prevent his nephew Germeuil from marrying Constance, d’Azinval’s sister, because he believes that if a marriage cannot be terminated no one should take part in it, himself included. Rosambert believes that “divorce allows the knots of marriage to be tied with flowers, without it they become the irons that the trembling slave gnaws at for they are the torment of life.”³³ This argument is the same expressed by Ninon or Madame Pinçon. However, Rosambert goes further. When the abbot Basilic comes to visit the household and argues with Rosambert about the sanctity and the religious aspect of marriage, Rosambert responds, “Father, you are wrong when you suppose that divorce did not exist alongside Christianity; in the first ten centuries it was practiced in Christian states and from Constantine to the emperor Leon, the divorce laws were in full vigor. It would therefore not be an innovation, Father, but a simple reestablishing of a useful, necessary law indispensable to the happiness of all mankind.”³⁴ This reference to the past is De Gouges’ attempt to reconcile divorce with the Catholic faith, which she never criticized or rejected like other revolutionary writers. Instead, she

tries to use the Catholic Church to legitimize her claim for the right to divorce. Later in his conversation with the abbot, Rosambert makes some of the same claims as Pierre-François Gossin at the National Assembly:

Through divorce, Father, you would place an innumerable mass of bachelors in the position of taking up marriage. They are reticent merely because they fear the eternity of marriage. More marriages would make it harder for libertines to illicitly search out girls, their numbers having decreased. Divorce gives you the means to propagate marriage by increasing its spread, by reducing the number of troublesome bachelors and, because the status of married individuals will depend on their behavior, they will perforce become more circumspect. Finally, through the exercise of divorce, you gain the upper hand over vice and you avenge an oppressed virtue without using violent means. Couples who are at present living as though they were actually divorced are forced into sterility; when their position is altered by the changes that will take place they will become fecund again. You return a man to a wife who is made for him and a woman to a husband she finds suitable. ³⁵

In arguing divorce would allow for more marriages, an increased birth rate, and reduced extramarital relationships, De Gouges is appealing to the Catholic Church, possibly the biggest opponent to the law of divorce, by predicting a decline in sinful actions. De Gouges proves Rosambert's argument in *Le Philosophe Corrigé*, in which the Marquis and the Marquise de Clainville have become estranged after several years of marriage, moved away from one another, and both engaged in extramarital affairs.

In *La Nécessité du divorce*, through the character of Rosambert, De Gouges proves the veracity of her arguments in favor of divorce. At the end of the play, Rosambert brings Monsieur and Madame d'Azinval together and pretends that the National Assembly has passed a law legalizing divorce. While Madame d'Azinval is devastated, her husband is taken aback by the news that not only he is legally allowed to leave his wife, but that she is also allowed to leave him. Monsieur d'Azinval then realizes his mistakes:

My wife! Would leave me? What's that? Ah! The veil of illusion is torn asunder. I am aware of all my faults: I swear I will rectify them if she would deign to forgive me and consent to... My dear Eugénie! May I hope for this generous forgiveness... Yes, I can see in your eyes my blessing and my happiness. Yes, you will be my spouse forever, my adored spouse and nothing will be able to break the ties founded on love, respect, repentance and virtue.³⁶

The couple is brought together by the law of divorce, which supports Rosambert's, De Gouges', and Gossin's arguments, that divorce actually dissuades couples from separating.

Even though De Gouges was in favor of divorce and strongly opposed to the institution of marriage in the eighteenth century, she always wrote happy endings for her couples. In *La Nécessité du divorce*, Monsieur and Madame d'Azinval are reconciled and Rosambert consents to let Germeuil and Constance get married. In *Les Voeux forcés*, Julie escapes her religious obligations and marries the Chevalier. In *L'esclavage des noirs*, Zamor and Mizra marry with the governor's blessing. In *Molière chez Ninon*, Olympe does not have to marry an older man anymore and marries her lover, the Chevalier de Belfort. In *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, Chérubin and Fanchette are married. In *Le Philosophe corrigé*, the Marquis and the Marquise de Clainville discover they had been cheating on each other *with* each other in disguise, and are

reunited. These happy endings were a way for De Gouges to promote her ideas about marriage, love and divorce in a way that would not shock her audience. An eighteenth-century theater audience was not yet ready for a strong independent female character to end up alone, especially in the genre of comedy.³⁷

Olympe de Gouges was an exceptional woman who matched the men of her time in espousing progressive Enlightenment ideas about marriage and divorce. She was ahead of her time. She refused to remarry to conserve her independence and to publish in her own name. She was the most prolific female writer of the French Revolution. She was not afraid to openly express herself and her opinions. De Gouges not only advocated for the right to divorce and the reform of marriage. She also supported the abolition of slavery, the right to vote for women, gender equality, the recognition of illegitimate children, and social projects such as medical clinics for women. Even though her ideas did not have any direct consequences on the political decisions made by the National Assembly, she participated in the ideology that alternative ways to engage in a relationship or in a marriage offered more freedom and equality for *both* partners. By translating her ideas to the literary form of plays she subtly made her voice heard while entertaining her audience. While De Gouge's plays were seldom performed for the public, they remain an important historical trace, indicative of new and radical ideas about women's rights that would soon spread and manifest themselves in Revolutionary Law. As noted, the National Assembly made marriage a civil contract, which could be dissolved as part of the law of September, 20 1792, and gave women the right to share property with their husbands, the biggest improvement for women's rights of the French Revolution. In the end, De Gouges' vision to defend women's rights was not in vain.

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- ¹ Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, "A Political Revolution for Women? The Case of Paris," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard, Merry E. Wiesner (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 268, 286.
- ² Olivier Blanc, *Marie-Olympe de Gouges: Une humaniste à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Cahors: Editions René Viénet, 2003), 11-12. All translations from French to English are mine.
- ³ Janie Vanpée, "La Déclaration des Droits de la Femme: Olympe de Gouges's Re-Writing of *La Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*," in *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1789*, ed. Catherine R. Montfort (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1994), 60.
- ⁴ Olympe de Gouges, *Œuvres* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 38.
- ⁵ Sarah Hanley, "Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800," *The American Historical Review*, 102, no. 1 (February 1997), 45.
- ⁶ Sophie Mousset, *Women's Rights and the French Revolution: A Biography of Olympe de Gouges*, trans. Joy Poirel (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 1.
- ⁷ De Gouges, *Oeuvres*, 1, 24.
- ⁸ Blanc, *Marie-Olympe de Gouges*, 30-32.
- ⁹ Nupur Chaudhuri, "Olympe de Gouges' Perception of Marriage and Motherhood," *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850: Proceedings* 20 (January 1990): 817.
- ¹⁰ Olympe De Gouges, *Molière chez Ninon, ou le siècle des grands hommes* (1788), 26, accessed November 28, 2017, Wikisource: la bibliothèque libre.
- ¹¹ Olympe De Gouges, *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin* (Paris: Cailleau, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1788), 26, accessed November 28, 2017, Wikisource: la bibliothèque libre.
- ¹² Candice E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 102-103.
- ¹³ Blanc, *Marie-Olympe de Gouges*, 30.
- ¹⁴ De Gouges, *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, 38.
- ¹⁵ De Gouges, *Oeuvres*, 183.
- ¹⁶ Olympe De Gouges, *Œuvres de Madame Olympe de Gouges* (Paris: Cailleau, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1788), 37-38, accessed November 28, 2017, Google Books.
- ¹⁷ De Gouges, *Œuvres de Madame Olympe de Gouges*, 92, 97.
- ¹⁸ De Gouges, *Oeuvres*, 184.
- ¹⁹ Chaudhuri, "Olympe de Gouges' Perception of Marriage and Motherhood," 818.
- ²⁰ De Gouges, *Oeuvres*, 109-110.
- ²¹ Maryann DeJulio and Sylvie Molta, "Olympe de Gouges, 1748-1793," in *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823*, ed. Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 73.
- ²² Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution*, 87.
- ²³ Hanley, "Social Sites of Political Practice in France," 29-30.
- ²⁴ Althea Arguelles-Ling, "Famille, Révolution, Patrie: National imaginings in the Plays of Olympe de Gouges," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 44, no. 3 (September 2007): 248-249.
- ²⁵ De Gouges, *Molière chez Ninon*, 127.
- ²⁶ Megan Cornway, "Olympe de Gouges and the Question of Divorce," *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe 1750-1850: Proceedings* 1 (January 2005): 67.
- ²⁷ Joan Scott, *Only Paradozes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), x-xi.
- ²⁸ De Gouges, *Molière chez Ninon*, 106, 29, 103.
- ²⁹ De Gouges, *Œuvres de Madame Olympe de Gouges*, 102.
- ³⁰ De Gouges, *Le Mariage inattendu de Chérubin*, 12.
- ³¹ Chaudhuri, "Olympe de Gouges' Perception of Marriage and Motherhood," 819.
- ³² Cornway, "Olympe de Gouges and the Question of Divorce," 65.
- ³³ Olympe De Gouges, *La Nécessité du Divorce, comédie en trois actes en prose*, trans. Clarissa Parlmer (1790), 4, accessed November 28, 2017, http://www.olympedegouges.eu/le_divorce.php.
- ³⁴ De Gouges, *La Nécessité du Divorce*, 5.
- ³⁵ De Gouges, *La Nécessité du Divorce*, 6.
- ³⁶ De Gouges, *La Nécessité du Divorce*, 17.
- ³⁷ Cornway, "Olympe de Gouges and the Question of Divorce," 66.

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