

The Various Receptions of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminist Ideas Over the Past Centuries

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"Métiers de l'Enseignement de l'Éducation et de la Formation"

VUILLEMIN Isciane

The Various Receptions of Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminist Ideas Over the Past Centuries

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Session de juin 2021

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INTRODUCTION:

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 in Spitalfields (London) and died in 1797 in Somers Town, she was a famous moral and political philosopher of the 18th century. As a woman from a poor family, with a violent and authoritarian father, and a mother who paid little attention to her, the prospects of Mary were very limited. Among her siblings, only her brother, Edward, received a formal education. At the age of 18, having received a poor education, she left home and never went back. She entered the most likely occupations for someone her sex and circumstances: a lady's companion, a schoolteacher, and a governess. But she progressively revealed herself by writing, and her first professional experiences influenced her reflections in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). [1]

In 1788 she became a translator and staff writer in *The Analytical Review*, an English periodical established by the London radical publisher James Johnson, who later published her most influential works. At the beginning of this mutually beneficial financial relationship, Mary wrote to her younger sister Everina in November 1787: “Mr. Johnson […] assures me that if I exert my talents in writing, I may support myself in a comfortable way. I am then going to be the first of a new genus – I tremble at the attempt”.[2]

Mary called herself "a new genus" because she was a woman who earned her living by writing. Her intellectual curiosity regarding the ideals of freedom already spoke so eloquently in her letters. She was taking the lead in showing the necessity of empowerment of women for social progress and also in claiming advancements in the workplace through her professional achievements. In that quest, Johnson was not only an employer but a friend and even a mentor to Wollstonecraft, fostering her literary career.[3]

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[1] Gary, Kelly. *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft.* New York, St Martin’s Press, 1992.

[2] Mary Wollstonecraft, letter to Everina Wollstonecraft, 7 November 1787 (letters 164) https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230514515_4

[3] Cayton, Andrew. *Love in the time of revolution*, p41 *https://books.google.fr*

She is best known for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in response to the French political leader Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord who declared in 1791 that the only kind of education necessary for girls was a domestic one. In her work, she calls for equal treatment of men and women in education and argues that women should be educated in a rational manner to give them the opportunity to contribute to society. Indeed, she supports that the educational system of the time trained woman to be frivolous and incapable. Consequently, if women are not naturally inferior to men, they appear to be so only because they lack education. She suggests that both men and women should be treated as rational beings and imagines a social order founded on reason. This way of rethinking education was radical. In the Europe of that time, there was not an education system that was similar to what she thought was right.

This work became one of the pioneering works of feminism. Feminist theories in Britain first emerged in publications such as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* in 1792, as it focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Even before the term feminism existed, she rejected the place given to women in society. Wollstonecraft wanted women to aspire to full citizenship, to be worthy of it, and this necessitated the development of reason.[4] Her ideas were very avant-garde, and revolutionary compared to the time in which she lived. Moreover, the revelation of the author's name, several weeks later, led to predictable outrage. Horace Walpole for instance, an English writer and Whig politician, denounced her as a "hyena in petticoats"[5] as he considered it was not the role of a woman to vindicate such statements.

Consequently, her philosophical project, one of the first to be based on respect for the Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights, remained a dead letter for a long time. Because the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

[4] Mary Wollstonecraft : *Aux origines du féminisme politique et social en Angleterre.* L'égalité des sexes comme facteur de progrès social, https://books.openedition.org/enseditions/5395?lang=en
[5] Horace Walpole's letter to Hannah More, 26 January 1795, https://chawtonhouse.org/the-library/library-collections/man-up-online-exhibition/mary-wollstonecraft/

(AVRW) caused controversy, and it failed to bring about any immediate reforms.[6]

Let us take a critical look on the context of the time and on the place of women to explain the difficulty she had defending her ideas.

At the time women's education was very different from that of men, they were much less educated and were mainly given a religious education, with the objective of understanding the Bible and its moral principles. The other part of their teaching was learning to become a model wife and a model mother. It was called a domestic teaching, where women were taught practical matters, such as spinning, sewing, hygiene, so that they later serve their husbands and families. Consequently, the women of the eighteenth century did not have access to a more advanced education, which would have developed their mind and a critical spirit.

What is more, marriage was arranged and of interests. Women passed from the authority of their father to that of their husband, who had all the rights over his wife and upon whom a wife is dependent for each of her doings. These several contextual elements lead us to understand that women did not have a crucial role in society in the eighteenth century. They were still considered inferior to men and their life remained determined by their family and by their husband. The right to education of women remained a subject of misunderstanding and mockery. Jean-Jacsques Rousseau, who had a major influence in the 18th century, shared the belief that women should not be educated, he advanced it the following way:

> The education of the women should be always relative to the men. To please, to be useful to us, to make us love and esteem them, to educate us when young, and take care of us when grown up, to advise, to console us,

[6] R. M. Janes, « On the Reception of Mary Wollstonecraft's: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman »*, Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol.39, No. 2 (April. -Jun.,1978), *https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708781?seq=1*

> to render our lives easy and agreeable: these are the duties of women at all times, and what they should be taught in their infancy.[7]

However, it was in this unfavorable context that Wollstonecraft's voice arose. In the same way that she nourished new ideas about the society of her time and the place of woman within the nation, Mary lived her personal life according to her desires and not according to the established conditions in the customs of a patriarchal Britain. Her quest for independence did not limit to earn her own living. The lifestyle she had was considered immoral by many writers, as Harriet Martineau, a prominent British writer and political activist. However, she denounced the injustices done to women, as to the working poor, and she had ambitions sometimes similar to those of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Indeed, following her death, Wollstonecraft became most famous for her unconventional personal life rather than her contributions to what might be called nowadays the feminist movement, mainly because of the biography published in 1798 by William Godwin, her husband. During much of the 19th century, she will only be remembered for her polemics and she was a figure rejected by most intellectuals.[8] Consequently, her ideas and her work faded into obscurity. She was undoubtedly criticized, and often harshly for her controversial life, but there were also those who defended her good name as Virginia Woolf. Considered as one of the most innovative writers of the 20th century, she took charge of bringing back to life the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. These last centuries led us to what she stands for today, she is deeply recognized for her groundbreaking contributions to the feminist movement, even called "the mother of Feminism".

Several questions then arise. We could indeed assess how her controversial personal life affected her credibility as a social reformist. To what extent did it impact her reputation as an advocate of women's right? How did it keep people away from her ideas, people who might otherwise have had an interest in her

[7] Johnson Lewis, Jone. "Rousseau's Take on Women and Education." *ThoughtCo, July 14, 2019* https://www.thoughtco.com/rousseau-on-women-and-education-3528799

[8] Godwin, William. *Memoirs and posthumous works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Printed by Thomas Burnfide, 1798.

viewpoints? We may indeed also wonder to what extent this outrage about her lifestyle was just a convenient excuse for evacuating Wollstonecraft from the political debate.

These are some of the topics I would like to address in the present paper.

I will begin by analyzing how the social and historical context of the time influenced the author in his quest for women's rights. Indeed, this time is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment, for it was in the 18th century that the ideas of the previous 100 years were implemented on a broad scale through denunciations and upheavals. Then in a second part I will explore Mary Wollstonecraft's works and explain their controversial reception during her living, describing later how *Memoirs and posthumous works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, author of a Vindication of the rights of woman* by William Godwin destroyed her reputation during the 19th century. Finally, I will study the renewed interest in her triumphs as a female intellectual.

1. The Deep Influence of Revolutionary Events and Female Thoughts on Wollstonecraft's Fight

In order to truly understand the stakes of Mary Wollstonecraft's life and the various changes she wanted to make within the society's mores regarding the status of women in society, there is a need to take into consideration the historical and social context of other countries. Indeed, she lived in a century of societal upheavals, especially in terms of equality and quest for happiness, including a search for liberty, which in the end generated the pursuit of social reforms and enhanced citizens' rights. Those social cataclysms have certainly influenced her perception and no doubt led her to wonder and to invest herself in the struggles that she thought were right in her own country, as recognizing that women must also have rights.

1.1 The American and French Revolutions Seen as a Turning Point in History

Here, we refer to two major events that were among the most important upheavals in world history, the American and French revolutions.

The American revolution broke out when the 13 colonies of America decided to revolt against Britain, which established new taxes as the Sugar Act (1764) or still the Stamp Act (1765). These taxes are imposed on the colonies and in addition, Britain refused to give western new fertile lands gained following the Seven Years War (1756/1763). The colonies began to express their anger and their indignation, especially as they didn't have a representative in the United Kingdom parliament to defend them. Consequently, they had no political power. They began to protest with the slogan *'no taxation without*

representation'. Riots broke out and they boycotted products imported from Great Britain, which did not react to their request in time.[9]

The Boston tea party on December 16, 1773 is a relevant example, where 342 cases of tea were thrown at sea by a revolutionary organization, called the Sons of Liberty, these colonists disguised as Indians wanted to protest and to resist new Crown taxes and laws. Colonial women wanting to be actively involved in this general rebellion were called the Daughters of Liberty, and their skills in sewing clothes and making tea also played an important role in replacing British products. For instance, the spinning bees were a community of women gathering to spin yarn and homespun production to support the patriotic cause (see painting in the appendices). Martha Washington was one of the leaders of this organization and participated in the Boston Tea Party. She supported the same causes as her husband, George Washington, commander-in-chief of the continental army during the war of independence. She accompanied him during much of the war. Thus, she will become the first First Lady of the United States in 1789.[10]

After eight years of struggle that also involved an alliance with France, the Revolutionary War officially ended in 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, treaty which officially recognized the Independence of The United States of America. The colonies adopted a constitution that led to a Republic. In France, the American Revolution had a great echo because it proved that it was possible to overthrow a king and to achieve the ideas of the Enlightenment. For instance, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution established the rights to freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness is also affirmed.[11]

Indeed, it declared that men have been created equal in law and that they can oppose tyranny. The country was founded on the words of Thomas Jefferson who proclaimed, "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

[9] Zinn, Howard. (1980) (rev. ed. 2005). *A People's History of the United States.* New York: Harper & Row. https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/peoples-history-zinn-1980.pdf

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Marienstras, Elise. *Les Mythes Fondateurs de La Nation Américaine: Essai Sur Le Discours Idéologique Aux États-Unis À l'époque de l'indépendance, 1763–1800.* F. Maspero, Paris, 1976.

inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."[12]

During the French Revolution, women failed in obtaining the right to vote. However, they hoped to achieve this through their commitment in the revolutionary struggle, but the male political members of the Revolution succeeded in ousting half of the population from the founding act of democracy, the universal suffrage. Women did not have access to a role in public life and simply had to remain an actor in family life, in the private sphere. They were nevertheless at the origin of many petitions and their presence in the popular struggles was real. So, even if women had a very limited official role, they remain an undeniable actor of the revolutionary period. They get some rights, especially divorce. However, they do not have political equality because the right to vote was not acquired for them in this unprecedented period of upheaval. But what is certain is that their deep desire to be part of political life inspired and confirmed Mary in her fight to make things change.[13]

1.2 Wollstonecraft as an English Jacobin

Mary Wollstonecraft began to write during a stormy period: in Britain, supporters and enemies of the French Revolution were at a clash. Wollstonecraft was deeply in favor of these political upheavals and chose to intervene in the debates through her writings. She also surrounded herself with authors who shared the same philosophies, like the political activist Thomas Paine: "Paine and Wollstonecraft were already acquaintances, and saw each other regularly later in their (1793-94) Paris days. They became linked together

[12] Kohls, L. Robert. *The Values Americans Live By*. Washington D.C.: Meridian House International, 1984.
[13] Bessieres, Yves. Et Niedzwiecki, Patricia. *Women in the French Revolution*, 1991, p 11. http://aei.pitt.edu/34003/1/A480.pdf

in the public mind as republicans, which became increasingly dangerous in England." [14]

Republican universalism is one of the fundamental principles of the various French republics, according to which the Republic and its values of freedom, equality, and fraternity are universal. The Republic of the United States put forward comparable philosophical principles, they must apply to all uniformly, and are destined to be adopted by all humans. However, it is important to remember that, in certain aspects and at different points in history, there was a total ignorance of women's rights.

Wollstonecraft was already conscious of this universalism; she did not understand how the natural rights of individuals could forget the conditions of women:

> There is a principle of —individualityll in the philosophical basis of the feminist perspective that appears in Wollstonecraft's thoughts. Accordingly, all individuals have equal moral values without any race, color, belief, and religion or gender discrimination. Individuals are distinguished from each other in points of their personalities, abilities or diligence. So, rights and freedoms related to social and political spheres are valid for all individuals. Any discrimination in these issues – whether in favor of women or men- should be avoided. That kind of discrimination is immoral and its outcomes will be negative not only for women but also for whole society.[15]

Thus, the universalism claimed by the French Revolution was going to be highlighted in Wollstonecraft's work. Men and women are equal when it comes to God, and therefore they aspire to the same freedoms and rights in their quest for happiness. The revolutionary context that promotes the adoption of new reforms especially as regards freedom and the right of citizens, as well as the right to express oneself and be respected in one's opinion, has somehow left

[14] Sapiro, Virginia. *A vindication of political virtue: The political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p 29.
https://books.google.je/books?id=6kgADu2buJMC&printsec=frontcover#v=snippet&q=Paine&f=false
[15]Duman, Fatih. *The Roots of Modern Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft and the French Revolution* International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 9; May 2012, p7
http://ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_9_May_2012/8.pdf

women aside, creating a legitimate sense of exclusion and incomprehension. This growing quest for universal equality is at the origin of feminism.[16]

Strong women who fought in for American Independence also inspired revolutionary ideas regarding women's rights, as Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren, prominent members of the Daughters of Liberty and thus both devotees to the patriotic cause. Some women have disguised themselves and were thus able to integrate the war in an all-male Continental Army. Deborah Sampson risked her life by doing so: she entered the army by posing as a man in the last year of this revolution and hid her secret for eighteen months.[17]

The Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776 did not specifically include, women, or Natives and African-Americans. Colonial women, whose role had however been decisive during the revolution, were not granted voting rights, and the right to own property, thus remaining second class citizens.

Eventually, the Seneca Falls Convention, organized by women took place in Seneca, New York in 1848, was the first major moment when American women demanded their full rights as full citizens. In *the Declaration of Sentiments* drafted in the manner of the Declaration of Independence, they fiercely denounced America's patriarchal society, which oppressed women in the same way that the British empire had oppressed the colonies before the US revolution.[18]

During the French Revolution, the strong political commitment of women was noticeable, they were given a nickname, "les tricoteuses". Olympe de Gouges influenced the works of Mary Wollstonecraft as well as Catharine Macaulay, a feminist historian whose views in *Letters on Education* (1790, *Lettres sur l'éducation*) were listed by Wollstonecraft, she was in France during the French Revolution and compared the conditions of women to the fate of

[16] Rochefort Florence, « *Revendiquer l'égalité des sexes, affranchir les femmes (1789-1860)* », https://www-cairn-info.scd1.univ-fcomte.fr/histoire-mondiale-des-feminismes--9782130732846-page-15.htm

[17] "Women in the American Revolution", *American Battlefield Trust*, January 26, 2017, https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/women-american-revolution

[18] Zinn, Howard. (1980) (rev. ed. 2005). *A People's History of the United States.* New York: Harper & Row. https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/peoples-history-zinn-1980.pdf

slaves. Her quest for gender and racial equality was absolute. Thus, both authors shared similar radical ideas.[19]

> Wollstonecraft espérait rencontrer Macaulay, qui décéda malheureusement trop tôt pour que cela se réalise. En décembre 1790, elle envoya un exemplaire de sa réponse à Burke à Catharine Macaulay, en soulignant que bien qu'inconnue, elle se permettait de lui envoyer son ouvrage, car, écrivit-elle, « vous êtes le seul écrivain femme dont les opinions coïncident avec les miennes à propos du rang auquel notre sexe doit s'efforcer de parvenir dans le monde.[20]

Like many struggles, feminism is at the origin a rebellion against oppression. To start a revolution, it is necessary to unite people around a common goal. Weariness and anger against oppression causes rebellion, yet only if the goal is common and wanted by a large majority. Individuals are more likely to commit to a cause when they know that there is a cooperation and that a collective commitment has chances to lead to victory.

> Lorsque l'objectif de la protestation collective est la défense d'une identité collective, si on appartient au groupe, il existe une forte incitation à participer car on possède une identité commune avec celle des autres membres et la participation constitue une réaffirmation d'appartenance. Ce n'est pas seulement le résultat de l'action qui compte mais aussi le fait d'affirmer l'identité et par-là même de la défendre quel que soit le résultat de l'action considérée.[21]

Thus, at the end of this first part, we are now able to understand the close link that have existed between the revolutionary events of the 18th century and the reflection of Mary Wollstonecraft. Indeed, her literary involvement in the search for equality and liberty was first inspired by these upheavals, as well as by the presence of other political philosophers

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[19] Bernez, Marie-Odile. « Catharine Macaulay et Mary Wollstonecraft. Deux femmes dans le débat sur la Révolution française en Angleterre », *Annales historiques de la Révolution Française,* 2006/2 (n°344), p161 à 178, https://journals.openedition.org/ahrf/6293

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Lazzeri, Christian, « Pourquoi se révolte-t-on ? Identité, intérêt, action », Revue du MAUSS, 2009/2 (n° 34), p. 165-188. https://www.cairn.info/revue-du-mauss-2009-2-page-165.htm

who also advocated the right for people to overthrow a government. From this point of view, she thought that human rights, since they were natural, should *also* be possible for women.

2. Wollstonecraft 's Innovative Ideas Defined through her Works and her Personal Journey

2.1 Analysis of Wollstonecraft' Revolutionary Political Ideas, as Seen by Some of her Books

Wollstonecraft's works, especially the prominent *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* have represented her innovative ideas and are proof that she was ahead of her time.

In 1783, within the space of a year she created two schools for girls, during this period she wrote books for children but also reflected on how the education system of the time undermined the possible future of each girl. She published *Thoughts on the education of daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* in 1787, where she said: "No employment of the mind is a sufficient excuse for neglecting domestic duties, and I cannot conceive that they are incompatible. A Woman may fit herself to be the companion and friend of a man of sense, and yet know how to take care of his family."[22] Here she explains that a woman can remain a good wife and mother while being more accomplished intellectually.

From the beginning of her professional career, Mary Wollstonecraft already had clear opinions about how to educate children, especially girls. She was already not in accordance with the mores of her time, and decided to share her opinions on the matter in her *Thoughts on the education of daughters*. Through the lines of it, she explained why she wanted a proper education for girls, since the role of women in society was clearly underestimated whereas they were the ones educating their. She wrote, "Whenever a child asks a question, it should always have a reasonable answer given it"[23], which meant that most of the women then, especially poorer ones, were not able to conduct

[22] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female conduct, in the more Important Duties of Life*. London, J. Johnson, 1787, p 66.
[23] *Ibid,* p 18.

reasonable discussions, the lack of education preventing them from cultivating their mind and, by extension, their children's minds.

Since women stayed most of their time at home to do domestic chores and look after their children, Mary suggested that they were then responsible for them and for their education, which was recognizing that women play a key social role. However, society cannot develop if future citizens do not grow up with intelligent and virtuous women by their side. In *Thoughts on the education of daughters*, Mary Wollstonecraft tried to prove the importance of giving women knowledge, since true virtue could not exist without a well-developed knowledge.[24]

Mary Wollstonecraft has consistently shown that a woman could not be truly fulfilled if she only had access to a domestic education. She always asked for independence, and she knew it had to go through a cultured mind capable of thinking: "In a comfortable situation, a cultivated mind is necessary to render a woman contented; and in a miserable one, it is her only consolation." In addition to bringing real fulfilment to women, education is also truly beneficial for society, since the latter suffers if one half of citizens are relegated to having no political and societal significance.[25]

Mary Wollstonecraft wanted to set up a unified education system for boys *and* girls. She believed that women's ignorance was in fact what made them cunning and frivolous. According to her, their innocence – a desirable quality then – was lost because of this lack of education. The superficial education they received was more conducive to sensitivity than to reason. She was already certain that a rational education given to women would allow them to change these personality traits .

Her children's book, *Original Stories from Real Life*, published in 1788, was inspired by her everyday life as a governess in 1785. It was quite

[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid,* p 101.

successful and already included the revolutionary ideas above mentioned, a similar education for boys and girls.[26]

Mary, A Fiction turns out to have many autobiographical elements of Wollstonecraft life, her childhood alongside a violent and alcoholic father, and a submissive, beaten, and vulnerable mother directly influenced her idea of marriage, based on a total dependence on man. In this work, she deals with "the slavery of marriage". [27]

We would like to cite one major book, one that is now considered the prominent literary works of Revolutionary Feminism: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, With Structures on Political and Moral Subjects,* published in 1792 by editor and friend Joseph Johnson. The book addresses the conditions of women, and leaving them in ignorance has intolerable consequences. As Wollstonecraft wrote,

> I may be accused of arrogance; still I must declare what I firmly believe, that all the writers who have written on the subject of female education and manners, from Rousseau to Dr. Gregory, have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society.[28]

We can imagine how back in the late 18th century public opinion was very divided on Wollstonecraft's ideas, but her writing style and her ability to construct reasonable arguments made her popular. She had her works published as she was adamant about speaking out against writers who regarded women as subordinate in nature and destined for the pleasures of men. She undoubtedly laid the groundwork form feminism. Although she received mixed reception of her revolutionary ideas during her life, the controversy carried on after her death with the publication of her husband's biography of her, in which he explored in detail the trials of her life (as well as

[26] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Original Stories from Real Life.* London, J. Johnson, 1788.
[27] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Mary, a Fiction.* London, J. Johnson, 1788.
[28] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects.* London, J. Johnson, 1792, p 24.

her achievements), among which we can quote her daughters out of wedlock, her two suicide attempts, and her “ambiguous” relationship with a woman.

2.2 Godwin’s Memoirs Condemning his Wife’s Image

Indeed, after the death of Wollstonecraft eleven days after she gave birth to their daughter, on 10 September 1797, William Godwin was devastated and was eager to publish some of her works posthumously, especially releasing his own biography of his wife, in *Memoirs and posthumous works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, author of a Vindication of the rights of woman.* He decided to be honest regarding all aspects of her life, expressing a deep sense of admiration and consideration for the person she was, which can be felt through the reading. Nevertheless, even if this biography explains the achievements of Wollstonecraft, it also explores the trials of her personal life.

In his work, he described all the different periods of her life, as well as the men she knew before Mary and he met and married. He first recounts Wollstonecraft’s non-marital relationship with Henry Fuseli, a Swiss painter whom she met when he visited his old friend Joseph Johnson. Many of their discussions revolved around his painting and Wollstonecraft was an admirer of Fuseli‘s work, and their relationship eventually became more intimate.

> She saw Mr. Fuseli frequently; he amused, delighted and instructed her. As a painter, it was impossible she should not wish to see his works, and consequently to frequent his house. She visited him; her visits were returned. Notwithstanding the inequality of their years, Mary was not of a temper to live upon terms of so much intimacy with a man of merit and genius, without loving him. [...] She conceived a personal and ardent affection for him.[29]

[29] Godwin, William. *Memoirs and posthumous works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, author of a Vindication of the rights of woman*. Gutenberg Ebook, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16199/16199-h/16199-h.htm

Indeed, dating a man and having intimacy with him without formalization of the relationship through civil law was strongly condemned at that time. Thus, this relationship, as told by Godwin, could but shock people and create a strong contempt for Mary Wollstonecraft's lifestyle. Godwin was conscious of that and reprehended the "rules of polished society", as he knew Wollstonecraft thought differently and had the courage to live as she felt was right for her.

> Mr. Fuseli was a married man, and his wife the acquaintance of Mary. She readily perceived the restrictions which this circumstance seemed to impose upon her; but she made light of any difficulty that might arise out of them. Not that she was insensible to the value of domestic endearments between persons of an opposite sex, but that she scorned to suppose, that she could feel a struggle, in conforming to the laws she should lay down to her conduct.[30]

Wollstonecraft did not distance herself from this man despite his own marriage, she was eager to live the passion and the mutual affection that existed between them. Godwin was conscious this relationship could have filled his wife at this time, it is explained by this following extract:

> There is no reason to doubt that, if Mr. Fuseli had been disengaged at the period of their acquaintance, he would have been the man of her choice. As it was, she conceived it both practicable and eligible, to cultivate a distinguishing affection for him, and to foster it by the endearments of personal intercourse and a reciprocation of kindness, without departing in the smallest degree from the rules she prescribed to herself.[31]

This non-marital relationship ended when Wollstonecraft decided to go to France in 1792, as it is said: "One of her principal inducements to this step, related, I believe, to Mr. Fuseli. She had, at first, considered it as reasonable and judicious, to cultivate what I may be permitted to call, a Platonic affection for him; but she did not, in the sequel, find all the satisfaction in this plan, which she had originally expected from it."

[30] *Ibid.* Chap. XI

[31] *Ibid.*

The connection that will be the most controversial and that will have serious consequences for the development of Wollstonecraft will be the one she has had with Gilbert Imlay, a businessman and author native of the United States of America. The man was single, but she refused at first to marry, since she did not affection the legal dependance that marriage caused. Moreover, Godwin advanced her reason as follows:

> "Mary had objected to a marriage with Mr. Imlay, who, at the time their connection was formed, had no property whatever; because she would not involve him in certain family embarrassments to which she conceived herself exposed, or make him answerable for the pecuniary demands that existed against her."[32]

However, she obtained "a certificate from the American ambassador, as the wife of a native of that country", it was thus made possible to live under the same roof, but the business interests of Imlay obliged him to leave for long periods of time to Le Havre. In January 1794, she decided to join him and her first child, called Frances, was born there on the fourteenth of May, it was then a child out of wedlock. Imlay returned to London in September, whereas Wollstonecraft came back to Paris. As William Godwin commented,

> "This absence, like that of the preceding year in which Mr. Imlay had removed to Havre, was represented as an absence that was to have a short duration. In two months, he was once again to join her at Paris. It proved however the prelude to an eternal separation"[33]

Mary Wollstonecraft believed for a long time that a return may be possible, as she believed in their deep mutual affection.

> She did not suspect the calamities that awaited her, till the close of the year. She gained an additional three months of comparative happiness. But she purchased it at a very dear rate. Perhaps no human creature ever suffered greater misery, than dyed the whole year 1795, in the life of this incomparable woman. It was wasted in that sort of despair, to the sense of

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*

> which the mind is continually awakened, by a glimmering of fondly cherished, expiring hope.[34]

In April, Mary Wollstonecraft joined Gilbert Imlay in London, and he took care of finding her a new place to live; yet, he had already started another relationship with an actress, he fell in love with her and had apparently lost interest in Mary Wollstonecraft; from that time on their interactions became quite formal. According to Godwin's *Memoirs*, "she saw, but too well, though she strove not to see, that his affections were lost to her for ever." Wollstonecraft has always made a habit of writing Imlay letters, quite regularly during their separations, but we understand in the last letters that he did not give her the same attention anymore: "I JUST now received one of your hasty notes; for business so entirely occupies you, that you have not time, or sufficient command of thought, to write letters. Beware! You seem to be got into a whirl of projects and schemes, which are drawing you into a gulph, that, if it do not absorb your happiness, will infallibly destroy mine."[35] At that time, the vindicative author who defended her rights and independence was in a deep depression because of this sentimental failure regarding Gilbert Imlay. She was that independent as she wished she had been. However, even though Wollstonecraft had been depressed most of her life, the greatest despair she felt appeared during this tumultuous separation. She could not bear this man's lack of love and support.

Wollstonecraft made several suicide attempts after this painful separation; she was deeply depressed after this infidelity and the fact she was left alone with her daughter.

> While she was absent from Mr. Imlay, she could talk of purposes of reparation and independence. But, now that they were in the same house, she could not withhold herself from endeavours to revive their mutual cordiality; and unsuccessful endeavours continually added fuel to the fire that destroyed her. She formed a desperate purpose to die.[36]

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[34] *Ibid.* Chap XI.

[35] Wollstonecraft, Mary. Letters XXXII. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34413/34413-h/34413-h.htm

[36] Godwin, William. *Memoirs*. Chap. XIII

Godwin explained her first attempt in detail. These following lines caused shockwaves which were numerous and lasting among the readers in a society that rejected killing oneself voluntarily, it was also an act prohibited by religious laws and civil laws :

> The agony of her mind determined her; and that determination gave her a sort of desperate serenity. She resolved to plunge herself in the Thames; and, not being satisfied with any spot nearer to London, she took a boat, and rowed to Putney. […] The rain suggested to her the idea of walking up and down the bridge, till her clothes were thoroughly drenched and heavy with the wet, which she did for half an hour without meeting a human being. She then leaped from the top of the bridge, but still seemed to find a difficulty in sinking, which she endeavoured to counteract by pressing her clothes closely round her.[37]

The sordid description and the strategies she used to sink as quickly as possible provoked strong criticism, especially since the act would not be considered a moment of error. The purpose of killing herself remained in her mind a long time: “the most inapprehensive reader may conceive what was the mental torture she endured, when he considers, that she was twice, with an interval of four months, from the end of May to the beginning of October, prompted by it to purposes of suicide.”[38]

Indeed, Godwin wanted to be deeply honest and being faithful about what his wife had confided in him, which included not keeping for himself her feelings and the difficult and depressive periods she went through. Before her suicide attempt, she sent a letter to Imlay, in which she said “I shall make no comments on your conduct; or any appeal to the world. Let my wrongs sleep with me! Soon, very soon shall I be at peace. When you receive this, my burning head will be cold.”[39] It was not be the case, as she was rescued just in time by passers-by.

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[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Mary Hays : Life, Writings and Correspondence, *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft.* 448, http://www.maryhayslifewritingscorrespondence.com/mary-hays-correspondence/mary-hays-s-writings/periodical-contributions/hays-memoir-of-wollstonecraft

Then, Godwin turned to the relationship he and Mary built together. They shared the same opinion regarding marriage and at the beginning they refused to comply to this officialization of a love, which had, in fact, already taken place:

> We did not marry. It is difficult to recommend any thing to indiscriminate adoption, contrary to the established rules and prejudices of mankind; but certainly nothing can be so ridiculous upon the face of it, or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony, and that which, wherever delicacy and imagination exist, is of all things most sacredly private, to blow a trumpet before it, and to record the moment when it has arrived at its climax.[40]

The reason for their change of mind was Wollstonecraft's second bearing of a child, as he said it in this ninth chapter: "The principal motive for complying with this ceremony, was the circumstance of Mary's being in a state of pregnancy."[41] Another information that will be widely talked about since it was her second illegitimate child. Her husband declared then "she loved to observe the growth of affection between me and her daughter, then three years of age, as well as my anxiety respecting the child not yet born."

Mary Wollstonecraft died of complications following the birth of their child. Shortly before her death, and referring to the hardships she had to endure, she declared "that she had never known what bodily pain was before."[42]

> Her remains were deposited, on the fifteenth of September, at ten o'clock in the morning, in the church-yard of the parish church of St. Pancras, Middlesex […] with the following inscription:

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN,

AUTHOR OF

A VINDICATION

OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN.

[40] Godwin, William. *Memoirs.* Chap. IX

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] Ibid. Chap. X

BORN, XXVII APRIL MDCCLIX.

DIED, X SEPTEMBER MDCCXCVII.

Thus, we can objectively say that the tribute that he wanted to pay to his wife through this work, by being frank, eventually destroyed her reputation that was already controversial during her lifetime. Her two out-of-wedlock children resulting from different relationships, her suicide attempts, and the distress she found herself in cast a deep shadow over her reputation. He also used expressions as “distempered mind” through his work, alluding to the personality of his dead wife. [43]

> This idea that Mary Wollstonecraft’s intellectual power grew out of a combination of emotional strengths and weaknesses was central to Godwin’s notion of modern biography: ‘Her errors were connected and interwoven with the qualities most characteristic of her genius.’ He was not writing a pious family memorial, or a work of feminist hagiography, or a disembodied ideological tract. He felt he could sometimes be critical of Mary’s behavior, while always remaining passionately committed to her genius.’[44]

As a conclusion to this second part, we would like to stress how much in favor of the emancipation of women Wollstonecraft’s books have been, both in terms of education (promoting intellectual freedom), and in the legal field (so that they could work in jobs that matched their skills and aspirations and be financially independent. Consequently, women would be more accomplished, and would improve their ability to be good wives and mothers in a society that would benefit from this progress. Regarding her controversial personal life, a multitude of questions remain, although some have met with answers in her biography published by her husband.

[43] Ibid. Chap. X

[44] Holmes, Richard. “How a Husband’s Loving Biography Ruined His Wife’s Reputation”. *Literary Hub*, March 21, 2017. https://lithub.com/how-a-husbands-loving-biography-ruined-his-wifes-reputation/ (last retrieved 02/03/2021)

3. Between Utter Disgrace and Rehabilitation: The Evolution of Wollstonecraft's Reputation

As seen earlier, the tribute Godwin wanted to pay to his wife has been shown to be at the opposite of his expectations. Whereas he had planned to praise her, Goldwin shared her private life, which was regarded as scandalous in view of 18th century Britain's social codes and standards.

3.1 Wollstonecraft's Loss of Credibility

Wollstonecraft had been depressed most of her life. During her relationship with Imlay and until the very end of it, she wrote him many letters, trying to convince him to stay by her side. The expression of her feelings has also been seen as proof of a desperate woman, a woman incapable of surviving without the support and the love of a man.[45]

> As a person, though, she was capable of appalling unreasonableness, which is the trait she has come to be known for in this biographical era. In "Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life," an exhaustive biography published last fall, Janet Todd damns Wollstonecraft with irrefutable evidence: her own letters. If she hadn't saved these, her life would have been remembered as a triumph of rational intelligence animated by amazing bravado.[46]

Indeed, for most of the readers of the 19th century, her letters appeared as proof that she was "blindly self-absorbed and unheroically in need of constant reassurance". There is a sharp contrast between the public woman who wanted

[45] Holmes, Richard. "How a Husband's Loving Biography Ruined His Wife's Reputation". *Literary Hub*, March 21, 2017. https://lithub.com/how-a-husbands-loving-biography-ruined-his-wifes-reputation/ (last retrieved 02/03/2021)

[46] Shulevitz, Judith. "Ahead of her time, though Wollstonecraft fought vigorously for women, she didn't like them much." *The New York Times*, July 1, 2001 *https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/07/01/bookend/bookend.html*

to be independent and defended the rights of her own sex, and the private woman who did not recover from a love relationship that ended, to the point that she wanted to die, leaving behind her 3-year-old daughter. She expressed her feelings in a letter from July, just before her suicide attempt:

> "I AM now on my journey to ------. I felt more at leaving my child, than I thought I should--and, whilst at night I imagined every instant that I heard the half-formed sounds of her voice,--I asked myself how I could think of parting with her for ever, of leaving her thus helpless?"[47]

Although Wollstonecraft regularly expressed her love and affection for her first daughter Fanny in the letters, and thus contributed to the image of being an attentive and involved mother as social conventions required her to be. Nonetheless, her decision to die and abandon her daughter discredited her idea that an emancipated woman would be a much better wife and mother.[48]

Public confirmation of her suicide attempts and her two children born out of wedlock – with two different men – caused vilified biographies during the 19th century, which focused on the scandalous aspects of her life, not her work. It was the case of *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography*, written by Ralph. M. Wardle (1909-1988) and published in 1951. In another of his works, called *Mary Wollstonecraft: Analytical Reviewer*, Wardle tried to identify the articles that Wollstonecraft had written for *The Analytical Review*, although she did not mention her name. Walpole somehow unearthed some information on how she grew radical ideas.[49]

Another aspect we would like to bring up here is how earning a living through writing was inappropriate for a woman 18th century Britain. Again, women were expected to stay in the family sphere, or at best be governesses,

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[47] Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Letter LVIII, July 14. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Posthumous_Works_of_the_Author_of_A_Vindication_of_the_Rights_of_Woman#LETTER_XX

[48] Shulevitz, Judith. "Ahead of her time, though Wollstonecraft fought vigorously for women, she didn't like them much." *The New York Times*, July 1, 2001 *https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/07/01/bookend/bookend.html*

[49] Todd, Janet. *Mary Wollstonecraft: An Annotated Bibliography. London, Routledge, 1976.* https://books.google.fr

as Wollstonecraft was. And yet, encouraged later by her publisher Joseph Johnson, she was more than thrilled with her new status as a female writer and philosopher. However, her life options were heavily criticized, since being an author while being a woman was already likely to attract judgment and contempt. Wardle wrote: "After years of dependence and servility Mary had, in her new position, found dignity and happiness through independence, and she doubtless felt that the ills of the world could be dissipated as quickly as the ills of her spirit had been." He wanted to insist on the fact that it was not a job for her sex, and he also highly suggested that she had a distempered mind. He added that "generally she could consider herself lucky that she had managed to stray as far from woman's acknowledged place as to be earning a living as a writer." [50]

Therefore, Wardle shared the opinion of Horace Walpole, who insulted Wollstonecraft of "Hyena in petticoats" much earlier.[51] This English author died the same year as her in 1797.

Harriet Martineau was a British journalist who was later considered as one of the first sociologists. Born in 1802, she had been one of the authors of the nineteenth century who condemned the character of Mary Wollstonecraft by learning about her personal life's trials. Nevertheless, as for Wollstonecraft, one of Martineau's aims was also to defend women's rights, and she was eager to express herself on numerous topics, although she was a woman in a literary world that included and favored men. She expressed her disregard towards Wollstonecraft in her work *How to observe Morals and Manners* as follows:

> "I never could reconcile my mind to Mary Wollstonecraft's writing, or to whatever I heard of her. It seemed to me, from the earliest time when I could think on the subject of Woman's Rights and condition, that the first requisite to advancement is the self reliance which results from self-discipline. Women who would improve the condition and chances of their sex must, I am certain, be not only affectionate and devoted, but rational

[50] Sapiro, Virginia. *A vindication of political virtue: The political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992. https://books.google.je/books?id=6kgADu2buJMC&printsec=frontcover#v=snippet&q=Paine&f=false

[51] Horace Walpole's letter to Hannah More, 26 January 1795. https://chawtonhouse.org/the-library/library-collections/man-up-online-exhibition/mary-wollstonecraft/

> and dispassionate, with the devotedness of benevolence, and not merely of personal love. But Mary Wollstonecraft was, with all her powers, a poor victim of passion, with no control over her own peace, and no calmness or content except when the needs of her individual nature were satisfied. " [52]

Mary Wollstonecraft was also an easy target for whose who thought her opinions to be misogynous. Indeed, she depicted women of her time as frivolous and manipulative, only accusing their lack of education, but the words she used still have been criticized:

> If women are in general feeble both in body and mind, it arises less from nature than from education. We encourage a vicious indolence and inactivity, which we falsely call delicacy; instead of hardening their minds by the severer principles of reason and philosophy, 'we breed them to useless arts, which terminate in vanity 'and sensuality. In most of the countries which I had visited, they are taught nothing of a higher nature than a 'few modulations of the voice, or useless postures of the body'.[53]

When she expressed herself on the conditions of women, she rarely seemed to include herself. Nevertheless, she explained many times that their attitude was not their fault and then completely excusable, as virtue could only come from reasonable education. She said "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone", which means that she affirmed that an inclusive educational system could change this subordination of women.[54]

However, for many people her immoral lifestyle ruined her reputation as a woman of sense, and when she wondered "Why are women so awful -- so shallow, insipid, manipulative and morally unreliable?"[55], those words would

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[52] Martineau, Harriet. *How to observe Morals and Manners.* London, Charles Knight and Company, 1838, p 33.
[53] Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects.* London, J. Johnson, 1792. P 67.
[54] Shulevitz, Judith. "Ahead of her time, though Wollstonecraft fought vigorously for women, she didn't like them much." *The New York Times*, July 1, 2001. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/01/07/01/bookend/bookend.html
[55] *Ibid.*

later on be intensely criticized by feminist authors, as they appeared appalling for a woman who advocated the rights of her sex.

3.2 The Resurrection as an Advocate of Women's Rights

The low opinion people had about Wollstonecraft obscured her books during the whole 19th century, and it took an evolution in moral attitudes to bring a change and a much less severe understanding of MW's independent life. Indeed, she was going to be considered the mother of feminism, as expressed in her works when she resisted male authority and tried to rise above vilified criticism. As a vindicator of the emancipation of women, she esteemed it was judicious and necessary to promote legal equality, social laws and to give women and education, and legal independence. It is interesting to note that she eventually accepted and appreciated the traditional role of women as wives and mothers, which did not stop her from defending her ideas.

Nevertheless, talking about feminism at Wollstonecraft' s period is somewhat contradictory, as it was only decades later that the term was consolidated. We today know that the first stages of women's struggle for their rights started then.

In 1800, Mary Hays wrote about Wollstonecraft's legacy in a comprehensive scale, "Her own sex have lost, in the premature fate of this extraordinary woman, an able champion; yet she has not labored in vain: the spirit of reform is silently pursuing its course. Who can mark its limits?".[56] She also addressed the detractors of the defender of the Rights of Women:

> Those who display eagerness in detecting the weaknesses of superior characters, would do well to weigh in the same balance their own proportion of goodness and greatness. A great character, to excite emulation and rouse the nobler passions, should be placed in a just light and a certain point of view. A habit of searching for defects will insensibly beget imitation: he, who never

[56] Mary Hays : Life, Writings and Correspondence, *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft.* http://www.maryhayslifewritingscorrespondence.com/mary-hays-correspondence/mary-hays-s-writings/periodical-contributions/hays-memoir-of-wollstonecraft

> warmed his heart by the contemplation of excellence, will scarcely rise to arduous heights.[57]

There is progressively a rehabilitation of the reputation of Wollstonecraft by several female writers, starting with Virginia Woolf in 1882, and continuing with Janet Todd in 1976. In 1929 Woolf declared that Wollstonecraft's writing, arguments, and "experiments in living" were immortal: "She is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living" [58]

"The Mary on the Green Campaign" is a campaign that fought for the construction of a memorial of Mary Wollstonecraft in Newington Green, the city in which she founded a girl school and began her writing career. The members of this campaign strongly believe that she deserves a commemorative memorial statue, to salute her involvement in the emancipation of women (a picture of the sculpture is included in the appendices).[59]

As a matter of fact, before being acclaimed in the 20th century, Mary Wollstonecraft had seen her reputation highly contempted. Then that reputation went into oblivion. It took almost a century for her to regain gratification and recognition for her works, thanks to an evolution in moral attitudes and society's quest for gender equality.

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[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Virginia Woolf, "Four Figures: III Mary Wollstonecraft," *The Uncommon Reader: Second Series.* London, The Hogarth Press, 1932, 163.

[59] https://www.maryonthegreen.org/

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Wollstonecraft's writings and life has allowed us to understand how her reputation had been in danger, because she was "too" radical for her time, a time that mostly did not look favorably at women wanting a proper education, their financial emancipation, as well as governmental laws that would give them access to the rights enjoyed by men.

However, although the list of her claims was long and complex, the American and French Revolutions have been a source of inspiration for Wollstonecraft who did not hesitate to discuss all the republican viewpoints that came out of those upheavals, as well as she enjoyed debating with other authors whom we now consider prominent authors. Thomas Paine was one of them, and like Mary Wollstonecraft he promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment, including intellectual progress, a quest for happiness, which caused a rebellion against the monarchy[60] and promoted the American revolution with its ideals of "liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness," as stated in the US Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.[61]

Mary Wollstonecraft fought in her writings to advance her feminist beliefs, arguing reasonably on the progress that feminism could bring society, without forgetting the family sphere. Nevertheless, and against her will, her image also had to "fight" after her death, since it was unwillingly disparaged by her husband's writing on her depression, her failure in love and her children born out of wedlock, all biographical elements heavily criticized despite her personal and public achievements.

Finally, her reputation has evolved along with an evolution of mores that rehabilitated her works and her person, even thanking her ability of having begun (among other authors) the fight for women's rights and their full consideration in society.

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[60] "Enlightenment", *History*. https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/enlightenment

[61] Zinn, Howard. (1980) (rev. ed. 2005). *A People's History of the United States.* New York: Harper & Row. https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/peoples-history-zinn-1980.pdf

We will conclude this paper by drawing a comparison with her daughter, Mary Shelley, who has had a huge success thanks mostly to her prominent literary creation, *Frankenstein*. To do so, we would like to quote Charlotte Gordon, a prize-winning poet and biographer who has drawn the link between Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter. Those two extraordinary women never came to know each other since Wollstonecraft died only ten days after the birth of her child. Nevertheless, it is no coincidence so to speak that they shared a powerful literary and feminist legacy. They were both female famous writers. They both fought to have a significant role in society by thinking about how mores could evolve, her daughter focusing more on the place of women as authors of literary works. Consequently, we would like to argue that the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft on her daughter, as well as on the progress on gender equality cannot be disputed.[62]

[62] Gordon, Charlotte. *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley.* Windmill Books, 2016.

PARTIE DIDACTIQUE

Pour cette partie didactique dans laquelle je me suis inspiré de mon sujet de mémoire de recherche, j'ai souhaité revenir sur l'évolution de l'image de la femme. Bien qu'une évolution réelle se soit faite depuis l'époque de Mary Wollstonecraft, l'image d'une femme intellectuellement plus limitée que l'homme, ou moins à même d'avoir des responsabilités est resté longtemps dans les mœurs. Au 20ème siècle, la femme était encore souvent uniquement rattachée à la sphère familiale. Être mère au foyer incluait le fait de s'occuper des enfants, et de faire l'ensemble des tâches ménagères, afin de soulager le mari qui n'endossait pas d'autres responsabilités au-delà de son travail.
L'objectif culturel serait la représentation de la femme dans les médias du 20ème siècle en Amérique.

La tâche finale dont l'objectif est de déconstruire les stéréotypes liés au rôle du genre, serait de créer un poster (avec collage ou photographies) représentant une situation familiale (en s'inspirant des photographies en noir et blanc vues en classe). Le poster inclurait une description, avec l'utilisation des différents objectifs étudiés (le présent simple V-ING, as, les tâches ménagères).

Le document d'anticipation serait le clip de Jennifer Lopez intitulé « I ain't your mama », afin d'introduire la nouvelle séquence avec un contenu que les élèves ont surement déjà écouté, même de leur propre gré. Cependant, ils ne se sont peut-être pas intéressés aux paroles, qui parle de la charge mentale des femmes à la maison. Les paroles se répètent et un exercice de compréhension orale serait alors mis en place, avec des paroles et des mots manquants.
Le sens de cette chanson, accessible pour leur compréhension grâce également au clip serait ensuite discuté afin d'aboutir au sujet de la séquence.

Séquence : Stop shaping gender roles

Niveau / cycle	**Entrée culturelle**	**Notion(s)**
Cycle 4 ; classe de 3ème ; niveau B1 visé	Gender role in America in the mid-20th century	Rencontre avec d'autres cultures

Tâche finale : création d'une affiche de publicité qui déconstruit les stéréotypes liés au rôle du genre.

Expression écrite : Create your own poster to deconstruct the stereotypes of gender role in the family sphere.
Expression orale : make a description of your work in front of the class, and justify your different choices to deconstruct traditional gender roles.

Pour réaliser la tâche finale, voici les **outils** dont mes élèves auront besoin, déclinés en termes d'**objectifs**

Culturels	**Méthodologiques**	**Linguistiques**		
		Lexicaux	Grammaticaux	Phonologiques
La représentation de la femme dans les publicités américaines du 20ème siècle **Objectif Citoyen :** déconstruire les stéréotypes du genre	Méthodologie de description d'une affiche (we can see, at the front of, the central element is)	Le lexique des tâches ménagères et de la maison Le lexique du combat pour l'égalité des sexes (gender rôle, stereotypes, to denounce something)	Should – rebrassage de must Présent simple V+ING As	Prononciation des nouveaux verbes d'actions assimilés

Visionnage du clip vidéo.[63]

Compréhension orale, avec questions posées à l'oral :

Do you know this song ? do you like it ?

Do you know the sense of the lyrics ? can you sum up with your words the first five sentences ?

The title is often repeated in the song, what is its sense ? does it clearly sum up the song ?

What does she mean by comfortable ?

Guess what is the theme of our new lesson

I ain't gon' be cooking all day, I ain't your mama
I ain't gon' do your laundry, I ain't your mama
I ain't your mama, boy, I ain't your mama
When you gon' get your act together?
I ain't your mama
No, I ain't your mama
No, I ain't your mama, no
Wake up and rise and shine (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
Best get to work on time (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
No more playing video games (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
Things are about to change ('round here, 'round here)
We used to be crazy in love
Can we go back to how it was?
When did you get too comfortable?
'Cause I'm too good for that, I'm too good for that
Just remember that, hey
I ain't gon' be cooking all day, I ain't your mama
I ain't gon' do your laundry, I ain't your mama
I ain't your mama, boy, I ain't your mama
When you gon' get your act together?
I ain't your mama
No, I ain't your mama
No, I ain't your mama, no
You're lucky to have these curves (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
Stop getting on my nerves (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
You still tryna ride this train (ah-yeah-yeah-yeah)
But somethings have gotta change ('round here, here, here)
We used to be crazy in love
Can we go back to how it was?
When did you get too comfortable?

[63] Lopez, Jennifer. *Ain't your mama. 2016.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqmx7z49OEk

'Cause I'm too good for that, I'm too good for that

Chacune des publicités suivantes seraient attribuées par ilot (plusieurs ilots auraient la même), afin que les élèves puissent discuter ensemble de ce qu'ils y découvrent, un chef d'ilot désigné viendrait ensuite au tableau pour commenter leur affiche, expression orale guidée grâce aux questions posées ci-dessous. Une mise en commun serait effectuée avec trace écrite pour que tous les élèves puissent accéder à l'étude de chaque image.

Look at the documents and answer the questions:

Describe the documents (nature, elements)

What product is promoted ? Who is aimed at (cibler) ?

What is the goal of this advertisement ?

Give your opinion. Do you think it is a good technique ? Would you buy them ?

Do you think ads can influence the way we see gender equality ? How ?



1953 Alcoa Aluminum advertisement[64]

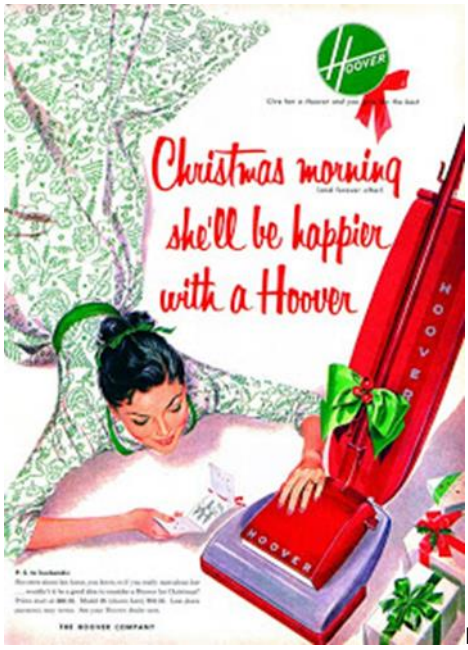


The Chef Kitchen mixer (Kenwood,1961)[65]

[64] Hunter, Michelle. "You mean a woman can open it". *American History,* November 4, 2020. http://blogs.shu.edu/americanhistory/project/you-mean-a-woman-can-open-it/



Schlitz, 1952.[66]



Hoover, 1953.[67]

[65] Kelly, Sarah. "Media Discourse and Analysis". *WordPress,* March 21, 2013. https://skell091.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/media-discourse-analysis-semiotic-print-advertisement-analysis/

[66] "Odd Ads : Schlitz Beer". *History by Zim,* February 16, 2013. http://www.historybyzim.com/2013/02/odd-ads-of-the-past-2-schlitz-beer/

[67] "Sexism in the 1950s", *The Visual Past,* August 27, 2014. https://visualpast.wordpress.com/2014/08/27/sexism-in-the-1950s/








Photographies tirées d'un article résumant la vie quotidienne d'une femme mère au foyer des années 40 aux Etats-Unis (In 1941, *LIFE* magazine sent photographer William C. Shrout to document the lives of one of the biggest single demographics in the U.S: the 30 million housewives who did most of the washing, made beds, cooked meals and nursed almost all the babies of the nation, with little help, no wages and no other jobs.)[68]

Cette activité de compréhension écrite consisterait à placer chaque phrase de description ci-dessous avec la photographie qui lui correspond. Cela permettrait d'introduire le vocabulaire des tâches ménagères, ainsi que d'expliquer l'utilisation du présent simple V-ING, en surlignant avec deux couleurs différentes les mots relevés.

L'utilisation de « as » en tant que conjonction serait également expliquée.

Match each description to the correct photography:

Jane scrubbing the bathtub in bathroom at home

Jane using pop-up toaster, as she makes sandwiches for her three children

Jane mending a pair of socks as she lounges in bedroom while listening to her favorite jazz records during her leisure hours (time with out kids)

Jane loading the automatic washing machine with several days' dirty clothes, in basement at home

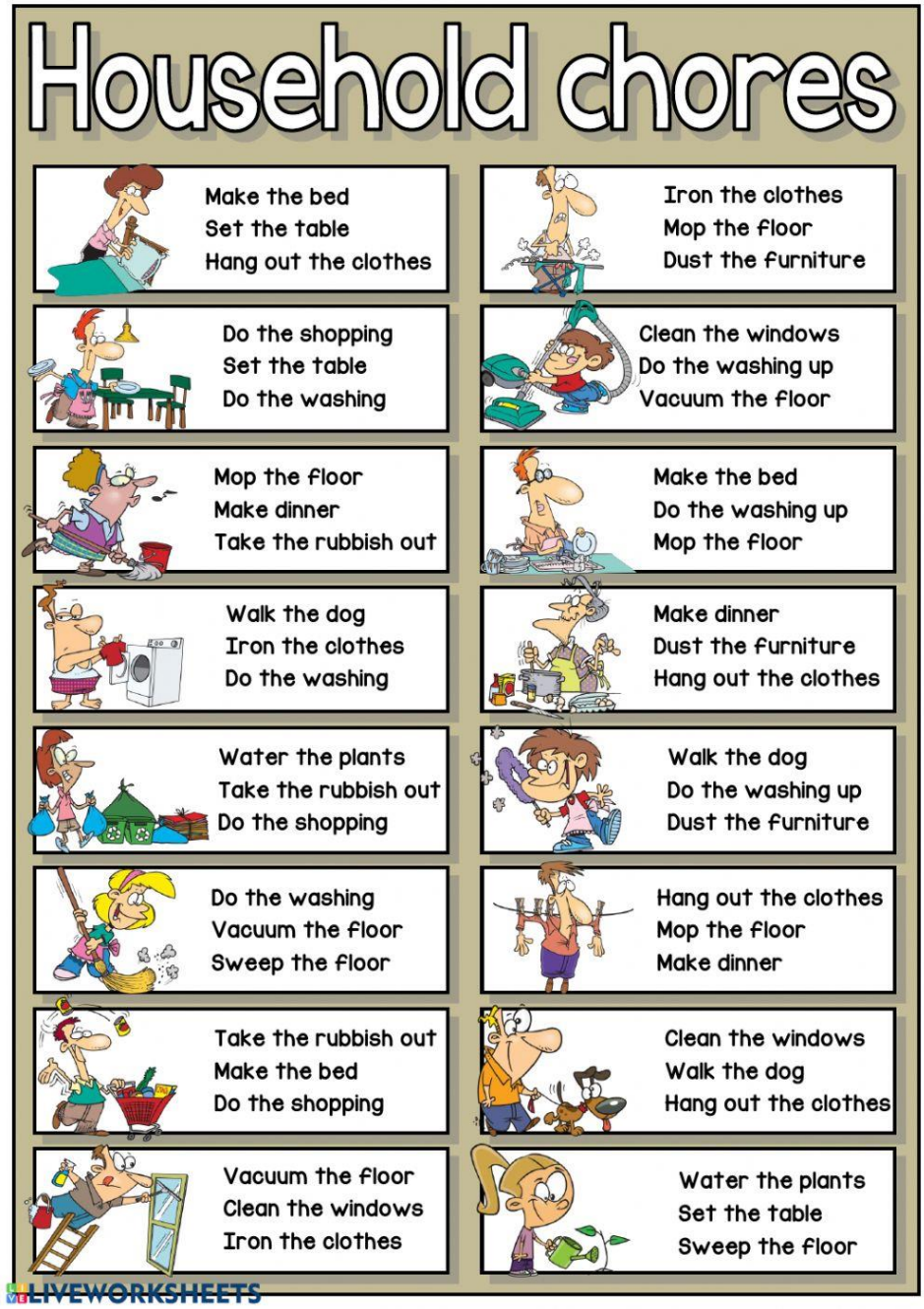
Jane bathing her daughter Pamela, 4, before dressing her for bed at night

Jane serving lunch to her husband Gilbert, who has come home from the office a few minutes away, and her ever-present kids.

Une mise en commun serait effectuée avec correction.

[68] "A Series of Vintage Photos Documented a Day in the Life of a 1940s Housewife". *Vintage Everyday*, August 5, 2018. https://www.vintag.es/2018/08/1940s-housewife.html

Autre document à utiliser pour l'élaboration de la séquence et le bon déroulement de la tâche finale :



[69]

Il faudrait également dresser un lien avec les tâches ménagères qui sont considérées à la charge des hommes puisqu'il s'agit aussi de sexisme.

[69] Household chores. *Liveworksheets.* https://www.liveworksheets.com/worksheets/en/English_as_a_Second_Language_(ESL)/Household_chores/Household_chores_nd18756ea

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Appendices :



Spinning bees: community gatherings to spin yarn, homespun production to support the patriotic cause during the American Revolution. Unknown artist.



Frontispice of the 1791 edition. Engraving of William Blake, used in *Original Stories From Real Life* By Mary Wollstonecraft.



Mary.W painted in 1790-91 By John Opie. By being portrayed with a book in her hands, her aim was certainly to increase awareness on the importance of education in women's development.

Portraits of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley joined together.



John Opie (1797) Richard Rothwell (1840)



A Sculpture for Mary Wollstonecraft was funded by a 10-year campaign and stands in Newington Green, near where she lived and worked. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Résumé du mémoire :

Mary Wollstonecraft, femme de lettres d'origine britannique du 18ème siècle a revendiqué l'éducation des femmes ainsi que l'égalité des droits dans ses œuvres. Influencée par les évènements révolutionnaires de son époque, elle est désormais reconnue comme une des pionnières du féminisme. Au centre de ce sujet de recherche, ses idées avant-gardistes et sa vie personnelle tumultueuse, qui ont été majoritairement désapprouvées, avant que son image soit finalement réhabilitée, et qu'elle soit considérée comme une grande écrivaine et réformatrice.

Mots-clés :

Mary Wollstonecraft - féminisme – éducation - égalité des sexes – littérature – émancipation

Summary of the thesis research :

Mary Wollstonecraft, an 18th-century British-born woman of letters claimed women's education and equal rights in her writings. Influenced by the revolutionary events of her time, she is now recognized as one of the pioneers of feminism. Her avant-garde ideas and her tumultuous personal life were central in this research as they affected her reputation. Both were mostly disapproved by the public opinion, but her person was eventually rehabilitated, as having been a prominent writer and reformer.

Keywords :

Mary Wollstonecraft - feminism – education – gender equality – literature - emancipation