Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

FROM SUPERIORITY TO EQUALITY?: MEN'S VOICES IN WENDY WASSERSTEIN'S PLAYS

Duygu Beste Başer

Master's Thesis

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KABUL VE ONAY

Duygu Beste Başer tarafından hazırlanan "From Superiority to Equality?: Men's Voices in Wendy Wasserstein's Plays" başlıklı bu çalışma, 16 Haziran 2016 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Yukarıdaki imzaların adı geçen öğretim üyelerine ait olduğunu onaylarım.

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Duygu Beste BAŞER

To my parents...

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ÖZET

BAŞER, Duygu Beste. *Üstünlükten Eşitliğe mi?: Wendy Wasserstein'in Oyunlarında Erkeklerin Sesi*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2016.

Yirminci yüzyıl ile birlikte tiyatro dünyasında daha fazla yer edinmeye başlayan kadın oyun yazarları, eserlerinde genellikle toplumsal adaletsizlik/eşitsizlikle mücadele eden hemcinslerinin yaşam öyküleri ve politik duruşlarını konu edinir ve birçoğu, erkek yazarların kadın bakış açısını tam anlamıyla yansıtmadığı savıyla ataerkil toplumu kendi deneyimlerini temel alarak yansıtır. Bu açıdan kadın yazarların eserleri, edebiyat tarihinin bir parçası olmanın yanı sıra, toplumsal-politik tarihe de farklı bir bakış açısı sunmuştur. Wendy Wasserstein de modern tiyatronun önemli kadın yazarları arasında kabul edilir ve eserlerinde, 1946-1954 yılları arasında doğan ve "Baby Boom" olarak adlandırılan neslin arzu ve hayal kırıklıklarına odaklanır. Hemcinslerine yönelik eleştirel bir yaklaşım sergileyen Wasserstein, oyunlarında çoğunlukla kadınların, özellikle de anneler ve kızlarının, hayatlarını anlatır. Ancak yazar bunu yaparken, eserlerinde herhangi bir toplumsal ya da ideolojik grupla özel bir bağ kurmamış ya da bu gruplara yönelik önyargılı bir tavır takınmamıştır. Oyunlarında nesnel bir tutum sergileyen Wasserstein, kendi yaşamından yola çıkarak, Amerikan toplumunun politika, feminizm ve erkek hareketleri tarafından nasıl şekillendirildiğini gözler önüne sermiştir.

Üstünlükten Eşitliğe mi?: Wendy Wasserstein'in Oyunlarında Erkeklerin Sesi başlıklı bu çalışma, Wasserstein'in toplumsal hareketler ve politikanın erkekler üzerindeki etkisine nasıl dikkat çektiğini ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda seçilen altı oyunda erkek-kadın ilişkileri üzerinden Amerikan erkeğinin toplumsal rolü irdelenmiştir. Erkek kimliğinin kadın ve erkek hareketleri sonucunda geçirdiği değişim/dönüşüm üzerinde durulmuştur. İlk bölümde ele alınan *Isn't It Romantic* (1983) ve *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) oyunlarında erkeklerin 1980'lerin toplumsal ve politik gelişmelerine gösterdikleri tepki ele alınmıştır. İkinci bölümde incelenen *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992) oyunu erkeklerin Amerikan toplumunun değişen/dönüşen değerlerine uyum sürecini anlatırken, *An American Daughter* (1992) erkeklerin feminist harekete yönelik düşünsel tepkilerini ve bu tepkilerin gündelik yaşamdaki karşılığını yansıtır. Çalışmanın son bölümünde irdelenen *Old Money* (2000) ve *Third* (2005) oyunlarıysa, sırasıyla, kurumsallaşan

Amerikan şirketlerindeki erkeklik olgusu ve erkek-karşıtı cinsel ayrıma yer verir. Çalışmanın genelinde, oyunların yazıldıkları dönemin toplumsal hareketleri ve bu hareketlerin kadın erkek ilişkileri üzerindeki etkisine değinilerek Amerikan yakın tarihinin detaylı bir analizi yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Feminist Tiyatro, Wendy Wasserstein, Feminizm, Erkek Hareketleri, Çağdaş Amerikan Tiyatrosu, Amerikan Kadın Oyun Yazarları

ABSTRACT

BAŞER, Duygu Beste. *From Superiority to Equality?: Men's Voices in Wendy Wasserstein's Plays*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2016.

The twentieth century saw a rise in the number of American female playwrights who developed alternative discourses that challenged the dominant male perspective. The works of these playwrights became tools to express their political stance and depict the worlds of women struggling with social injustices as a result of biased gender politics. They also wrote about their personal experiences with the patriarchal system since most male writing failed to introduce women's voices to readers and audiences in a fair and complete manner. Wendy Wasserstein (1950–2006) joined these playwrights as a Baby Boomer by introducing the frustrations and aspirations of the post-World War II generation. Complaining that she had not studied any female playwrights, Wasserstein mostly dramatized the lives of women, especially mothers and daughters, in her plays and approached women and feminism critically. While doing so, she neither promoted nor demoted any group's rights or ideologies. In an attempt to remain objective, Wasserstein dramatized how American society was shaped by the feminist and men's movements, while including references to the people and events in her own life.

In order to draw attention to the impact of these movements on men, and the political atmosphere of the country, this thesis will focus on Wasserstein's social commentary through drama. Specifically, it will explore the role of men in terms of their relationships with women through six Wasserstein plays. Moreover, this thesis will examine how American men changed and developed a new sense of identity, alongside women, as a result of the feminist and men's movements. The first chapter will focus on *Isn't It Romantic* (1983) and *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) as a means of analyzing men's responses to the social and political atmosphere of the 1980s. In chapter two, *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992) will illustrate how men adapted to American society in flux, while *An American Daughter* (1997) will analyze how and why they participated in the backlash against feminism. The plays discussed in the last chapter, *Old Money* (2000) and *Third* (2005), will respectively emphasize manhood in corporate America and reverse discrimination against men. All three chapters will include in-depth analyses of the social

and political conditions of the time periods in which the plays were written, with references to how the feminist and men's movements impacted American men and women.

Keywords: Feminist Theater, Wendy Wasserstein, Feminism, Men's Movements, Contemporary American Drama, American Women Playwrights

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INTRODUCTION

For years, male playwrights and authors have depicted the world of women, forcing readers to see women from a man's perspective. Over the course of the twentieth century, female playwrights such as Susan Glaspell, Sophie Treadwell, and Lillian Hellman broke this mold and introduced women to audiences and readers from a woman's perspective. As French feminist Helene Cixous conveys, this helped women make their voices heard:

> Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (256)

Cixous means that women can be a part of history only by writing about themselves. In order to write the truth about women, women must write about their experiences. If they do not engage in such writing, men will.

Jewish American playwright Wendy Wasserstein (1950–2006) shared this opinion. Exposed to very few female playwrights as a student because there were hardly any in the field, she dedicated her writing career to composing plays on women's issues (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 3). Today, Wasserstein's dramatic works are considered to be historical "time capsules" that provide valuable information about women and the Second and Third Waves of Feminism (1960s–2000s).

To take this one step further, Wasserstein uses performance to impact the lives of men and women. She "'spoke for a generation,' the Baby Boom generation of upper middle class women to which she belonged" (Lively 412), dramatizing their lives, and the lives of their mothers and daughters. Moreover, Wasserstein's plays also deal with masculinity in transition between the 1960s and 2000s, and reflect the men who were a part of her life—her father, brother, friends, and lovers. They served as role models, archetypes, and inspirations for her male characters, while also representing a cross-section of the various (sub)urban masculinities of her era.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE FEMINIST AND MEN'S MOVEMENTS

Wendy Wasserstein was born in 1950 as part of the post-World War II Baby Boom generation, which means that she grew up in the midst of the Second Wave of Feminism of the 60s and 70s, and had the chance to observe how the movement affected women's lives. Wasserstein witnessed the accomplishments of the movement, as well as its failures. Instead of simply glorifying women and the movement in her plays, she exposed its problems. Frazer Lively affirms that "Wasserstein is concerned with the effect of historical events on individuals and how individuals respond to them" (420). Thus, in order to understand Wasserstein's plays, it is necessary "to reach beyond [their] edges and study the world that shaped [them]" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 1).

Although the Second Wave of Feminism began in the early 1960s, the social and cultural conditions which prepared its groundwork emerged during World War II. While American men went off to the battlefields to fight for their country, American women entered the work force. Even though the women contributed to the economy in a significant way, they were forced back into the home when the men returned because "women could do 'men's work,' but they were only expected to do it temporarily" (Milkman 470). Women who continued to work were forced into pink collar jobs such as teaching and nursing because these professions replicated the traditional female gender roles of nurturing and caring, and did not pose a threat to men. However, the majority of women returned to the domestic sphere, which led to the rebirth of the nineteenth-century "cult of domesticity." As a result, American society became more family oriented after World War II. Women went to college to get an MRS degree, not an MS, and most were either engaged or married by the time they graduated. Their major achievements became their family, and thus the women of this era married earlier, had more children, and divorced less often, all of which led to a baby boom from 1946 to 1964. A single woman was seen as "unnatural," and being unmarried was a source of shame and embarrassment (Rosen 14).

In 1961, John F. Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women, headed by Eleanor Roosevelt, to learn more about women's status in the United States (Rosen 65–66). This commission prepared a report which was issued in 1963, *The*

Presidential Report on American Women, which documented the inequality between male and female workers, especially the wage gap. It also stressed the fact that women were oppressed at home as mothers and wives (Rosen 66–67). The same year, Betty Friedan's renowned book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was published. In it, she describes the lives of middle class women and voices problems which had previously never been discussed. She said what many women could not say:

> If I am right, the problem that has no name stirring in the minds of so many American women today is not a matter of loss of femininity or too much education, or the demands of domesticity. It is far more important than anyone recognizes. It is the key to these other new and old problems which have been torturing women and their husbands and children, and puzzling their doctors and educators for years. It may well be the key to our future as a nation and a culture. We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: "I want something more than my husband and my children and my home." (78)

As Friedan states in her book, women suffered from "The Problem That Has No Name," an indescribable depression and emptiness that was the consequence of the gender roles they were forced to perform. Educated, white, middle class women living in the suburbs devoted their lives to their children and husbands, which eventually led to dissatisfaction. This was called the "housewife syndrome" by doctors; however, Friedan proved that this was an easy label, and much more than that. Society was pushing women into strict gender roles, leaving them no freedom of choice. Friedan illustrated how these women, whose skills and intellect were being ignored, felt incomplete and invisible.

Friedan encouraged women to develop independent identities and leave the suffocating domestic sphere by pursuing education and employment. Thus, *The Feminine Mystique* is said to be the foundational text of Second Wave American Feminism since it initiated an awakening. The establishment of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 by Friedan herself was another important step. NOW demanded equality and called women into action through their "Statement of Purpose." Women wanted social justice against sexism, and demanded childcare centers, equal education, and political participation. They also stated that wives and husbands should share domestic and child-rearing responsibilities (Rosen 78–79), and Wasserstein examines these issues throughout her *oeuvre*, especially in plays such as *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977), *Isn't It Romantic* (1983) and *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988).

Meanwhile, younger women who participated in the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s discovered sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, also realized the problems with politics. Some of them joined the Peace Corps, while others took part in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Many women were also active in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and fought for civil rights (Douglas 142). As members of these groups, they acquired organizational skills which they then used to fight for their rights.

The women of the Second Wave accomplished a great deal, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1972 and 1975, and *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which made abortion legal (De Hart 615–616). However, just when the feminist movement reached its peak in the 1970s, the media started a backlash. Feminists were stereotyped in advertisements, news, and the movies. Susan J. Douglas claims that feminists were portrayed as "unfeminine, unappealing women" who could only attract men's attention by protesting in the streets (156). In the 1970s, feminism also became a "catfight" between women for media attention, and those feminists who were unappealing to men were characterized as angry, humorless, and crazy radicals and fanatics (Bailey 22). The Equal Rights Amendment became a major part of this media catfight, and the backlash worked: the ERA was not ratified in 1982. With this defeat came the death-knell of the Second Wave.

In the 1980s, the media backlash tried to convince women that they had gained their freedom, were not oppressed anymore, and that feminism was a useless relic. "Because I'm worth it" became the narcissistic motto of the era, and women were told by corporations such as L'Oreal that being beautiful for themselves, instead of men, was a sign of liberation (Douglas 245). As Douglas conveys, "sisterhood was out, competitive individualism was in" (257). American women were being pulled into consumerism through feminism, and clothes, make-up, perfect bodies, and youth became their new focus. As Ruth Rosen points out, the "supermom" of the 1950s was transformed into the "superwoman" in the 1980s (327–328), and Wasserstein depicts this shift in *An American Daughter* (1997).

Even though life improved for many white, middle class, American women, women of color, lesbians, working class, and older women continued to suffer, which prepared the groundwork for Third Wave Feminism. As Cathryn Bailey states, the line between the Second and Third Waves is blurred: "In an interesting way, the wave metaphor captures the notion of continuity as well as discontinuity; waves are different from one another but are similar, too" (27). Dorothy Chansky describes the Second Wave in relation to the Third Wave, explaining that the focus of the latter movement is not singular but rather multiple. She concludes that the Third Wave Feminism does not refute the accomplishments and aims of the Second Wave. Rather, Third Wave feminists expand such issues by tackling them in a transnational way ("Usable Performance" 352). Celebrating diversity and universality, Third Wave feminists have focused on issues such as racism, economic exploitation, gendered double standards, lesbian rights, reproductive rights, labor abuse, female genital mutilation, healthcare reform, political rights, violence and harassment, sexual freedom, the glass ceiling, maternity leave, childcare, and the work–family balance (Baumgardner and Richards 627–628). As Bailey states, an "important lesson to be learned may be just this; that complexity, multiplicity, and contradiction can enrich our identities as individual feminists and the movement as a whole" (26). Wasserstein's treatment of Third Wave Feminism is evident in her last play, *Third* (2005).

When gender is discussed in academia, there is a tendency to focus only on women. To explain this, Julia T. Wood suggests in her book *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture* that white American men have had certain rights and privileges throughout the nation's history, especially in terms of enfranchisement, property ownership, and the social, economic, and legal systems, and therefore they have not been involved in as many organized movements as white American women (94). However, along with the Second Wave of Feminism came the men's movements. It was inevitable that men would be affected by both movements, and this attracted Wasserstein's attention. Unlike many feminist playwrights, Wasserstein explicitly features men in her plays, even though her main focus remains women. We learn that just like women, men also wanted to cut loose from traditional gender roles which, as Judith Butler claims, are "shaped by political forces with strategic interests" (164). Acts or gestures, or what Butler calls the "gendered body," are "performative," which actually is an "illusion discursively

maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (173). Because those who fail to perform their socially constructed and assigned gender roles are punished, gender (both femininity and masculinity) is a performance that requires repetition (Butler 178). This means that how men and women perform their roles may change over time and alongside the politics of gender. Butler's theory of gender performativity is exemplified in Wasserstein's works, especially when they are considered chronologically. The ways in which the playwright's men perform masculinity differ in each play, and Wasserstein connects these changes in gender performance to the social and political forces at play in each era.

Wood explains that the Second Wave of Feminism provided both women and men with a chance to explore gender. While doing so, some men reinforced traditional gender roles whereas others wanted to transform the definition of American masculinity (94). Ironically, *Playboy*, which started publication in 1953, was the first magazine to encourage men to disengage from the burdens of the patriarchal system. It told men to enjoy sex without feeling guilty or responsible for their families, and in the 1960s, they too began searching for freedom (Rosen 47). As the women's movement fractured into different groups in order to follow specific agendas, the Men's Movement also split into various branches, including Men's Liberationists, Men's Rights Advocates, Radical Feminist Men, Social Feminist Men, Men of Color, Gay Male Liberationists, Promise Keepers, and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement. Linda Alcoff suggests that "being a 'woman' is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context" (435). When this approach is applied to the men's movement, it becomes apparent that men too have taken numerous positions over the past few decades, and have changed and adapted their agendas to fit their "moving historical context." Men's responses to feminism and the masculinity crisis fall into three categories: masculinist, profeminist, and antifeminist (Messner 9).

The Feminist Men's Movement gained momentum in the 1970s with the rise of Second Wave Feminism. Wood states that

> During the 1972 campaign to ratify the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), many men . . . joined women on public platforms to advocate for women's

> equality and rights. Today most male feminists endorse efforts to gain equal pay for equal work, to end discrimination against qualified women in academic and professional contexts, and to increase parental leaves and affordable child care. (96)

Such profeminist men also established groups like NOMAS, the National Organization for Men against Sexism, members of which engaged in consciousness-raising activities and discussed how to overcome patriarchal oppression (Wood 99).

Those who believed that men suffered from gender discrimination were the "masculinists." Wood states that masculinist men thought that profeminists were soft and therefore are not "real" men. Moreover, masculinists did not have concerns about gay rights whereas profeminists were devoted to end discrimination against gays and women (104). The masculinist approach was aligned with the Men's Rights Movement, including a group called Free Men which established organizations such as MR, Inc. (1977), the National Coalition for Free Men, and the National Organization of Men (NOM). Wood states that members of these organizations believed that men had to regain their masculine role: "tough, rugged, invulnerable and self-reliant" (104). Additionally, according to Free Men, "the primary burden of masculinity is the provider role, which makes men little more than male tickets whose worth is measured by the size of their paychecks and their professional titles" (Wood 104). Messner also summarizes that the Men's Rights Movement (a.k.a., the Fathers' Rights Movement) mostly focused on the rights of men after divorce. They believed that men were victims of ex-wives who used the legal system to limit their interaction with their children (47).

Another masculinist ideology, the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, was initiated by Robert Bly.[1] Messner affirms that supporters of the Mythopoetic Movement blamed modernization for the feminization of men (17). Therefore, "they insist[ed] that men need[ed] to recover the *distinctly male mode of feeling*, which [was] fundamentally different from the female feelings endorsed by profeminist men" (Wood 108). Emphasizing the importance of returning to nature to build stronger bonds among men, the Mythopoetic Movement encouraged nature retreats where men "gather[ed] in the woods to beat drums, chant, and listen to poetry and mythic stories, all designed to helped

[1] His book *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990) is considered the foundational text of the movement.

them get in touch with their father hunger and move beyond to positive masculine feeling" (Wood 108).

According to Messner, Promise Keepers, which started in 1990, shared common ground with the Mythopoetic Men's Movement: they believed that the main problem with men was their feminization. While the Mythopoetic Movement blamed modernization, the Promise Keepers blamed feminism, gay liberation, sexual liberation, and the breakdown of the family. According to these two groups, men should regain their leadership role in society by reasserting their "masculinity" and "manliness" (17). Wood also differentiates these movements as follows: "Whereas Mythopoetics [saw] reconnecting with nature as the way for men to regain their wholeness, Promise Keepers [saw] connection to God's commandments as the path" (109). The latter group, which had Evangelical strands, also maintained that being a husband and a father were God-given rights.

Another important movement is Gay Liberation Movement, which started after the police raided a gay bar, The Stonewall, in New York City in 1969. According to Stephan Valocchi, the movement was influenced by Second Wave of Feminism. They embraced "sexual liberalism" and also examined "how a system of rigidly structured sex roles were built into all social institutions in American society and how this system contributed to gay oppression" (337). The AIDS epidemic, which will be discussed in Chapter 1, caused the breakup of the movement as a lot of gays were baffled and devastated by the loss of their friends, partners, or family members, and lost hope in political organization.

THE PLAYS OF WENDY WASSERSTEIN

Wasserstein's plays are replete with references and allusions to, and the impact of, the Second and Third Waves of Feminism and the various men's movements. She entered Mount Holyoke College at a time when most girls still attended school to acquire an MRS degree, but also at a moment of transition when change was looming just on the horizon. Girls took courses such as *How to Develop Poise and Self Confidence* and *How to Be a More Interesting Woman*, both of which were offered through Amy Vanderbilt's Success Program for Women. Wasserstein herself was sent to Helena Rubinstein's Charm School and to the June Taylor School of Dance. However, at the same time, many students were

reading Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1963), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 6).

During the Second Wave, women gradually entered the male professional world and acquired legitimate career options beyond the pink ghetto. However, they did not earn equal pay for equal work. Wasserstein was affected by these conflicting ideas, and applied to graduate school in law, business, and creative writing after Mount Holyoke. Clearly, she was overwhelmed by the new career possibilities afforded by the women's movement (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 8). Wasserstein includes such conflicting and competing elements in her works, which often portray women who are caught between feminism and the backlash of sexism, homophobia, and traditional values (Balakian, "Wendy Wasserstein" 214).

Being Jewish was central to Wasserstein's identity, and she portrayed her mixed feelings about Jewishness in her plays (Salamon 327). Wasserstein was an outsider in American WASP theater society with her full figure, sex, and Jewishness (Dolan 447). This allowed her to examine her environment through multiple lenses, and she dramatized her observations in her plays. For instance, Tasha in *Isn't it Romantic* resembles her own mother in that both are eccentric dancers who desperately expect their daughters to marry. Moreover, as Wasserstein admits in her interview with Jackson Bryer, in her plays, she included people from her childhood whom she remembered as being "colorful" (i.e., ethnic or non-conformist). The faux furrier in *The Sisters Rosensweig* shares the same job as Wasserstein's father who manufactured all kinds of "ettes," like suedette and leopardette (10). Nevertheless, Wasserstein tried to remain objective about feminism, and consequently was criticized for "not being feminist enough." However, as Jill Dolan states, her aim was not to start a revolution but to show women the complex reality of their cause. Above all, she critiqued the choices women have and do not have, and created universal meaning out of women's shared experiences (434).

In order to convey universal meaning, Wasserstein typically deployed history, either through a contrast in generations or a juxtaposition of time periods (Czekay, "Interview" 46). A contrast between the two sexes should also be added to this list. Dolan claims that

Wasserstein shifted the emphasis from fathers and sons to mothers and daughters in her plays (448). However, this does not mean that the men in her plays are stagnant. It was not only women who changed over the course time; men also underwent social and cultural changes throughout Wasserstein's body of work. Men played an important role in her dramas since they have always been part of women's lives as fathers, brothers, sons, and love-interests. Wasserstein depicts these men and how they followed, and challenged, patriarchal rules. She also dramatizes how men and women were sometimes at odds with each other, and how they were sometimes at odds with themselves, which allowed Wasserstein to show how men, and their attitudes, changed over time. Consequently, as Angelika Czekay affirms, "Wasserstein's characters reflect the gender politics of their times" ("Not Having It All" 20).

Wasserstein attempts to reflect reality in her plays. While celebrating women, she also holds a mirror up to the problems they experienced as a result of the feminist movement. "Equally disturbed by Hollywood's negative and stereotypical representation of women, Wasserstein was determined to prove that a woman need not be insane, desperate or crazy in order to be stageworthy" (Balakian, "Wendy Wasserstein" 216). Thus, in her plays, Wasserstein includes a variety of women from different backgrounds (Janie and Harriet in *Isn't It Romantic*), age groups (Laurie and Emily in *An American Daughter*), and with different identities (the female characters in *Uncommon Women and Others*). Moreover, in *Isn't It Romantic,* she compares and contrasts different generations of women, and women of the same age. In *The Sisters Rosensweig*, she depicts three sisters whose lives and ideologies diverge greatly. While doing so, Wasserstein neither excludes nor marginalizes men. Although female characters are at the center of her plays, men also constitute an important segment. The male characters exhibit change over the course of every play, reflecting the changes in society. She portrays their confusion, reactions, and evolution alongside that of women. If "plays are like the fossils of their time," then Wasserstein's plays are successful at representing the "historical, social and sexual forces that have shaped female," and male, "identity" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 1, 4).

DRAMATIZING MEN AND MASCULINITY

This thesis will argue that Wasserstein was just as adept at representing the forces that shaped male identity as she was at depicting the factors that shaped female identity. Clearly anything but one-dimensional, her male characters exhibit the changes that Michael A. Messner discusses:

> Men *are* changing, but not in a singular manner, and not necessarily in the direction that feminist women would like. Some of these changes support feminism, some express a backlash against feminism, and others (such as Bly's retreat to an idealized tribal mythology of male homosociality) appear to be attempts to avoid feminist issues all together. (2)

This thesis will analyze these changes by examining the male characters in six Wasserstein plays—*Isn't It Romantic* (1983), *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992), *An American Daughter* (1997), *Old Money* (2000), and *Third* (2005)—with a focus on their identity, relationships with women and other men, and how they reflect changes within the women's and men's movements. I maintain that by examining these characters, more insight can be gained into Wasserstein's thoughts on the issues of her time, especially sexuality, the gendered American social and political power structure, the patriarchal system, and male/female relationships. Analyzing male characters is essential because they provide us with a window into American society during this period of time, reflecting the changes in men's lives in response to shifting cultural norms.

Wasserstein's other plays, *Any Women Can't* (1973) and *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977), will not be included because they were written before Wasserstein began playwriting as a profession (the former is the play Wasserstein used to apply to Yale Drama School and the latter was her Yale MFA thesis). Other plays such as *Tender Offer* (1983) and *The Man in a Case* (1984) are not discussed in this thesis because they are one-act plays that do not provide insight into the men's movement. *Psyche in Love* (2004) is excluded since it is a retelling of a mythological story and *Welcome to My Rash* (2004) is not addressed because while it was performed, it has not been published as a text.

Men are not at the center of most of Wasserstein's plays. They are secondary characters who are presented only in situations related to women. As a result, they either do not have as many lines as female characters, or are not seen on stage. In order to analyze as fully as possible the role of men in Wasserstein's works, two plays have been chosen to represent each decade. Moreover, this thesis does not examine theatrical techniques such as performance and staging, or reader/audience response, in order to focus on Wasserstein's social commentary as conveyed through the plays' textual dialogue.

Although Wasserstein's first two plays will not be examined in this thesis, they convey her concerns as a woman playwright and also illuminate the path she would take in her playwriting career. Before she was admitted to the Yale School of Drama, Wasserstein wrote *Any Woman Can't* (1973) as a response to a guide, *Any Woman Can!,* for "sexual and personal fulfillment" published by a physician and so-called sex expert, David Reuben (Salamon 114).[2] The play reflects Wasserstein's own experiences and the characters are based on herself (Christina) and her family members. Christina has a boyfriend who constantly criticizes and intimidates her by using condescending nicknames such as "Teeny" or "Pet Tuna." Julie Salamon states that this boyfriend was modeled on Wasserstein's boyfriend at the time, James Kaplan, who became disturbed by his depiction on stage. Although Wasserstein reassured him that the characters in a play are never completely "real," Kaplan was still upset by Wasserstein's harsh treatment (115). As Wasserstein states in an interview with Esther Cohen, she did not mind offending people on moral grounds (266), and her first play did just that by critiquing the ways in which men trivialized women. She would not repeat "the same old stories," but would mirror social relations from perspectives generally ignored by other playwrights. This led her to write plays that are not didactic but, as Chris Durang notes, human (Salamon 120).

Beginning with her first play, Wasserstein's main focus became the complexity of human relationships, especially romantic love. *Any Woman Can't* was followed by *Uncommon Woman and Others* (1977), which focuses on women's experiences. Despite the absence of male characters on stage, *Uncommon Woman and Others* is all about men, through the

[2] The play was produced by Playwrights Horizons of New York City, and was staged at their theater five times in April 1973 (Salamon 114).

eyes of women, and the gender politics of the era. Her succeeding plays continue this theme by proving that Wasserstein was not indifferent to the struggles of men. In fact, she constantly attempts to analyze why men "are the way they are" alongside her commentary on women's issues.

The first play I will examine, *Isn't It Romantic* (1983), focuses on the question "Can women have it all?" Unable to keep up with the times, the male characters in the play are stuck between the past and present. Marty fails to recognize the demands of feminism, which results in his break up with Janie. On the other hand, Paul enjoys the freedom that has come as a result of various social movements, but clings to his traditional values. He also fails to understand feminists and underestimates them, believing they will all end up marrying "breadwinning" men who will provide them with economic and social security. Women's sexual liberation is important for men like Paul, but only insofar as they can use and exploit women. Female sexual liberation is only acceptable as long as they can engage in casual sex without the "burden" of marriage and family. Once women start demanding more, such men, as Wasserstein illustrates, crack under pressure, creating a stark contrast with the "ideal patriarchs" of the 1950s. Whether this is good or bad she leaves for the reader to decide.

These changes are also evident in *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), which serves as a bridge between *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Sisters Rosensweig*. Even though Peter and Scoop resemble each other (1960s liberal social activists who by the 1980s integrate into mainstream yuppie America), Scoop moves on to the next step and genuinely tries to understand the complexities of feminism. This helps him survive as a Baby Boomer in a society whose ideology and concerns are constantly changing. Peter, on the other hand, is the voice of homosexuals. Having grown up in a heterosexist society, he struggles to find a place for himself, and represents the overlap of two causes: the gay and feminist movements. His identity and position, both in society and in Heidi's life, are shaped by the changes of the era. However, he is not willing to sacrifice his liberation for hers which, at times, places him at odds with the female protagonist.

The Sisters Rosensweig (1992) is about three sisters, Sara, Pfeni, and Gorgeous, who reunite at Sara's house to celebrate her birthday. Wasserstein identifies *The Sisters*

Rosensweig as a play of possibilities and states that "most of the characters in the play are struggling with who they are" (*Shiksa Goddess* 66). *The Sisters Rosensweig* differs from her previous works in that one of the main characters, Sara, is in a relationship at the end of the play, suggesting that men and women have changed to the point that by the 1990s, they can at least compromise. In the play, Mervyn Kant and Geoffrey Duncan suggest that society is in flux, and that the dominant (male) and subordinate (female) binary is slowly being deconstructed. Unlike in *Isn't It Romantic,* which takes place in the 1980s, and in which men try to control and dominate women's lives, in *The Sisters Rosensweig*, the relationship between the two sexes is more balanced. Mervyn and Geoffrey transgress traditional gender roles by helping women regain their identities.

In *An American Daughter* (1997), the male/female and dominant/subordinate binaries have been deconstructed to the point where Wasserstein's men are now active participants in the backlash against feminism, trying to dismantle women's gains in a jealous, reactionary manner. Unlike Geoffrey and Peter, who are liberal and bisexual/gay, the gay character in *An American Daughter*, Morrow, is politically conservative and endorses the Republican Party. Like Peter, Morrow prioritizes himself and selfishly tries to derive personal benefit from women's issues. On the other hand, Lyssa's husband, Walter, seems to support his wife, but only on the surface. He cheats on Lyssa with a former student, Quincy Quince, who is a "postfeminist."[3] Walter, who thinks feminism is outdated, represents men who undervalue and intimidate successful women. Tucker, as the embodiment of the male dominated media, represents another element of the backlash against women and feminism, while Lyssa's father, Senator Alan Hughes, also contributes to her downfall by refusing to take her work seriously (he maintains that politics is a part of the male sphere) and to defend her against ferocious allegations. In other words, Hughes is unwilling to tarnish his reputation to save his daughter.

In *Old Money* (2000), Wasserstein uses class, money, and gendered power relations to examine male/female social dynamics. She compares and contrasts the Gilded Age with contemporary America in order to critique the social codes of the elite. Wasserstein maintains that female talent is not appreciated in today's America. For instance, Saulina

[3] Postfeminism will be defined and discussed on pages 63–67.

Webb's art is undervalued by men who believed that her feminist work is "dated." For men, feminism and art are not part of the male power structure, and are therefore worthless. As Wasserstein conveys, by the 2000s, men are looking for the power that comes with money and status symbols, and not with social change. Bernstein buys the Pfeiffers' mansion and gains the power, respect, and social position that it represents. No longer interested in civil rights, money is now the name of the game for liberal men. As Jan Balakian states in her book *Reading the Plays of Wendy Wasserstein*, by comparing the past and present, Wasserstein claims that "old money was for building a country, while new money is about accruing money" (173). Obsessed with wealth, status, and materialism, Bernstein fails to recognize the significance of family. On the other hand, his son, Ovid, values intellect. For him, real power is knowledge, whereas for Bernstein, an anti–intellectual, money is power. Unlike the men of the previous generation who joined men's movements for liberation, Bernstein pursues greed as the path to liberation from the burdens of his role as the breadwinner. Materialism has replaced idealism, and the individual has triumphed over community. However, the younger generation of men offers the possibility of reconstructing the humanist values that lie in knowledge, art, and history.

Third (2005) focuses on how a thwarted liberalism has destroyed idealism, with the younger generation (Third and Laurie's daughter, Emily) once again symbolizing the possibility of mending society's political and cultural wounds. Laurie Jameson accuses her student, Woodson Bull III, nicknamed "Third," of plagiarism. Although Third is acquitted of plagiarism by a university committee, he suffers as a result of his academic probation, losing his wrestling scholarship. Because he cannot afford to attend a private liberal arts college without a scholarship, Third has to transfer to another school, thus becoming a victim of "liberal ideas." Though a feminist, Laurie ironically contributes to Third's marginalization. Third is stereotyped by Laurie, who concludes that his writing resembles that of an advanced scholar, rather than a wrestler's, and therefore cannot be his. Although Third seems to be a patriarchal conservative, he is actually a closet liberal who supports women's rights. Failing to understand that, Laurie attacks Third, the new sensitive, complicated young man of the 2000s, as a symbol of all that is wrong with George W. Bush's America. Here, Wasserstein deploys a non-patriarchal male character in order to convey where feminists stand in the 2000s. Through Third, she criticizes

feminists who have fallen into the same narrow-minded traps they were originally fighting in the 1960s, illustrating that extreme liberalism can be just as dangerous as extreme conservatism. With *Third*, Wasserstein comes full circle, showing how liberal feminists, in the end, have become the conservative tyrants and victimizers they detested, and how men have become the victims of unbridled political correctness and reverse sexism.

Shaped by the feminist and men's movements, the male characters in *Isn't It Romantic* (1983), *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992), *An American Daughter* (1997), *Old Money* (2000), and *Third* (2005) reflect the changes that American society underwent during Second Wave Feminism and beyond. In all the plays, men have a complementary role; yet, the way Wasserstein places men in women's lives changes from *Isn't It Romantic* to *Third*. Women were not the only individuals who developed a new sense of identity during this time period. Men's worldview also changed, which impacted their relationships with women. Examining the men in Wendy Wasserstein's plays as complementary characters who change alongside women will thus illuminate the social commentary she makes through drama.

CHAPTER 1

ISN'T IT ROMANTIC (1983) AND *THE HEIDI CHRONICLES* (1988)

1.1. *ISN'T IT ROMANTIC* (1983)

Janet Brown writes in her article "Feminist Theory and Contemporary Drama" that feminist drama of the twentieth century, which expressed moral concerns and presented social criticism, committed itself to tell the stories of women who had been silenced for years (155). The reason why Wasserstein started writing plays is connected not only to her background as a Baby Boomer, but also to her experiences as a female student in the 1970s. Balakian states that as a student, for example, Wasserstein did not study plays by woman playwrights, nor did she meet any woman directors, and she was determined to change this for future generations (Balakian, "Wendy Wasserstein" 215).

Wasserstein began this project with her first play, *Any Woman Can't,* in 1973. She used her own experiences with men, women, and feminists to add a tone of authenticity, and incorporated humor into serious subject matters, which became a hallmark of her work. Her second play, *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977), which was her Yale thesis, is considered one of her most essential dramas.[4] Even though all of its characters are women, it speaks volumes about the male experience, especially how men were shaped by gender politics. In this play, Wasserstein focuses on five women whose lives go in different directions after college, and uses their life paths to explore the options women had at the time. The play was also a chance for Wasserstein to explore the possibilities she had as a female playwright. When a male student complained that he did not understand the play because it was about women, Wasserstein explained how she was able to overcome the same problem of reading all-male plays, written by men, and learning to appreciate them (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 16). Nevertheless, male characters are not undervalued in her plays as women had traditionally been in works by

[4] *Uncommon Women and Others* was produced by The Phoenix Theatre on November 21, 1977. The play was also performed at Playwrights Horizons in NYC and after watching it, Honor Moore wrote an article about *Uncommon Women and Others* "for the December 1997 issue of *Ms.* Magazine, where the name Wendy Wasserstein first appeared in a national publication" (Salamon 160, 166). Meryl Streep, Wasserstein's classmate from Yale, acted in the PBS television production of the play.

male playwrights. On the contrary, they function in crucial ways, not only as foils to each other and to female characters, but also as complex and meaningful figures in their own right.

1.1.1. Before Having It All: *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977)

Uncommon Women and Others begins with a scene where college friends Kate, Samantha, Muffet, Rita, and Holly reunite six years after graduation. Wasserstein explores their struggles through flashbacks to their college years. Although men do not appear on stage, a male paternalistic/patriarchal voice is used in each flashback to narrate information about the college and its graduates, "women with personal dignity, intelligence, competence, flexibility, maturity, responsibility, gaiety, femininity, a capacity for giving, stimulated by demands, intellectual curiosity, diligence, adventure, a conception of the good life, and the spirit of systematic disinterested inquiry" (Balakian, Wendy Wasserstein 217). Through the characters, Wasserstein presents the difference between image and reality while also mocking the male voice, which represents patriarchal society and the ways in which it tries to speak for women and usurp women's power and decision-making abilities. In the end, the male narrator does neither, and comes across as dated, out of touch, and irrelevant.

In act 2, scene 7, the male narrator conveys that ninety percent of graduates married within ten years of graduating while sarcastically commenting that commencement provided women with new opportunities. Even though almost all of them found employment or continued their educations, the positions they acquired were as a "Girl Friday for an eastern senator, service volunteer in Venezuela, or assistant sales director of Reader's Digest" (64). Here, Wasserstein underscores the huge gap between the feminist movement's promises to women and the social and political realities of the 1970s. The movement still had a great deal to accomplish, which is highlighted by the fact that a man is conveying this gap. However, Balakian also points out that the male narration fades into a woman's voice, articulating the real difficulties in the workplace, which is dominated by men, reclaiming the feminist message of the play (Reading the Plays 17).

As Christopher Bigsby suggests, men are at the center of these women's lives. Feminist goals are not their main topics of conversation (Wasserstein implies they should be), but rather the same old traps of marriage and sex which, by default, include men who are "pursued, derided or admired" (336). Men drain the female characters' time, energy, and creativity without giving very much in return.

One example of this is Samantha, who discusses her relationship with Robert, a "typical" 70s man. The couple's relationship is based on male domination, machismo, and bravado; Samantha is subordinate and Robert guides her. Samantha accepts this traditional gender binary and shapes her life accordingly. Samantha tells Rita that Robert blames her for not growing up into a woman: "I'm sort of a child woman. I've been reading a lot of books recently about women who are wives of artists and actors and how they believe their husbands are geniuses, and they are just a little talented. Well, that's what I am" (54). Samantha believes in men's superiority and is ready to serve her husband as an obedient wife. Therefore, when Robert claims that she has not grown up, Samantha accepts it unconditionally because to a certain extent, he is speaking the truth. Her reliance on the patriarchal system, like a little girl, prevented her from becoming a strong, independent woman. Like Marty, who in *Isn't It Romantic* constantly tells Janie what she should do, and how she should act and think, Robert is perpetually guiding Samantha, who plays into the naïve and inexperienced trope. He unabashedly expresses the sexual double standards of the time—he expects a woman to remain virginal and pure until marriage, while he sows his wild oats—and Samantha, the ideal American girl, accepts this without any resistance because she is looking for a man who will protect and support her emotionally and economically. Here, both characters clearly suggest what anarchist-feminist Emma Goldman posited throughout her entire writing and activist career: that marriage exploits both women and men.

In act 1, scene 8, Samantha, Kate, Rita and Holly discuss menstruation and men. Rita tastes her own menstrual blood believing it will make her a liberated woman, as feminist Germaine Greer claimed. Samantha responds with Robert's idea—since she does not have any of her own—that "women shouldn't wear underwear" (37). While Rita experiments and challenges men in her search for an identity, Samantha accepts Robert's point of view unquestioningly. Rita's frustration with such neanderthals leads to the

comment that "all men should be forced to menstruate . . . should be forced to answer phones on a white Naugahyde receptionist's chair with a cotton lollipop stuck up their crotch" (37). Rita's comment suggests how men gain power over women's bodies: "through their construction of weakness as biologically linked" (Chirico 85). In other words, it criticizes the Freudian dictate that "anatomy is destiny" and the idea that women should be excluded from the public sphere because they are only biologically fit to reproduce, and not designed to function intellectually. Wasserstein emphasizes—six years before Gloria Steinem wrote the essay "If Men Could Menstruate" (366–369)—that if men menstruated, it would be the most natural and valuable event in the world, not a dirty taboo. Here, Wasserstein makes the point that women are not impeded by menstruation when it comes to functioning in the public sphere—they can hold down jobs and lead as effectively as any man, despite their monthly visitor. Rather, as Wasserstein implies, women are impeded by society's negative attitude towards menstruation, which would be radically different if men menstruated (Chirico 85).

In *Uncommon Women and Others*, Wasserstein critiques the male patriarchy which gives men the chance to explore the world, while giving women only one option: inferiority and invisibility. Rita helps her friends see the world from a new, feminist perspective through her questions and actions. She tastes her own menstrual blood, leaves a man lying in bed after she has had an orgasm and he has not, and leads conversations on topics like masturbation, which were normal in the male world but forbidden to women. In this sense, Rita claims power for herself and women in general by engaging in discourses usually reserved for men. Thus, she transgresses gender roles by reversing them (Chirico 90). Through Rita, Wasserstein creates an alternative female world, normalizing activities usually associated with men. In this sense, even in their absence, men shape the lives of women in this play.

1.1.2. *Isn't It Romantic* (1983) as a Transition

When her plays are considered chronologically, one can observe Wasserstein's experimentation with her characters, especially how she uses them to explore possibilities in personal development (Boles 63). Over time, the male characters in her works change from dominating, *superior* (future) husbands, to somewhat *equal* partners. In *Uncommon*

Women and Others, Wasserstein creates an alternative reality by leaving men out, which in and of itself advocates different possible realities. The absence of men also provides women with a chance to explore and question life, but often with an oppressive male shadow/voice lurking in the background.

Isn't It Romantic (1983) can be considered a continuation of *Uncommon Women and Others* with its two female protagonists trying to find a place in society as independent women, all the while fighting social norms and impulses to become wives and mothers.[5] Janie Blumberg is constantly being reminded of the necessity of marriage by her Jewish parents, who are modeled on Wasserstein's own parents. Meanwhile, her best friend Harriet is constantly being encouraged by her mother to pursue a career, but struggles to balance social expectations with personal aspirations. Both Harriet's and Janie's mothers are important figures in their lives. Janie comes from a Jewish background and has an unconventional relationship with her family, but her mother, who is a dancer, has traditional values. Obsessed with marriage, Janie's parents, Tasha and Simon Blumberg, voluntarily become matchmakers for their daughter, which was, and still is, common within the Jewish American community (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 60).

On the other hand, Harriet's mother, Lillian, is a successful divorced woman who expects Harriet to postpone marriage so she can focus on her career. Both Harriet and Janie lack paternal authority in their lives. Harriet's father is not included in the play and Janie's father is not a dominant figure in the family. Moreover, Simon Blumberg does not have traditional expectations from his wife, such as cleaning or cooking. Nevertheless, he desperately hopes Janie will marry, just like Wasserstein's own father, Morris, did (Salamon 110).

Unlike *Uncommon Women and Others*, the male characters in *Isn't It Romantic* are at the center of the play along with Janie and Harriet, and their presence contributes to the work's main theme of self-discovery. One of the main male characters is Marty Sterling, a Jewish doctor with whom Janie has a relationship. Even though Marty wants to marry, Janie feels uncomfortable doing so because Marty only considers her as a future wife who

[5] *Isn't It Romantic* was debuted on December 15, 1983 at Playwrights Horizons's NYC theater. The play was directed by Gerald Gutierrez (*Isn't It Romantic* 76).

will serve, not a life partner who will share. Thus, Janie breaks up with him, deciding it is more important to pursue her career than marrying a man who is not supportive of her decisions. On the other hand, after having an affair with Paul Stuart, who is her boss's boss, Harriet marries Joe Stine. Janie feels betrayed by Harriet's decision to marry, mainly because Harriet has always emphasized the importance of independence.

While Janie is struggling to balance her goals, family, and boyfriend, Cynthia Peterson, Janie's other friend, leaves her phone messages about her disappointing relationships with men:

> CYNTHIA PETERSON *on phone machine*: Janie, it's Cynthia Peterson. It's my thirty-fourth birthday. I'm alone. Nothing happened with Mr. Houston. I should have married Mark Silverstein in college. Janie, by the time I'm thirty-five, this is what I want . . . Janie, I met a man at the deli last night. He asked me if I wanted to have a beer in his apartment at one o'clock in the morning. Do you think I should have gone? (152)

The audience/reader becomes acquainted with this character only through her telephone messages. However, Cynthia's statements about the men in her life are essential to the play as Wasserstein uses them to draw a picture of how gender worked in American society in the 1970s and early 80s.

Isn't It Romantic focuses on the sexual politics of these decades, summarized by Kate Millett as "male shall dominate female," and "elder male shall dominate younger" ("Theory of Sexual Politics" 220). Wasserstein's characters are thus "a product of the politics of gender" as well as generational politics (Bigsby 342). The male characters seem to be more traditional than Harriet and Janie, who find it difficult to get along with them since they are Second Wave liberated woman. Both Harriet and Janie, and Marty and Paul, represent the 1980s as individuals caught between old and new values. Yet, Wasserstein does not take any sides while dramatizing these characters. She is aware that "just as women are shaped and limited by a compulsory femininity," men are also "constantly challenged to enact a compulsory masculinity" (McDonough 5), allowing the reader to evaluate these characters for themselves.

1.1.3. Male Domination and Female Revolt

Marty is introduced in act 1, scene 1 as Harriet and Janie are walking in Central Park. Wasserstein describes him in her stage directions as follows: “He is Janie’s mother’s dream come true: a prince and a bit of card” (82). This not only foreshadows Janie’s upcoming crisis (she is always in conflict with her mother over her marriage), but also suggests that Marty will be the reason of this future conflict. Marty and Harriet know each other from college, and Marty uses this to impress Janie. Marty always dominates conversations, mostly bragging about himself. When he is introduced to Janie, he says he saw Janie and Harriet together in Cambridge all the time, and that Janie always looked frightened to death, but more attainable. Harriet, the feminist, was impossible to reach; moreover, he is “not attracted to cold people anymore” (83) anyway. These statements expose Marty’s traditional perception of women as objects to win or lose, and the notion that many men did (and still do) perceive feminists as being stern, anti-male, ice queens. Also, his statements reveal that he *was* attracted to those “cold people” at some point in his life, but now Janie is more appealing to Marty with her “frightened” passive appearance. She will need his guidance and protection, and will stroke his ego as an alpha male.

Marty mentions his father’s business almost like bait to lure in the two women. These characters have come of age in a patriarchal society which valued men as breadwinners, positioning women as materialistic individuals in pursuit of economic stability. Marty knows this, and deploys his father’s wealth and his own professional status as a doctor to impress Janie and Harriet:

> MARTY: Kasha. Little noodle bow ties with barley. Uh, my father’s in the restaurant business. Are you familiar with Ye Olde Sterling Tavernes?
>
> HARRIET: Sure. That’s a national chain.
>
> MARTY: My father’s chain.
>
> HARRIET, *impressed*: Well!
>
> JANIE: Well. (83)

Marty impresses Harriet and Janie which, in turn, reinforces his male power and social authority. He remains dominant, which he assumes to be natural, and uses his money to strengthen his position. Janie receives the message that he is potential husband material, whereas Harriet sees through the routine. Marty, who overtly engages in identity politics as exemplified by his decision to change his name from the Jewish Murray Schlimovitz to the WASPy Marty Sterling for personal gain, is replete with deception. As Harriet expresses; "It's all right. I can make do without Dr. Murray Marty and his father's popovers. I have to get to that interview" (84-85). She prioritizes her career over men, while Janie believes she can have a good relationship and a career: "If you don't marry Marty Sterling, I'll marry him. Wait till I tell my parents I ran into him. Tasha Blumberg will have the caterers on the other extension" (85).

Although both Harriet and Janie are college graduates who want to pursue a career before marriage, Janie believes that it is possible for her to be in a relationship based on mutual understanding while looking for job opportunities. She gives Marty a chance, which ends up in disappointment;

> JANIE: Marty, by you everything is much more simple than it has to be. You want a wife; you get a wife. You drop out of Harvard twice; they always take you back. You're just like me. We're too fucking sweet. I'm so sweet I never say what I want, and you're so sweet you always get what you want.
>
> MARTY: Not necessarily. Why do you think I'm thirty-two and not married? All I want is a home, a family, something my father had so easily and I can't seem to get started on . . . You want to find out what it's like to take care of yourself, good luck to you. But it isn't right for me. And I'll tell you something, Janie: it isn't right for you either. (138)

Marty expects a traditional relationship and patronizes Janie. On the other hand, Paul exploits Harriet's liberation by using her for unattached sex: "You are excited. Don't be embarrassed, Beauty. I'll be wonderful for you, Harriet. You'll try to change me, you'll realize you can't and, furthermore, I'm not worth it, so you'll marry some nice investment banker and make your mother happy" (101). In other words, Paul offers excitement and adventure, but does not offer security and commitment.

In *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*, Susan Faludi states that men need women in order to prove their manhood, and that when women demand to be

treated equally, they challenge male power and identity (62). Wasserstein supports Faludi's claim through Marty. On his first date with Janie, Marty states that Harriet is not as sweet as Janie and compares her to his feminist medical school classmates: "They're nice but they'd bite your balls off" (98). Marty's manhood is threatened by women who challenge gender roles and social norms. On the other hand, Janie, who is a part time writer, is safe for Marty because according to him, writing is not a "real profession," or at least real enough to challenge male authority.

As sociologist Michael Kimmel conveys in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*,

> Jewish men were also seen as feminized because they came from a religious culture that stressed morality and literacy; thus, they were seen bookish and effete…what is most significant to me now is the way that communism, Judaism, and homosexuality were so easily linked in his mind. All three…were not "real men." (200)

In order to counterbalance this, Jewish men began supporting Zionist militarism in Israel, believing that "supporting Israeli territorial expansion was a way to rescue one's manhood" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 201). Initially, as the reader learns, Marty tries to erase his Jewish identity by changing his name and assimilating into WASP society. However, he realizes that not only is this impossible, but doing so would also betray his cultural and religious heritage and reinforce the idea that Jewish identity was somehow inferior. Marty reverses his position and instead engages in another form of identity politics: a display of ethnic masculinity. We discover he has "worked on a kibbutz" and that he is willing to open a new practice in Tel Aviv because Israel is very important to him. Thus, Marty decides to reinvent his manhood through his Jewishness, and his support of Israel is significant in the sense that conquering territory has always been a masculine act and one that feminists have connected to conquering a woman's body, as Ynestra King conveys: "In the project of building Western industrial civilization, nature became something to be dominated, overcome, made to serve the needs of men . . . Women, who are identified with nature, have been similarly objectified and subordinated in patriarchal society" (471). This is also another reason why he chooses the Jewish Janie over the WASP Harriet.

Janie's Jewishness, however, never satisfies Marty. He claims that Janie is not supportive of Israel, but should be, and states that "Jewish families should have at least three children" (97). This implies that Janie is not an equal partner, but rather a Jewish woman who will produce his Jewish children (according to Judaic law, religion is matrilineal). Marty is interested in using Janie's Jewishness, and Jewish uterus, as part of a larger project to keep Jewish culture alive, and constantly lectures her about appropriate Jewish behavior. He is grooming her to be the perfect Jewish wife and mother and, in the process, is reclaiming his own Jewish masculinity, which has been emasculated and denigrated by the processes of immigration and assimilation.

"Jewishness" causes a problem in their relationship because Marty deploys it as a form of self-validation. For Janie, her Jewishness is only one part of her identity, and not a particularly important part at that. Thus, according to Marty, Janie is not Jewish enough. He tries to solve this problem by training her to become a more traditional Jewish wife and mother. While Marty wants to marry Janie because "a child born to a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman is not considered Jewish" (Solomon 142), Janie feels she can marry whoever she wants because a child born to a Jewish woman is automatically Jewish. Janie does not feel the same pressure Marty feels to marry someone of her religious and cultural background. However, she feels another insurmountable burden—her biological clock—and her mother never allows her to forget it. If she remains single and does not have a child, she will be "*aharon ha–aharonim*, the last of the last" (Solomon 142), which to her parents is an abomination. Janie is thus torn between traditional values (becoming a wife and mother) and her feminist goals (independence and a career).

Because of its Jewish roots and values, Janie's family is not a typical Anglo-American family. Linda J. Waite claims that "Jews believe more strongly in equality between the sexes than any other religious group" and that their liberal ideas are more progressive than that of WASP Americans (42). However, Waite also conveys that "Jews' attitudes toward cohabitation, marriage, divorce and sex outside marriage suggest a strong preference of marriage" (43). Jewish girls were, and are, expected to marry Jewish men, which became even more urgent after the death of millions of Jews during the Holocaust (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 60). As David Lyle Solomon suggests, Janie and Marty's

marriage is a dream come true for a Jewish family (142). That is why for Janie, "the idea of Marty as a mate seems more interesting than Marty himself" (142).

Harriet is a much more independent woman and is supported by a progressive, divorced, non-traditional mother who urges Harriet to be self–reliant. Although both Harriet and Janie are struggling with social norms, Harriet is less stressed about it because she only confronts mainstream, patriarchal, American values whereas Janie also has to defy Jewish American culture. Here, contrasting two types of families (Jewish and WASP) provides Wasserstein with an opportunity to present the conflicting values that existed within American society at the time. In the 1980s, the American nuclear family was disintegrating rapidly and many tried to resist it. Tim Stanley conveys this in his article "The Changing Face of the American Family" by expressing how the younger generation perceived family very differently than their parents. Simultaneously, however,

> America was undergoing a religious revival and the cultural Right was evolving into a well-oiled political machine. Its delegates to the Conference on Families believed that women's best hope of 'liberation' was found in marriage, where their compassionate instinct for motherhood formed a perfect union with her husband's authority. To the feminists at the conference such views were the last gasp of an old patriarchal order that was out of step with the unstoppable march of progress. (15)

Not surprisingly, both American women and men were confused by these conflicting messages, and Wasserstein dramatizes this very accurately in the play.

One scene that reveals the social attitudes of the time is act 1, scene 7 when Marty and Janie have a conversation after their arrival from dinner with Marty's family. Janie feels guilty about spilling horseradish on Marty's nephew, Schlomo, and Marty tries to calm her down by stating, "You worry too much. You are just like my mother. My mother says you're shy and a little clumsy because you're very angry with your family. But she says don't worry, you'll grow out of it. I told her your mother was a bit cuckoo" (109). Marty's mother thinks Janie's family is odd, and places the blame on Janie's eccentric mother. It is Tasha's fault that Janie cannot perform properly in Jewish society. However, Marty is confident that Janie will become the "ideal woman" and that she will learn how to be the perfect partner for him. To assure her, Marty gives his sister-in-law as an example: "She met my brother and now she's a wonderful mother, and, believe me, when Schlomo is a

little older, she'll teach or she'll work with the elderly—and she won't conquer the world, but she'll have a nice life" (109).

Carla J. McDonough states that

> Male fears that women, who are actually physically and socially disempowered, will ravage their manhood demonstrate that "masculine discourse" is, in fact, the locus of its own precarious relationship to masculinity, manhood, and virility. It creates a need to "conquer" the female body, or at least the feminine, in order to establish its own existence. (7)

Marty attempts to conquer Janie's world before she conquers his in order to remain dominant throughout their relationship. Starting on their first date, Marty calls Janie "Monkey" to maintain his superior position as a patriarchal man. He infantilizes and denigrates her by giving her a trivial and degrading nickname, forever positioning her as inferior in their relationship. Trivialization and infantilization is a recurring problem for women, as depicted in earlier works of feminist literature such as Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963). In these works, women are seen by the men in their lives as weaklings or hysterics and thus treated as if they were children or ill. Like *Isn't It Romantic,* all these works focus on female characters who are unhappy with their lives and who are infantilized and denigrated by the ultimate patriarchal authority—a male doctor, who is often a fiancé or husband. While Dr. Marty Sterling does not outright call Janie crazy, he implies it over and over again, and uses her "indecisiveness," or "mental instability" as a woman who wants more, to end the relationship.

At the end of act 1 scene 4, Marty invites Janie to his parents' house and the lights fade out as Marty embraces Janie which, in the context of the play, suggests impending sexual intercourse. When Janie asks what she can do for him, Marty says "Be sweet. I need attention. A great deal of attention" (99). Although he wants to be in charge, Marty hopes to be nurtured and "taken care of" in bed. He asks for "an undivided loyalty that situates his own needs at the forefront of their relationship" (Ciociola 46). Marty wants to be mothered and expects Janie to satisfy his needs, which, as Barbara Ehrenreich discusses in *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, is a typical

expectation of men who grew up in the 1950s and 60s when the social order required men to marry and become breadwinners to support their family. To sustain this order, marriage was romanticized so that men and women believed in the "equal exchange" of work: men would offer money (economic stability), while women would offer services (cooking, cleaning, sex) as compensation (3).

Faludi states that by the 1980s, most men believed that women had made progress in their fight for equality and found these small advances enough for women (*Backlash* 60). Marty does not oppose working mothers and wives, as long as they take care of their families first. He believes that women are only capable of pink collar, gendered work, such as teaching or unpaid community service, which will not threaten the male world. Men like Marty privilege "'masculinity' over 'femininity' and they believe" that "women (the feminine) are still to blame for many male problems because they 'emasculate' men" (McDonough 10). Marty feels he has the right to make decisions for Janie in order to prevent her from becoming a threat to his masculinity. This is exemplified when he reveals that he has rented an apartment for them. Even though they will be cohabiting, supposedly as equal partners, Marty uses first-person "I" language throughout the conversation, reinforcing his position as "boss" and breadwinner:

> MARTY: I figured if I waited for you to make up your mind to move, we'd never take anything, and I need a place to live before I open my practice. You don't have to pay your half of the deposit now. I can wait a month. Is that okay?
>
> JANIE: Sure.
>
> MARTY: I decided we should live in Flatbush or Brighton Beach, where people have real values […] What don't you know? Janie, you're twenty-eight years old. What I'm saying is, either you want to be with me—you don't have to; you should just want to—or, if you don't want to, then we should just forget it. (110)

Marty, who grew up with the idea that "father knows best," is pushy and at times an aggressive bully, and does not allow Janie to speak because he feels responsible for the decisions regarding their relationship. Positioning himself as the patriarchal authority figure in the relationship, Marty plays the role assigned to him by society. Thus, he expects Janie to play her part as well. For instance, Marty assumes Janie can cook because

women who were born in the 1950s grew up learning domestic chores; “Monkey, you don’t know how to cook a chicken?” (114). However, as a woman raised by an eccentric mother, Janie was not taught such traditional tasks. Marty’s patronizing attitude, when he discovers her lacking in this area, causes Janie to feel ashamed for not knowing how to cook chicken, “I do. I do. I do. I can make Teflon chicken” (114). She confesses to Harriet that she cannot tell Marty the truth since he did his part by renting an apartment for them (114). In other words, Marty convinces Janie (for a short time) that she needs to prove her femininity through domestic chores. He, in turn, performs masculinity by making decisions for Janie.

While Marty’s words and deeds fit the heteronormative masculinity of the era, Janie does not meet his gendered expectations, leading to feelings of guilt and insufficiency. However, Janie’s experience is similar to that of women in patriarchal societies all over the world. After watching *Isn’t It Romantic* in Tokyo, Wasserstein realized that Janie represents all women who are under pressure due to social expectations. The actress who played Janie Blumberg in Japan asked Wasserstein if she was single, and Wasserstein’s response lived up to her expectations. “I thought so. Me, too,” replied the Japanese actress. “I am Janie Blumberg. She is mine” (Wasserstein, *Bachelor Girls* 37–38). This conversation illustrates how deeply Wasserstein’s plays, which dramatizes women’s and men’s lived experiences, resonates with audiences not just in the United States, but globally, suggesting that such issues are universal, transcending nation, culture, race, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.

Marty does not want Janie to make her career a priority, emphasizing that work should not take over a woman’s life by calling it a trap (129). His body language also illustrates his controlling attitude: he rubs Janie’s back and taps “as if checking her heart” (129). Marty assumes Janie is a weak creature who cannot make her own decisions, and thus needs his guidance (but Janie proves him wrong). That is why he always lectures her on how to be a good woman, or what kind of life she should desire. He assures Janie that she definitely should not aspire to a career: “Look, I have plenty of friends who marry women doctors because they think they’ll have something in common. Monkey, they never see each other. Their children are brought up by strangers from the Caribbean….I have nothing against your working. I just want to make sure we have a life” (129–130). He

underestimates Janie's profession and assumes she will sacrifice her career for their "life." For Marty, this is the natural and necessary order of things. He feels that women should place their husbands and children at the center of their lives. Men, on the other hand, should never be asked to make the same sacrifice because "the fact is that men, on the average earn more than women. The assumption is that men use their higher wages to support women" (Ehrenreich 8). Therefore, asking men to sacrifice careers for relationships is foolish, whereas for women, it is expected.

Marty experiences a masculinity crisis on many levels. That is, not only does he feel the need to assert his manliness as a Jew in WASP society, but he also fears Janie, and women in general, who can usurp his power as a breadwinner. In other words, he secretly worries that he is unnecessary, dispensable, and without a purpose. He reminds Janie that he can offer attention, affection, and love (137), but as he quickly realizes, these sentiments are no longer enough for 80s women. Even the promise of financial stability has its limits. Marty sees that the rules have changed—that the assurances that once lured women into marriage and motherhood no longer hold the same allure. Disarmed, Marty lashes out by judging, pressuring, and patronizing her: "You want to find out what it's like to take care of yourself, good luck to you. But it isn't right for me. And I'll tell you something, Janie: it isn't right for you either" (138). Marty leaves after this conversation and "moves on with his life," while Janie is left on stage alone. This signifies that men like Marty will not compromise with feminism, which they see as a threat to masculinity, since they feel intimidated by women who are not dependent on men. As McDonough claims, "one is not born a man; one *proves* himself to be one" (13), a reference to De Beauvoir's famous phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (184). Marty cannot prove his masculinity in a relationship with Janie, so he simply gives up and walks away.

1.1.4. The Male Revolt against American Patriarchy?

In her survey of American family history, Ehrenreich states that the agrarian family was a production unit in which all members worked together. This changed with industrialization as production shifted from homes to factories. In due course, women became bound to the private sphere, and men were forced to enter the public sphere to work for the family's survival. As a result, women became "parasitic" and men became

"earning mechanisms," with the economic stability of the family emerging as their uniting goal (4).

According to nineteenth-century socialist feminist writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the capitalist economics of marriage required men to "make and distribute the wealth of the world," with women "earn[ing] their share of it as wives." This placed husbands into "employer" positions with wives as the "employees" (*Women and Economics* 111). However, by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a "healthy" man had become someone who delayed marriage, who did not want financially dependent women, and who did not prioritize his own desires (Ehrenreich 12). This was the impact of the "playboy culture" which began in 1953 with the first issue of *Playboy* magazine. Ehrenreich also states that the articles in *Playboy* encouraged men to stay single in order to avoid traditional, oppressive gender roles as the head of the family, and to enjoy their freedom because "the playboy did not want his 'traditional role' back; he just wanted out" (47). They were also encouraged to enjoy sex without emotional and financial involvement. Instead of wives and families, imported liquor, stereos, colognes, cars, and fancy clothes became male status symbols (Ehrenreich 47–49).

In the light of this information, the other important male character in the play is Paul Stuart, a married man over forty with whom Harriet has an affair. While Marty represents single men who expect to marry the right woman, Paul seeks freedom in sexual affairs to escape the burden of his responsibilities as a husband, father, and provider.

Whereas Marty, perhaps as an ethnic male still struggling for acceptance in American society, is far more traditional (and even "unhealthy" or "pathological" according to 1970s and 80s standards), Paul represents this "liberated" *Playboy* generation. He is looking for new possibilities in midlife and to escape from socially constructed gender roles: "Harriet, do you know that forty percent of the people at McKinsey are having interoffice affairs?" (101). With this statement, Paul declares that having extramarital relationships is the new norm among men. He is probably a good husband who takes care of his family. However, he also suggests that having an interoffice affair with Harriet is not a big deal, as long as it is kept secret and does not ruin his comfortable family life. In

other words, as long as Harriet does not make any emotional or financial demands, and as long as she is always sexually available and discreet about it.

McDonough claims that during this era, masculinity itself became the new "problem that has no name." Like the 1950s housewives described by Friedan, these men were also dissatisfied despite their advantageous position in society. Such men suddenly felt "limited, confused, and victimized by gender expectations," rather than empowered (9). McDonough also states that feminism was thought to be the cause of this masculinity crisis, as men felt threatened by women and feared "they [were] not living up to an idea of manliness" (11).

Kimmel discusses this phenomenon in a chapter entitled "The Masculine Mystique," comparing the problems of 1970s/80s men to those of 1950s/60s women. He states that the mid-1970s saw the emergence of the Men's Liberation Movement, which sought to address a very simple, but crucial, question: "If men were supposed to be so powerful and oppressive, how come so many men were still living lives of quiet desperation—working in boring and unfulfilling jobs, trapped in unhappy marriages with little or no relationships with their children . . . unaware of their feelings?" (*Manhood* 202). Kimmel also conveys that men's liberationists challenged gender roles by refusing to use sex as a tool to perform manliness and masculinity. Furthermore, they defied the sacred connection between fatherhood and the financial security of the family which, using heterosexist, monogamist tropes, brainwashed men into thinking that only through marriage, children, and work could they live "longer, happier and healthier" lives (*Manhood* 204–205).

Paul represents a dangerous strand of these male liberationists—those who sought to liberate themselves through already liberated women. Paul exploits feminists, such as Harriet, as a way to escape his marriage and the burdens of society. They, he assumes, would not expect emotional or financial support, and if they did, he could throw their "so-called liberation" right back at them as a means of eliding responsibility and commitment. Rather than working for both male and female liberation as feminists have done, members of Paul's school of male liberation were selfish—male liberation meant only *their* liberation, and they cared little about the overall cost to others. Thus, when Harriet asks

him to stay with her a little longer, Paul states "You knew what the parameters were here" (128).

Paul constantly reminds Harriet that they have a liberated relationship based on mutual benefit to ensure that she does not cause any problems, or expect anything more than no-strings-attached sex. When Harriet complains that he degradingly calls everyone "Beauty" and questions if Cathy, Paul's wife, actually exists, Paul reverts to his sexist comfort zone, telling Harriet not to expect too much from him, and suggesting that she is a demanding woman. He also implies that she is becoming "hysterical" because she is afraid of her biological clock as she is unmarried and childless at thirty. In the same way that Marty degrades Janie, Paul patronizes Harriet, educating her on what she really wants in a condescending, paternalistic manner:

> Baby, I'm older than you. I've been through this with a lot of women. You want a man who sees you as a potential mother, but also is someone who isn't threatened by your success and is deeply interested in it. And this man should be thought of 'intelligent' by your friends. But when you need him, he should drop whatever it is he's doing and be supportive. (112)

Paul is even more dangerous than men like Marty because Paul seems supportive of women's goals, but ultimately is only out to protect his own interests.

Paul's misogyny surfaces throughout his dialogue with Harriet. He looks down on women who are liberated, claiming that investing time, money, employment, and educational resources in them is a waste since all "career girls" change their minds when they hit thirty (101). He underestimates feminists and trivializes women who pursue careers by labeling them "career girls"—real careers are for men, not girls. Increasingly, Harriet begins to feel uncomfortable about their relationship. For Paul, women like Harriet are to have affairs with, not to marry, and he admits that he was raised in a different society: "The girls I date now—the ones like you, the MBAs from Harvard—they want me to be the wife. They want me to be the support system. Well, I can't do that. Harriet, I just wasn't told that's the way it was supposed to be" (113). Paul selects from a wide range of tropes, ranging from traditional to liberated, depending on their convenience. However, they all have the ultimate purpose of reinforcing his selfish decisions. Paul is a hypocrite of the worst kind. For him, women are sex objects to be used and discarded as soon as

they start asking the wrong questions, demand true equality, or threaten his social standing. Like Marty, Paul is obsessed with wielding power over women, and any woman with true career aspirations is a humiliation. After Paul disappoints Harriet during their dinner with Janie and Marty, Harriet suggests ending the relationship, and Paul replies by asking if she has her period (128). He undervalues Harriet's discontent and does not take her decisions seriously, blaming her disappointment on hysteria caused by menstruation. Wasserstein uses this final insult to signal to Harriet, and to the audience, that this degrading relationship is over.

1.2. *THE HEIDI CHRONICLES* (1988)

Wasserstein takes a closer look at the Second Wave of Feminism and the Baby Boom generation in *The Heidi Chronicles.*[67] Bigsby states that "Wendy Wasserstein has said people are products of the time in which they came of age and her plays would seem to bear that out . . . [Women] take the particular form that they do because of the social debate" (345). Therefore Wasserstein, much like an historian, chronicled how attitudes and values changed in American society, and how individual priorities reflected these changes, and dramatized them through her plays. In this Pulitzer Prize-winning work, she chronicles the rise and fall of Second Wave Feminism, between the 1960s and the 1980s, from Heidi's perspective as "someone who was there."

Balakian suggests that *The Heidi Chronicles* "raises the question about how to reform the male-establishment" ("The Heidi Chronicles" 96). In this sense, the play serves as a bridge between *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Sisters Rosensweig*. The male characters in *Isn't It Romantic* are part of American patriarchy, but they are beginning to grapple with social norms—a process that continues in *The Heidi Chronicles*. On the other hand, the men in *The Sisters Rosensweig* are more liberated in that they are more open–minded about women and gender roles, and come to the table with less personal baggage.

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[6] *The Heidi Chronicles*, directed by Daniel Sullivan, was first produced by Playwrights Horizons (off Broadway) in 1988, after its workshop production by Seattle Repertory Theatre. The play was produced on Broadway in 1989 (*The Heidi Chronicles* 4).

[7] *The Heidi Chronicles* reopened on Broadway in 2015. However, it only lasted about three months. Elisabeth Moss, known for her role as Peggy Olson in *Mad Men*, starred as Heidi and was nominated for a Tony Award for her performance.

The Heidi Chronicles begins in 1988 with Heidi's lecture on the role of women in art at Columbia University, where she is a professor of art history. Wasserstein then flashes back to a high school dance in 1965 when Heidi meets Peter, who will be her lifelong friend. In 1968, she meets Scoop who, together with Peter, plays an essential role in Heidi's life. Heidi becomes a feminist in college, joins consciousness–raising groups, and takes part in protests. By the 1980s, most of her feminist friends have left the movement as a result of the "me era" and the backlash against feminism. However, Heidi remains loyal to feminism and feels alone on this path. An unmarried woman, she adopts a baby at the end of the play, which was criticized by feminists as reifying traditional gender roles and promoting conformity when all else "failed." However, for Wasserstein, feminism was about giving women choices, and respecting their life decisions, such as the playwright's decision to have, as a single woman, a child in her late forties, which was anything but conventional. Even though Heidi is the main character, Peter's and Scoop's roles are as significant as hers because she is "dominated, dramaturgically, by the wit and strong presence" of the two men (Keyssar 142). They not only represent the changing concerns of American men, but they also serve a critical function in her life—they compel her to distill her ideas and thoughts at moments of personal ambiguity and confusion. Like foils, they shape Heidi's feminist development and consciousness in that she often crystalizes her convictions in response to Scoop and Peter.

1.2.1. Feminism and Gay Liberation

The time span of *The Heidi Chronicles*, between 1965, when Heidi is in high school, and 1988, provides an overview of American society's response to Second Wave Feminism. Like many Baby Boom women, including Wasserstein herself, Heidi awakens in her late teens and gradually develops into a liberal feminist. She joins consciousness-raising groups where, as a young, white, middle class heterosexual, she initially feels like an outsider. However, it is from the diverse women in such groups that she learns that the "personal is political." Eventually, believing that sisterhood is dead, most of Heidi's friends, including Susan, leave the movement and become part of the system against which they fought, whereas Heidi remains loyal to the cause. For younger backlash "postfeminist" women (e.g., Denise), Heidi's generation of activists become tragic

figures who “made mistakes.” Heidi feels alienated and abandoned, especially by women whose dedication has been replaced by empty, materialistic values, and by men whose solidarity has now become indifference.

Wasserstein not only addresses feminist issues in her plays, but also connects them to other transformational movements in American society. The Gay Liberation Movement is one of those milestones because it urged change in deep–rooted traditions, especially those pertaining to sex, gender, and sexuality. When police raided the Stonewall, a gay bar in New York City in 1969, they encountered a strong reaction from patrons, which ignited national resistance and sparked the Gay Liberation Movement. Like feminists involved in the Women’s Liberation Movement, gay men began forming consciousness-raising groups, where they shared their personal experiences and traced the roots of their oppression, which were the same roots that oppressed women: heterosexist patriarchal system. This resulted in “immense anger, joy, pride and a boiling over of new ideas” and in 1970, gays officially declared their rejection of heterosexual standards through the “Gay Manifesto” (Adam 77–78). In the 1980s, the Gay Liberation Movement expanded to include issues such as AIDS, a terminal immune-deficiency illness caused by the HIV virus. Barry D. Adam states that 471 AIDS cases were identified in the United States by 1982, and this number exceeded 15,000 by 1985. The gay community formed support groups to help find treatments, research funding, and a cure. However, neither the conservative Republican government, led by President Ronald Reagan, nor the media was interested in AIDS since its initial victims were mostly from the gay community (156). Wasserstein comments on this issue through Peter, who reflects the emotional state of gays during AIDS crisis.

In *The Heidi Chronicles*, Wasserstein examines the concerns of women and gay men in tandem, introducing Heidi and Peter, the chief representatives of each group in the play, at the high school dance in act 1 scene 1. This scene takes place in 1965 when homosexuality was not open to discussion; thus, Peter does not directly state that he is gay. However, when he says, “I want to know you all my life. If we can’t marry, let’s be great friends” (12), it is understood that Peter is not the “marrying kind” (i.e., heterosexual, in the days before same-sex unions). Both Heidi and Peter have no interest in the party and are thus outcasts, but for different reasons. Act 1 scene 2, which takes

place in 1974, is post-Stonewall. Peter openly declares his homosexuality, coming out of the closet to Heidi at a feminist art protest:

> Heidi, I'm gay, okay? I sleep with Stanley Zinc, M.D. And *my* liberation, *my* pursuit of happiness, and the pursuit of happiness of other men like me is just as politically and socially valid as hanging a couple of God–damned paintings because they were signed by someone named Nancy, Gladys, or Gilda. And this is why I came to see you today. I am demanding your equal time and consideration. (29)

Here, Peter equates his liberation with women's liberation, undermining the power of the feminist protest, which seems like another usurpation of women's voices by men. However, as a gay man, the situation is radically different. He calls for (heterosexual) feminists to engage in a second great awakening; that is, to acknowledge the plight of LGBTQ individuals who were being excluded by mainstream feminism. In fact, Betty Freidan called lesbians the "lavender menace" and did not want them in the National Organization for Women, which prompted the establishment of separate lesbian feminist groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For Peter, gay liberation is as essential as women's liberation, and he expects the same interest to be shown to him that he has shown to the women's movement. He reminds women that they should not think of all men as the "enemy" because gay men, for example, suffer from heterosexism and the dictates of the patriarchal society just as much as they do. In other words, since women and gay men are united in their oppression, they should be united in their liberation as well. He implies it is just as difficult being a woman in the 1970s as it is being a homosexual, even if gays who "passed as straight" could claim some of the privileges of heterosexual men. Thus, Peter hopes that women and gay men will be able to join forces since both the Feminist and Gay Liberation Movements "came out of student and other New Left movements and carried with them current debates and precepts, which they turned to issues of gender and sexuality" (Adam 76).

Nevertheless, not all the feminists in the play share Peter's enthusiasm and dreams of solidarity. Debbie does not even shake hands with Peter and asks him to leave because she interprets his presence as a microaggression. Heidi supports Peter and states "But I thought that our point was that this is *our* cultural institution. 'Our' meaning everybody's. Men and women" (29). At this point, Heidi and Peter unite under the banner of

"humanism" because they believe that everybody has the right to fulfill her/his potential (Bigsby 348). However, to a certain extent, humanism erases the specific goals and different needs of each movement with its inflated optimism. As Peter reminds Heidi at the end of the scene that the museum's curator is a gay man, suggesting that while both women and homosexuals suffer from similar forms of oppression, gay men were still far more entrenched in the social power structure than women. In short, he compels Heidi to begin thinking about the intersections, and limits, of friendship, feminism, and solidarity—a dilemma she will encounter, once again, towards the end of the play when she suddenly feels abandoned by her feminist sisters.

Peter is not only one of Heidi's closest friends, but is also her springboard and advisor. He is critical of her relationship with Scoop, who he believes symbolizes, much like Paul in *Isn't it Romantic*, the two-faced liberal out to oppress, demean, and sexually exploit women. His distrust of Scoop is a constant thread throughout the play. However, by the end of *The Heidi Chronicles*, the two men, who have reached the pinnacle of their careers (Peter as a pediatrician and Scoop as a journalist), seem to have a lot more in common. Both are now self-oriented Baby Boomers, embracing "me" and not "we." In fact, women such as Heidi are no longer their liberal sisters, but invisible. This becomes apparent when all three are asked to appear on a morning TV show dedicated to the Boomers. Both Peter and Scoop do not allow Heidi to speak for herself—they constantly interject, answer for her, or answer over her, stifling her voice and acting like the patronizing patriarchs they despised not so long ago.

A later scene, which takes place at a pediatric ward in 1987, also illustrates how Peter has changed due to the impact of AIDS:

> I'd say about once a month now I gather in some church, meeting house or concert hall with handsome men all my own age, and in the front row is usually a couple my parents' age, the father's in a suit and the mother's tasteful, a pleasant face. And we listen for half an hour to testimonials, memories, amusing anecdotes about a son, a friend, a lover, also handsome, also usually my own age, whom none of us will see again. After the first, the fifth, or the fifteenth of these gatherings, a sadness like yours seems a luxury. (66)

Peter thinks Heidi's discontent pales in comparison to his, and reinforces this using first-person pronouns such as "I," "my," and "we," thereby excluding Heidi. The 1980s was a time when everybody had their own concerns and Peter, who was supportive of Heidi, prioritizes his own problems now more than ever. In other words, everyone is now on their own—a sentiment which reinforces the conflicting binaries of friendship and alienation, insider and outsider, and male and female that permeate the play.

Balakian also affirms that "although gay and feminist characters are such good friends, they do not seem to empathize with the discrimination that each faces" (*Reading the Plays 92).* In that sense, Peter resembles men like activist Warren Farrell, who authored *The Liberated Men* (1974) and organized consciousness-raising groups where he encouraged men to "listen to women rather than dominate," question the politics of marriage, and ponder the relationship between machismo and violence (Faludi, *Backlash* 302). According to Faludi, he expected men and women to find a common ground because once women were free, men would also break free from social norms. However, pondering and talking are not the same thing as doing, and actions always speak louder than words. Ultimately, Farrell became less enthusiastic when feminism lost its social influence in the 80s, and decided to dedicate his life to fighting for men's rights, organizing workshops to educate women about "men's grievances against them" (303). Like Farrell, Peter feels marginalized by feminists who are not interested in his cause since they are obsessed with their own. He loses his interest in female liberation, and in the end, focuses solely on gay men's problems.

It is through Peter that the audience/reader realizes the complexity of the relationship between men and women. For years, men have been accused of not understanding the plight of women; however, Wasserstein shows that women do not understand the male struggle either. In *Isn't It Romantic*, men are incapable of accepting women who "refused to conform to familiar models," whereas it is a female character in *The Heidi Chronicles*, Heidi, who cannot comprehend the struggles of the men in her life because "their privacies are as closed to her as hers seem to be to them" (Bigsby 349–350).

1.2.2. The Male Backlash against Feminism

The other important male character in *The Heidi Chronicles* is Scoop, who is named after Wasserstein's nephew (her brother Bruce's son). Scoop resembles Bruce in that he seems to support feminism on the surface and has an interest in journalism, but is eccentric, arrogant, sexist, and perhaps even misogynistic (Salamon 228). Scoop, like Paul from *Isn't It Romantic*, uses feminist women as sexual objects and derives pleasure from manipulating, demeaning, and exerting power over them, especially personally and politically. In fact, as a self-professed leftist, he pretends to be sympathetic to feminist causes in order to attract and bed women, even though he is actually a hypermasculine conservative bully who believes the family is "the union of a strong and reliable male with a fecund and patriotically self-sacrificing female" (Ehrenreich 155–156). Ehrenreich also confirms that when feminists were fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), men were taking advantage of it and were eliding responsibility by using feminist claims like "pregnancy is a woman's choice" to enjoy free, uninhibited sex (147).

Although the backlash against feminism has always existed in American culture, it reached its peak in the 1970s and 80s with debates over the ERA. Faludi discusses how Baby Boomers were polarized in the 1980s, and how sixty percent of men claimed they were conservative. Also, the rate of men who supported women's rights dropped dramatically from 1986 to 1988 as they longed for the return of the traditional family with the husband as breadwinner, the wife as mother and homemaker, and the children as "perfect" (*Backlash* 60–61). The male dominated media contributed to this backlash, telling Americans to "blame it on feminism" with its hysterical, irrational, fussy, interfering, emasculating, and fanatic supporters (Faludi, *Backlash* 76).

Scoop is an egocentric male chauvinist who assigns a letter grade to everything, including women, positioning himself as a Boomer decision-making mechanism and arbiter of taste. Bigsby describes him as "an opinion setter who has no engagement with the issues on which he offers his opinions" (351). He is introduced in act 1, scene 2 at yet another dance, in 1968. As he converses with Heidi, Scoop is confident, patronizing her by claiming that she has "an inferiority complex" (13). Despite being irritating, Scoop manages to impress Heidi with his bravado, arrogance, and machismo. Heidi comments

on his self–assurance by questioning mothers "who teach their sons what they never bother to tell their daughters" (15). Women of her generation were taught to be passive, whereas men like Scoop were raised to be assertive and confident individuals who believed they could get whatever they wanted. Thus, it is not surprising when Scoop casually asks Heidi to go to bed with him—without any hesitation or fear of rejection—and she eventually complies. On the surface, he supports well-educated women, like Heidi, who he believes should not waste their lives making sandwiches: "She shouldn't. And for that matter, neither should a badly educated woman. Heidella, I'm on your side" (17). Scoop pretends to be a feminist to impress Heidi. Yet, he also devalues feminism to the point where he trivializes the movement as going "'hog wild,' demanding equal pay, equal rights, [and] equal orgasms" (17).

Like Marty in *Isn't it Romantic*, Scoop Rosenbaum, who is also Jewish, proves his manhood when he "conquers" (the non-Jewish) Heidi's world. As E. Anthony Rotundo states, men reach the top of social and professional life by competing with women, and other men, and often feigning cooperation or "teamwork" (286). In *The Heidi Chronicles*, Scoop competes/cooperates with feminists in order to secure his position in society. He changes Heidi's name to the diminutive, childish, Heidella, which is the first step in seizing her life. Moreover, when Heidi declines his initial offer of sex, claiming she can take care of herself, Scoop replies: "You've already got the lingo down kiddo. Pretty soon, you'll be burning bras" (17). This presents Scoop's tendency to "support," yet ridicule, women's liberation, acknowledging its power while simultaneously depicting its supporters as crazy fanatics. Although he is aware of the truth, Scoop prefers to devalue feminism and mock feminists. He also humiliates Heidi in different ways, from embarrassing and publically shaming her, to using nicknames like "kiddo" or "Heidella." Like Paul, Scoop underestimates women, especially feminists, trivializing Heidi's desire to become an art historian as "really suburban" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 84).

Michael Kaufman claims that to gain power, which men associate with masculinity, they must engage in a number of activities: "We've got to perform and stay in control. We've got to conquer, be on top of things, and call the shots. We've got to tough it out, provide, and achieve. Meanwhile we learn to beat back our feelings, hide our emotions, and

suppress our needs" (148). Scoop never intends to marry Heidi because her feminism and intellect intimidate him:

> Let's say we married and I asked you to devote the, say, next ten years of your life to me. To making me a home and a family and a life so secure that I could with some confidence go out into the world each day and attempt to get an "A." You'd say "No." You'd say "Why can't we be partners? Why can't we both go out into the world and get an 'A'?" And you'd be absolutely valid and correct. (38)

Scoop is afraid of Heidi because he would be competing with her if they married. If he marries Heidi, he will lose his power, resembling Bruce who "demanded justice for all, but that didn't mean he wanted his wife to become a feminist" (Salamon 108).

Heidi also has similar experiences with other men. For instance, Heidi is in a serious relationship with a British academic, when she receives a job offer from Columbia University. However, their relationships ends when he gives her an ultimatum and Heidi chooses her career over becoming his wife and living in London (45). Moreover, Heidi dates a lawyer who calls her "Darling" and claims to love her, but does not want her to "call him after ten o'clock" (55). These men resemble Scoop and Paul from *Isn't It Romantic* in terms of using feminists as long as it is convenient. They reject commitment and display a lack of interest in any kind of long-term relationship, exploiting Heidi for sex and companionship, and abandoning her when her needs start to infringe on their own.

Clearly, Scoop is influenced by the backlash against feminism, which proclaimed women's liberation as the new American curse (Faludi, *Backlash* xvii). Scoop conveys that Heidi is assertive, successful, and not as needy as she should be, and that her independence is not an attribute, but rather a detriment that will eventually lead to the breakdown of their relationship. Thus, he suppresses his feelings for her and marries Lisa, a woman who is inferior, whom he can control, and who will allow him to go out and get an A. Lisa is the most suitable partner for Scoop because she idolizes, and does not intimidate, him. According to Scoop, Lisa is not an "A+" like Heidi, but as he expresses, "I don't want to come home to an "A+." "A–" maybe, but not "A+" (38). Being an "A+" challenges Scoop's intellectual authority and manhood as the head of the family. Moreover, it might prevent Heidi from being the wife and mother of Scoop's dreams, assuming that Heidi desires motherhood at all. Wishing to secure his position as the

superior breadwinner, Scoop joins the conservative backlash against women, rejecting reproductive rights, sexual freedom, and women's entry into the workforce (Faludi, *Backlash* 238).

Scoop dances with Heidi instead of his new wife at his own wedding. He holds Heidi tightly and sings "Darling, you send me./ Honest you do./ Honest you do" (40), which again suggests that Scoop blames Heidi's feminism for their broken relationship (Keyssar 142). However, Scoop continues to take advantage of feminists, like Paul in *Isn't It Romantic*. Despite his marriage, Scoop has an affair with a colleague who Balakian characterizes as a "phony feminist" (*Reading the Plays* 94), and who may be the perfect match for Scoop's phony liberalism. Scoop "is, as he admits, or perhaps boasts, arrogant, difficult and smart. He has the confidence [Heidi] lacks" (Bigsby 347), and he never lets Heidi, the professor with numerous graduate degrees, forget it.

1.3. CONCLUSION

The plays discussed in this chapter address a variety of issues like the complexity of male/female relationships, the price of independence, identity problems, the possibility or impossibility of having it all, the relationship between mothers and daughters, Jewishness, and sexism (Balakian, *Wendy Wasserstein* 218). The male characters in these plays reflect the sexual politics of the 1970s and 80s, and all support and reject the strict rules of American patriarchy, depending on the situation.

Sexism is the main problem behind Harriet's and Janie's struggle in *Isn't It Romantic*. They want to have it all; however, they do not know whether they are ready to pay the price such as losing their individual identities, compromising their goals, or even ending up "childless and alone." The play is significant because it addresses the problems that arose from feminism with a great deal of candor and honesty. Society was not ready for change, and men were the first to react. Marty and Paul illustrate how men and women felt when the values of society and feminism were juxtaposed. Bigsby confirms that *Isn't It Romantic* is not only about women, for "the men are no less baffled by the world in which they find themselves" (343). Even though feminists accomplished a great deal, change did not occur as quickly or as completely as they expected. Men refused to be

their safety net, and more often than not, they discovered they were on their own, with even their parents questioning their motives.

For Marty, Janie's career poses a threat. He does not accept women's power because much like American society, he is not ready for powerful women. Balakian suggests that Marty and Paul represent an America in transition—struggling, rather unsuccessfully, to bridge the gap between traditional and new values. This can be seen as a reflection of the national conservatism that began with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 (*Reading the Plays* 54–55). This conservatism, which was represented by the backlash against feminism, gave men permission to be uncomfortable with liberated women.

Through Marty's and Janie's relationship, Wasserstein explores the question "Can a Jewish woman be strong, independent and remain unmarried without having her identity negotiated through Jewish men?" (Salamon 135). Marty wants to control and dominate Janie's life, leaving her no freedom of choice. This is not because he does not love Janie, but because he does not know of any other way to act in a relationship. It was all about power, and superiority over women meant power for men in the 1980s. Even though Paul's life with his wife is not presented, it is understood that he views the world the same way. Cathy takes care of the laundry and cooks dinner for Paul, while he enjoys the privileges and perks of life by being both sexually and socially active in the private sphere. As a pseudo-liberal with a conservative and traditional underpinning, Marty will probably follow the same path as Paul in about ten years.

The characters and events in Wasserstein's plays come from her own life, reflecting the social and political atmosphere of her time. Wasserstein used Douglas Altabef, a Jewish man she dated, as the prototype for Marty in *Isn't It Romantic*. Altabef did not take her profession seriously and called her "Monkey" assuming she "loved" it (Salamon 149). Positioning women in search for liberation in one corner, and conservative men who opposed it in the other, helped Wasserstein draw a portrait of American society in the 1980s. She depicted how women still had a long and difficult way to go before achieving equality. According to Balakian, "in 1983, *Isn't It Romantic* was telling us the 'real' and 'new society' was the single woman, and that perhaps marriage was 'illusionary'" (*Reading the Plays* 59).

Heidi, Scoop, and Peter "address or recall the vicissitudes of their own lives in the context of the changing values and mores of the larger society" (Keyssar 143). The ideologies and concerns of American society are constantly changing, yet Scoop is able to survive by integrating himself into the mainstream, conservative world of the 1980s. Scoop understands the complexities of feminism and takes advantage of them to secure his place in this competitive world. On the other hand, Peter represents the interaction of the two causes—the gay and feminist movements—which preceded the "me" era of the 1980s. However, he loses his interest in feminism as a result of the AIDS crisis. His tone changes from optimism to pessimism by the end of the play, reflecting the mood of gays who were struggling to survive in a heterosexist society.

Bigsby sees this shift as indicative of the changes within American society, which "lost its structure and purpose" in the 1980s. "Where earlier Peter, like the society he mirrored, had abandoned idealism for an egotism disguised as self-assurance, now the self has collapsed" (353), prompting him, once again, to seek comfort in the "we"—this time the gay community. Furthermore, as Helene Keyssar states, while these characters change in age, education, occupation, and their responsibilities, they fail to transform themselves or the world (143), and are just as oppressed at the end of the play as they were at the beginning, but in different ways. Yet, it should be noted that Wasserstein did not aim to change the world through her plays. She held a mirror up to the sexual politics of her generation with the hope that her contemporaries would reflect on their actions, and the faith that the younger generation would complete the transformation they started.

CHAPTER 2
THE SISTERS ROSENSWEIG (1992) AND *AN AMERICAN DAUGHTER* (1997)

2.1. *THE SISTERS ROSENSWEIG* (1992)

Salamon reveals in *Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein* that Wendy Wasserstein's plays have always been political despite their humorous stance, starting with the play she wrote for her application to Yale, *Any Woman Can't* (1973). The reason why Wasserstein wrote about women was that she wanted to dramatize herself and the people in her life. Therefore, she is represented in almost every play she has written (e.g., Holly in *Uncommon Women and Others*, Janie in *Isn't It Romantic*, Heidi in *The Heidi Chronicles*, and Pfeni in *The Sisters Rosensweig*). Her writing can thus be called "faction," or a combination of fact and fiction—a form of writing in which real people and events are depicted as if they were fictional. Wasserstein juxtaposes hopes and realizations, and ambitions and achievements, while writing about how experiences impact lives (Bigsby 345). As stated in Chapter 1, her plays are the results of her own experiences, so the reader/audience simultaneously witnesses how Wasserstein's life changes, and how her ideas evolve, as she herself matures. For the playwright, men are naturally a part of this growth.

The Sisters Rosensweig (1992) is set in 1991 and concerns three sisters—Sara, Gorgeous and Pfeni—who meet at Sara's apartment in London to celebrate Sara's fifty-fourth birthday.[8] Modeled on Wasserstein's own sisters, Sara is Sandra who also "cooks delicacies such as cassoulet" and who survived cancer (Salamon 292). Divorced twice, Sara is a successful woman working at a bank. She had a hysterectomy and has no interest in love, men, or her Jewish identity. Gorgeous, on the other hand, is a devout Jew who is married to an attorney. She was inspired by Wasserstein's sister Georgette, who is the "real Gorgeous," but "more outrageous," like their mother Lola (Salamon 293). She seems happy and successful, but nothing is as it seems. Pfeni, or Wasserstein herself, is

[8] *The Sisters Rosensweig* was performed at the Seattle Repertory Theatre (1992), at Lincoln Center Theater (1992), and on Broadway (1993). It was directed by Daniel Sullivan (*The Sisters Rosensweig*).

the youngest sister, a journalist dating a bisexual director, Geoffrey. The play is basically about Sara's awakening and her acceptance of her Jewish identity, both of which are catalyzed by a male character, Mervyn. Conversations about identity, ethnicity, and gender constitute most of the play, rather than physical action.

Wasserstein's romantic friendship with Terrence McNally is depicted in *The Sisters Rosensweig* through Pfeni's relationship with Geoffrey. As Salamon states, McNally, who was openly gay, suddenly asked Wasserstein to be his life partner—a relationship that would be based on marriage and parenthood, and not sex and emotions (264). Wasserstein's friendships with gay men allowed her to enter the community, and she became involved with their social issues. Salamon reveals that McNally lost one of his lovers to AIDS, Wasserstein's playwright friend Harry Kondoleon was infected with the disease, and her cousin Barry Kaufman also died of AIDS, but her parents did not share this with anyone, including Wasserstein herself, because they felt ashamed; thus, "AIDS became not just a disease but a cultural indicator" (266), and authors, poets, and playwrights did not refrain from talking about it in their works. Wasserstein first addressed the issue of AIDS in *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) through Peter, and continues the discussion in *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992). In *An American Daughter* (1997), she leaves AIDS behind and introduces a new topic: gay conservatism.

Like Pfeni and Geoffrey, Wasserstein and McNally considered having a child (Salamon 267), but McNally abruptly ended their relationship over the phone. Wasserstein responded with a letter stating: "But you should know that you cannot arrive at a person's apartment, involve them in your life, and when it is the right time for you simply turn the switch off. Well, frankly of course you can, but there are consequences, at least to that person" (Salamon 281). In *The Sisters Rosensweig*, she conveys her disappointment by presenting "the dissolution of private lives and the decay of public form" (Bigsby 359). Wasserstein also uses her trauma to explore what she really wanted in life and to express her confusion about men. In *The Sisters Rosensweig*, she accomplishes this through two male outcasts, Geoffrey and Mervyn, who help Wasserstein present the male experience of the early 1990s.

Roark, et al. state that the gay and lesbian rights movement resulted in closeted homosexuals leaving the closet, an increased awareness about their existence as a social and political force in American society in the 1980s and 90s, and a mainstreaming of their concerns, only one of which was AIDS. Gay politicians became more and more vocal, and the Democrats included gay rights on their agenda. Job discrimination against homosexuals was banned in some cities, sexual orientation became a protected category in eleven states in 1982, and gay partners were offered health insurance. However, there was also a rejection of gay rights by groups such as the Christian Coalition, which declared that gays and lesbians were immoral, and by Ronald Reagan's administration, which did little to promote the idea of government as a "helpful and problem solving institution" (Roark, et al. 931, 936). Even though Republican politics dominated American society during the 1980s and early 1990s, society still underwent changes through the efforts of activist groups, compelling conservatives to confront the reality that there were gays and lesbians among them. Wasserstein reflects these ideas in both plays examined in this chapter.

Kimmel discusses that with Reagan and George Bush, Sr. in the White House, men regained their masculinity, which they displayed every chance they had. Confidence, money, and security became new symbols of power for American men (*Manhood* 211). However, there were various competing role models for men, including the "warm, sensitive, cuddly, and compassionate" partner. While in the 1970s, such sensitive men were admired as a refreshing alternative to the macho brute, by the 1980s, they were scorned by other men, and women, for not being "real men." Now wimps, these men suddenly lacked a purpose and did not fit in with the vulture capitalistic world of Wall Street yuppies (young urban professionals). They were seen as moral and economic weaklings who used the guise of equality to elide their responsibilities as male breadwinners (Kimmel, *Manhood* 213).

Definitions of manhood and masculinity shifted, once again, in the 1990s when the contribution of men to the economy decreased after the stock market crash of 1987. Women realized that the trope of the male breadwinner was finally dead, and that they had to find their own way financially. Men reacted in two ways. Traditionalists believed in a reactionary re-separation of the spheres so that masculinity could be saved, while

men's rights groups claimed reverse discrimination (that women, and the programs instituted to help them achieve equality, were now discriminating against men) (Kimmel, *Manhood* 217–218). Those who believed in male victimization established organizations such as "Coalition for Free Men, the National Congress for Men, Men's Rights, Inc. (MR, Inc.), and Men Achieving Liberation and Equality (MALE)" to fight feminists and reclaim their masculinity. Fathers' rights groups, which advocated paternal child custody in cases of divorce, also became very popular (Kimmel, *Manhood* 221). Wasserstein's two plays, *The Sisters Rosensweig* and *An American Daughter*, explore such ideas, especially through the lenses of American (identity) politics and the continued backlash against feminism.

The Sisters Rosensweig was first performed in 1992 when the nation was still under the influence of Reagan's conservatism. All the characters dramatized in the play are in search of an identity, which reflects the atmosphere of the country at the time. With the "emergence of the antifeminist, antihomosexual, antiabortion Moral Majority," feminists, gays, and other minorities were left in a precarious position (Badinter 113). The Cold War, with the traditional gender roles it had reinforced, had finally come to an end, and the Soviet Union was breaking apart on a daily basis. The play highlights these issues of independence and identity, reflecting how they were both personal and political, and local and global, in the early 1990s (Bigsby 357). For example, while Sara is grappling with her Jewish identity, her daughter, Tess, plans to go to Lithuania with her working class boyfriend Tom to support the country's independence movement.

According to Salamon, Wendy Wasserstein used Chekov's *Three Sisters* as a leitmotif in her play (290), identifying *The Sisters Rosensweig* as a play of possibilities and one in which most of the characters "are struggling with who they are" (*Shiksa Goddess* 66). Sara, the oldest of the three sisters, is a twice-divorced woman working at a Hong Kong bank. Sara does not believe in love anymore and is uncomfortable with her Jewish identity. However, this changes when she meets Mervyn Kant: Sara starts to believe in love again and she re-embraces her Jewish identity. Gorgeous, a mother of four, is married to an unemployed husband. She is the most attractive, and traditional, among the sisters. Yet, her life is not as "gorgeous" as it seems: her designer clothes are fake, much like her

"perfect" life, which is falling apart. The youngest sister is Pfeni, a journalist. She dates a bisexual director, Geoffrey, who eventually abandons her for a man.

Czekay defines the women in the play as mature, middle-aged, and evaluating their past, in contrast to the women in *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Heidi Chronicles*, who try to "have it all" but ultimately do not succeed ("Not Having It All" 34). Wasserstein's characters have matured alongside the playwright, who by the early 1990s was in the process of evaluating her own life, including options such as marriage and motherhood. *The Sisters Rosensweig* is different from the other plays, however, in that Sara ends up in a relationship at the end—a happy ending, especially for a middle-aged woman whom society assumes is too old for love. This shows that both women and men have changed, or that now, they can at least compromise. As Wasserstein states in the preface to the play, "Mervyn, the world leader in synthetic animal protective covering, and Sara, the international banker, are not romantic fantasies. They are grownups whom we don't get to see on stage often enough" (x, xi).

2.1.1. Bisexual Men: Liberating or Oppressive?

Although Geoffrey is a "liberated man" both sexually and ideologically, he is still extremely patronizing towards Pfeni, the woman in his life. As a bisexual, he engages in behavior often associated with heterosexual "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, "A Very Straight Gay" 748), perhaps as a way to claim a heteronormative masculinity for himself and to erase any traces of "effeminacy" that would be assumed to accompany his bisexuality. Geoffrey reinforces the socially constructed connections between sex, sexuality, and gender (male, heterosexuality, and domination) by performing the aggressive "manliness" stereotypically expected from heterosexual men. Like Marty in *Isn't It Romantic*, he tries to dictate to Pfeni what she should think and how she should behave, and is condescending towards her, sarcastically insisting they have a "perfect" relationship when it is clearly dysfunctional on many levels: "All I know is that whenever you're around that woman, you tell me we have to stop seeing each other. My darling, we hardly ever do see each other. I'm always in rehearsal and you're in Timbuktu half the year. It's a bloody brilliant relationship" (17). He then kisses Pfeni on the forehead, like

a father would a daughter, suggesting not only romantic paternalism, but also the need for men to protect, and the need for women to be protected.

His behavior also implies that he may be using Pfeni as a prop to conceal his true sexual orientation—homosexuality—in a homophobic world, transforming it into a potentially more acceptable bisexuality through her presence in his life (as McNally may have desired). He also confesses, "Pfeni, I love you. I will always love you. But the truth is, I miss men" (86). It is revealed through his statements that Geoffrey is not committed to Pfeni in the same way that she is committed to him. This is unfair to Pfeni, who is trapped in a hypocritical one-way relationship to nowhere, and to Geoffrey, the theater director, who cannot live his life freely and openly, and must always perform, both onstage and off: "You really don't understand what it is to have absolutely no idea who you are" (88).

Mark A. Gammon and Kirsten L. Isgro discuss Gary Zinik's categorization of bisexuality in their article "Troubling the Canon: Bisexuality and Queer Theory" as follows:

> Simultaneous bisexuality, which includes having sex with at least one partner of the same and different sex in the same period; concurrent bisexuality, which includes having sex separately with males and females during the same time period; and serial bisexuality, which is defined as alternating between male and female sexual partners over time. (166)

Geoffrey fits into the third category as he confirms: "You must know that the entire time I've been with you, I've never acted out, I've never cheated on you" (87). The reader is informed that Geoffrey had a boyfriend before Pfeni and now he wants to be with men once again. However, Geoffrey never talks about having been in a relationship with women before Pfeni. Therefore, Wasserstein leaves it to the reader/audience to decide whether Geoffrey is concealing his homosexuality with bisexuality, or not.

Elisabeth Badinter introduces two terms—"tough guy" and "soft man"—to discuss socially acceptable and unacceptable men: A tough guy is a man who is competitive, proud of his intellectuality and sexuality, handicapped emotionally, always self-confident, aggressive, and obsessed with power. In other words, the alpha heterosexual male. The soft man sacrifices his male privileges, and does not aspire to power and the natural superiority over women provided to him by the patriarchal order. Moreover, the soft man is not aggressive and is willing to devote himself to his family and children,

supporting equality between the sexes in all domains (128). Geoffrey is neither the tough guy nor the soft man: he is a combination or hybrid of the two, much like his bisexuality. Steven Angelides suggests locating bisexuality "where the definition of heterosexuality leaves off and homosexuality begins—that is, at which point heterosexuality becomes homosexuality, and vice versa" (205). In this sense, Geoffrey stands at the point Angelides discusses; therefore, it becomes easier for him to be the tough guy and soft man interchangeably. Because of these reasons, Gorgeous insists that Pfeni should not be with Geoffrey because, she assumes, he would not make an appropriate husband: "Pfeni, you're wandering yourself right out of the market place. And don't tell me you have Geoffrey. I know you can't judge a book by its cover, but sweetie, you're at the wrong library altogether. Pfeni, don't you want what any normal woman wants?" (72). She suggests that Pfeni would never be able to satisfy him completely and he would make a questionable role model to their children. Geoffrey, on the other hand, takes advantage of his sex and gender, playing the tough guy when he is challenged sexually, but claiming to be the soft man in order to continue his relationship with a confused feminist. Thus, he is able to elide wearing "the mask of an exhausting omnipotence and independence" by playing both sides of the fence (Badinter 134).

Bigsby states that Geoffrey offers everything, except the feeling of security. Like Peter in *The Heidi Chronicles*, Geoffrey has lost many friends to AIDS. Thus, he does not want to spend his time on relationships. Instead, he puts all his energy into his plays so that his life becomes an extension of his art (361). For him, "gay masculinity" is all about "sophistication and modernity" (Connell, "A Very Straight Gay" 746). When he is first introduced to the reader, Wasserstein describes him as an "attractive forty-year-old man in a hip leather jacket and a Sunset in Penang T-shirt." As he enters the house, he "immediately begins applauding" in response to Pfeni's and Sara's singing (14–15). He is flamboyant, but masks this with positive energy, illustrating Gaylord Brewer's claims that he uses "quips, one-liners, rejoinders, and performance" to remain distant from "real life" and to hide the pain that he feels inside due to his conflicted sexuality (127):

> GEOFFREY: Very good! *Three Sisters*, Act III. Now, Pfeni darling, see how worthwhile it's been knowing me. If not for me, you'd still think that *Uncle Vanya* was a Neil Simon play about his pathetic uncle in Bronx.

> PFENI: And now instead I've had a three-year relationship with an internationally renowned director and bisexual.
>
> GEOFFREY: You left out botanist. I read botany at Cambridge. And I also put that "f" betwixt your name. If not for me, you'd be plain and simple Penny Rosensweig. (17)

Geoffrey uses humor to escape serious conversation, yet simultaneously broaches a number of serious topics: Jewishness, cultural illiteracy, his troubled relationship with Pfeni, and how identity is socially, and self, constructed. Clearly, Geoffrey believes he is the man who has made Pfeni the woman she has become. In fact, he has even named her, thus inserting sophistication into her life and asserting control and power over her identity. Geoffrey remakes Penny Rosensweig into a new, open-minded, liberal person, like himself. As a mind-controlling guru, he convinces her that she cannot live without him. After all, he has the answer to all her problems, including sexuality: "Pfeni, if you want to find unconditional love, have a baby. Adopt a red and fuzzy brood of them. Better yet, have artificial insemination [...] 'Hello darling, this is Daddy. Say good morning to your daddy.' 'Morning, Daddy.' Or you could become a lesbian. Most of the really interesting women I know are lesbians" (17). Here, Geoffrey suggests becoming a sexual chameleon as a solution to her personal and political dilemmas. As we see in the play, Geoffrey uses his bisexuality to his advantage: when heterosexual life becomes too much, he switches to homosexuality. When being gay becomes a burden, he escapes to the comfort of the heterosexual world. In the end, he never comes to terms with anything, and is never true to himself or those around him. Perhaps, as Wasserstein suggests, this is another form of male privilege and authority. As Sara responds to Geoffrey: "Since when are you the expert on female sexuality?" (50).

Pfeni is searching for the love and commitment that Geoffrey fails to provide. Geoffrey replies that only another woman, or a child, can give her the "unconditional love" that she seeks. Here, he outright tells her that she is a needy woman who expects male affection that he cannot, or will not, give. Just like he seeks love elsewhere, he proposes that she do the same. Pfeni is so insecure about her ability to satisfy Geoffrey and so desperate not to lose him that she even asks if he would like to meet a nice man (18). As Wasserstein illustrates, despite all his talk of open-mindedness and liberation, Geoffrey stimulates

feelings of self-loathing in Pfeni, just like Marty, Paul, Peter, and Scoop did in the female characters with whom they interacted.

Even though Geoffrey claims that their relationship is based on equality and mutual respect, it is clear that there are layers of (self)oppression at work. This is further exemplified by the way in which Geoffrey always prioritizes himself: "My Darling, I can't waste any more time listening to your negativity and self-criticism. You're becoming as self-absorbed as I am" (19). Geoffrey believes he has the right to be egocentric in his relationship with Pfeni, but when Pfeni needs him, he accuses her of being self-centered. Erich Steinman states that the LGBTQ community provides "a space for men to explore and experience alternative ways of constructing and expressing masculinity" (407). In this regard, as the tough guy (alpha male), Geoffrey wants a partner who will be passive, support him unconditionally, and indulge his every whim. On the other hand, he, as the soft man (drama queen), wants his partner to be liberated and open minded.

While Marty calls Janie "Monkey," Paul calls Harriet "Beauty," Scoop calls Heidi "Heidella," and Lyssa's father in *An American Daughter* calls her "Mousey," Geoffrey addresses Pfeni as "Angel," which is a diminutive nickname, mostly used for women, to suggest that they are as pure as sinless angels. Geoffrey does not expect women to be "pure" in the traditional sense (virginal); however, he does render women secondary by placing them on a pedestal. By doing so, he clears the pathway for his main expectation: that he expects his self-sacrificing partner to step aside so that he can take center stage and succeed in life.

Geoffrey's relationship with Pfeni is a temporary escape from reality (homophobia, the AIDS crisis, loneliness), which renders him an unstable character and unreliable partner. Geoffrey claims he will marry Pfeni if that is what she wants: "Do you want to get married? We'll get married . . . You are the first person I want to see in the morning and the last person I want to talk to at night. Do you want to have children? Brill. We'll have a troop of them" (67–68). However, he eventually breaks up with her because he misses men, which reinforces her feelings of hopeless inadequacy: "Pfeni, when I sat next to you at the ballet, it was a dark time in my life. Jordan had just left me, and my friends were

becoming increasingly ill…Pfeni, my friends need me" (87). Not only does the reader/audience constantly question his sincerity (when is he lying, when is he telling the truth?), but resentment also builds up around Geoffrey for the way he manipulates people, especially "liberated women" (just like other male Wasserstein characters), and the gay community, weaving in and out of the latter whenever the fancy strikes him.

Geoffrey's inner struggle is the struggle for truth and self-discovery, but at other people's expense. His proposal to Pfeni, to marry and have children, is not out of love or devotion, but is rather an attempt to ensure his posterity and immortality in the face of so much death, loss, and mortality:

> I've changed address books three times this year because I couldn't bear to cross out any more names. I've lost too many friends. I've seen too many lights that never had their chance to glow burn out overnight. I've tried for years now to make sense of all this, and all I know is life is random and there is no case to be made for a just or loving God. So how then do we proceed? In directing terms, what is the objective? Of course, we must cherish those that we love. That's a given. But just as important, people like you and me have to work even harder to create the best art, the best theatre, the best bloody book about gender and class in Tajikistan that we possibly can. And the rest, the children, the country kitchen, the domestic bliss, we leave to others who will have different regrets. Pfeni, you and I can't idle time. (69)

Geoffrey believes becoming a husband and father will end his suffering; however, he realizes it is not possible to devote himself to art, or to Pfeni, if he assumes these traditional roles. He wants "a real life outside the theater" (men) (88), and admits he is a selfish "instinctive person." Even though he might regret his choices in the future, this does not prevent him from doing what he feels.

As R. W. Connell states, "a specific masculinity is not constituted in isolation, but in relation to other masculinities and to femininities" ("A Very Straight Gay" 745). Thus, Geoffrey develops his gay masculine identity during his relationships with gay men, and his heterosexual masculine identity with Pfeni and other women. Connell also states that homosexual men respond to heterosexual masculinity through "wariness, controlled disclosure, and turning inward to a gay network" ("A Very Straight Gay" 745). The latter explains why Geoffrey eventually decides to return to the gay community: he grows tired of "playing straight."

Geoffrey does not expect Pfeni to wait for him while he is busy in the public sphere or rediscovering the other side of his sexuality. On the contrary, because now it suits him, he insists that Pfeni is an independent woman with a satisfying profession. While Marty and Paul teach their partners how to be more domestic, Geoffrey instructs Pfeni on how to be more liberated. However, he is always motivated by selfishness and not by an altruistic desire to help Pfeni. In this sense, Geoffrey is like Peter who initially supports Heidi's feminism. However, both characters ultimately disappoint the women in their lives, as friends and partners, because they prioritize themselves. As Kimmel suggests, and Geoffrey and Peter exemplify, "men were still searching, but they still hadn't found what they were looking for" (*Manhood* 210). Once again, women were not the solution for men, and men were not the solution for women. In the end, both groups were on their own.

2.1.2. Hope for Equality: The Men Who Changed

Wasserstein does offer a glimmer of hope through Mervyn Kant, who resurrects Sara's Jewish identity and lost feelings of love. The only male friend she has is an upper class Englishman, Nicholas Pym, who "provides style without substance" to Sara's life (Bigsby 358), and is thus useless in her road to self-discovery. Mervyn, on the other hand, helps her regain her identity in a city, London, where she is hiding from her background. Brewer asserts that Mervyn provides a balance between humor and loss: he is "warm, charismatic and funny" and the antithesis of Sara (125), who is cold and stoic. When he meets Sara, a successful banker, he does not feel inferior or weak, unlike Sara's male coworker who claims that she has the "biggest balls" at the bank (8), suggesting that not only is she unattractive because she exhibits male qualities, but that any woman in power is a threat to heterosexual men (i.e., a feminist and/or a lesbian).

Rosen also touches upon this issue through various examples, one of which is the following headline, written after a woman was selected as a guest conductor for the San Francisco Symphony: "Symphony Guest Gets to Do a Man's Job" (303). The expression, "the biggest balls," serves the same purpose as the headline, implying that it is not Sara's place to work at the bank, and that she is actually doing a man's job. With her "biggest balls," then, Sara is the superwoman who is no longer the loyal mother or wife, but a

"dangerous individual, unplugged from home and hearth" (Rosen 330). Here, Wasserstein once again draws attention to the backlash against women in the workplace, a theme which will be the focus of *An American Daughter*.

Assuming Sara is married, Mervyn asks Pfeni what Sara's husband does, and Pfeni's answer—that he (she) is the managing director of the Hong Kong/Shanghai Bank Europe— impresses Mervyn even before meeting Sara, laying the groundwork for him accepting her as a smart woman (22). He realizes his first impression was correct when Sara discusses economic and class conditions in the United States (24), and even though women like Sara are criticized by the younger generation for being impossible superwomen, Mervyn embraces Sara's definition of womanhood, "But your sister's right. You are a brilliant woman!" (24).

Starting with their first conversation, Mervyn begins to challenge and change Sara with the stories he tells and the questions he asks. However, Sara is prejudiced against men because she is used to fighting them in the boardroom and bedroom. As Badinter states, "While women were demanding gentler, kinder, less aggressive men, they themselves were encouraged to be fighters and conquerors" (145), perhaps because fighting a subdued man would be easier. Although Sara has become successful in the male sphere, she is fragile because both her body and soul have been damaged (by cancer, by men), which instinctively forces her to observe the world from the outside (Bigsby 360). Thus, Sara's rude behavior towards Mervyn is a self-protection mechanism: she does not want Mervyn to stay for dinner, telling him that they will eat a roast which consists of beans, lamb, duck, and pork sausage. She then adds: "I don't recall the rules precisely, but if any of those go against your or the Rabbi of Dublin's religious or dietary regimen, you might want to get to Simpson's in the Strand after all" (26). In addition to her discourteous nature, Sara's mocking comments also reveal that she has no interest in Judaism or Jewish culture.

Sara's statements also expose what she thinks of Jewish manhood. She dislikes Mervyn for what he signifies: the nice Jewish boy she was expected to marry as a young Jewish girl and if she had done so, she would have been "following the life that was dictated for her" (Solomon 140). Thus, when Sara tells Mervyn that the meal might go against his

religious beliefs, she implies that she is not the "nice Jewish girl" a nice Jewish boy would want. However, Mervyn confronts Sara with questions rather than judgment, asking if she always tended to be rude to men (27). Sara's response gives Mervyn a chance to talk about his life and to discover if Sara is a suitable partner. Sara, though, resists Mervyn's advances because to her, he represents an ethnic past she is trying to erase.

Even though she does not know him well, Sara believes Mervyn is no different than the men with whom she went to high school: intelligent providers who read *The Times* and are worried about their health upon reaching fifty (53). She insists that Mervyn is one of those stereotypical men: "Yes, Henry's wonderful, and I'm sure you're wonderful, and Tom's wonderful. You're all wonderful…You know what really irritates me in life, Merv? When men like you tell women to take it easy because somewhere they believe that all women are innately hysterics" (53). Sara's comments reveal the truth about the men of her generation—that they thought that women who were unhappy were either neurotic, ungrateful, or troublemakers, like Paul and Marty in *Isn't It Romantic*. However, Mervyn is not a typical Jewish man. In fact, he even mocks tradition: "You know, I don't think it's particularly true that Jews don't drink. I think it is a myth made up by our mothers to persuade innocent women that Jewish men make superior husbands" (27). Although Marty believes that embracing Jewish manhood means living according to Jewish tradition, Mervyn looks at matters far more objectively.

Mervyn manages to break the ice with Sara through humorous language and an unintentional reference to Sara's Jewish past when he calls her Sadie, which was the nickname used by Sara's grandfather, who hoped Sara would be a singer (54). In the play, singing is a metaphor for Sara's rebirth because it is connected to her Jewish identity. Mervyn realizes that Sara has "assimilated beyond her wildest dreams, and now she's lonely and wants to come home" (57), and uses singing as a way to bring her back to her Jewish roots, which includes him (a Jewish husband).

Mervyn states he wants to be in love; however, Sara tells him he only wants to be taken care of (57). For Sara's generation, men were meant to support the family financially, while women were expected to be wives and mothers, so this is the only way she can process the emotion of love—in the context of marriage and family, and not romantically.

Mervyn's deceased wife "put [him] through school" and "brought up the children." Therefore, as he conveys, "I've already done having someone take care of me" (57– 58), and now wants more. According to Badinter, men like Mervyn are "reconciled men" who are neither tough nor soft, but belong to a third category of men, able to "combine reliability and sensitivity" (161). She explains that a man becomes reconciled only after decades of contemplation because being a reconciled man requires "a change of mentality" as well as a "transformation of private and professional life" (162).

Mervyn has changed, and no longer wants what once made him happy. He is done with having someone take care of him, and now only cares about love. The climax of their conversation comes when Mervyn tells Sara that she is a gorgeous person, to which she responds that it is her sister who is Gorgeous. Mervyn says "No, you are, Sara Rosensweig" (58), and sings for her. This act not only helps Sara regain her identity as a Jewish woman, but also as a desirable woman. This illustrates that Mervyn is a reconciled man who is willing to share love with a woman, rather than feed on a woman's love:

> Sometime I look at you and see all my mother's photographs of her mother and her mother's entire family […] The men waving at the camera or smiling, holding up a cantaloupe! They were sweet, these men, some even handsome, but they couldn't hold a candle to the women. The women in their too-large dresses with their arms folded all had your brilliant eyes—they sparkled even from those curled and faded photographs. Unfortunately, most of them and their families didn't survive. But Sara, when I look into your eyes, I see those women's strength and their intelligence. To me you are a beautiful and most remarkable woman. (79)

For Mervyn, Sara represents the past, present, and future but, above all, his Jewish heritage and a connection to his deepest roots, both geographically and culturally. Sara recognizes that he means just as much to her as she does to him, and finally accepts Mervyn into her life. Mervyn's transformational effect on Sara becomes evident when she starts using his phrases, such as "There are real possibilities in life, Tessie" (106). This echo proves that Mervyn is the reason why Sara makes peace with her past and future. Balakian also suggests it is their shared Polish-Jewish experience that enables a romantic relationship to flourish, even though they seem, at first, an unlikely match (*Reading the Plays*, 123).

2.2. *AN AMERICAN DAUGHTER* (1997)

According to Salamon, Wasserstein wanted to write a serious play when she started *The Sisters Rosensweig*. However, critics did not take it as seriously as she expected. Thus, Wasserstein's next goal became "achieving the gravitas" that she had been avoiding in her plays (313). Wasserstein concentrates on the antifeminist backlash in *An American Daughter* (1997), [9] but without humor and with a specific focus on the role of men. *An American Daughter* is thus one of her most serious plays because she "combines the private and the public, the personal and the political spheres" (Czekay, "Not Having It All" 37).[10]

The 1992 election signaled a significant shift in American politics because it brought an end to three terms of Republican domination. A "New Democrat," William Jefferson Clinton, became the forty-second president of the United States, promising to support the middle class, which had been neglected for a long time, but through moderate and centrist means (Roark, et al. 949). With the Clintons, Wasserstein's generation, the Baby Boomers, "were no longer the up-and-comers but rather the ones who had arrived," and assumed the responsibility of ruling the country for the first time (Salamon 313). During his presidency, Clinton generally stood behind feminists, environmentalists, affirmative action advocates, and gay rights activists. For instance, he supported the Violence against Women Act of 1994, fought against air pollution and for national forests and parks, increased the minimum wage, and created AmeriCorps, which provided students with a chance to take part in community service in order to pay for their education. Additionally, African Americans, women, and Latinos became cabinet members, mayors, and department heads under the Clinton administration (Roark, et al. 950–951).

However, Clinton could not ignore conservatives, and gradually changed his policy on homosexuals in the military. He supported the "don't ask don't tell" policy, which forbade officials from asking military personnel about their sexual preferences, while also

[9] *An American Daugher* was presented on Broadway on April 13, 1997. It was directed by Daniel Sullivan, and Kate Nelligan starred as Lyssa Dent Hughes (*An American Daughter* 4). Meryl Streep played the lead role in the Seattle workshop.
[10] Kate Nelligan told Wasserstein on the opening night of the play that this play would change her life and Wassertein would be taken seriously now (Salamon 316).

prohibiting soldiers from being open about their sexuality. The policy drove the LGBTQ military community further into the closet, even sanctioning "homosexual behavior" as grounds for a dishonorable discharge. The Defense of Marriage Act, which reinforced the idea that marriage was between "one man and one woman" and banned state-licensed marriages (civil unions) between same-sex individuals, became law during Clinton's presidency, in 1996. His administration was also beset by scandals. There was an investigation concerning the firing of White House staff, the political use of FBI records, and the Clintons' real estate investments in Arkansas (Whitewater). However, the most serious charge came in 1998 when Clinton was accused of having a sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a twenty-one-year-old White House intern which, lying under oath, he initially denied, but was later forced to admit due to the compelling evidence against him (Roark, et al. 952–954).

History tends to focus on the political life of a president rather than his family life, unless there is a scandal that threatens politics. Kimmel focuses on Clinton's relationship with his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, in *Manhood in America* as a means of analyzing men's behavioral patterns in the 1990s. He summarizes Clinton's presidency as one of the few exceptions in American history because he did not fit the typical "national father" figure (*Manhood* 215). Like John F. Kennedy, and to a lesser extent Barack Obama, Clinton exuded confidence, charisma, and sex appeal. Kimmel also describes Bill Clinton's marriage with Hillary Rodham Clinton who, according to antifeminists, is a career-oriented "ball-busting bitch," as a partnership-marriage (*Manhood* 216). This is why, according to Kimmel, Hillary forgave Bill over and over again, standing by her man and attacking his mistresses as "nuts and sluts." Defending her husband's reputation became the equivalent of defending her own, because in essence they have a political marriage, with each drawing strength and popularity from the other. As a result of this, many saw Bill Clinton as a "henpecked husband" who hid behind his "careerist wife's business suits" (*Manhood* 216). Wasserstein admired the Clintons as she believed they were a "revolutionary couple," with Hillary, as First Lady and first partner, taking responsibility for healthcare system reform (Salamon 328–329). However, as suggested by *An American Daughter,* she clearly had reservations about the political system to which they belonged.

Lawyer Zoe Baird, who Bill Clinton nominated for the position of Attorney General, became the inspiration for *An American Daughter,* which criticizes the victimization of professional women by the sexist "search and destroy politics" of conservative, male dominated society (Park 160). Baird had to withdraw her nomination because she did not pay the Social Security tax of a childcare worker from Peru. *Time* magazine and *The New York Times* presented this scandal as "Nannygate" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 139). As Balakian states, Wasserstein was disturbed by this sexism—a male nominee would have never been forced to withdraw his nomination over a nanny. Back taxes and a fine would have been paid, and the scandal would have blown over. This ran much deeper into the realm of gender politics. Baird's need for a nanny called her motherhood into question, and suggested that women could not "have it all." The message was that they should steer clear of the male sphere, especially the world of politics (139).

An American Daughter focuses on Lyssa Dent Hughes, a forty-two-year-old liberal physician who is deeply concerned about women's health and wants to enter politics so she can educate Americans about her cause. A Clintonesque president nominates Lyssa to be Surgeon General, but instead, her professional life is destroyed by "connections and disconnections, support and betrayal" (Mandl 10). Her father, Alan Hughes, is a conservative senator from Indiana and her great-great grandfather is Ulysses S. Grant and the source of her first name; thus, Lyssa is closely linked to the American political patriarchy. She has two sons, and is married to Walter Hughes, a liberal sociology professor who has not published serious work in five years. Lyssa's friend, Judith Kaufman, who is divorced from a gay man, is a Jewish African American oncologist who desperately wants to have a child and is receiving fertility treatments (Wasserstein's voice in the play).

Judith and Lyssa represent the old generation of Second Wave feminists whereas Quincy Quince, a twenty-seven-year-old journalist and political commentator, is a "postfeminist" who sees life from a different perspective. She is an opportunistic, arrogant, competitive, aggressive, and hyper-confident woman who sees no problem in having an affair with Walter, since everything other women have—jobs, careers, families, and husbands—is fair game. Quincy, Walter, Alan, Morrow (Lyssa's conservative gay friend), and

journalist Timber Tucker cause Lyssa's downfall and fuel the backlash against feminism that undergirds the play.

An American Daughter is a "catfight" over men and power as much as it is a political play, complementing the changes in feminism and the men's movement that were occurring in the 1980s and 90s. These changes are reflected in *The Heidi Chronicles* as well (the younger women want to marry and have kids by the time they are thirty) and anyone's man (i.e., Scoop) is up for grabs, including those of older feminists. Instead of working for equality together, they fight over men, jobs, status, and careers, which undercuts the idea of feminist sisterhood and collaboration. Wasserstein compares and contrasts Quincy with Lyssa and Judith to comment on this catfight and backlash. Judith and Lyssa are Second Wave feminists for whom the "personal is political" and for whom sisterhood still matters. However, the 1980s saw a transformation in feminism from "collective rights" (we) to "individual rights" (me). With the rise of the individualism of the "me" decade, feminism became unrecognizable and connected to impossible social and professional expectations, double standards, and hostility against successful women (Rosen 327–328).

Quincy symbolizes this new postfeminist generation, becoming part of the backlash against older feminists and sisterhood. As Rosen states, postfeminists took part in the male-driven backlash by embracing "a life dedicated to consumption and self-absorption" (Rosen 328) in order to gain power. Likewise, Quincy is a selfish narcissist (me) who breaks free from the "old conventions" of the Second Wave (we), believing that the only way to be liberated is to "put yourself first" (Douglas 246). Wasserstein uses Quincy to illustrate that the catfight among women was not only political or professional, but also personal. Although she states that she is working for equality, Quincy helps the men in the play ruin Lyssa's life and career by using the media as her platform. As Wasserstein shows, second wavers and postfeminists were now, in the late 1990s, at each other's throats; sisterhood is broken and feminism is on the verge of extinction.

Unlike Geoffrey and Peter, who are liberal bisexual and homosexual men, respectively, in *An American Daughter*, the gay character, Morrow, is a politically conservative Republican. Morrow stands for equal rights, individual liberty, individual responsibility,

the free market, and strong national defense (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 145). He is also against abortion and, along with the other men in the play, prompts the withdrawal of Lyssa's nomination, even though he is supposed to be a close friend. In the drafts of the play, it is Morrow who initially tells the media that Lyssa did not respond to a jury notice. However, in the final version of *An American Daughter*, Lyssa's husband Walter destroys her career by revealing this fact, which cuts even deeper. Morrow, instead, accuses Lyssa of elitism during an interview, which opens a Pandora's Box of scandal (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 140).

In this case, Lyssa's "scandal" reveals the values of a country whose citizens are "content to allow its priorities to be determined by those who have no concern for the issues at stake" (Bigsby 364). Lyssa's nomination and withdrawal are significant because they expose the hypocrisy in politics, the continuing backlash against feminist women, and the media's contribution to this backlash. Wasserstein also dramatizes another important issue in *An American Daughter*—why women hold so few seats in Congress (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 142). Baird was victimized because she did not meet her duties as a mother. Similarly, the media focuses on Lyssa's statements about her mother, which gives way to public criticism of Lyssa's own motherhood and womanhood. Balakian also claims that the interview "becomes the nineties vehicle for betrayal" ("Wendy Wasserstein" 228). Above all, however, Wasserstein urges the reader/audience to ask him/herself how the situation might have turned out differently if the nominee were a man.

2.2.1. Successful Wives and Intimidated Husbands

Walter seems to support his wife on the surface; however, his words are ultimately transformed into "empty gestures" (Bigsby 365) because he is intimidated by her success and dominant attitude in their relationship. Wasserstein reverses gender roles in Walter and Lyssa's relationship by attributing male qualities to Lyssa, while portraying Walter as a passive husband who only watches Lyssa from the sidelines.

Lyssa is ambitious while Walter is content with what he has; Lyssa is a doctor, traditionally a male profession, whereas Walter is a sociologist, a field American society

has historically deemed "appropriate for women." Moreover, Walter spends time at home with his children, while Lyssa is busy in the public sphere. Despite her problems, Lyssa fights "like a man" and does not surrender. She draws strength from her great-great grandfather, General U.S. Grant, whose genes and motto ("rise and continue") she shares (74).

Walter is generally a passive underachiever who is overwhelmed by his wife's accomplishments. While Lyssa is one of the fifty top leaders over forty, Walter is on the waiting list (33). He seeks revenge by cheating on Lyssa and by insulting her, sometimes publicly. Given the political context of the play, Lyssa's relationship with Walter, and her media victimization, may suggest Wasserstein's sympathy for Hillary Clinton, who was also betrayed by her husband and victimized by the media (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 141).

In *Feminism's Unfinished Legacy: Critiques of Gender and Racial Inequality in Contemporary American Women's Literature*, Tanfer Tunc claims that Walter is actually in a midlife crisis and is trying to "recapture his youth," which is probably caused by his wife's lack of intimacy and sexual attention. A selfish and egotistical man, he finds this intimacy in Quincy, a selfish and egotistical woman (75–76). Wasserstein describes Quincy Quince, Walter's former student, as "a very pretty woman of about twenty seven in a mini skirt and leather bomber jacket" (8), drawing a picture of a new generation of postfeminists for whom consumer culture has become more important than female solidarity and equality. For women like Quincy, designer clothes and cosmetics are vehicles of power and control (Douglas 254). Lyssa despises Quincy, and Walter punishes his wife by sleeping with a woman she hates.

Quincy calls Lyssa "super-woman retro chic" (8), reflecting how this new generation of women sees the former. Quincy has written a book, *Prisoner of Gender*, in which she, like a true postfeminist, reinterprets feminism according to contemporary social trends. She claims that women like Lyssa are "prisoners of gender" because they are superwomen who take on too many responsibilities, causing them to neglect their families and become trapped by the burdens of feminism and equality. Instead, she believes, they should embrace their female power, not as "superwomen" reifying the patriarchal structure by

imitating men, but as sexual, seductive, and intelligent beings who draw strength from their femininity. Here, *Prisoner of Gender* is also a reference to Norman Mailer's *Prisoner of Sex* (1971), a response to Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) in which she accuses Mailer of being frightened of losing his male power to women. Aligning with men like Mailer, and the patriarchal system in general, *Prisoner of Gender* is Quincy's response to Second Wave feminists. Postfeminists "watched their mothers disintegrate after divorce, stumble into new jobs, or burn out from reinventing themselves over and over again" (Rosen 275), and openly declared that they did not want to make the same "mistakes" their mothers made.

Walter, who believes feminism is a relic like Soviet communism, is attracted to Quincy, one of the fifty top leaders under thirty. According to *Time* magazine, Quincy is reshaping feminism according to the twenty-first century. Quincy, on the other hand, admires her mentor Walter, whereas Lyssa does not appreciate his work, which has grown stale over the years. Walter is unhappy with his life and is intimidated by successful people, who make him feel worthless and inferior:

> I live in one of the nicest homes in Georgetown. My wife is Ulysses S. Grant's fifth-generation granddaughter. My children are both at the Sidwell Friends School and floating through cyberspace, three of my classmates from Harvard are on the cabinet and my five-year-old book is a standard for deconstructing liberalism. Am I happy, Quincy Quince? I want a Bloody Mary. (34)

Lyssa's family is respectable, his classmates are more successful, and even his sons are "ahead" of Walter, making him feel suffocated and powerless. Therefore, following this confession of insecurity, he kisses Quincy, which Lyssa witnesses, as a way to reclaim his manhood. Walter is attracted to Quincy because she does not humiliate him like Lyssa, and praises him both as a man and a scholar, providing him with the confidence he is lacking.

Kimmel suggests that "if masculinity could not be achieved at work, perhaps it could be achieved by working out." Thus, some American men became obsessed with health and fitness in the 1980s and 90s to "explore the boundaries" of their bodies, which became

"another masculine testing ground" (*Manhood* 224).[11] Walter, who runs long distance every day, tries to prove his masculinity to Lyssa by making her pull up his shirt so that she can feel his six-pack. Lyssa mockingly reassures him that he has "the strong virile arms of a twenty-eight-year-old male hustler" and should be a Green Beret (19).

In another scene, Walter compares one of their sons to himself, and the other to Lyssa: "It's amazing how much Kip is like me. He's very sensitive. Very imaginative. You should have heard the stories he made up about the Space Shuttle. He's hilarious. Nicholas is much more like you. He's perfectly happy home alone with his computer" (16–17). By doing so, Walter glorifies himself as loving, caring, and sensitive, while revealing that he finds Lyssa academic and cold. Like Walter, their sons wait for Lyssa's love and attention, but do not receive it, and resent the fact they are not the center of her world. Consequently, Kip and Nicholas watch their mother on television and, like little patriarchs in training, focus on their mother's mistakes: "Mom, Mom… you made a mistake" (7).

Walter resembles Scoop from *The Heidi Chronicles* with respect to his ideas about Lyssa as a working woman. He is disturbed by Lyssa's success, just like Scoop is intimidated by Heidi. This is one reason why Walter claims to be supportive, but constantly mocks Lyssa, whom he occasionally calls Lizard: "I think this job thing is making you a little nutso. Look, worst case scenario, if it doesn't happen I won't be profiled as one of the most enlightened husbands in America. So what? Even in your present overworked and highly emotional condition, I'll still love you" (17). Like other male Wasserstein characters, he describes successful women as "nuts" and hysterical, and presents Lyssa's personal qualities as negatives, claiming he loves her "despite" these "drawbacks." Lyssa responds by quoting Quincy Quince, who claims that sweetness is a camouflage for repressed hostility.

Walter's statements about Quincy express that he respects her more than he respects Lyssa: "Judith has no right to pass judgment on someone as valuable as Quincy. Quincy is committed to making a tired ideology new" (17). For Walter, Lyssa's and Judith's

[11] Women were also obsessed with beauty in the 1980s and 90s. For further discussion of this issue, see p. 93.

feminism is old fashioned and no longer valid. He accuses Lyssa of having lost her curiosity and being stuck in the past, which makes her dull. His support of Quincy and Morrow also reveals that Walter is part of the backlash against feminism. He undervalues feminist achievements and deep down does not believe in their struggle. Instead, he invites Morrow, a pro-life conservative gay man, to the interview so that Morrow will expose Lyssa as a "pro-choice, pro-national health insurance commie pinko" (18). Moreover, he openly praises Quincy and Morrow ("tomorrow") because they are "looking directly to the future" (19).

In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel argues that in the 1990s, men's rights groups claimed that men did not need liberation from masculinity; they needed to liberate themselves from women with their tired demands for equality and empowerment (107). He also stresses that men's rights activists knew what they wanted from women, and that they loved traditional women "who won't compete outside the home for scarce jobs that should go to men anyway." These men, whom Kimmel calls "angry white men," were also confused about their own social position, and could not decide whether they should accept the traditional masculine role of patriarch, or reject it as liberated men (108–109).

Clearly, Walter is an "angry white man." He blames Lyssa's ambition for his masculinity crisis, and is tired of suffering because she, as Quincy points out, is a superwoman and a prisoner of gender. Lyssa is not only a successful physician, but is also one step ahead career-wise with her nomination. Thus Walter, jealous and desperate to restore his masculinity, does not hesitate to reveal, during the TV interview, that in the recent past, Lyssa was called for jury duty, but failed to appear. The final notice arrived on an extremely hectic day when both of their children were sick and the nanny was not available. Moreover, there was a problem at the hospital where she worked. Overwhelmed by her superwoman life, Lyssa could no longer keep track of the details (she had become a prisoner of gender) and let the notice slide. This oversight, exposed by her husband and blown out of proportion by misogynistic politicians and the antifeminist media, would cause the disgrace of this American daughter.

2.2.2. Mission Changed: Conservative Gays

As Connell conveys, some gays in the 1990s, most of whom did not have a commitment to the Gay Liberation of the 1970s, felt like they had nothing in common with the movement, and thus had no obligation to uphold its liberal positions ("A Very Straight Gay" 748). They had not fought for their rights in the 1970s, but were rather born into them, and, as adults, had always been out of the closet. Like many postfeminists, these "postgays" decided that conservatism was a better fit for their social, political, and economic beliefs (Vaid 106, 125). Some became Log Cabin Republicans, sharing "a number of values with the religious right, such as churchgoing, restricted abortion rights, militarism, and reduced 'welfare' spending" (Rogers and Lott 502). As Mary F. Rogers and Philip B. Lott describe, Log Cabin Republicans are gay members of the Republican Party who reject "queer" politics, "leftist" projects, and "earring-wearing liberals" with their "libertine lifestyles." Mostly white, middle and upper middle class men, they aim to educate gays about the self-reliant principles of the Republican Party, going back to the log cabin days of Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president (500).

Lyssa's conservative, Republican, gay friend, Morrow, reflects Wasserstein's "desire to create an uncharacteristically dubious mouthpiece regarding gay—and specifically, gay male—culture" (Ciociola 102). Rogers and Lott summarize that the Log Cabin Republicans not only used, but also reinforced, the feminist backlash to their advantage. As yet another group of angry white men, gay Republicans expressed "status frustration" and "displaced hostility," which they channeled towards feminists (503–504). No longer allies, such gay men suddenly became the enemy—there was no room for compromise, collaboration, and solidarity anymore, and the days of Heidis and Peters were over. As a representative of this movement, Morrow defends his position by claiming that it is the inconsistency of the left that has made him support the Right Wing: "Why are you so bitter Judith? You're the jewel in the crown of the great society. Walter, this is another perfect example of the inconsistency of the left and the reason for my happy transition to the far right" (22). Associating liberals with elitism, Morrow believes Lyssa's nomination will help establish a new "political dynasty like the Roosevelts or the Kennedys," as he sarcastically comments, because Americans always value the elite (37).

Morrow and Walter begin the destruction of Lyssa's career at the infamous interview. That Morrow does not think about the consequences of his actions illustrates that he is only concerned with his own "well-being" (me) rather than the "social direction of America" (we) (Balakian, "Wendy Wasserstein" 229). Morrow believes attacking Lyssa is fair game because after all, she is a token woman who has been nominated not for her competency, but because she is "bland and unobjectionable," especially after the previous nomination, which turned out to be a disaster (22). In Morrow's opinion, Lyssa is a last resort and not a serious nominee; thus, she can be sacrificed to the media. Much like Walter, he refuses to acknowledge or appreciate Lyssa's professional qualifications, perhaps out of jealousy.

Conservative gay men like Morrow disapprove of feminists because in their opinion, such women "go too far." Failing to recognize how sex, sexual, and gender discrimination are linked in American society, they approach feminism in much the same way that most heterosexual men approach it—as a threatening transgression of social rules and cultural norms (Connell, "A Very Straight Gay" 747). Morrow is as sexist as any heterosexual man could ever be, and Judith has no problem pointing this out to him. Judith is also disturbed by the fact that gay men do not pay any attention to women's health issues, even though women are affected by AIDS, and they have always supported the fight against it: "Do you know how many AIDS benefits I have been to? Do you know how many donations I've made? But I'm still waiting for one gay man to voluntarily come to my hospital and say, 'I'm concerned about a disease that's decimating my mother, my aunts, and my sisters'" (25–26), such as breast cancer. Like in *The Heidi Chronicles*, Wasserstein expects gay men to support women here too, but this solidarity never comes—just the opposite. Perhaps this is also a criticism of her own gay friends, who were so absorbed in their own lives that they ignored women's health issues, like infertility and cancer, both of which would impact Wasserstein's life.

Wasserstein also refers to the "don't ask don't tell" policy regarding gays in the military through Morrow's and Charlotte's conversation about Timber Tucker. Charlotte claims that it is impossible for Timber to be a gay man because he is a war reporter. On the other hand, Morrow states that "Chubby, there are gay men who served with distinction in the military and there are straight men who avoided the draft by dabbling in Canadian

pornography" (27). Here, Wasserstein criticizes the hypocritical policy by suggesting how homosexuality has been politicized and used for different agendas, and how masculinity, the military, and heterosexuality have nothing to do with each other. Each can be manipulated, when it is convenient.

While as a pro-military Republican Morrow supports gays in the military, he is against abortion, claiming that life begins at conception (he does not comment on the life lost through war). He also states that human identity, as well as sexuality, is determined by genes (30), which interestingly challenges the conservative belief that homosexuality is an acquired (environmental) sin/voluntary life choice that can be "cured" through medical intervention, marriage, and prayer, among other things. Despite his own hypocritical elitism—he believes the legal system should be able to control women's bodies, but does not see this as a form of patriarchal sexism—he accuses Lyssa of being a hypocritical elite, giving Lyssa's evasion of jury duty as an example, while ignoring all the reasons: "All I'm saying is this is precisely the hypocrisy of the elitist left-wing thinking. For example, your daughter, the wife of one of my best friend, surgeon general nominee, a woman of impeccable commitment, at the forefront of women's health issues, pro-choice, pro-gay, has never served on a jury" (38). He reinforces this idea—that Lyssa is a hypocrite and an elitist—by suggesting that Lyssa believes that "the people who do answer their 'invitations,' who do serve on juries, are less crucial to their family and work" (38), painting her as an out-of-touch feminist "bitch" and snob. By adopting a male heterosexist position, Morrow, as a gay man, not only proves his "manhood," but also his worthiness in the high-stakes world of American politics. For him, destroying Lyssa's career is nothing more than a casualty of war, and all is fair in love and war.

2.2.3. Male Dominated Media and the Backlash

Connell states that in the 1970s, men were willing to work with women believing that women's liberation would lead to men's liberation. In fact, the Men's Liberation Movement emerged out of the belief that sexism could only end when men and women fought together. However, this movement split into different groups in the 1980s with the emergence of antifeminist men's rights groups, which also contributed to the backlash against feminism (*Masculinities* 250). The media presented "heterosexuality, male

authority and feminine nurturance" as normative, and made money from conservative values. This reinforced the backlash's cultural power (Connell, *Masculinities* 252–253).

In *An American Daughter*, the media is depicted as being overwhelmingly male and concerned with reinforcing traditional masculine codes. It revels in "the power to set agenda," and those agendas almost always prioritize men and their issues (Douglas 293). Act 1, scene 2 begins with Walter watching television. The "anchor*man*" is discussing Lyssa's nomination, but does not mention Lyssa's accomplishments. Rather, he emphasizes that Lyssa is the daughter of Senator Alan Hughes and a descendant of Ulysses S. Grant, and that she was nominated after the rejection of a male candidate (15). Not only is Lyssa identified through American patriarchy, which strips her of her own identity, but she is posited as "sloppy seconds"—a viable choice only after all the other choices have been exhausted.

Journalist Timber Tucker enjoys asking questions that place Lyssa in a difficult position and provoke the public's anger, prioritizing his ratings over the truth. He does not ask about Lyssa's qualifications, but instead focuses on Lyssa as a woman, wife, and mother. "Timber, as a TV reporter, delves into Lyssa's sore spot, jury duty, and pinpoints it as the problem of Lyssa's family, her character," and her career (Park 166). He exploits the popular 1990s idea that "feminism was a curse," and that "only a few grotesque crones were still feminists" (Douglas 276). Feminism was to blame for everything; even the Nannygate scandal was "an outgrowth of the seventies having-it-all mythology" (30). As Quincy claims, Lyssa's problem is the problem of her generation, with its urge to demonstrate its capacity in every area, never stopping to consider the consequences of late marriages, infertility, or careers (45). Not wanting to "repeat the same mistakes," the younger generation, assisted by the media, relished challenging old school "women's libbers" (Douglas 232–233). While Lyssa's generation fought for legal, social, and economic rights, Quincy's generation simply wants to "come home to a warm penis" (29).

Timber attempts to tarnish Lyssa's mothering skills, just like the media sullied Zoe Baird's maternal abilities, by asking questions like: "Are you home when your kids get in from school?" (30). Lyssa, who believes in equal rights for men and women, asks if Timber would be home in the same situation. This personal question leads to a discussion

of Lyssa missing jury duty because of her busy schedule, which becomes the core of the scandal. Moreover, her "traditional" mother becomes a foil for Lyssa's "questionable" motherhood. When asked to describe her deceased mother, Lyssa remarks: "I don't remember my mother having any sense of adventure at all. She was the kind of ordinary Indiana housewife who took pride in her icebox cakes and cheese pimento canapés" (37). Timber uses these statements about jury duty and her "ordinary" mother to depict Lyssa as an elitist snob and feminist bitch who devalues mothers, trivializes their work (including that of her own mother), and is out-of-touch with middle America. When Timber says "I tried to warn you" (67), it comes off as a paternalistic threat, which is exactly what it is meant to be. Timber knows what he is doing is not ethical, but feels the need to do it to survive professionally. Thus, Timber symbolizes the power of men, and the media, to ruin women's lives (Balakian, "Wendy Wasserstein" 229).

2.2.4. Conservative Fathers and Feminist Daughters

Lyssa's father, Senator Alan Hughes, represents old school male chauvinism. He brings in an advisor for Lyssa, Billy, only after her public image has been ruined by Timber Tucker. He believes that she can validate herself in the eyes of the public by constructing an image of a "loving family" (50), but keeps his distance in order to protect himself and his own political career. Like the other men in the play, he devalues Lyssa, calls her "Mousey" in front of everyone (and his wife Charlotte "Chubby"), does not believe that Lyssa can take care of herself, and is in need of male assistance and guidance. The nickname he uses for Lyssa exemplifies his general attitude towards his daughter—that she is squeaky, insignificant, and perhaps even an annoying pest.

Billy arranges a follow-up interview, and instructs Lyssa to highlight her roles as a working mother, a loving wife, and a traditional woman who goes hiking with her family and to church every Sunday (49). He tells Lyssa to avoid all feminist rhetoric, including any mention of women's rights and issues, and to hold the interview in the kitchen which feels more "homey" (50). Being interviewed in the kitchen, he asserts, will also give the impression that she has the support of her family, and that she embraces domesticity, especially making icebox cakes and cheese pimento canapés. Ironically, the men in her life decide that reinforcing traditional female gender roles is the only way to save her

career, which was destroyed by her resistance to such tropes in the first place. By doing so, Lyssa is not only being forced to "sell out" deeply-held feminist values and beliefs, but she is also strengthening the case of postfeminists, angry white men, and men's rights advocates who claimed that feminism was an outdated and destructive relic, and that women were better off embracing their femininity and coming home to a warm penis.

Although he has been involved in politics for a very long time, Lyssa's father prefers not to be involved with Lyssa's problem because he feels it might besmirch his own reputation. On the surface, he seems supportive; however, he wants Lyssa to change her public image by appearing more traditional and reliant on the patriarchal system. Thus, Alan feels comfortable when Billy expects Lyssa to pretend to be someone that she is not. Even though he has been "a senator for twenty-four years and a congressman for eight years before that" (63), he claims that he cannot help his daughter. In reality, he does not want to damage his own career and does not want Lyssa to be in politics, which is a man's world and should stay that way. He treats all women like baby dolls, and maintains his power as a patriarchal politician by keeping them in their place. With no other options remaining, Lyssa withdraws her nomination, ending her short-lived political career, and returns to her life as a wife, mother, and physician.

2.3. CONCLUSION

The two plays discussed in this chapter focus on the different roles of men in the 1990s. Although *The Sisters Rosensweig* exhibits glimmers of optimism in terms of male and female relationships, *An American Daughter* is arguably Wasserstein's most pessimistic play with overtly conservative and hypocritical male characters. Through these plays, Wasserstein reflects the conflicting sexual politics and coexisting masculinities of the late twentieth century.

While the female characters in *The Sisters Rosensweig* are mature and settled, Geoffrey is generally indecisive about what he really wants in life, leaving Pfeni because he misses men. Thus, as Deborah K. Anderson affirms, Geoffrey represents "a typical liberated late-twentieth-century male position" willing to please the woman in his life, but unwilling to learn how to do so (111). His confusion leads to problems in the relationship, which

reveal Pfeni's real concern in life: "Although she is a successful, professional career woman like her sisters, Pfeni also needs and pines for a supportive man in her life" (Park 149). However, Geoffrey fails to be this ideal man for Pfeni.

In *Isn't It Romantic*, the male characters try to control and dominate women's lives, whereas there is a more balanced relationship between the sexes in *The Sisters Rosensweig*. Yong-Nam Park states that "Not pushy like Marty, Merv and Geoffrey, for instance are kind gentlemen to their woman partners. Merv sings songs for Sara while Geoffrey dances for Pfeni. They are, in a sense, romantic, pleasant men for their women and they respect women's opinions and their decisions" (151). While Paul and Marty are patriarchal figures who want uncomplaining wives who will be mothers to them and their children, Mervyn wants a woman who has improved herself intellectually and who has more going for her than housework. Mervyn helps Sara reclaim her identity by helping her rediscover the past in order to be able to commit herself to the future. He is the first person to call her Sara Rosensweig in thirty years, which represents Sara's reidentification with her past, culture, and religion, and the beginning of her healing process (Bigsby 359–361).

In an interview with Laurie Winer, Wasserstein herself calls Mervyn a magician and states that his appearance in the lives of the Rosensweig sisters "turned the play upside down" (14). Mervyn reverses gender roles and allows Sara to decide when to begin or end their relationship. On the other hand, Geoffrey represents the sexually liberated man. He too transgresses gender roles when in a relationship with a woman whom he expects will improve herself and be independent. In short, "the two men in *The Sisters Rosensweig* are 'much nicer' and 'more catalysts for action' than the men in *Isn't It Romantic*" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 131).

Although the United States elected a Democrat at the beginning of the 90s, the public was still conservative, valuing women only as mothers and wives. The male dominated media bombarded Americans with role models for women that reminded them of their traditional duties. The number of women in the public sphere increased; however, they were still expected to complete a double shift—one at work, and the other at home. Double standards pervaded American society, but instead of women complaining, it was

now men who aired their displeasure. In *An American Daughter*, Walter is disappointed because Lyssa did not fit his definition of the perfect wife and mother, which became humiliating for him since it threatened his manliness and position as a husband and father.

Lyssa's career and her nomination to the post of Surgeon General are sabotaged by the men in her life (Tunc 56). As Wasserstein demonstrates, "smart, capable women are routinely kept from important centers of power" (Dolan 448), mostly by such men. Like Peter, Morrow is indifferent to women's issues and prioritizes his own rights as a gay man, reflecting the selfish attitudes of the 1990s and the crumbling male-female partnerships of previous decades. Nevertheless, Lyssa continues to turn to the other men in her life for support—"her husband (sexually), her father (politically), Morrow (socially), her sons (maternally), Timber (ethically), and the president (professionally) who does not speak for Lyssa in order to protect his own political reputation" (Tunc 76)—but repeatedly, they all turn their backs on her. Clearly, the days of solidarity are over, and perhaps Wasserstein is even warning feminists that this may be the price they will ultimately have to pay.

Lyssa's husband, Walter, is overshadowed by his wife, and uses this as an excuse to cheat on her with Quincy Quince, who is out to grab whatever money and power she can, even if it means stepping on other women as she climbs the social ladder. That Walter cheats on his wife with a woman who believes Lyssa has lost her soul, and who no longer sees feminism as relevant or even beneficial (she adopts the individualist postfeminist "me" and not the collective Second Wave "we" approach), suggests that men still undervalue, and are intimidated by, women who are successful in both their professional and personal lives. Labeling Lyssa a "superwoman," Walter believes that feminism is dead and critiques her actions throughout the play. When Walter and Alan are compared, Walter is far more dangerous. He seems to be a liberal but is not, whereas Alan maintains his conservative position from beginning to the end, adhering to the traditional male chauvinist stereotype. Tucker, on the other hand, represents the male dominated media, which wants Lyssa to suppress her feminist attitudes and replace them with a feminine housewife mask.

All these male characters preserve their positions in society while causing Lyssa's personal, professional, and political downfall. As Dolan states, Wasserstein offered "a critique of Clinton era gender betrayals" with a presentation of the different expectations that Americans had of women (444). In the 1990s, women remained active participants in the public sphere, as long as they did not pose a threat, whereas men were still not expected to work within the domestic sphere, leaving this responsibility, once again, to women, who continued to work double time for equality.

CHAPTER 3

OLD MONEY (2000) AND *THIRD* (2005)

3.1. *OLD MONEY* (2000)

Despite their many personal and political differences, Wendy Wasserstein's brother Bruce played an important role in her life. She wrote a musical comedy, *Miami*, about the strong bond between Cathy and her beloved brother, Jonathan, who are based on Wasserstein and her brother, Bruce (Salamon 45). Wasserstein loved her brother, who was as famous as Wendy herself, the former a high-profile, billionaire investment banker who represented everything that was wrong with Wall Street vulture capitalism. For instance, when *Isn't It Romantic* opened at Playwright's Horizon, Bruce was taking part in a deal that merged Texaco and Getty Oil (Salamon 227). Salamon also states that the two siblings had more differences than similarities: Wendy was warm and concerned about conveying a message to the public through her plays, whereas Bruce, a cold, competitive, and greedy man, cared only for money and begetting heirs. Thus, their lifestyles differed in many respects:

> Wendy lived in a series of sublets, while her brother moved from a ten-room Fifth Avenue apartment to one that had fifteen rooms (and six bathrooms, four fireplaces). She escaped to the Hamptons to write in an apartment over a garage; he bought a sixteen-acre beachfront estate, eventually becoming one of the biggest tax payers in East Hampton, a community with a disproportionate allotment of millionaires and billionaires. (228–229)

These differences inspired Wasserstein to write a play, *Old Money*, based on Bruce and his lifestyle. The play is Wasserstein's attempt to understand "the excesses of the world her brother occupied" (Salamon 359). That is, the play reflects the greed of Bruce's world, which equated money with power and masculinity. Balakian also attributes the underlying reason why Wasserstein wrote such a different play, both structurally and thematically, to her desire to understand America better. To do so, she needed to "explore not only gender, but also money and class" (*Reading the Plays* 165).

In *Old Money,* Wasserstein uses the same setting, the Pfeiffer mansion, in two different time periods in order to analyze the forces—like money—that shape society.[12] Wasserstein compares and contrasts four generations with a specific focus on the differences between the generations of fathers and sons. The play is "an anthropological study of the personalities that acquire money and its power" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 174). Evoking the similarities between Gilded Age and contemporary America, in *Old Money* Wasserstein analyzes economics "in terms of social and cultural change" while comparing and contrasting two centuries (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 166–167).

The play spans two parties at the same Manhattan mansion in two different eras (in the early 1900s and the present). The host of the contemporary party is Jeffrey Bernstein who is "a legend in high-risk arbitrage and at the pinnacle of new-money society" (Wasserstein, *Old Money* xv). He has restored the Pfeiffer mansion and lives there with his son, Ovid. His guests are a Hollywood director Sid, Sid's second wife Penny, Jeffrey's wife's sister Saulina, who is a sculptor, a party publicist Flinty McGee, an eighteen-year-old would-be singer Caroline (Sid's daughter), and Vivian Pfeiffer who is the grandson of the robber baron who built the house. The Gilded Age guests are Schuyler Lynch, who is the architect of the Pfeiffer mansion, Arnold Strauss who is in the department store business, Toby, the seventeen-year-old son of the robber baron, Pfeiffer's mistress Florence Deroot, Sally Webster, who is an artist, Betina Brevoort, who is the protector of the status quo, the seventeen-year-old Irish maid, Mary Gallagher, and Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer, the robber baron and "coal miner's son from Uniondale who later owns the coal mines and builds railroads across America" (xvii). As with all of Wasserstein's plays, the characters are inspired by people in her life. For instance, Jeffrey Bernstein is based on Bruce, while Ovid is based on Bruce's older son. Saulina draws on Wasserstein herself, and Sid Nercessian is a reflection of Harvey Weinstein who was "the symbol of Wendy's ongoing irritation with Hollywood" (Salamon 360–362).

One of the most prominent qualities of the play is that each actor/actress has two roles, one in the present and the other in the past, as conveyed by the list of characters. This is not coincidental or random; Wasserstein deploys this technique to reinforce connections

[12] The play debuted at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater on December 17, 2000 and was directed by Mark Brokaw (Watson 1).

between the two eras. Thus, characters have doppelgangers to show that both ages "consist of social climbers and opportunists, and also some dreamers and artists" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 170): Schuyler Lynch and Vivian Pfeiffer; Arnold Strauss and Jeffrey Bernstein; Toby and Ovid Bernstein; Florence Deroot and Flinty McGee; Sally Webster and Saulina Webb; Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer and Sid Nercessian; Betina Brevoort and Penny Nercessian; and Mary Gallagher and Caroline Nercessian. "By doubling eight characters in the past and the present," Wasserstein finds "the rhythm of a dance" (*Old Money* x) between her male and female characters.

3.1.1. The Gilded Age: Robber Barons and Manhood

The Gilded Age (1865–1900) marked a period of incredible industrialist capitalist growth, and the completion of the transition from agricultural economy to urban industry. This growth reshaped politics, affecting not only the economic but also the cultural framework of American society. Industrialization evoked hope along with fear because the gap between the rich and the poor increased drastically. Big business helped men like Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and J.P. Morgan to become American "captains of industry" and "robber barons" (Roark, et al. 523).

Before the Civil War (1861–1865), wealth was measured by possessions like livestock or property. They were replaced by money when the economic basis of the United States transformed from agriculture into modern industries like railroads, steel, and oil, after the war (Roark, et al. 523). With the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, east and west were linked, enabling an exchange of goods and culture. In a very short time, railroad tracks reached 193,000 miles in length, and this became the first big business in the United States (Roark, et al. 525). It opened the way for social climbers, like Pfeiffer's father, who was a coal miner, to make enormous sums of money in the railroad business. Although railroads were privately owned, they were financially supported by the government. However, robber barons like Jay Gould, who bought and sold railroad stock on Wall Street, and Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer from *Old Money*, were only interested in the profit they would make (Roark, et al. 525).

Jay Gould was “the most hated man in America” because he did not “play by the rules” and prevented fair competition. Unlike Jay Gould, Scottish immigrant Andrew Carnegie became a “hero” with his generosity late in life. Rising from poverty, Carnegie refused to speculate in business and pursued success in the steel industry instead. While Gould earned money through stock speculation, Carnegie focused on iron mining and steel manufacturing, controlling every aspect of production through a business practice known as “vertical integration.” Not only did he vastly increase the amount of steel being produced in the United States, but he also cut the cost of making rails from $58 to $25 a ton. He challenged managers, fired unproductive workers, and gave his best employees shares as a reward, helping to initiate the trend of worker-owned companies that continues today. Despite his corporate innovations and philanthropic contributions, like Carnegie Hall for example, his employees worked long hours with low wages. Another notable businessman was John D. Rockefeller, who rose from poverty to supreme wealth through the oil business. Learning how to bargain from his peddler father, he relied on rebates, secret deals, predatory pricing, and “horizontal integration” through holding companies, to eliminate his competitors. In fact, after the publication of investigative journalist Ida Tarbell’s muckraking exposé, *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904), which revealed his cut-throat business skills, Rockefeller slept with a gun under his pillow (Roark, et al. 527–529). Thus, while these men helped build the country and are often considered to be captains of American industry, their underhanded practices also earned them the notorious title of “robber barons,” with historians still debating these distinctions today.

The wealth of the Gilded Age was reinforced by the emergence of “finance capitalism,” with banks and bankers guiding investments. The most famous finance capitalist was John Pierpont Morgan whose ultimate aim was to eliminate competition through central control. Unlike most of the robber barons, he came from a wealthy family, valuing character and reputation, and despising climbers and speculators. He became a powerful broker by playing an important role in “the reorganization of the railroads and the creation of industrial giants.” Morgan also challenged Carnegie and eventually took over his company, creating the largest corporation in the world at the time, U.S. Steel. While Carnegie was after wealth, Morgan was after power, and Morgan’s power was measured by the billions he controlled (Roark, et al. 533–534). In short, the Gilded Age, as Kimmel

summarizes in *Manhood in America*, was an era in which "some men's success was so visibly the result of other skills, like self–promotion, avarice, or outright theft" (67). *Old Money's* Tobias Vivian Pfeifer, who wished to make an infinite amount of money and did not shrink from abusing workers or thwarting his competitors, was thus a combination of these men.

The industrial revolution changed the workplace, forcing men who had been self-employed farmers to become employees in factories. This also led to a change in gender roles. As Kimmel discusses, the machinery that replaced male labor invaded "men's sphere of control" because the new military discipline of production turned workers into human machines. Losing shops or farms to factories made many men "economically dependent," which was a humiliating position as dependency was equated to femininity (*Manhood* 62–63). Peter N. Stearns also confirms that the patriarchal system was challenged by industrialization, as it separated work from the home. Women also went off to work in factories and in other pink collar occupations in the public sphere, as typists and shop girls, for example, which increased their social freedom and economic independence. Industrialization and urbanization also led to a reduction of the time that adult males spent with young boys. This created generation gaps between fathers and sons more than ever, because boys could not follow in their fathers' footsteps (49–50). Pfeiffer' and Toby's relationship reflects this in that Toby not only chooses a different life path than his father—perhaps in rebellion against his greed—but also exhibits different character traits.

The scenes in the past are linked to those in the present by Vivian Pfeiffer, the grandson of Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer, the robber baron. In the first Gilded Age scene, Vivian witnesses his father's conversation with Mary, an Irish maid. To Vivian's surprise, Toby has no interest in his father's business. He would rather go into show business and direct musicals. Mary is the voice of reality and knows that Toby's father will not let him write musicals. He should go to Princeton, as expected, and take over his father's business and the house when the time is right (13). Even though they share the same name, Tobias and Toby are as different from each other as Jeffrey Bernstein and his son Ovid. Toby is not interested in his family's wealth and the advantages his name provides. In fact, he wants to enter show business where no one is concerned with names (15). This is one of the

main reasons why Toby eventually becomes a philanthropist, like Carnegie, and builds libraries and hospitals in places where his father "busted a union" (26).

The importance of property ownership declined with the industrial revolution; thus, the younger generations were more interested in new career opportunities and were "less susceptible to the blandishments of ownership" (Stearns 50). Toby is open to new possibilities and is not interested in his father's property or fortune. He rejects the life that his father "mapped out for him" (43). Toby later explains to Vivian that by repudiating his father's wealth, he "freed" Vivian of a burdensome legacy. If he had not done so, money would have shaped Vivian's life. Thus, Toby gave Vivian the best legacy possible—freedom and independence. Toby provided his son Vivian with a chance to "find some independent energy" (81–82), and follow his own dreams.

Toby relates to Schuyler Lynch, the architect of the mansion, more than his father. Although people admire Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer because he has an obscene amount of money and therefore power, Toby idolizes Schuyler's creativity. When people look at a building, they see Pfeiffer's name on it; however, Toby knows that at its heart is Schuyler's vision. Pfeiffer can only pay for it, whereas Schuyler can create it (44). Pfeiffer's money needs art to legitimate it as much as art needs Pfeiffer's money to be produced. By rejecting his father's money, Toby suggests that he not only has the qualities of an artist, as Schuyler states, but also optimism for the future.

Toby's denunciation of his father's lifestyle also implies a refusal of his father's definitions of manhood. Toby despises capitalism and class division as well as traditional gender roles and sexist restrictions on men and women. He does not define his masculinity by his economic and social superiority over women, and transgresses social norms by having a serious relationship, and not merely a sexual fling, with the Irish maid, Mary (47). As a working class woman and Irish Catholic immigrant, Mary is the ultimate "other" in this elite WASP world. However, while Pfeiffer looks down on Mary as an inferior in every way possible, Toby treats her as his equal. Toby asks Mary to dance, representing an abandonment of the old traditions. As Toby expresses, "from now on, I'll be making my own decisions for what I should be doing. I'm my own man now, Mary

Gallagher" (47). Their dance serves as a departure from the established gender and class practices of American society, promising a new future to the next generation.

Stearns states that the businessmen of the Gilded Age had extramarital partners and companions (mistresses), most of whom, like Florence, were social inferiors (123). Pfeiffer's and Florence Deroot's relationship is an example of this type of partnership based on mutual interest. While Florence benefits from Pfeiffer's money and social standing, Pfeiffer's position in society is reinforced by the music, dance, and art Florence brings into his life. She not only reinforces his power and masculinity (i.e., his ability to keep a younger and beautiful woman interested), but when necessary, Florence Deroot also exerts power over him. As Balakian states, it was not only about having money, it was also about "knowing how to dress, speak, socialize, attend the right cultural events, read the right books, [and] go to the right schools" (*Reading the Plays* 167). Florence teaches Tobias Pfeiffer how to act appropriately, appreciate classical music, and how to live like old money. She, in turn, is rewarded with the privileges of high society.

Since he is a widower, Pfeiffer allows Florence to play the role of wife because she compensates for areas in which he lacks. When Florence and Toby meet for the first time, Florence tells him that his father loves Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*; however, the conversation reveals that Pfeiffer is only interested in what classical music can do for his public image:

> FLORENCE: I've heard so much about you, Toby. *To Pfeiffer*. Dear, I'll ask the musicians to try a little Vivaldi. *To Toby*. Your father loves Vivaldi. Especially *The Four Seasons*.
>
> TOBY: Which season do you like the most, Father?
>
> PFEIFFER: The one they charge the least to play. (25)

Most Gilded Age men disliked what they called "cultural feminization," and many yearned for a return to the pre-industrial past where men were manly, masculine, and self-reliant. Even though they profited from industrialization, when it came to culture and music, they expected to hear "the manly dissonance of strong sounds and a virile patriotism." The music of impressionists was "easy music for the sissies" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 107–108). Pfeiffer finds classical music effeminate, but needs it in high society.

Thus, he engages in a devil's bargain with Florence: he spends his money on people and items that will bring him social respect and prestige, even if it means hating it every step of the way.

Class was, and is, so much more than money—it includes manners, culture, education, breeding, and bloodline (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 168). Therefore, as a coal miner's son, Pfeiffer has to learn, and expand his knowledge on, the markers of upper class society, including art. As he expresses, "Doesn't it make you calm the way the strong realist tendencies of the early Renaissance give way to an interest in emotion and poetry?" This is not his opinion, but a phrase he learns from Schuyler. Florence teaches him about music, while Schuyler informs him about art, all of which, when combined with his money, reinforces his power and validates his manhood. Thus, in the industrial age, Pfeiffer is able to sustain his masculinity through economic power and the social privileges it provides.

Social activities among men, such as drinking, were also "a form of masculine resistance to feminization" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 92). In a scene which juxtaposes the past and present, Jeffrey asks whether Flinty can join them for a cigar and drink. Pfeiffer is shocked, and asks Schuyler to "please inform my tenant that cigars and after drinks were traditionally male affairs" (55). During the Gilded Age, men reinforced their masculinity by socializing with each other. Although gender roles have changed—women can smoke, drink, and do so much more in public—one thing has remained constant: they are still outsiders in the world of men, especially in the inner-sanctum of the high-powered male business world. While the glass ceiling may have cracked, it has not shattered. Both *An American Daughter* and *Old Money* make that painfully clear.

Social Darwinism, which was a very popular theory during the Gilded Age, explained inequality in American society. Ideas such as the "survival of the fittest" and "natural selection" allowed the rich to be wealthy without guilt, since the poor, it was assumed, were poor because of their lack of ingenuity, laziness, or mental/physical inferiority. Such theories also justified laissez-faire politics and economics, which gave robber barons a green light to accumulate as much wealth and power as possible (Roark, et al. 535). Encouraged by the ideas of Social Darwinism, some looked for a way to retreat into the

"masculine virtues" of the pre-industrial era when manhood was also reinforced by the exclusion of blacks, Indians, Asians, Mexicans, Catholics, and other immigrant groups who were not "real" Americans and therefore not "real" men (Kimmel, *Manhood* 67).

In this respect, Jews were outsiders in the old money game. They were considered to be *nouveau riche,* no matter how long their families had been in the United States, or how much wealth they had, much like Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). J.P. Morgan, for instance, never lent money to Jews (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 178) because Jews were seen as underhanded and effeminate. It was thought that lending them money would allow them to pass as "real" men, sabotaging the purity of the WASP race, which consisted of "rulers, organizers, and aristocrats" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 68). Therefore, Pfeiffer, who cannot stand the thought of having a single Jew (Arnold Strauss) on the museum board, is shocked to learn that a Jewish man has bought his house. Although Jews became insiders in the twentieth century, in the nineteenth century they were excluded from WASP high society, and it was almost impossible for them to buy their way in, even by purchasing houses like Pfeiffer's mansion.

An example of Gilded Age anti-Semitism is conveyed in the scene in which Arnold Strauss's museum committee membership is discussed. Pfeiffer tests him to see whether or not he is competent enough to be a member of the museum board:

> STRAUSS: The painting displays distinct Renaissance qualities. However, the realism gives way to an interest in emotion and poetry.
>
> PFEIFFER: Did you coach him, Schuyler?
>
> SCHUYLER: No.
>
> STRAUSS: Although I'm not sure this is the original, I would suggest that a number of copies do exist. I believe I've seen a pen drawing in my friend Mr. Lehman's collection.
>
> BETINA: You people really stick together.
>
> TOBY: Father, this is intolerable!
>
> PFEIFFER: Be quiet Toby. All right, Mr. Strauss. Who is the painter?
>
> STRAUSS: I'd say Fra Filippo Lippi, around 1480.

> PFEIFFER: Sorry. Botticelli, 1502.
>
> SCHUYLER: Botticelli was actually a student of Flippo Lippi, so that's a pretty fair guess. (76)

Pfeiffer's knowledge is basically limited to what he has learnt from Schuyler. Art becomes a way for Pfeiffer to display his manhood to a Jewish man who is assumed to be neither a real man, nor a real intellectual, although Strauss probably knows much more about art than Pfeiffer ever will. Nevertheless, Pfeiffer finds him threatening and votes against Strauss's membership. Thus, while high society accepted Pfeiffer, a self-made man and coal miner's son, into their ranks because he was a WASP, they were not ready to take in Strauss who, despite all his money and connections, was still too ethnic and *nouveau riche* for their taste. Even social climbing had its limits within American society.

As Kimmel states, a gay subculture emerged in the United States at the turn of the century with gay "meeting places, language, folklore and moral codes," all of which was a threat to heteronormative masculinity. Sexuality became a new trait to prove manhood, and being marked as a homosexual created anxiety. Men were "diagnosed" as homosexual by psychiatrists if they paid special attention to their appearance and clothing (what today would be considered a metrosexual), and were seen as "less manly" than "normal" men. Thus, "to be considered a real man, one had better make sure to always be walking around and acting 'real masculine'" (*Manhood* 75). At the turn of the century, as it does today, this meant rugged, yet put together; one of the boys, but not a boy or a brute; in control, yet respectful to those in close proximity, especially women.

After being caught drinking with a young man, Schuyler Lynch is assumed to be gay and suddenly loses his popularity. Because of the incident, he spends the rest of his career "designing community halls and gift shops in small towns" (60). As Kimmel discusses, being homosexual at the turn of the century was equal to being effeminate and unmanly (*Manhood* 148). Those who did not conform to accepted standards of masculinity were ostracized from society, although these gender expectations eventually became blurred in the 1920s. Wasserstein does not explore the politics or even the specifics of Schuyler's sexuality in the play, but what she does convey is that the details, or even the truth, did not matter. Like in *An American Daughter*, just a hint of scandal is enough to ruin a career and a life—a reality shared by gay men and women.

3.1.2. The New Gilded Age: Manhood in Corporate America

To understand the early millennial mindset, it is essential to look back to the 1980s and 90s. The main character in the contemporary era, Jeffrey Bernstein, is a reflection of Wasserstein's brother Bruce. He was the yuppie male of the 1980s, and his greed as a vulture capitalist mirrors one definition of Baby Boom masculinity. On the other hand, Jeffrey's son Ovid is a Generation Xer who, much like Toby, rebels against the corporate masculinity of his father's generation.

Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981–1989) ushered in a "new, ambitious, and aggressive era" to American manhood, urging men to display their masculinity at every opportunity (Kimmel, *Manhood* 211). Faludi argues that Reagan was like a throwback to an old-fashioned rugged "cowboy" masculinity, reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt. Reagan challenged American men, encouraging them to buck up, leave the wimp behind, and to "submit to the new corporate-management and national-security powers, fight the enemies they designate on the frontiers they choose, and they will make a man of you" (*Stiffed* 361). In this context, the frontier could mean anything from Communism, to the work front, to the home front. In other words, he told American men to be "men" again, and to reclaim their manliness in order to let the world know who was boss in every sphere.

Jeffrey and Sid are Baby Boomers who devote themselves to the world of corporate management and perform masculinity accordingly. In the 1980s, more was more, and Americans valued, celebrated, and relished the acquisition, and spending, of wealth. Greed was good, and million-dollar parties were regularly displayed on television, lavish evening soap operas depicting the uber-rich like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* became national obsessions, billionaires like Donald Trump and yuppies like *Wall Street's* Gordon Gekko became heroes, and shows like *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* encouraged Americans to indulge, if only vicariously, in the culture of conspicuous consumption (Roark, et al. 927). Individuals like Jeffrey Bernstein and Bruce Wasserstein earned money not from production, but mergers and takeovers. This generation was still pursuing the American Dream but, like the robber barons, as greedy, materialistic, and ambitious businessmen.

They became the new financial alpha males who reinforced their masculinity through risk-taking and consumerism.

With the Clinton era of the 1990s came an economic boom. Interest rates were lowered to encourage economic expansion, which made it easy to borrow money; companies decreased their costs and increased their revenues; American firms became more active in the international market as a result of economic problems in Europe and Asia; and trade barriers in North America were eliminated through NAFTA. Although the economic boom helped Americans from all income levels prosper, "the gap between the rich and the poor and between the wealthy and the middle class, which had been growing since the 1970s, endured" (Roark, et al. 957–958). Wasserstein experienced the effects of this economic boom as a New Yorker, and criticizes this era through the guests at Jeffrey Bernstein's party.

As Kimmel discusses, while Baby Boom men came to associate money, status, and power with ideal manhood, their sons modified definitions of ideal masculinity (*Angry White Men* 218–219). Jeffrey proves his manhood through money; however, Ovid is uninterested in the power that money provides. He believes that real power is achieved through intellect. The play begins in the present era, with Ovid telling the story of the house. Ovid immediately makes it clear that the house is not his, but his father's, disassociating himself with his father's values and lifestyle (3). As the reader/audience soon realizes, father and son are two completely different men, which is exemplified in their perception of what makes a man "a man."

Ovid's father is a "player," making up his own rules, whether in the world of finance or the world of women, a lesson he learns from Tobias Pfeiffer, the former owner of the mansion (4). Both patriarchs believe that a "real" man should follow traditional male gender roles, and that masculinity is about being aggressive, ambitious, and domineering. Ovid, like Toby, does not intend to follow in his father's footsteps. Ovid wants to be a writer, a profession which Jeffrey finds effeminate, in much the same way that Tobias Pfeiffer finds show business to be an inappropriate career choice for Toby.

Ovid's monologue at the beginning of the play reveals that his father is a social climber and part of the *nouveau riche*:

> My parents bought this house in 1998, one year after my father's bank went public. Well, it's not really my father's bank, it doesn't have our name, but my father pioneered its fixed-income arbitrage into the largest trading desk in the world. At least that's the story according to the *Wall Street Journal*. When the bank went public, my father suddenly became an expert on Beaux Arts painting, Gulf-stream jets, and Victorian lacquer lamps and furniture. Shortly after that time my mother and father's marriage broke up, as did the marriages of five of his managing partners. (4)

Ovid's statements unveil the fact that his father, Jeffrey Bernstein, has not always been rich. Like Tobias Pfeiffer, he climbed the social ladder from modest means, in this case transforming his professional and social identity from a teacher to a businessman. He also acquired "culture" after entering the world of the wealthy since he was not originally from that class. Much like masculinity, we see here how class is also socially constructed, especially in a classless country like the United States which is predicated on physical and social mobility. In the end, it is all a performance, with the end goal of reaffirming one's position in the hierarchy. Contrary to belief, the wealthy are not "experts" on everything. They, as Ovid conveys, achieved the American Dream bolder and quicker than most, and thus have the means "to fake it." Jeffrey illustrates Ovid's point through his comments concerning his son's interest in old maps and New York history: "Ovid, don't become the kind of dilettante intellectual who wastes his life dwelling on the past" (5). Jeffrey is proud of being an anti-intellectual, and someone who believes that one should read for a purpose, not out of sheer interest.

Whereas Jeffrey invites to his parties individuals whose attendance will contribute to his fame and reputation, Ovid invites Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer III—an architectural historian, Columbia professor for fifty years, and the grandson of Tobias Pfeiffer—after having read a review of his novel in the *Times*. Wasserstein compares and contrasts Jeffrey Bernstein with Vivian Pfeiffer because the former became rich later in life (new money), whereas the latter was born in the mansion to a wealthy family (old-er money). Vivian even jokes about this by calling himself "the last living dead white man" (9), which also alludes to his status as a WASP among Jews, whose whiteness, as non-Christians, has also been historically questioned in the United States (Brodkin 175).

These gaps, between father and son, the past and present, old and new money, WASP and Jew, and masculinity and effeminacy, is also reinforced by the characters' names. The

name Vivian was popular for both men and women during the Gilded Age; however, it is typically a female name in the contemporary era. While his name represents the past, and Vivian speaks for the old values through his attitude and etiquette. Likewise, Ovid is a reference to the Roman love poet. Ovid's name symbolizes his creativeness, as well as his love of history, the graciousness of the past, and the sophistication of old society.

"Money is the road to liberation" (6) for Jeffrey. In other words, money fuels his reputation and provides him with a chance to have affairs with whoever he wants. Therefore for him, much like for the robber barons, money is a way to perform masculinity. Jeffrey believes that money can buy him happiness and status as a Jewish man in elite WASP society, but it clearly does not. He loses his wife Jessica, who was part of an old money family, without even realizing that she was ill (she dies after she leaves Jeffrey). Moreover, he drives away his lifelong friend, Saulina, who believes that Jeffrey hides behind parties, art, and empty people (87). Saulina reveals the truth about Jeffrey—that his "interest in art is very recent" (67)—which conveys that despite his façade, and his wife's ability to get him on the board of directors of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (a privilege denied to Arnold Strauss), he will always be *nouveau riche*. Saulina also criticizes Jeffrey's lost idealism (Salamon 362), claiming that when he was in college, "this house would have been the last place he'd imagine himself living in" and he "would have ripped this party to shreds" (33). According to Jan Balakian, this summarizes what Wasserstein thought of the Baby Boom leftist idealists of the sixties, like Scoop and Bruce, who turned into the selfish materialists of the 1980s and 90s (*Reading the Plays* 180).

Just like Florence uses Pfeiffer to climb the social ladder, Florence's doppelganger Flinty McGee, "a well-groomed woman of thirty-five, simultaneously exuding professionalism and sexuality" (6), uses Jeffrey to accomplish her personal goals, proving that not much has changed in a hundred years. As Wasserstein suggests, despite the advances feminism has brought to women, some women will always continue to depend on men, especially for financial support and social status. Her name sounds like flaky, reflecting what she really is—an unreliable opportunist and postfeminist out to grab money, power, and status by using her sex appeal and crafty wit. Flinty is only interested in the famous mansion, not in Jeffrey, confessing that she has been "dying to see the house" and that she wants

to write a film set in the house (7). Clearly, Flinty wants to profit from the house since it is "the perfect evocation of a new gilded age" (8). While Flinty, like Florence, reinforces Jeffrey's manly reputation, it is one that is built not on mutual love and understanding, like Toby's relationship with Mary or Ovid's relationship with Caroline, but the affection that only money can buy. Thus, as Wasserstein implies, the younger men in the play, Toby and Ovid, are better men than their fathers will ever be.

As the "me" generation, Baby Boomers were naturally obsessed with external appearances. As exemplified by Walter in *An American Daughter*, this extended to their bodies as well, for disciplining the aging body by working out or through expensive, tailored, clothing became a way to exert one's fading masculinity. For women, "I am worth it" became a motto, and men too embraced this self-centered narcissism. In the 1990s, this led to the emergence of the metrosexual.[13] A metrosexual had money to spend, was fashionable, and cared about his skin and hair. Also, the metrosexual symbolized upward mobility like the yuppie of the 1980s (Kimmel, *Manhood* 248–249). Expensive designer suits became symbols of corporate business and capitalism, and thus the uniform of Baby Boomers and metrosexuals alike. Jeffrey, for example, is a typical yuppie/metrosexual for whom clothing and luxury items are important status symbols. As Wasserstein describes him in her stage directions: he is "an attractive man of forty-eight in a very chic but defiantly casual linen suit" (4). His outfit speaks for him, "You've got the perfect 'I'm just a regular guy who paid five thousand bucks for this shirt' look" (5).

During a scene in which the two time periods are juxtaposed, Pfeiffer is shocked to learn that the second floor of his mansion belongs entirely to Jeffery with a gym, dressing room, bath, jacuzzi, media lounge and bedroom:

> PFEIFFER: All for him?
>
> SCHUYLER: They're obsessed with staying in shape.
>
> PFEIFFER: Thank God I just had to make money. (56)

[13] Michael Kimmel states that British journalist Mark Simpson coined the term (*Manhood in America* 248–249).

Wasserstein clearly refers to this new culture and how contemporary men have attempted to perform masculinity through their bodies. Whereas during the Gilded Age robber barons with bellies to match their wallets were the expected norm, starting in the 1980s with the yuppies and extending to the metrosexuals of the 1990s and 2000s, men began to join women in their obsession with the way they looked, and working out became a requirement. Initially, this took the form of activities such as indoor badminton, tennis, and exercising on stationary bicycles and other gym equipment—activities that could easily fit around a busy workaholic schedule and could be done at night, at home, in the office, or on weekends. Gradually, men began to push the limits, and by the 1990s, they wanted to be "iron men" both professionally and physically. They started to explore the boundaries of their bodies, and joined women in the consumption of products, such as pills, powders, creams, surgery, and treatments, in order to achieve the ideal body (Kimmel 224–225). In *Old Money*, Jeffrey uses his wealth to enhance his appearance and perform metrosexuality which, ironically, has expanded definitions of hegemonic masculinity due to its adaptation of traditionally non-heteronormative practices (e.g., male primping and preening, which have historically been associated with homosexuals).

Jeffrey expects Ovid to be just like him as the heir of his wealth and reputation. However, even the way they dress differs. Generation Xers rebelled against the values and lifestyles of their parents, so Ovid appears on stage "in standard chinos and blue shirt" (4), representing a more casual mindset than his father's designer-suit generation. Similarly, Sid's daughter Caroline, another Generation Xer, blames him for hypocrisy, "You are such a hypocrite! You show up at a formal dinner in a T-shirt and jacket just to show how hip and above-it-all you are, but the truth is, you take it all much more seriously than anybody else" (35). For the younger generation, Sid's and Jeffrey's world is fake and vulgar.

Sid Nercessian symbolizes Wasserstein's resentment of Hollywood. Nercessian is an Armenian name that sounds like narcissist, which is what Sid is as a member of the "me" generation. He reflects, in many ways, Bruce, who once ignored a group of Wasserstein's friends at dinner thinking they were all "idiots" because they did not form a corporation to sell shares in themselves (Salamon 250). As an ethnic white, like the Jewish characters in the play, Sid is a *nouveau riche* wannabe who mimics the practices and values of the

old rich. Lynn Watson claims that Sid uses art for legitimacy by producing Hollywood films based on important literary works (327). He has readapted *Citizen Kane* with Matt Damon, and is planning on updating Sheridan's *The Rivals* with Jeffrey Bernstein's support. Like Flinty, he is also aware that using Jeffrey's house for his film would attract attention: "Jeffrey, we could shoot my update of *The Rivals* right here. Use all New York actors. Save at least ten million!" (29). As Balakian states, new money is defined by connections with the rich, famous, and powerful (*Reading the Plays* 173). Jeffrey is Sid's connection, and they use each other for personal gain.

Sid is a condescending snob who looks down on people if they do not live up to his exacting standards. For Sid, people are important as long as they have power in business. Representatives of old money, like Vivian, who lectures him about Nantucket are not worth talking to since they have little real power anymore. When he learns Vivian once lived in Jeffrey's house, Sid cannot believe it since it denotes a tragic fall from grace: "Wait a minute. That guy grew up in this house? This is beyond depressing! Fuck!" (17). Sid "defines wealth by whether or not someone needs to work" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 178), which Vivian evidently does. Moreover, for Sid a real man is someone who is powerful and dominant, and who can survive in the business jungle. As Flinty states, Sid "reveres real money" as all capitalist alpha males do, and that "he would sell his mother to be considered legit" (8). Vivian clearly cannot compete in this testosterone-laden, aggressive, heterosexist, money-hungry *nouveau riche* world, which reinforces the idea that he might a gay character that Wasserstein has chosen to keep in the closet for protection.

Caroline uncovers the truth behind Sid's and Penny's marriage, which resembles Tobias Pfeiffer's and Florence Deroot's relationship in the sense that Sid is her golden egg, just like Pfeiffer was Florence's ticket to the upper class. When they first meet, Penny is working as an apprentice at Calvin Klein, but she quickly gives up her career when she marries Sid, choosing a life of luxury and ease instead. In exchange for status, she becomes Sid's trophy wife. As Sid states, "I thank God every day I was smart enough to start again with this wonderful woman. She is my perfect pitch, my polish, my guide" (37). Marrying a younger, Asian wife with style becomes yet another way for men like

Sid to reinforce their masculinity. Having a young wife is one way to prove that they are still attractive and sexually active.

Sid dislikes Second Wave feminists like Saulina Webb because they see right through these men's charade and masked misogyny. Sid becomes excited when he meets her because of her connections to the art world, but tempers his feelings with "but feminist," as if it is an insult: "Wait a minute! I know you! You're Saulina Webb. The sculptor. The Tampon Totem Pole. Oldenberg, but feminist" (29). Although new money men use art to reinforce their status, Saulina's feminism is a major roadblock to her popularity because people like Sid appreciate artists who are young, "the next wave, the cutting edge" (61), and not "has been" middle-aged relics like Saulina, who resembles Lyssa, Judith, and Heidi in this respect.

In *Old Money*, the new generation of artists either suppress their feminism, or reshape it like Quincy Quince in *An American Daughter*. For Sid, Saulina is irrelevant, a "bitter, angry, mediocre cow." Yet, he suggests having Penny's lingerie launch at Saulina's next opening since he is always searching for the next important connection. Moreover, Sid thinks his wife's lingerie collection is more artistic and "fresher" than any of Saulina's work because of its sexy, empowered, postfeminist message. On the other hand, Vivian, the sensitive soul in the modern age, appreciates Saulina's idealism. According to Vivian, Saulina's daughter, who teaches English and disapproves of e-mail, is just as brave as Saulina because she too resists conformity and is trying to remain true to her beliefs in a superficial world. Whereas Sid perceives Saulina as a threat, Vivian sees her as a kindred spirit, an outsider who once was, ironically, an insider.

In the final scene of the play, when Vivian is on the verge of death, characters from the past (Florence, Betina, Strauss, and Pfeiffer) enter the stage dancing and singing a song Toby wrote. Vivian closes his eyes as Ovid reenters, talking about what became of his life. This scene represents the final death of old money and the rebirth of American society through the younger generation. The house in which Ovid and Vivian grew up has become a museum where Ovid takes his grandson. Their conversation proves that Wasserstein remained optimistic about the future, despite her grievances with the past and present. Ovid's grandson hopes to reverse all the "wrongs" of the previous

generations and, in fact, when Ovid shows his grandson a quarter, informing him that people used to think it would open all the doors of the world, his grandson does not recognize the "old money." This scene parallels Toby's last scene, during which Vivian and Toby discuss their choices in life. Toby hands Vivian a coin, telling him that it is all they have left of their "old money," meaning Vivian will have to find his own way in life, and construct his own identity as a man, without the Pfeiffer family's power and wealth to guide him.

As a Gilded Age robber baron, Pfeiffer connects money and masculinity to nation-building. As he explains, they were actually "building a nation" with oil, steel, and coal, and they were investing in railroads and later automobiles—machines that would make America into an industrial superpower. On the other hand, according to Pfeiffer, contemporary robber barons have no grand project, and thus no real showcase for their masculinity—they "just move numbers" (57). However, while the marriage between politics and money was in its infancy during the Gilded Age, today, politics is money and money is politics. Thus, Jeffrey's fortune gives him a voice to express his opinion about "newspapers, movie studios, and the Democratic Party" (58) that Pfeiffer never had, suggesting that the moneyed political game is the core of the contemporary American male nation-building project.

Despite slight nuances, the way Gilded Age robber barons perceived manliness, and the way contemporary robber barons perform masculinity, are very similar. Although Pfeiffer accuses Jeffrey of not using his money for the public good and not cultivating a philanthropic legacy, he was just as selfish as Jeffrey in his pursuit of wealth: Pfeiffer abused his workers and lived a comfortable life while his employees were dying in shantytowns (57). Both were part of the *nouveau riche* when they first became wealthy, and only became accepted over time and with the passage of generations. Moreover, both men also "cultivat[ed] a style, not a character" (59) through art and their artistic entourages. "Real men" were supposed to develop character; yet both turned to money and power as the source of their masculinity. By the end of the play, Wasserstein's commentary on American masculinity is clear: Gilded Age robber barons were reborn in the late twentieth century as the yuppies and vulture capitalists of the Reagan and Clinton eras. Not bound to any ethical or moral standards, they used their money and power to

define their identities. This new generation of men derived their self-worth not from noble social or political principles, but from their ability to manipulate others to win "the game" and emerge victorious, especially over women.

3.2. *THIRD* (2005)

In 2000, Republican George W. Bush, whose political agenda and masculine "cowboy" stance resembled that of Ronald Reagan, was elected president of the United States. Like Reagan, Bush also represented a "father figure" of comfort and strength, but was "more patrician than paternal" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 275). During the Reagan administration, a so-called "culture war" began against feminists and gays, which fueled the backlash. Reagan-era politics became harsher with Bush's "pro-life" stance and his efforts to ban gay marriage and other progressive initiatives (Peiss 3). Reagan became president shortly after the Vietnam War which, together with the women's, gay, and civil rights movements, shattered American men's confidence in their masculinity. Reagan helped them restore this lost confidence by claiming superpower dominance in world affairs, which Kimmel likens to the attitude of a schoolyard bully. More importantly, however, Reagan reminded American men that manhood is an "inner confidence and security, as well as a real hierarchical position" (*Manhood* 211).

American masculinity was also in danger in the early years of George W. Bush's presidency. In 2001, his administration experienced one of the most deadly terrorist attacks in history, the 9/11 attacks. The country immediately declared a war against Al Qaeda, whose headquarters were in Afghanistan and supported by the Taliban government, and the "War on Terror" became a showcase for presidential, and therefore American, masculinity. Bush believed that his country had the right to start a war against terrorism, and made "claims (subsequently refuted) that [Saddam] Hussein had links to Al Qaeda and harbored terrorists and that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction" (Roark, et al. 968). He used this justification to invade Iraq in 2003 and finish off what his father's administration began with the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s. Roark, et al. state that even though weapons of mass destruction were not found in Iraq, and Saddam Hussein's link to Osama Bin Laden was never proven, Bush insisted on bringing "democracy" and other American values, such as militarism, to the Middle East. This not

only increased anti–Americanism around the world, but also, just like with Vietnam, caused unrest in the United States (969). The Republican Party lost the presidency in 2008 with the election of Barack Obama, the first African American to hold the highest office in the land.

The 1980s gave birth to Third World feminism, which had an agenda that embraced the accomplishments of the Second Wave while expanding its focus from white women to women of color, from the middle to the working class, and from the national to the global. It was led by Chicana lesbian feminists Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, coeditors of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), in which they "voiced the frustration and anger" they felt as a result of their negative experiences in the feminist and Chicano movements. They wanted to connect "women's issues to larger political issues" believing that "different stories had created a unique women's agenda" (Rosen 290–291). Their specific emphasis, however, became the shared experiences of minority women in America and women in "third world" countries, such as Mexico and India.

Third World Feminism melted into Third Wave Feminism in the 1990s, and for many, the Beijing Declaration, which was adopted at the fourth U.N. World Conference on Women in 1995, marked the official beginnings of Global Feminism. Hillary Rodham Clinton was the keynote speaker at the conference, which was a significant moment for Baby Boomers like Wasserstein. Not only did it signal an appreciation of the legacy of the Second Wave, but it also symbolized a renewed interest in women's issues, but this time on a much broader scale. Issues such as equality, diversity, the eradication of poverty, violence against women, and healthcare were part of the conference's agenda, transcending many of the limits of the Second Wave, especially national borders (Kolmar and Bartkowski 521–525). This movement transformed into Transnational Feminism in the 2000s with a renewed emphasis on transnationality and the collaboration of women around the world.

The men's movement was also regrouping while women were reigniting the fight for equality. Although the Clinton model of manhood became popular in the 1990s, many men did not believe it went far enough, arguing that "American men and boys were

becoming feminized" at the hands of old school feminists such as the First Lady. For some men, working out became a way to achieve ideal masculinity, others recreated the frontier through literature in order to escape from effeminate city life, while still others sought masculinity in the military (Kimmel, *Manhood* 224–227). Robert Bly's *Iron John* and Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* fueled the mythopoetic masculinity movement, which encouraged men to seek homosocial environments as a means of self-healing, and to express suppressed emotions and feelings, especially about women. According to the supporters of this strand of the Men's Movement, masculinity was destroyed during the Industrial Revolution when fathers left home to work, and boys were in the hands of their mothers from whom they now had to learn manhood. This "incomplete separation," or dependence on a mother or wife, made American men soft over the years. They felt that the only way to escape this was to return to their lost rugged masculinity—to run into the woods where they could block out the female world and bond with one another to rediscover the roots of their masculinity (Kimmel, *Manhood* 229).

Kimmel explains that 9/11 was a watershed moment in that it revived discourses concerning American masculinity, setting multiple masculinities into competition with each other. Americans generally fell into two major camps, although other variations existed as well. While some claimed that it was time to embrace militarism, discover one's inner Rambo, and kill terrorists, others saw it as a time to nest and bond as families, taking the bombings as a warning that America should turn inwards and purge itself of capitalist and corrupt elements, and foreign influences. Either way, a strengthened patriarchy would take center stage, and the president was poised to take a leadership role.

George W. Bush represented a "new-old masculinity" and used it to empower his administration. Knowing that masculinity is a social construction, he became the first president in recent history to wear military attire to a pseudo-event, which was ridiculed by many and seen as a "masculine drag performance" (*Manhood* 277–278). He landed on an aircraft carrier, disembarked from a fighter jet and, wearing a pilot's bomber jacket, declared, as Commander-in-Chief, that the war in Iraq was over after only a few months, which it clearly was not. This staged event and performance of masculinity, whose abundant phallic symbolism did not go unnoticed, was nevertheless a powerful display on the world stage. Bush's cowboy rhetoric, which included smoking terrorists out of

their caves, seemed to evoke Ronald Reagan, who confused war movies with real life. Reagan often spoke of his experiences in World War II, but never actually served in the military. "Declared ineligible for combat, he spent the war narrating flyboy training films and appearing in a few of them . . . Later, he recalled how his 'service' (in the Army Air Corps First Motion Picture Unit in Hollywood) had ripped him from home and hearth" (Faludi, *Stiffed* 360). Although Reagan played a soldier in numerous films, he was never one in real life, yet constantly conflated the two in the political arena in order to accentuate his manliness and attract votes.

Wasserstein was terminally ill with cancer when she started writing *Third*, whose main character is based on a waiter she met at a restaurant.[14] The waiter had been a student at Wesleyan where he had wrongly been accused of plagiarism. A professor accused him of academic dishonesty since, as a wrestler, it was assumed he could not have possibly written such a good paper. Wasserstein took the story and combined it with another idea, which came from her assistant Michael Barakiva. He told Wasserstein about a class he had taken at Vassar about *King Lear*, taught by a professor who was about her age, with cancer. The professor had radical feminist ideas about *King Lear*, so she decided to include that in the play as well, and *Third* was born (Salamon 385).

In the play, Wasserstein not only critiques feminism but also liberalism. Laurie Jameson, a professor of English, accuses her student, Woodson Bull III, also known as Third, of plagiarism. She claims that Third has plagiarized his paper about *King Lear* because it is "too good" for a wrestler, and takes the case all the way to the college's Committee of Academic Standards. Laurie's best friend, Prof. Nancy Gordon who, like Wasserstein, is battling cancer, is on the committee and does not think Third is guilty of plagiarism. Although the committee decides that Third is not guilty, he is placed on academic probation, loses his wrestling scholarship, and must transfer to Ohio State because he cannot afford to stay at the small, expensive, private liberal arts college. In the process, he also loses the support and respect of his father, which hurts him more than the unfounded accusations against him, but learns, just like Laurie, to make peace with life.

[14] The play debuted at Lincoln Center's Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater in 2005 (Salamon 408).

Laurie, on the other hand, realizes her mistake, apologizes to Third (which he accepts), and they begin the road to healing and self-discovery together.

3.2.1. Reverse Discrimination and Angry White Women

The play begins with Laurie Jameson's first lecture of the semester, which is a politically correct monologue on her mission to eliminate heterosexist, racist, and classist barriers. She expects students to "speak up" and not to refrain from contradicting or challenging her, or social norms (72). However, she becomes a victim of her own liberalism, illustrating how difficult it is to turn theory into practice. Jameson argues that "King Lear's expectations are the expectations of the ultimate privileged paternal white man" whereas his daughter Cordelia, a loving, obedient girl, is "the traditional feminine victim." She also suggests that western literature traditionally vilifies girls as "nuts" and therefore, the tragedy of Lear is "actually the girlification of Cordelia" (72).

Laurie Jameson, a "privileged white woman," forces Third to "assimilate to her point of view" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 197), patronizing him from the moment they meet. She is offended that he is taking her course just because he needs humanities credits, and becomes irate when he informs her that he will not be able to join a screening of *King Lear* because he has a wrestling match the same day. Although Third kindly asks if it is possible to rent the film, Laurie denies him the opportunity to catch up. She claims that it is impossible to find a copy of the film, yet he finds it at the Museum of Broadcasting, which suggests he is sincerely interested in Laurie's class and is willing to put the effort in to learn the course material.

Wasserstein reveals that Third is an intellectual who reads a wide range of books. However, at every turn, Laurie mocks his efforts, unfairly victimizing her student with arrogance and prejudice: "Mr. Bull, I'm sure you are the first person to ever walk out of that bookstore with *The Wretched of the Earth* and *The Reggie Jackson Story*" (76). Even though Third has taken a Modern Gay and Lesbian Fiction class taught by a very important professor, McNealy, and makes intelligent comments about *Pinky*, a diary by an aborigine lesbian, Laurie refuses to acknowledge his opinion and all the indications that he is capable of writing an excellent paper.

Laurie seems to be determined to discriminate against Third who, she believes, is a Right Wing conservative Republican. She reflects everything she despises onto Third and sees him as a representative of everything that is wrong with America, especially the Bush administration. Laurie is disturbed by the fact that Third is a wrestler, which she sees as both "bull" (bullshit, or a waste of time) and "bull" (aggressively masculine, like the animal). He represents "the world of sports" which "has always been a masculine refuge, a pristine homosocial world of male bonding" that has its own sexist code. Wrestling, which "offers hypermuscular caricatures of masculine icons," is an important part of this world (Kimmel, *Manhood* 274). Jameson assumes that Third is interested in wrestling in order to prove his manhood because wrestling provides a manly escape from the female world (Kimmel, *Manhood* 274). Although Third claims that he does not do "that kind of wrestling," Jameson does not believe him. As she conveys, "I'm sure you don't. People who are nicknamed 'Third,'" in other words WASP men who come from a long line of wealth and privilege, "never do that kind of wrestling" (73).

Laurie is just as prejudiced as any hardcore right winger, and tends to stereotype people based on their interests. As her daughter Emily states, Laurie is obsessed with this occupation. Even though she has not seen her daughter for a long time, she prefers to watch George W. Bush addressing the U.N. about Saddam Hussein on television instead. Laurie watches the news 24/7, and is always tense and on-edge. She projects her anger for the Bush administration onto Third, whom she believes symbolizes Bush's brand of militarized masculinity.

While Third views Professor Jameson fairly and in the same way he sees male professors, Laurie ironically makes gender distinctions (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 189). Third is against categorizing because he thinks it prevents growth, which is why he attends a college where he is considered a "retro-heterosexual sociopath"—in order to challenge himself. He enjoys the fact that "every other day someone here is coming out of the closet as a vegan antiglobalization bisexual who is currently experimenting with the opposite sex" (77). Nevertheless, Laurie maintains Third is "someone who is about to write a neo-con exposé" of the place, masking his true identity by claiming to be "pro-choice" (77). Instead of seeing the truth—that Third is actually from a modest background, that his father is a small-claims lawyer, and that he is there on scholarship—Laurie believes what

she wants to believe, and pigeonholes Third as a "privileged, preppy, frat boy" (81) who "fits right in with the power elite, with the white men who are still running this government, this country, the world" (78).

Laurie's prejudice against Third is the main reason why she accuses him of plagiarism: she cannot believe that Third could write a paper "worthy of publication" (78).

> THIRD: I think this is reverse discrimination.
>
> LAURIE: Don't accuse a woman like me of discrimination, Mr. Bull […]
>
> THIRD: […] You have a problem with me because I'm happy.
>
> LAURIE: What does that mean?
>
> THIRD: I'm straight. I'm white. I'm male. And I happen to like America.
>
> LAURIE: And you're a Republican. Don't leave that out. (79)

She is obsessed with him and almost determined to make him fail. Third, on the other hand, contends that Laurie is accusing him of plagiarism because he is a happy, straight, white man who likes America. He is not the "angry white man" of generations past. In fact, if anything, Laurie is an "angry white woman" who is venting her frustration with the failures of feminism, liberalism, and the world, by harassing him. She is not the open-minded and welcoming professor she professes to be; she is just as narrow-minded as those she critiques. Third becomes the target for her aggression and "the new other."

"Third understands what it means to challenge hegemony" and embraces liberal ideas despite his conservative manners (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 188–199). He not only stands up to his professor, but also speaks out at the dining hall when students are discussing the nude dormitory and the Patriot Act. He courageously expresses his opinion about patriot missiles in order to compel other students to see all sides of the same issue, thus broadening their narrow minds and educating them about important current events. Although students claim to be sensitive about the environment and individual rights, they do not clear their food trays or care about those who have to clean them. Third warns them about this and reminds them of the fact that somebody will have to pick up after them. Through Third, Wasserstein conveys the idea that it is time for liberals to hear the

voices of those with whom they may or may not agree. She also holds Third up as a potential role model for the twenty-first-century man.

3.2.2. The Generation/Gender Gap: Daughters, Mothers, Boyfriends, and Husbands

Laurie, as a Baby Boomer, is still trying to perpetuate the rules that her generation created. She patronizes people, expecting them to lead a life that follows her expectations. With the county on the verge of war, Laurie cannot understand why Emily and her friends do not start organizing against it. “Oh come on, Emily. You go to Swarthmore. Surely you and your friends have more intelligent things to do than just look at leaves. Your sister has already demonstrated” (73). Emily knows that protesting no longer works the way it did during her mother’s youth—that politics and money have become so deeply entrenched in the military-industrial complex that war is profitable and thus impossible to stop. As she comments, “My sister Zooey is not going to stop this war happening because she and her girlfriend went to a candlelight vigil holding up a piece of oak tag that they wrote on with magic markers” (73).

Emily’s boyfriend also poses a problem for Laurie and becomes the target of her criticism. First, she assumes Richard is a yuppie investment banker and berates Emily for that. Later, Laurie is even more upset when she learns that Richard, who is thirteen years older than Emily, is only a bank teller, dropped out of school ten years ago, and plays the guitar in a bar. At least a yuppie investment banker would have been successful at what he did, and not an underachieving loser, Laurie reasons. Although she believes in the deconstruction of gender roles, Laurie still judges Richard based on traditional assumptions concerning masculinity, just like she judges Third. Laurie tells Emily that “He doesn’t even want to be a musician. He just wants to chill. Emily, you can do a lot more with your life than spend it with a man whose ambition is just ‘to chill’” (83). According to Laurie, Richard should graduate from school, get an acceptable job, and become a breadwinner, which adds to her hypocrisy. As a liberal, she is as narrow-minded as the conservatives she hates.

Laurie tends to categorize and discriminate against people based on unfounded assumptions. She decides that Third has plagiarized because she "needed that to be true. Just like they decided there were weapons of mass destruction because they needed *that* to be true" (83). Balakian compares Third's accusation to America's invasion of Iraq, both of which were based on misconceptions (*Reading the Plays* 192). Laurie is clearly no different than the Bush administration she maliciously criticizes. Emily also adds that if Third were a gay, Native American playwright, she would not have touched him. Likewise, Laurie does not say anything when Zooey's girlfriend Rena cheats on her because she is a published poet (83). For Laurie, old victims of discrimination are still heroes. She now victimizes those who are white, straight, Republican, or rich: "If you look conservative, a liberal might target you" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 194). She becomes her own worst enemy, judging individual worth according to outdated standards without contemplating the consequences.

Laurie's husband, Stephen, is never seen on stage; however, as revealed through Wasserstein's indirect characterization, he is suffering from a masculinity crisis. Although he is a political science professor, Stephen, who used to be a pretentious hotshot, is no longer interested in the *zeitgeist*. When Laurie learns the government has decided to support Bush's wish to use force in Iraq, he is too busy lifting weights.

Like Walter in *An American Daughter*, Laurie's husband is overshadowed by his dominant wife. Therefore, he has turned Emily's room into a gym and has been lifting weights to compensate through his body. However, he is going overboard and to highlight his obsession, Laurie sarcastically states that he should take steroids so he can join the Bulgarian Olympic team (74). This implies that Stephen is not only struggling to prove his manhood through his appearance, but that he is a joke, much like the Bulgarian Olympic team (she does not tell him to join the U.S. team, which is an athletic powerhouse).

According to Stephen, Laurie's perception of the world is limited. She ignores him and never really listens to what he says because she does not think it is important, just like she judges Richard and Third before knowing anything about them. As the soft man trying to find his inner tough guy, Stephen is far more sensitive and compassionate towards

Emily and her needs. Laurie trivializes his masculinity crisis, emasculating him as an old school "ball busting" feminist. Moreover, she is embarrassed by him because "he is not a star" about whom she can brag, "You've totally eclipsed him" (83). He responds by buying a Harley and hanging out with a motorcycle gang, retreating into a hyper masculine male homosocial world in order to escape reality.

By the end of the twentieth century, men like Stephen, who became overwhelmed by the changes in male and female gender roles that occurred between the 1960s and 1980s, felt the need to protect their positions through "self-control, exclusion, and escape" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 245). Kimmel argues that men who had been criticized by feminists for decades were now looking for a way out, and many sought empowerment through other men as well as through "perfectly sculpted, hairless, tan and muscular" bodies (Kimmel, *Manhood* 245). Thus, Stephen's heavy work out program and motorcycle gang were ways to escape invisibility, to say "I'm here," even if their wives and girlfriends did not notice or care.

3.2.3. Final Thoughts on the Second Wave

The sisterhood between Laurie and Nancy is very similar to that between Lyssa and Judith in *An American Daughter*. Both Nancy and Judith (and Wasserstein herself) are struggling with cancer and they are looking for old-fashioned sisterhood in a world where such values do not matter anymore. Nancy leaves academia rather than stay and fight, just like Lyssa decides to withdraw her nomination. Nancy believes that some fights are not worth it anymore—the world has changed, for better and worse. Laurie also questions her purpose and decides to retire. However, this is not giving up and quitting. For Wasserstein, it was a matter of passing the baton, of saying "this is what we did, and I hope you can do better." As illustrated by *Old Money* and *Third*, having faith in the next generation is key. Laurie understands this by the end of the play, and learns to let go, which is a victory in and of itself. Knowing when to leave the fight, and making room for new ideas and new people, is sometimes just as important as fighting.

Wasserstein not only believes in young women, like Caroline from *Old Money* and Emily from *Third*, but also young men like Third and Ovid, who she suggests will lead the

renewed battle to eradicate gender discrimination and sexism in the United States. Wasserstein was in the final stages of cancer while writing *Third*, yet she remained faithful that Millennials would bring a fresh perspective to issues such as femininity and masculinity. She exits with a final warning—that power, like prejudice, can destroy both men and women and that it should be used very consciously and carefully.

3.3. CONCLUSION

The plays analyzed in this chapter present different versions of American manhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Wasserstein critiques masculinity and its relation to money in *Old Money* and shows what has become of her generation in *Third* by illustrating how they became part of the system they despised. In both plays, Wasserstein entrusts the future to the next generation.

As Fitzgerald expresses in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), when the pursuit of wealth replaces the pursuit of happiness, unhappiness is the only possible result. Wasserstein compares the late twentieth century to the nineteenth-century Gilded Age when cash replaced class (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 167). In both eras, sons confront their fathers about life choices, and both Toby and Ovid choose different directions than their fathers. Seeing that talent, virtue, and intellect have lost their importance, Ovid chooses the road less traveled and reclaims talent, virtue, and intellect and passes them on to his grandson, the next generation. Toby, on the other hand, finds high society hypocritical and rejects his father's money, entering show business and forging his own path. For them, being independent and true to one's self is the ultimate expression of masculinity—not power, wealth, feigned interest in art, and fawning women.

On the other hand, Third forces Laurie to reconsider her didacticism, and she enables him to rethink the meaning of *King Lear*. Jameson suffers from "free–floating anxiety" (Salamon 386) because she is so entrenched in her ideals that she marginalizes what was previously the norm. Laurie has been unfair to men who do not live up to her expectations: to her husband, to Third, and to Emily's boyfriend Richard. However, her experience with Third helps her see the error of her ways.

Balakian states that if liberal ideas are imposed in a wrong way, they too can be fascistic (*Reading the Plays* 188). Wasserstein criticizes feminists for turning the movement into an ideological guilt card that shames and excludes those who disagree. Laurie represents those feminists who are now the new bigots and who interpret the world through the 1960s. But whether they like it or not, the world has changed, and these women must change in order to survive. If they do not, they will become a relic just like communism as Walter says. Clearly, Wasserstein is not advocating postfeminism—on the contrary. She is calling for a strong Third Wave, with the guidance of Second Wave women. She wants the older generation to listen and learn from the younger one. Turning a deaf ear to Emily's criticisms actually represents Laurie's misunderstanding of the changed agenda of feminists: "Jameson's lively mindset of the sixties has become more defined by 'pride' and 'prejudice' in the twenty–first century. In contrast, Third understands the need to evolve and to adapt to change" (Balakian, *Reading the Plays* 195).

In short, as Lively suggests, "Third attacks certainty and self–righteousness, suggesting that intellectual arrogance is what is wrong with America at the beginning of the twenty–first century" (426). The title of the play symbolizes not just the character's name, but it also connotes the Third Wave of Feminism, and the third part of Laurie's life, her retirement. Wasserstein, as a Second Wave feminist chronologically, asks her generation to step aside in order to give way to the new feminism of the new generation.

CONCLUSION

There are many articles, books, and dissertations written on Wendy Wasserstein's feminism and the female characters in her plays, with very few on the role of men and masculinity. This thesis studies how male characters changed and developed over the course of Wasserstein's plays by focusing on three decades, the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Chapter 1 focuses on *Isn't It Romantic* (1983) and *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988) as a means of analyzing male characters' reaction to Second Wave feminists, while Chapter 2 explores *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992) and *An American Daughter* (1997) in terms of middle-aged women's relationships with men and the shifting attitudes of men towards issues such as feminism, self-identity, and manhood. Lastly, Chapter 3 analyzes *Old Money* (2000) with regard to corporate masculinity by comparing and contrasting the Gilded Age with the contemporary era, and *Third* (2005) focuses on the politics of gender, feminism, and academia in the twenty-first century.

Although she has been criticized by feminists for not being feminist enough, Wendy Wasserstein provides an alternative discourse to the patriarchal writing of male playwrights. She provides a feminist, or at least female, assessment of men and how they, and gender roles, changed over time. Each chapter in the thesis includes a discussion of the male characters in her plays as reflections of the people from her life—friends, family, and lovers. This thesis also dissects how men, affected by social movements such as the Feminist, Men's, and Gay Liberation movements, have changed alongside women, asserting that these plays track the historical development of male identity in twentieth-century America. They provide insight into transformations concerning the relationships between men and women, as well as shifts in men's attitudes toward women and feminism.

Wendy Wasserstein began her career as a playwright with *Any Woman Can't* in 1973. Starting with this very early play, Wasserstein incorporated people from her personal life into her works. She used them to analyze the impact of politics, social developments, and popular culture on American society. In the process, she illustrated how the experiences, expectations, disappointments, and accomplishments of her generation, the Baby Boomers, developed and changed over time. Like her later plays, Wasserstein's *Any*

Woman Can't also presents the complexity of relationships between men and women. Therefore, right from the beginning, Wasserstein made it clear that her plays would not simply focus on women, for one cannot understand the female experience without men. She illustrated that in order to understand gender, one must understand the patriarchal power relations behind it. Concentrating on women was half the story, and feminism had no chance of succeeding without a deconstruction of how men and women relate to each other. Human relationships are always complex, and this complexity increases exponentially when issues like gender, politics, and power enter the equation.

Wasserstein's next play, *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977) differs from the rest in that all the characters are women. Nevertheless, the impact of men on women is a constant theme in the play, which considers how the female world is dominated and shaped by men. Both in *Any Woman Can't* and in *Uncommon Women and Others*, female characters are confused about gender roles, whereas men perform their roles as assigned by oppressive patriarchs who are clearly years away from understanding the nature and extent of female discontent.

Isn't It Romantic (1983) is basically about Janie's and Harriet's struggle as independent women struggling to find a balance between their individual aspirations and relationships with men, who are indifferent to their goals. Wasserstein uses men from different age groups—Marty is a single young man whereas Paul is a married middle-aged man—in order to show how men respond to feminism. Marty is self-confident and dominant, and does not want to be challenged by women. As a Jewish doctor and son of a rich father, he wants to follow tradition and become the breadwinner of the house, because he has been taught, since childhood, that men are stronger than women both physically and emotionally, and thus powerful and privileged. Marty attempts to prove his manhood by oppressing and controlling Janie since equality threatens his masculine identity. He constantly calls her "Monkey," interferes with her life decisions, and expects her to be nice (passive) and attentive (a pushover), because women should satisfy the needs of men according to his masculine worldview. Marty performs his manly role by patronizing Janie and lecturing her about how to be a good Jewish woman. Clearly, he is frightened by the fact that women no longer need breadwinners to survive. They can earn their own money too.

Paul Stuart represents middle-aged men who use feminism to escape responsibilities as fathers and husbands by having affairs with "liberated" women. He uses the sexual independence of women that came with the Second Wave to enjoy sex without financial or emotional commitment. Paul is a product of *Playboy* culture, and lives a double life by seeking sexual independence while benefitting from the comforts of a wife and family. Feeling limited and victimized by social expectations, he seeks affairs with feminists, who he thinks expect nothing but sexual pleasure and freedom, as a means to escape the traditional male gender roles of husband and father. Even though feminists help him elide the burden that sexism has placed on his shoulders, Paul is still sexist, especially towards women who want to pursue careers because he believes they threaten male power in the public sphere. For him, feminist women are troublemakers, and he disciplines Harriet by humiliating her and treating her like a child. Despite claiming to be liberated and non-patriarchal himself, Paul is still a traditional male with a wife and children as his safety net. Thus, he is far more deceitful than Marty since the latter never hides his thoughts or intentions.

In the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), the male characters, Scoop and Peter, prioritize their own voices in society and participate in the backlash against feminism, while also using it for their own advancement. Wasserstein introduces a gay character in this play, Peter, to examine the relationship between the Feminist and Gay Liberation movements. Scoop and Peter differ from Marty and Paul in that they seem to come to terms with feminism. However, they still benefit from the patriarchal order. Heidi is dominated and overshadowed by these two men, among others, and spends most of the play trying to emerge from their shadow.

The Gay Liberation Movement led to a great transformation in American society. The movement, which started in the late 1960s and gained prominence with the AIDS crisis, has been addressed by numerous playwrights including Tony Kushner in *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1993). Gays, who had been supporting feminism as a parallel movement, became more self-oriented in the 1980s and began prioritizing their problems as a result of AIDS and the need to enact equality legislation as soon as possible. Wasserstein uses Peter to analyze the relationship between gay men and feminists. Peter has always supported Heidi and her decisions as an independent

woman. However, he expects the same from feminists since he believes that gay men's liberation is just as important: after all, both groups suffer from the patriarchal system. While in the 1970s Peter is willing to work with feminists, his attitude changes in the 1980s when he becomes more egocentric. He begins to focus on his own problems rather than Heidi's, contributing to the backlash that reached its peak in the 1980s. Realizing that feminists do not empathize with his problems, Peter loses his interest in feminism too.

Scoop not only reinforces his beliefs in the traditional inferior position of women, but he also participates in the active backlash against feminism while using feminists for free sex without commitment, much like Paul. The conservative policies of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s gave men permission to rethink their attitude toward feminism and to re-embrace traditional family values. As a conservative man who wears a liberal mask, Scoop is egocentric, confident, and patronizing. He devalues feminism to the point where, he claims, feminism is only about equal orgasms. Scoop continually tries to prove his manhood and, like Marty, uses nicknames for women and tells them what to do. Unlike Marty, who intends to marry Janie because he is confident he can change her, Scoop and Heidi's other two boyfriends never expect to marry her. Scoop is intimidated by Heidi's intellect and activism; moreover, she is not Jewish. Thus, he chooses a traditional woman whom he can control. After he becomes the breadwinning husband and father, Scoop, like Paul, engages in the same "rite of passage," selecting liberated feminists for affairs. Like Peter, Scoop actively participates in the backlash against feminism and prioritizes his own voice, trying to silence women. Although at the end of the play Peter experiences a breakdown, Scoop integrates himself into a changing America because he understands the complexities of women and feminism, which enables him to use them for his continued benefit.

The Heidi Chronicles serves as a bridge between *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Sisters Rosensweig.* Although men are traditional and dominant in *Isn't It Romantic* and *The Heidi Chronicles,* Wasserstein presents two non-conformist men in *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992) who question the system (Mervyn and Geoffrey). As sensitive nineties men, they challenge traditions and stereotypes by illustrating how homosexual men can

hide behind the patriarchal system when it is convenient, and how heterosexual men can be as open-minded and liberated as gay men.

Geoffrey is a bisexual man who is sexually and ideologically liberated; however, he uses Pfeni to escape the AIDS crisis, making him an unstable and unreliable character. He plays the tough guy and soft man to his own advantage, patronizes Pfeni, and feels superior to her. He refrains from offering her permanent security through marriage and children, and tends to be oppressive in their relationship, telling Pfeni what to do and how to feel, thereby contributing to her low self-esteem. Geoffrey even changes her name from Penny to Pfeni, which represents his control over her identity. He still considers women as needy beings who expect to be guided and nurtured, and forces Pfeni to adopt his point of view in all matters. Like Scoop and Peter, Geoffrey is egocentric and devalues Pfeni's problems. He expects a partner who will care for him and be supportive whenever he needs her. Although he generally does not play the traditional role of patriarch, he still sees women in a secondary position and stereotypes them accordingly.

Unlike Geoffrey, Mervyn Kant helps Sara embrace her identity. Rather than being intimidated by Sara's professional success, Mervyn is impressed by her intelligence. Sara assumes that Mervyn is a typical patriarchal man who proves his masculinity through women, and is surprised to discover that he wants to fall in love and cultivate a mutual relationship. He is a reconciled man who has kept up with changes in society, and serves as a catalyst in Sara's life, helping her find a way to reconcile her ethnic and sexual identities. Unlike Paul and Marty, Mervyn is a man who disengages from the patriarchal system and, contrary to Scoop, expects the woman in his life to be intellectually challenging.

The 1990s was a complicated period in that men were divided in terms of their perception of masculinity. While some preferred to be "wimps" like Geoffrey and Mervyn, others criticized these men believing they jeopardized masculinity. Therefore, most men contributed to the backlash against feminism to ensure their own positions and to keep women out of the public sphere.

The men in *An American Daughter* (1997) cause Lyssa's downfall. Walter is overshadowed by her success, much like Scoop is intimidated by Heidi. Walter, however,

is a passive man who has not done anything valuable for five years, while his wife has been successfully climbing the ladder of the public sphere. To hide his intimidation and regain his masculinity, Walter cheats on Lyssa with a postfeminist woman who "appreciates" him. He also minimizes Lyssa's accomplishments to increase her insecurity, and works out to recapture his glory days by impressing Lyssa and other women. Walter undervalues Lyssa by implying that her aggressive personality puts her at a disadvantage, and glorifies himself as a sensitive and imaginative man. He believes in the death of feminism and respects women like Quincy Quince who will not compete with him and who will help him liberate himself from women who are asking for equality. In short, Walter blames Lyssa for his masculinity crisis; therefore, he sabotages Lyssa's nomination and places the blame on her superwoman lifestyle.

Lyssa's conservative gay friend Morrow is also a self-centered man who destroys Lyssa's nomination. As a sexist, he does not believe in Lyssa, and claims that she was nominated only because the president ran out of options. Morrow devalues Lyssa and does not trust her professional qualifications. By opposing women such as Lyssa, Morrow engages in the conservative backlash against feminism, and undermines the support women have historically had from gay men. He also suggests that gay Republicans' understanding of masculinity differs from that of liberal heterosexuals.

The male dominated media also contributes to the reaction against Lyssa. Timber Tucker deliberately asks questions about motherhood and womanhood that place Lyssa in a difficult position, rather than focusing on her professional skills. By twisting facts, he uses Lyssa to ensure his position in the media, although he knows his strategy is not ethical, but opportunistic. Lyssa's father also contributes to the backlash that leads to her withdrawal. Despite his powerful position in politics, Senator Alan Hughes does not become involved in Lyssa's problems, fearing that his reputation will be ruined if he did. Even though he seems to be proud of Lyssa, he asks Billy to change Lyssa's public image, forcing her to act like a stereotypical wife and mother instead of remaining true to her convictions.

In the plays discussed in the first and the second chapters of this thesis, women are at the center whereas men are presented as lovers, fathers, or friends. However, with *Old Money*

(2000) and *Third* (2005), Wasserstein's main focus shifts from women to men. In *Old Money*, she analyses men in terms of how they view money and masculinity. On the other hand, reverse discrimination becomes a masculinity issue when a student is victimized by a feminist professor in *Third*.

In *Old Money,* the attitudes of contemporary men are compared and contrasted with those of the Gilded Age. In both centuries, money is used to define one's manhood. Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer's understanding of masculinity is compared to his son Toby's in the Gilded Age, whereas Jeffrey Bernstein and Ovid are compared in the contemporary era. For Tobias Vivian Pfeiffer, a man's value is measured according to his social background and the amount of money he possesses. Therefore, Pfeiffer believes that Arnold Strauss, a Jewish man, and Schuyler Lynch, an artist, architect, and possible homosexual, are less manly than himself. On the other hand, Toby defines his manhood by accomplishments and intellect, not by class or money. Therefore, he devotes his life to creative productivity. Pfeiffer uses women to polish his public image and enhance his manliness, whereas Toby values them regardless of their class or ethnic background.

In the contemporary era, corporate masculinity is presented with money as an indicator of status and manhood. For Jeffrey, the more money a man has, the more powerful and masculine he is. Jeffrey always wants to be a player, a defining characteristic of a "real man" as it requires ambition and aggressiveness. His wealth and fit, well-dressed body make Jeffrey "manly" because money is the road to liberation and appearance also contributes to masculinity. Women are impressed by Jeffrey because of his money, so Jeffrey uses women to enhance his reputation: his wife becomes a tool to help him climb the social ladder, and Flinty, who sees him a status symbol, reinforces his manhood with her admiration. Believing that real men should build their character rather than a fortune, Ovid, like Toby, breaks free from his father's values and rejects his wealth. Ovid creates his own definition of manhood, which is not measured by money, but by intellect. Vivian, who represents old money, becomes a role model for Ovid. Like Jeffrey, Sid Nercessian uses money and art for legitimacy. He also associates money and women with power, and dislikes feminists who threaten his masculinity.

In *Third*, Richard, Stephen, and Third are subjected to discrimination by Laurie who patronizes men. Third becomes a target for Laurie, who projects her anger with American politics onto him. Laurie unjustly identifies Third with conservatism and sexism, and accuses him of plagiarism, which causes Third's academic probation and the loss of his scholarship. Moreover, Laurie's ideas and behavior reveal her hypocrisy, which resembles that of American patriarchy. Although she claims to be open-minded and progressive, she is regressive and reactionary, still expecting Richard, Emily's boyfriend, to be the male breadwinner. Her husband Stephen is overshadowed by his bossy wife like Walter; therefore, his masculinity is threatened. To regain his masculinity, Stephen relies on body building and hangs out with a motorcycle gang, where male homosocial bonding allows him to escape women's demands and rediscover his lost manhood.

Overall, *Isn't It Romantic*, written at the beginning of the 1980s, reflects men (Marty and Paul) as oppressive patriarchs, whereas men in *The Heidi Chronicles* become more liberated, while remaining superior to women. Both Peter and Scoop take whatever they can get from feminism, yet continue to prioritize themselves. In the 1990s, two groups of men appear on stage: those who come to terms with feminism and those who see women and feminism as threats to their masculinity. Despite his patronizing and self-centered attitude, Geoffrey in *The Sisters Rosensweig* is a sexually and politically liberated man who wants Pfeni to advance in her life. Likewise, Mervyn respects and helps Sara to come to terms with herself. He neither prioritizes himself nor devalues Sara as a woman. However, the men in *An American Daughter* resist and react to change, causing Lyssa's demise. In their world, a woman is still defined by her patriarchal connections. Therefore, Lyssa's existence is meaningless without the approval of the men in her life, none of whom approve. Walter, Alan, Morrow, Timber, and even Lyssa's sons take active parts in the backlash against women, mainly to protect their manhood.

Wasserstein's plays in the 2000s present a different version of manhood—a manhood that has come full-circle. In *Old Money*, she critiques the corporate masculinity that came into existence with Reagan's political, economic, and social policies. These men, like the men of the Gilded Age, define themselves through money, which functions as a status symbol and symbol of masculinity. However, Ovid represents the younger generation who will put an end to this corporate culture. Wasserstein does not discuss Ovid's masculinity;

however, she makes it clear that she is hopeful that at some point in the future, there will be an end to gender binaries. She reinforces this idea in *Third* as well. Besides criticizing Baby Boom women for becoming the patriarchs they despised, she also expresses optimism that Millennials will redefine gender roles. Although full gender equality is not achieved in any of these works, Wendy Wasserstein's dramas shed light on the fact that male transformations constitute an important part of women's experiences because men change alongside women, and adapt their masculine identity accordingly. Thus, it is the enduring promise of gender equality that is the true message of Wasserstein's plays.

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APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
THESIS/DISSERTATION ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE

Date: 01/06/2016

Thesis Title / Topic: From Superiority To Equality?: Men's Voices in Wendy Wasserstein's Plays

According to the originality report obtained by myself/my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options stated below on 01/06/2016 for the total of 119 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled as above, the similarity index of my thesis is 3%.

Filtering options applied:

1. Approval and Decleration sections excluded
2. Bibliography/Works Cited excluded
3. Quotes excluded
4. Match size up to 5 words excluded

I declare that I have carefully read Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Guidelines for Obtaining and Using Thesis Originality Reports; that according to the maximum similarity index values specified in the Guidelines, my thesis does not include any form of plagiarism; that in any future detection of possible infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility; and that all the information I have provided is correct to the best of my knowledge.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

01/06/2016
Signature

Name Surname:	Duygu Beste Başer
Student No:	N12223415
Department:	American Culture and Literature
Program:	American Culture and Literature
Status:	☒ Masters ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Integrated Ph.D.

ADVISOR APPROVAL

APPROVED.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
YÜKSEK LİSANS/DOKTORA TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 01/06/2016

Tez Başlığı / Konusu: Üstünlükten Eşitliğe Mi?: Wendy Wasserstein'in Oyunlarında Erkeklerin Sesi

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 119 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 01/06/2016 tarihinde tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda belirtilen filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 3'tür.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler:
1- Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç,
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4- 5 kelimeden daha az örtüşme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orjinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

01/06/2016
İmza

Adı Soyadı: Duygu Beste Başer
Öğrenci No: N12223415
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DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.

Doç. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç

APPENDIX 2: ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM FOR THESIS WORK

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM FOR THESIS WORK

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE TO THE DEPARTMENT PRESIDENCY

Date: 16/06/2016

Thesis Title / Topic: From Superiority to Equality?: Men's Voices in Wendy Wasserstein's Plays

My thesis work related to the title/topic above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.
4. Is not based on observational and descriptive research (survey, measures/scales, data scanning, system-model development).

I declare, I have carefully read Hacettepe University's Ethics Regulations and the Commission's Guidelines, and in order to proceed with my thesis according to these regulations I do not have to get permission from the Ethics Board for anything; in any infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility and I declare that all the information I have provided is true.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

16/06/2016
Signature

Name Surname:	Duygu Beste Başer
Student No:	N12223415
Department:	American Culture and Literature
Program:	American Culture and Literature
Status:	☒ Masters ☐ Ph.D. ☐ Integrated Ph.D.

ADVISER COMMENTS AND APPROVAL

APPROVED.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ETİK KURUL İZİN MUAFİYETİ FORMU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 16/06/2016

Tez Başlığı / Konusu: Üstünlükten Eşitliğe Mi?: Wendy Wasserstein'in Oyunlarında Erkeklerin Sesi

Yukarıda başlığı/konusu gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne müdahale içermemektedir.
4. Gözlemsel ve betimsel araştırma (anket, ölçek/skala çalışmaları, dosya taramaları, veri kaynakları taraması, sistem-model geliştirme çalışmaları) niteliğinde değildir.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullar ve Komisyonlarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre tez çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kuruldan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

16/06/2016
İmza

Adı Soyadı: Duygu Beste Başer
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DANIŞMAN GÖRÜŞÜ VE ONAYI

UYGUNDUR

Doç. Dr. Tanfer Emin Tunç

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