



The Heidi Chronicles

Wendy Wasserstein

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Comprised of a series of interrelated scenes, the play traces the coming of age of Heidi Holland, a successful art historian, as she tries to find her bearings in a rapidly changing world. Gradually distancing herself from her friends, she watches them move from the idealism and political radicalism of their college years through militant feminism and, eventually, back to the materialism that they had sought to reject in the first place. Heidi's own path to maturity involves an affair with the glib, arrogant Scoop Rosenbaum, a womanizing lawyer/publisher who eventually marries for money and position; a deeper but even more troubling relationship with a charming, witty young pediatrician, Peter Patrone, who turns out to be gay; and increasingly disturbing contacts with the other women, now much changed, who were a part of her childhood and college years. Eventually Heidi comes to accept the fact that liberation can be achieved only if one is true to oneself, with goals that come out of need rather than circumstance. As the play ends she is still "alone," but having adopted an orphaned baby, it is clear that she has begun to find a sense of fulfillment and continuity that may well continue to elude the others of her anxious, self-centered generation.

The Heidi Chronicles Details

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From Reader Review The Heidi Chronicles for online ebook

Michael McClain says

What struck me most about The Heidi Chronicles was Heidi's uncertainty as time marches on and she becomes increasingly lost and frustrated dealing with the repercussions of what she fought for back in the '60's and '70's. I think I expected a more confident, self-assured Heidi when I began but what Wendy Wasserstein gave us was a more complex, ambivalent portrait. Heidi even compares herself to a Heffalump and gurrlllll. Same.

Heidi's heartbreaking speech in Act 2, Scene 4 is the perfect distillation of what Wasserstein's aiming to bring to the surface: wasn't the feminist movement supposed to bring women together? If so, why does Heidi feel so alone?

Becca Morello says

Wow. Amazing. "The Heidi Chronicles" captivated me in ways I never expected! This witty, fast-paced and enchanting play culminates with a chilling reality about careers, love, marriage, friendship and the ups and downs of life. "The Heidi Chronicles" resonated with me on so many levels and I look forward to seeing it on stage soon. Better yet, I look forward to someday portraying Heidi on stage. Highly recommend.

Susan says

I cannot remember not knowing there was a play called "The Heidi Chronicles," but I had never seen or read it. I read a lot about it and about Wendy Wasserstein. recently, I read a New York Times article about the Broadway revival of the play starring Elisabeth Moss, whose Peggy Olsen was quite Heidi-ish, by the way. The article stated that the play was closing due to lack of ticket sales. That was interesting to me. Was the play dated? Irrelevant? So I finally read it.

It's a very good play, about a particular time and place. I can see why a professor quoted in the Times article teaches it as a "history play." But thank you, Wendy Wasserstein, for capturing our history so truly and so well, and for giving us Heidi.

Brina says

One of my reading themes in 2016, that I hope to continue in 2017, has been to read more classic plays. It is in this regard that I selected Wendy Wasserstein's The Heidi Chronicles, which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1988. Wasserstein had previously wrote for the Seattle Repertory Company and penned two other plays- An Uncommon Woman and A Life Imagined. Heidi was her first play to win multiple awards and enjoy long success on Broadway.

The Heidi Chronicles details twenty five years in the life of Dr. Heidi Holland, professor of art history. Heidi

becomes an archetype of the baby boom era who went from campaigning for Eugene McCarthy to demanding equality for women in the work place and at home. Along the way, we meet other characters who share Heidi's journey in life: Susan who is Heidi's closest friend and cracks the glass ceiling in the working world; Scoop Rosenbaum an entrepreneur who loves Heidi but can not marry her because she would rather achieve at work than at home; and Peter Patrone, Heidi's first love who becomes a successful pediatrician and then turns out to be gay. These four characters become representative of the baby boom era that is still achieving today.

In the course of 80 pages of dialogue, it is clear that Wasserstein diligently took the time to research Heidi's character. We learn of lesser known female painters who had to take a back seat to famous men in society; most evident is Lilly Cabot who at a time lived next door to Monet and learned from the French master. What Heidi hoped to achieve in the art world was to eradicate the gap between men and women so that Lilly Cabot is as well known as Claude Monet. This is apparent with Wasserstein's other characters as well. Susan makes inroads in producing sitcoms, Lisa publishes children's books, and April hosts Hello, New York. All of these gains occurred in the 1980s while the glass ceiling was first beginning to crack.

What did not work for me and lowered my rating was the depiction of the male characters in the play. In order to get Heidi to achieve, Wasserstein created two ex-lovers who maintained traits negative enough for Heidi to reject them. Scoop Rosenbaum desired a spouse who would not compete with him. Lisa Friedlander desired a family and was happy taking a back seat to her husband, so she was marriageable material; Heidi, who loved Scoop dearly but wanted a successful career, was not. Peter also loved Heidi for a quarter century but turns out to be gay. In the 21st century, Scoop and Heidi would be considered a power couple. In the mid 1980s, however, Heidi impedes Scoop rise to stardom, thus dating the play thirty years back.

The Heidi Chronicles remains a poignant study of the feminist side to the baby boom generation. I enjoyed reading how women of my mother's generation began to crack into the mythical glass ceiling in many facets of the working world. Yet, from its depiction of men, I believe the play not to be as timeless as some of the other plays I have read this year. Heidi was deserving of the Pulitzer upon its release in 1988, and I glad that I took the time to study it. Worthy of this award, I rate The Heidi Chronicles 4 stars.

Steven says

A pulitzer prize winning play for the feminist Vassar and Brown crowd.

Natalie says

I picked this up for an audition monologue, and I liked it much more than I was expecting to after hating Uncommon Women and Others! Almost 30 years on, it didn't feel particularly groundbreaking to me (especially not after having read several other Baby Boomer Retrospectives), but the characters were interesting, and several of the scenes were comedic gold.

Kasy Long says

I enjoyed this play because the themes are still relevant to today's culture. Even though it's 20 years old, the

play's themes on feminism, female empowerment, friendship, culture, society, etc. are still true today. This was an interesting play. If you're interested in feminism writing, you should give this a read.

Jackie says

I liked this play a lot more before I read my Women in Theater professor's article about it. Then all of a sudden all its flaws became pretty clear. Nonetheless, my favorite thing about it, the dialogue, remained unchallenged, so that's okay.

Heidi was an interesting main character in that she is often portrayed as responding to things happening around her rather than actively engaging in them herself. As a way to highlight the different stages of the second wave feminist movement (stages Heidi sees her friends enacting) this wasn't a bad choice.

Also, as far as dialogue is concerned, the play read very naturally. "I know some of these people," I kept telling myself, mainly because I could hear their lines so vividly in my head.

And Heidi's an art historian. Yes.

Carrie Ridgeway says

I listened to the audio version of the play from Library2Go. The story was pretty good. Enjoyed the interview with the author at the end.

LoriO says

Some plays read better than others; this is one I think needs the nuance of voice and facial expressions to help with comprehension. I can't believe I've never seen this performed! Anyway, there are bits I'm just not sure I understood, characters I'm just not sure how I'm supposed to feel about. But the language is so spot on and the banter is so real...I trust that, when seen and heard, all would be revealed.

As an aside, I also find amusing the fact that this reads, and strongly, as a period piece now, when it was actually set in the then near future when first performed.

Gorfo says

The Heidi Chronicles is a coming of age novel that leaves the reader feeling empty, disappointed and more than a little depressed. The main character comes of age during a time of change and movement from the time spanning the 1960's-to the early 90's. With all of this change surrounding her Heidi feels compelled to action and finds herself fiercely advocating for the representation of women in art. However through all of this she finds herself lonely and unfulfilled. Her romantic life center mainly around two men, Peter Patron and Scoop Rosenbaum, however each one has a surprise for her.

Besides the fact that I hated the main character the story itself was pretty good I guess. GUESS being the operative word. The play is a disjointed mess, that lacked the fluidity which most readers (or viewers) need in order to keep up with the story. The so called "witty banter" reeked of forced artsyness and I felt an

extreme disappointment that this play had won awards and was considered great American writing.

But maybe the play actually would be good for somebody who was 16 in 1965 and could understand all the references. OH THE REFERENCES!!! Without a proper understanding of these references it's impossible to garner any sort of appreciation for the book and that in itself is a problem. It doesn't have the timelessness of a true play (cough cough...SHAKESPEARE...cough cough OSCAR WILDE). And therefore god willing it will slip quietly into oblivion within the next decade or so.

Ina says

I'm not big on plays, but I really liked this one. The thing that attracted me initially was the synopsis - finding myself and trying to be true to myself (as cliché as it sounds) are things I have always thought about. But I definitely found much more in this play.

People argue if this work is still relevant, they talk about feminism and how it's different today. I do agree that this work is about the specific situation of a middle-class woman in that specific time and I wouldn't say that one can just change some details and, voila, the play would be as if set today. (The dialogue alone both between Heidi and Scoop or Peter and Heidi and Fran or Susan would go quite differently today.) But, although significant improvements on women's rights have been made, I would say the question of "having it all" is still very much on the table (or the question of having equal opportunities if we're talking in terms of class). We as people are still trying to find ourselves, wanting to find our own voices, but also wanting to be a part of a larger group, to find acceptance, but also be content with ourselves.

But it's not only about being relevant, it does and has more than that. The play serves as a historical view on feminism and its problems back then, it is a play where the sentiment that was present in the lives of many women was finally put on paper and then the stage. And it has such snappy and witty dialogues that to me they seemed as good and important as the subject matter itself.

I'm not going to go into an analysis of the text itself as there are definitely more competent people out there doing just that, but there is one more thing I would like to say about the matter at hand and things around it. The women in this play fight for having it all, but the content of "having it all" is not the same for every woman (or every man, for that matter). The play seems to be more about the women being in this together (or, as it turns out, not being together), but it seems to me it also brings up a question of separateness in this togetherness. That is still a question worth considering. And this is still a play worth reading.

Anna Fitzgerald says

I didn't find the characters overly interesting and watched them passively from a distance as if they were a bit flat. However, I read a lot of plays and what I did like was the approach of the interconnected scenes moving back and forth through time. That kept the pace moving forward and was refreshing.

Bradley says

I'm on a bit of a Wendy Wasserstein kick. This play won the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony in 1989. Even though the play is over 20 years old, the themes presented are still valid.

Jason says

I adore Wendy Wasserstein's work and this is my favorite. I've always wanted to play Peter in a production. A great look a life!
