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The graduating seniors of a Seven Sisters college, trying to decide whether to pattern themselves after Katharine Hepburn or Emily Dickinson. Two young women besieged by the demands of mothers, lovers, and careers—not to mention a highly persistent telephone answering machine—as they struggle to have it all. A brilliant feminist art historian trying to keep her bearings and her sense of humor on the elevator ride from the radical sixties to the heartless eighties.

Wendy Wasserstein's characters are so funny, so many-sided, and so *real* that we seem to know them from their Scene One entrances, though the places they go are invariably surprising. And these three plays—*Uncommon Women and Others*, *Isn't It Romantic*, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Heidi Chronicles*—manage to engage us heart, mind, and soul on such a deep and lasting level that they are already recognized as classics of the modern theater.

The Heidi Chronicles: Uncommon Women and Others & Isn't It Romantic Details

Date : Published July 2nd 1991 by Vintage (first published 1988)

ISBN : 9780679734994

Author : Wendy Wasserstein

Format : Paperback 249 pages

Genre : Plays, Drama, Theatre, Fiction



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David Jay says

I didn't have great expectations for this collection of plays. I've always thought Wendy Wasserstein was overrated and I've really disliked some of her other works (I hated "The Sisters Rosensweig...") What a pleasant surprise. I thought all three of these plays were beautifully constructed and interesting. Some cliches here and there and wow, these pieces are so so dated. But I think that that becomes almost charming, a la Thornton Wilder or William Inge. They are time capsules of a completely different, albeit not so long ago, era. I particularly liked "Isn't It Romantic?" which I imagine is the least known of the three. Still though, I hardly think "The Heidi Chronicles" is worthy of the Pulitzer Prize, which it won.

Marcella says

[Disclosure: My positive reviews of these plays is helped by the fact that I found a SIGNED copy of this book at the library book sale for fifty cents. ?????!]

One of the things I like about these plays is that they are firmly realistic. They deal with real issues and choices of women from a particular moment in history. Wasserstein's ear for dialogue is outstanding, even when slang changes with the times.

Uncommon Women gets brownie points from me because I attended the eventually coeducated college near Mt. Holyoke, so I was familiar with some references that shockingly haven't changed in forty years (and befuddled by the idea of formal teas). It's not the most focused play in terms of plot, but it does a great job showing the range of young women attending a prestigious college who struggle with the inevitable "what next?"-ness of college that still exists today.

Isn't It Romantic I actually want to see performed, because it seems really damn funny.

I struggled the most with the Heidi Chronicles, even though it is the most tightly written and character-driven work. I think this is an example of when a work of art that's groundbreaking at the time of its creation doesn't seem unusual later because it causes a shift in the wider cultural landscape. (I did howl with laughter when WW basically predicted Sex and the City.) In many ways, women are still facing the questions of how to live their lives in the ways that they faced in the 80s, and by now we've seen many introspective works by women on these issues. How much work, how much love, how much motherhood can one actually have at the same time? Again, I think it probably comes to life when performed, and I'd happily attend.

Korri says

These plays are all about a subject dear to my heart: women struggling to figure out what they want and how to 'have it all'. The dialogue reminds me of how much has changed (one WASP character wouldn't hypothetically marry a Jewish character because 'there would be problems at the club') and how much is still the same (tea at women's colleges, limiting and contradictory expectations placed on women, etc). The plays

must have seemed provocative and controversial at the time but now they are a bit musty. Still, we can't relegate them to the closet when so many of the issues Wasserstein raises are relevant now.

Tony says

THE HEIDI CHRONICLES; UNCOMMON WOMEN AND OTHERS; ISN'T IT ROMANTIC. (Various dates). Wendy Wasserstein. ****/***/***.

This is a collection of Wasserstein's most famous play, The Heidi Chronicles, along with two plays of hers that preceded it. The Heidi Chronicles, first staged in 1988, went on to win the Tony Award for best Play, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1989. It follows Heidi's life from high school, through college, and on to her life and career choices. It's full of those one-liners that I always wish I could come up with but can't. It's also full of women who have more or less lost their way. In their pursuit of fulfillment, they failed to define the endpoint. Instead, they have taken up causes related to women's issues and eschewed the ideals of women of earlier generations. This play probably plays better than it reads. There's just too much patter among the players to keep up with the printed word. All of the subjects popular at the time are included: women's rights, the role of marriage, the perfect mate, AIDS, career, etc. If I had to describe the style, I'd have to go back to Sardou and/or Wilde. It is a good play, but I think it will become a period piece.

Recommended.

Cassandra White says

I felt a lot of the emotions that Heidi did as I was reading this play. But the final image made it worth it.

Jeaneé says

I knew these plays would orient around feminism and the sort, but I didn't think they would be so exhaustive. All three plays shared the same theme and characterizations of people, i.e. of women -- beautiful, intellectual, independent, yet confused. The only play I somewhat enjoyed was *Isn't it Romantic* because the characters and dialogue were believable and the idea of compromise was relatable to a certain extent.

Harriet [daughter]: Well, I've made up my mind. I'm going to try to do it: have it all [career, child, and husband].

Lillian [mother]: Good for you. For your sake, I hope you can. *Pauses*. What's the matter, Harriet? Did I disillusion you?

Harriet: No, I'm afraid I'm just like you.

Lillian: Don't be afraid. You're younger.

Harriet: Mother, you're trying my patience.

Lillian: You sound just like me, dear.

Anna says

I love these three plays. I wrote on the Heidi Chronicles in my Masters thesis. The topic of "wanting it all", career, kids and a society approved relationship is elaborated in a very refreshing way. At the same time it made me think of how the play still strikes today's Zeitgeist, given all the TV-shows and shiny magazines that want to tell us how to design our life styles: get pretty for work in the morning, while preparing a healthy lunch in a chic lunch tote, gym after work if not having a drink at a 5-7, wedding day, kids, all needs to be planned years in ahead.

Where are today's Heidis who point the way to an attitude that allows us to pass on some of those many societal expectations? Cause it's ok and it's your happiness to take to heart.

Lauren says

This collection of three plays is not only entertaining but beautifully capture a segment of the Baby Boomer population – namely, the idealistic, professional women who embraced feminism and tried to make sense of what having it all means. All three plays are excellent, and I say this as someone who is generally lukewarm about the Baby Boomers and their tendency towards narcissistic naval-gazing. Ms. Wasserstein walks a fine line in exploring the issues that concerned her and her compatriots while avoiding self-centered ranting. In a way, the three remind me of a less commercial *When Harry Met Sally*. Recommended.

Larry Bassett says

This book of three short plays from the 1970s and 1980s is a delightful flashback for me. I will go to my 50th high school class reunion this year. It will be interesting to see how many of us managed to have it all.

A random speech from the first play, *Uncommon Women and Others*:

HOLLY: What kind of pleasure? There's someone on top of you sweating and pushing and you're lying there pretending this is wonderful. That's not wonderful. That's masochistic.

Well, this is a feminist play from the 70s! What did you expect?

Here is the description of Holly at the front of the play:

HOLLY KAPLAN: hair disheveled, yet well cut. She wears expensive clothes that don't quite match, not because she doesn't know what matches, but because she doesn't want to try too hard. That would be too embarrassing. A relier for many years on the adage "If she lost twenty pounds, she's be a very pretty girl, and if she worked, she'd do very well," Holly has devised a strong moral code of warmth for those you love and wit for those you're scared of. Holly saw the Radio City Easter Show in second grade and planned to convert.

Andre Bishop writes in the Foreword:

Reading the plays of Wendy Wasserstein is quite different from seeing the plays of Wendy Wasserstein. In the theatre, they are consistently funny; the comedy sparkles. Yet when one sits down to read these three plays, one is surprised, almost overwhelmed, by their seriousness. It seems to me that Wendy's plays are *ideas* that happen to be written as comedies. The three heroines, though vastly different, share an essential sadness, but it is a sadness deflected by humor, because these are witty women and they use their wit to devastating effect.

The thing is: I think maybe I just should have been born Jewish. That way I could have a heritage without having to be religious. I just love these Jewish characters and I loved the Jewish women in the Grace Paley short stories I just read. I must have lived in NYC in a past life. Or maybe I will in a future life!

A random speech from the second play, *Isn't It Romantic*:

HARRIET: Mother, do you think it's possible to be married or live with a man, have a good relationship and children that you share equal responsibility for, build a career, and still read novels, play the piano, have women friends, and swim twice a week?

In the third play, *The Heidi Chronicles*, Heidi gives a talk to an alumnae group in 1986:

Well, you might be thinking, this is a woman's meeting, so let's give her the benefit of the doubt. After teaching at Columbia yesterday, Miss Holland probably attended a low-impact aerobics class *with* weights, picked up her children from school, took the older one to drawing-with-computers at the Metropolitan, and the younger one to swimming-with-gifted-children. On returning home, she immediately prepared grilled mesquite free-range chicken with balsamic vinegar and sun-dried tomatoes, advised her investment-banker, well-rounded husband on future finances for the City Ballet, put the children to bed, recited the favorite Greek myths and sex-education legends, dashed into the library to call the twenty-two-year-old squash player who is passionately in love with her to say they can only be friends, finished writing ten pages of a new book, took the remains of the mesquite free-range dinner to a church that feeds the homeless, massaged her husband's feet, and relieved any fears that he "might" be getting old by "doing it" in the kitchen, read forty pages of the *Inferno* in Italian, took a deep breath, and put out the light. So after all this, we forgive Miss Holland for not preparing a speech today. She's exemplary and exhausted.

If you are a baby-boomer or a feminist or an over-achiever or simply know someone who is, you might enjoy this quick-read that will give you something to relate to, to remember and to think about for a while. Those were the days. Five stars. One extra for the nostalgia. Winner: 1989 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Kurt Ostrow says

"I hope our daughters never feel like us. I hope all our daughters feel so fucking worthwhile" (182).

"No more master penises!" (185).

"I'm just not happy. I'm afraid I haven't been happy for some time.' I don't blame the ladies in the locker room for how I feel. I don't blame any of us. We're all concerned, intelligent, good women. It's just that I feel stranded. And I thought the whole point was that we wouldn't feel stranded. I thought the point was that we were all in this together" (232).

I really liked reading HEIDI CHRONICLES, even if some of the plays' politics felt dated and some of the comedy felt off-the-mark to me. Like, are we meant to laugh at the radical lesbian or with her? The plays are really sharp, really funny, and persistently relevant. I appreciated the specificity of the characters and the settings: Seven Sisters and Ivy League (soon-to-be) graduates, navigating their lives as "uncommon women" in New York. Yes, it's a 9-5 kind of white (Jewish) feminism, with insufficient class critique, but those are the stories Wasserstein knows, not to mention ones that feel most familiar to me, and I'm grateful she told them.

Julia says

When I requested this from the library I thought I was getting the play "The Heidi Chronicles" and I was, but I was also getting "Uncommon Women and Others" and "Isn't It Romantic." What a delightful combination! The first is a play from 1977 that I knew well then; I did Holly's monologue in college. "Isn't It Romantic" I knew only from Wasserstein's biography. "The Heidi Chronicles" I'd heard of – I don't *quite* live under a rock— it won the Pulitzer Prize and Tony, but I haven't seen a production of it. "Uncommon Women" is dated, but it's also still a wonderful piece of writing and I'd love to see it staged again. "Isn't it Romantic" is from 1983 and it's about Janie and Harriet who have moved back to New York City after going to college, their parents and their lovers and their careers. "The Heidi Chronicles" came to Broadway in 1989 and takes place in roughly chronological scenes from 1965 to 1989 and is about these years in the lives of Heidi Holland and Susan Johnston, their boyfriends, careers and families. It's a great play with dialogue that jumps off the page. As one of the characters might say: "A+!"

Amanda says

I picked this up for my Modern Drama class in college. I had to choose a playwright we were not studying in class to read and write a paper about. My dad suggested Wendy Wasserstein for he thought she was up my alley. Oh, how I loved this play. I read all of her plays in print for my assignment, but the Heidi Chronicles is so true, so heartbreakingly real, and touched me in a way few authors are able. It stands the test of time and does not date itself. I have given this to many friends during some tough times in their lives.

Allison says

Uncommon Women and Others was really good. It was refreshing to read a play with female characters written by a woman. That's the reason the monologues from this play are used so much in auditions. What's also really cool is the familiar names in the original cast. Picturing Glenn Close or Meryl Streep saying the lines makes the reading more vivid.

Isn't It Romantic didn't sit as well with me, but that was probably more my fault because I read the play in pieces over the course of a week. The conclusion was however, very satisfying, and is again, a reason to read the works of female playwrights.

I really enjoyed The Heidi Chronicles. The play is filled with original characters and seems fresh and relevant twenty years later. The chronological vignette structure is a difficult one for playwrights to pull off, but Wendy Wasserstein executed it brilliantly.

Definitely read all three plays, in order.

Marc says

Uncommon Women & Others - 2 stars - may have been great with the original cast that included Swoosie Kurtz, Glenn Close.

Isn't It Romantic - 3 -

The Heidi Chronicles - 3.5 stars - had some funny moments

Angelique says

The first time I read The Heidi Chronicles, I thought it read flat and couldn't see it at all. But it's one of those plays where the more you become acquainted with, the more you like it. It feels like a real theatre students play. It is definitely the strongest of the bunch, but I much prefer 'Isn't it Romantic?', because I like the characters more. Heidi is such a tough nut. They all have the same themes running through them, but man, she can write dialogue like a boss. She's a less wordy waspy Tom Stoppard. 'Uncommon Women and Others' is just, weird. I don't know why it's even a play. But I'm sure once I get more acquainted with it, I'll like it more. A+ form, A- content.

Melissa says

Definitely one from the ever growing canon of white, educated urban women examining their lives and making some vanguard choices. It's from 1988 but could have been written last week. I'm actually comforted by the fact that a life like Heidi's--educated, accomplished and independent, yet still ambivalent and longing-- is so cliché to me by now, the stuff of long-running television series and best-selling books. And though it's tempting to dismiss clichés, I need to remember these were not the pop culture clichés my mother was bombarded with, and that's where the significance lies.

Meg says

Given:

1. Rating anthologies of plays is silly and a little impossible.
2. Reading a play is a funny business unto itself.

However:

1. This collection got me in a soft spot at the right time.
2. I don't know what took me so long.

The Fifth Star:

1. Is just for Wendy, in general.
2. And for me, a little bit. And for jokes. And for plays with jokes. And for relationships, and for plays with relationships. And for theatrical realism, whatever it is, and how it's here, even if I don't know what it is.

Lisa Feld says

The best part of a good collection is watching a writer's voice develop over time. Reading *Uncommon Women*, I thought, "This is nice, I guess: kind of like a Seinfeld episode: mildly amusing, with very random characters who talk like people really talk, and nothing actually happens." By *Isn't It Romantic*, I was thinking, "Well, she's good at capturing a particular historical moment and showing how women think and feel, but she's not actually making *me* feel anything. She's good, but she's no Jane Austen." But by the time I finished *The Heidi Chronicles*, I was up to, "Well, damn. I may have to revise my thinking on that Jane Austen thing."

Each of these plays is interesting in its own right, following bright young women of Wasserstein's generation who graduated from the best colleges, filled with feminist ideals about having it all--marriage, kids, and fulfilling careers--only to find themselves in their mid-thirties with little if anything to show for it. Their careers are not as far along as they once dreamed. They struggle with singlehood or with settling for men who secretly want to marry Donna Reed. And despite the professed values of the Feminist Movement, they're beset by the cattiness of other women. Wasserstein's heroines are struggling with the gulf between the ideals of feminism and the realities of life.

The Heidi Chronicles is clearly the star of the collection: the characters feel like people, not stock types, their pain pulls at the heart strings, and the gay character, Peter, gives the play further depth by pointing out to Heidi that women are not the only ones struggling to be seen and respected, and dreams aren't the only things dying in New York in the late 1980s. Wasserstein has captured something very powerful here, and, like Jane Austen, I wish she could have lived longer and had the chance to write much, much more.

Stephen says

I had only been exposed to one of Wasserstein's plays, when I played the role of douche bag Paul Stuart in 'Isn't It Romantic' while still in high school. The subject matter was over our heads then and the play- even with having two very strong female leads- wasn't what it could have been. Still, it provided for an introduction to her work. Now, approaching 30, I picked up her plays, which include the aforementioned, and I most definitely understand the themes and complex, nuance struggles of the characters. I also understand Wasserstein's awards, accolades and fan base. She really was hitting the nail on the head with the prevailing gender role issues that were a part of the past three generations of American life. Her sincerity, keen observations, sarcasm and general optimism permeates what could be a very dark group of plays. Beautiful work. Very happy to reread 'Isn't It Romantic' especially.

Jed L says

A play I read for my survey of theatre class, *The Heidi Chronicles* wasn't my favorite. I felt that it lacked any plot or much depth in character development. It tried to tell a moving story of how a woman grows up through the 60s-80s trying to find a voice for herself, but I struggled to connect with the character at all. It jumped around a lot and was pretty confusing. It won a Pulitzer Prize, but I am not sure why. Probably because it explored new issues and was controversial. And the movie is even worse with Jamie Lee Curtis. Avoid both if you can.
