***JAST*, 2018; 48:1-22**

Submitted: 06. 11. 2017

Accepted: 08. 03. 2018

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Death of the Second Wave? Men and the Backlash against Second Wave Feminists in Wendy Wasserstein's *An American Daughter*[1]

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Abstract

This article examines Wendy Wasserstein's (1950-2006) commentary on the backlash against to the Second Wave of Feminism through one of her most serious plays, *An American Daughter* (1997). It explores how and why men participated in the backlash against feminism, resulting in the downfall of Second Wave feminists. The analysis concludes that men reacted to the Second Wave in a reactionary manner as it threatened not only their masculinity and authority, but also their professional careers. The men in *An American Daughter* resist and react to change because in their world, a woman is still defined by her patriarchal connections. Therefore, the protagonist Lyssa's existence is meaningless without the approval of the men in her life. Walter, Alan, Morrow, Timber, and even Lyssa's sons take active parts in the backlash against women, mainly to protect their manhood.

Keywords

Wendy Wasserstein, *An American Daughter*, feminism, masculinity

[1]This article is derived from the author's MA thesis entitled *From Superiority to Equality? Men's Voices in Wendy Wasserstein's Plays.*

İkinci Dalga Öldü Mü? Wendy Wasserstein'ın *An American Daughter*[2] Adlı Oyununda Erkekler ve İkinci Dalga Feminizm Karşıtlığı

Öz

Bu makale, Wendy Wasserstein'in (1950-2006) *An American Daughter* (1997) adlı oyununda İkinci Dalga Feminizm karşıtı tepkileri nasıl ele aldığını incelemektedir. Bununla beraber, erkeklerin İkinci Dalga feministlerin çöküşüne sebep olan bu karşı tepkiye nasıl ve neden katıldığını da ele almaktadır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, erkekliklerinin, otoritelerinin ve profesyonel hayatlarının tehdit altında olduğu hissine kapılan erkeklerin, İkinci Dalga Feminizm karşısında eleştirel bir tutum sergilemiş oldukları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. *An American Daughter* oyunundaki erkekler değişime direnirler, çünkü onların dünyalarında kadınlar hala ataerkil toplum kuralları üzerinden tanımlanmaktadır. Bu yüzden, oyunun başkahramanı olan Lyssa'nın varlığı hayatındaki erkeklerin onayı olmadan anlamsızdır. Oyundaki erkek karakterlerin hepsi (Walter, Alan, Morrow, Timber ve hatta Lyssa'nın iki oğlu), tehdit altında olan erkekliklerini korumak adına kadınlara ve feminizme karşı tepkilere aktif olarak katılıp Lyssa'nın hayatını olumsuz yönde etkilerler.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Wendy Wasserstein, *An American Daughter*, feminizm, erkeklik

The women of the Second Wave of feminism 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

[2] Bu makale, yazarın *Üstünlükten Eşitliğe mi?: Wendy Wasserstein'in Oyunlarında Erkeklerin Sesi* (2016) başlıklı yüksek lisans tezinden alınmıştır.

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. According to Ruth Rosen, the "supermom" of the 1950s was transformed into the "superwoman" in the 1980s (327–328).

Third Wave of Feminism emerged from this fight between the Second Wave feminists and postfeminists who became a part of this backlash. Stressing the need for a new movement, names like Naomi Wolf and Rebecca Walker distinguished themselves from the previous generation and postfeminists. In *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*, for instance, Naomi Wolf not only criticizes the backlash against feminism and the ideologies that try to "undo" all the things feminism has accomplished, but she also warns women who have fallen into the trap stating that "the contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically" and a "new way to see" will free women "from the dead weight" (19). She equates beauty standards to currency standards and claims that just like economy, beauty is determined by politics, which is no surprisingly male dominated (12). Likewise, Rebecca Walker writes in "Becoming the Third Wave" that "I realize I must undergo a transformation if I am truly committed to women's empowerment. . . . I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave" (601). Wasserstein depicts this time period between the Second Wave and the Third Wave in *An American Daughter* (1997).

Born as a part of post- World War II Baby Boom generation, Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006) witnessed the rise and fall of the Second Wave of Feminism of the 60s and 70s; thus, she had a chance to observe how the movement affected American society. In her works, Wasserstein mainly discussed the outcomes of this movement from an objective observer's perspective. As Frazer Lively affirms, "Wasserstein

is concerned with the effect of historical events on individuals and how individuals respond to them" (420). This article will analyze Wendy Wasserstein's depiction of the antifeminist backlash in *An American Daughter* with a specific focus on the role of men. The male characters' participation in the backlash reflects the reaction of American society to the Second Wave of Feminism. Although men have a complementary role in Wasserstein's former plays such as *Isn't It Romantic* (1983), *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988), and *The Sisters Rosensweig* (1992), the way Wasserstein characterizes them changes in *An American Daughter*. In this regard, male characters are as important as the female protagonist of the play as the male/female and dominant/subordinate binaries have been deconstructed to the point where Wasserstein's men are active participants in the backlash against feminism, trying to dismantle women's gains in a jealous, reactionary manner. Moreover, analyzing *An American Daughter* in 2018 will contribute to the "Me Too" movement, which encourages women to talk about sexual assault and harassment. Although Wasserstein does not deal with sexual harassment directly, she breaks the silence about the victimization of women and she overtly criticizes the hypocrisy of the patriarchal system.

Traces of History in *An American Daughter* (1997)

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 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. Michael 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.

Wasserstein was closely watching the politics of the Clinton administration. Thus, it was impossible for her to miss a so-called "scandal" directly related to the backlash against women. In this regard, 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 Jan 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 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 liberal bisexual and homosexual men of *The Heidi*

Chronicles and *The Sisters Rosensweig*, the gay character, Morrow, is a politically conservative Republican in *An American Daughter*. 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.

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). 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 is disturbed and intimidated by Lyssa's success. 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 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.

Mission Changed: Conservative Gays

As R. W. 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. 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. Wasserstein expects gay men to support women, 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.

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).

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.

Conclusion

An American Daughter is arguably Wasserstein's most pessimistic play with overtly conservative and hypocritical male characters. In this play, Wasserstein reflects the conflicting sexual politics and coexisting masculinities of the late twentieth century. 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. 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 Jill 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.

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