

The Heidi Chronicles as Illustration of the Second
Feminist Wave in the United States

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Abstract

This final degree dissertation aims to show how vital was the Second Wave Feminism in the twentieth century in terms of women's struggle for better conditions. This period of intense fight has been the object of many literary and critical works, such as novels, collections of poetry and scholarly articles. From the huge bibliography on this topic I have chosen to focus on *The Heidi Chronicles*, a play written by Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006) which reflects and engages with the main concerns raised by women in the period covering the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Thus, I argue that this text could very well illustrate the political, social and theoretical aspects developed within the Second Feminist Wave in the United States. A further reason for choosing this work has to do with the possibilities of theatre as a cultural manifestation to deal with questions that include gender relations and social themes. The theatre has always implied an interaction between characters in a literal way, and this turns it perhaps into the most straightforward genre to involve the public – the audience – or the readership.

I will use a methodology based on the implementation of the Second Feminist Wave theories, and examine the play in the light of the main proposals and suggestions found in that body of work. Basically, then, I will highlight the demand of rights and a group of other related questions made by women made in that period.

Key words: Wendy Wasserstein, Second Feminist Wave, gender issues, feminist drama

1. Introduction

This final year dissertation focuses on the Second Feminist Wave in the United States, an extremely relevant period regarding women's rights in the twentieth century. More specifically, I have chosen to analyze Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* as a remarkable illustration of the main issues developed and articulated by women in that period. My aim, then, is to provide a closer vision to this most decisive period for women through the plot, characters and themes exhibited in Wasserstein's play. Additionally, I also intend to examine the possibilities that the theatre has in order to deal with gender issues.

My methodological framework will apply the notions extracted from a brief historical and social analysis of the Second Feminist Wave to the literary work in question. The reason for choosing this topic for my work has to do with my strong and long-lasting interest in feminist issues, among them, gender (in)equality, feminist movements, women's suffrage, reproductive rights and domestic violence. Moreover, the advances achieved by women during this period single it out as a crucial stage within the struggle for women's rights.

As far as the election of a literary work is concerned, I have opted for a drama play because it is normally the least treated genre within English Studies at our department, and students have very little chance at reading them. Consequently, the choice of a dramatic text implied for me an intellectual challenge I wished to take up. Obviously enough, if my work was going to focus on the Second Feminist Wave, it is just logical that I had to choose a feminist text in order to illustrate my points, and much more if we bear in mind Carolyn Craig's explanation of the great growth of feminist playwrights during this period and the sense of community that held these women together in a shared interest of working in favor of women's progress. (11)

According to Carolyn Craig, Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006) tends to construct her plays around bright and ambitious women, being this to some extent a reflection of her own experiences. A case in point is the work I will study, *The Heidi Chronicles*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1989. As well as other feminist playwrights, Wendy Wasserstein used her family background as a source for stage material. In this sense it is important to mention the influence of her mother, Lola Wasserstein, who

always behaved as a non-conventional woman and mother. Wendy Wasserstein has explained that her mother “didn’t cook... She didn’t clean. I never saw any evidence of laundry... Lola sort of operated in a different sphere.” (qtd. Craig 184) Wasserstein’s family, then, provided her with a different view of women’s roles, obviously opposed to those in vogue at that time.

Wendy Wasserstein made her script-writing debut at a girls’ high school, where she wrote the “mother-daughter fashion show” to get excused from gym, as she has explained: “I didn’t know anything about fashion... but I knew that they’d let me out of gym if I wrote the mother-daughter fashion shows... I also wanted to write shows” (qtd. Craig 187). After that, she went to the women’s college Mount Holyoke where she was so impressed about how much more confident male students were that she started reading feminist papers and going to consciousness-raising groups. Back in New York, Wendy Wasserstein took writing classes at City College, and in that period she managed to write her first play, *Any Woman Can’t*, about a college girl who goes to New York, fumbles a tap-dance audition, and ends up making an unfortunate marriage.

The next play written by Wendy Wasserstein was *Uncommon Women and Others*, based on her undergraduate experiences at Mount Holyoke, which shows the character of Holly as a thinly disguised Wendy Wasserstein. After that, Wasserstein wrote her next play, *Isn’t It Romantic*, which she described as being “pretty much about me and my mother Lola, and my best friend and her mother... Most of my plays come from something that happens in my life... and I can’t stop thinking about it...” (qtd. Craig 190). By the mid-1980s, Wasserstein wrote for television as well as articles and essays for magazines when a brilliant idea came to her mind:

I was seeing a lot of plays in which I found the image of women disturbing again. I was beginning to feel like I felt at Yale. It’s not that there were not good plays...it’s just that I felt again that the image of women was not being fully represented. So I thought, I can either go out to drinks with my friends and get angry about this, or I suppose I could write a play, which is always harder.

The other thing was, I was beginning to think, Well, what’s happened to feminism – to all the political commitment?... Because I actually have always had an interest in history... in how we got from the past to the present, when everything seems to be breaking down (qtd. Craig 191)

And that was the starting point for Wasserstein to write *The Heidi Chronicles*, which won the Tony Award for best play (she was the first woman winning this prize)

in addition to the Pulitzer Prize. Both of them made her internationally recognized and widely praised by many critics, even though she wrote it just for “herself”, as she later confessed: “*Heidi* was a play I wrote very much for myself... Basically, I didn’t think a play about a feminist art historian who becomes sad could be a commercial hit” (qtd. Craig 191)

The Heidi Chronicles covers the life of a woman throughout twenty-four years, in which the author shows how she assumes the values of the Women’s Movement, simultaneously making a portrait of a whole generation of politically-committed women. The fact that this play became a commercial success was a proof for Wasserstein that the Women’s Movement was clearly advancing. Wendy Wasserstein was a passionate feminist and this is noticeable in all her works, but she wanted to make clear that her feminist ideas were closely intertwined with humanist ideas:

I know that, for myself, that whole feminist movement – it did change my life. I know that. I think I would have wanted to write plays, you know, have had the talent to. I think that Marsha and Beth and I are very fortunate to have come to age when we did, at this time – when the women’s movement had made enough of a dent in society that the repercussion of it were able to open up the theatre to our voices (qtd. Craig, 206)

In an 2001 interview Wasserstein was asked about her works *Uncommon Women*, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, *An American Daughter*, *Old Money* and *The Heidi Chronicles*, about which she said that all are about women who think they should be content with what they have and are frustrated because they are not — they want more. (Homes). The author deceased in 2006, having been named the “Playwright Who Dramatized the Progress of a Generation of Women.” Her writings, and especially her play *The Heidi Chronicles*, turned her into one of the most prominent female playwrights in the United States.

In the next chapter, I will engage with a brief discussion of the Second Feminist Wave both as a political and a theoretical movement. I will draw mostly on the notions developed by Cynthia Harrison in her essay “Creating a National Feminist Agenda,” and I will combine this analysis with the one elaborated by Sally Burke in her book *American Feminist Playwrights: A Critical History*.

Chapter three will be devoted to the analysis of *The Heidi Chronicles* from the perspective of the political and theoretical Second Wave Feminist movement in the

United States examined in the previous chapter. This will include an explanation of the aspects previously explored in relation to the play.

2. Second Feminist Wave: A Brief Account

This chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of the Second Feminist Wave in the United States, from both a political and a historical perspective. I will base my analysis on Cynthia Harrison's above-mentioned essay and in the second part of the chapter I will briefly deal with some aspects connected with the feminist playwrights that emerged in that time following Sally Burke's study on American feminist playwrights.

Second Wave feminism came out of a period of social protest in which the women's movement was associated to many other campaigning groups of the 1960s. More specifically, the Civil Rights Movement played a major role in the emergence of the feminist movement (Carr 121). According to Sara M. Evans, several scholars and historians of the Second Feminist Wave have tended to focus on divisions within the women's movement, in terms of race and class, rather than on the strong alliances formed during this period. For this reason, the author offers a wider vision on the different coalitions and partnerships in which feminists and many other activists joined forces in the fight against social injustice. Thus, feminists in that period formed numerous and diverse coalitions across divisions of race, class or political ideology breaking the stereotype of a white, middle-class, politically rigid movement in a very turbulent time (Evans xii).

Cynthia Harrison points out that in 1971 a group of feminists in New York led by Brenda F. Fastau and Gloria Steinem, created the Women's Action Alliance (WAA) with the purpose of providing information, extending their support and offering services in favor of the cause of the still young but growing feminist movement (19). This incipient movement based its constituency in the new small feminist groups emerging across the country that needed to know what the rest of feminists were doing to fight sexism in their communities. In 1975, together with the International Women's Year (an initiative of the United Nations), the WAA opted for a connection with the traditional women's organizations formed decades earlier with the purpose of creating a women's agenda that would strengthen the movement by connecting these older groups to the same objective. That same year, in response to the United Nations' declaration of the International Women's Year, President Gerald Ford established the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, which was the latest of

a series of federal commissions on women that President John Kennedy had instated in 1961. Nevertheless, after the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, independent feminist groups started to push hard in order to guarantee that the government's advocacy for women was not the only medium to improve women's conditions and expand their opportunities (Harrison 20). In fact, the WAA wanted to create an active coalition of women's organizations that would operate the agenda of the women's movement indefinitely. So, the WAA leaders believed and strongly defended that their coalition of feminist groups was the logical organization to accomplish this function:

When the United Nations declared in 1975 International Women's Year and the beginning of a Decade on Women, the only group available to bring together women's groups to coordinate a National Women's Agenda was the Alliance... Unlike every other women's group, the Alliance has no agenda except to strengthen the hand of other groups (qtd. Harrison, 20)

A small group of leaders of recognized national women's organizations – modern and traditional, representing a variety of different electors – attended the first meeting. After this first meeting took place, the WAA extended formal invitations to a hundred national organizations. The result of this was the creation of the first draft of the National Women's Agenda (NWA), in which the WAA gathered their responses and unified a series of common objectives and tasks in the fight for women's rights. The committee developed a preamble to the agenda that addressed the essential need of both unity and recognition of diversity within the movement:

In creating the first National Women's Agenda, we are making explicit demands on our Government and on the private sector as well. Firm policies and programs must be developed and implemented at all levels to eliminate those inequalities that still stand as barriers to the full participation by women of every race and group. For too long, the nation has been deprived of women's insights and abilities. It is imperative that women be integrated into national life now... Diverse as we are, we are united by the deep and common experience of womanhood. As we work toward our common goals, we insist upon the protection of this diversity, and call for the simultaneous elimination of all the insidious forms of discrimination, not only those based on gender, but also on race, creed, ethnicity, class, lifestyle, sexual preference, and age" (qtd. Gilmore 21)

Hence, the agenda contemplated numerous and diverse concerns, like the will for more women in positions of influence and authority, a question that had attracted the interest of traditional women's organizations since the suffragist movement's times and

with the arrival of the Second Wave had revived attention from the feminist groups. For this reason, the agenda included this item under the title “Fair Representation and Participation in the Political Process.” In addition to that, education demands were also included under the “Equal Education and Training” in demand for the eliminations of sex role stereotypes at every level of the educational system or in education materials. The “Fair Treatment by and Equal Access to Media and the Arts” was a section dealing with concerns about the image of women that promoted the removal of stereotypes of women and girls (Harrison 21).

Homemakers were also contemplated in the new demands as the new movement wanted homemakers to be “legally recognized as workers whose work had certain economic value” (Harrison 22). In this sense, working women’s needs were visible in the “Meaningful Work and Adequate Compensation,” a category in which the NWA underscored the need of a development and imposition of antidiscrimination laws, an increase of labor laws to cover working women such as domestic workers or farmer laborers, affirmative actions to combat discrimination between sexes, the petition of flexible work schedules (especially for working mothers) and the adaptation of job positions for pregnant workers considering the “disabilities of pregnancy as normal, temporary employment disabilities.” (Harrison 22)

Among the rest of the demands, the agenda of the movement also claimed for “equal pay for comparable work, that is, work frequently performed by women... equivalent to work performed by men, but for which women receive less pay” (Harrison 22). Furthermore, under the rubric “Equal Access to Economic Power” a section was devoted to speak about the circumstance of the most vulnerable women, where strategies to end poverty among these women, the possibility to generate wealth and to guarantee a minimum wage were the main goals. The program pursued as well the work towards the respect of individual rights and dignity of all women, and the creation of such program is the result of the demands and needs for change expressed by many women during this period.

But the inquiries of the movement were not only focused on women in need. They also included women in more privileged positions. So in these cases, some changes were suggested towards a modification of the income taxes, the call for homemakers to be covered by social security, the need for equal access to credit as well

as pension plans or the establishment of equal inheritance laws and the urgency of a revision of the legislation affecting the family. In addition, questions regarding body integrity and privacy or sexual autonomy were also raised, in which for the very first time the Supreme Court recognized all women's right to make reproductive choices.

The conclusion of the agenda was marked by the demand of recognition and respect of all women as individuals with absolute rights that are fully capable of making any choice affecting their lives at any level. This statement served as an anthem under which many women of the Second Wave fought against the social injustice that had ruled in United States for many generations. The requests of these women eager for a change were linked under the major national women's organization, which worked to create a sense of sisterhood among all women.

Many were the public meetings that took place during those years and little by little the Women's Movement started to gain space among the rest of movements advocating changes in basic questions. In this sense, Paquita Vivo, of the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, addressed the public during a National Conference highlighting the compromise and devotion of the women's movement to serve all women:

"The Women's Movement is a movement for civil rights. Today black women stand beside Latin [sic] women, stand beside white women, to confirm the common denominator which unites us all. Today voluntary and service organizations stand beside political organizations in a strong show of the compatibility of goals and the ability of our women's movement to encompass many styles and to include many strategies... Together we make the largest and strongest and most integrated for social change this nation has ever seen" (qtd. Gilmore 26)

The demands of the agenda were turned into the "the First Women's Plan of Action of the Decade," making a clear reference to the United Nation's declaration of the decade of the women, which took place from 1975 to 1985. In fact, a member of the movement expressed that it was certainly time for a change because it was the first time in the history of the United States that society had started to see things in the eyes of a historically oppressed group:

Elit... became clear that by and large women's organizations in this country had not viewed their issues from a woman's perspective before. They had, after all, been historically formed in order to give women a voice on fundamental social issues. But they had not been created and were only beginning to understand their self-interest and self-relationship to these issues as women.

[...] By and large, women have not engaged in strategy, they have not thought of themselves as policy makers or implementers nor as people with power” (qtd. Gilmore 27)

After that, the leaders of more than 100 different national women’s organizations met with a common purpose: to consult collective goals and strategies as well as to examine the possibility of creating a national coalition of diverse women’s organizations. Obviously enough, the concerns of American women at that time were much more complex and challenging than the ones concerning the First Wave. Indeed, as not all women shared the same goals, it was vital to show that the Second Wave women’s movement represented many different women’s perspectives.

Little by little, the political and social sphere started to perceive some favorable changes in the social conditions of women. Jimmy Carter, the Democratic presidential candidate of the period, “delivered the major policy speech of his campaign on issues affecting over the 50 per cent of the population of the country” (qtd. Harrison 29). In fact, this was the first time in history that a presidential candidate considered that he had to be involved in women’s demands. So, in his thirty minutes speech, Carter blamed President Ford of ignoring women’s needs, which he considered to be a terrible administration of one of the most relevant concerns of the country. In order to avoid his predecessors’ mistakes, he offered his sympathy on the cause promising strong actions in benefit of women at all levels: education, employment, politics, health care and justice. Carter’s political program incorporated “child care, renewed federal antidiscrimination actions, more women appointed to high-level posts, flextime and part-time work schedules for parents of school-age children, and pursuit of equality in credit, insurance and education” (qtd. Gilmore 30). Other feminists groups, such as the General Federation of Women’s Club, started to work on their own in the search for better conditions for women. In this sense, the “Declaration of American Women” settled the basis of the Second Wave Feminism fight:

We are here to move history forward. We are women from every State and Territory in the Nation. We are women of different ages, beliefs and lifestyles. We are women of many economic, social, political, racial, ethnic, cultural, educational and religious backgrounds. We are married, single, widowed and divorced. We are mothers and daughters. We are sisters. We speak in varied accents and languages but we share the common language and experience of American women who throughout our Nation's life have been denied the opportunities, rights, privileges and responsibilities accorded to men... We are poorer than men. And those of us who are minority women - Blacks, Hispanic American, Native American and Asian Americans - must

overcome the double burden of discrimination based on race and sex... We seek these rights for all women, whether or not they choose as individuals to use them. (qtd. Gilmore 36)

This announcement was held for the first time in more than 200 years of America's democracy in which women gathered together in a national women's conference under the same purpose: to evaluate the status of women in the country at that time, as well as to analyze the progress they had achieved, to identify the barriers that prevented them from being completely free and to elaborate a list of suggestions to the President and the Congress in order to eradicate these barriers. During the conference, feminists acknowledged the advances obtained in the lives of women since the founding of the country and especially since the First Wave Feminism. They affirmed that they had witnessed a process of improvement and enrichment of their lives, leaving behind unsatisfactory conditions in which they had been regarded almost as slaves whose work and achievements were unrecognized, whose needs and wishes were completely disregarded and whose rights were ignored, to the point of being second class citizens whose liberties and aspirations were actually mere unfulfilled dreams.

But although during the Second Wave period women could already vote and own property, laws, social customs and prejudices, among other things, still kept a majority of women in an inferior position. In spite of having improved their conditions, women had still to face the daily reality of discrimination and very limited opportunities. Gender equality was for the Second Wave a dream to fulfill; women found that their capabilities were weakened by discriminatory actions and by old-fashion ideas of what being a woman meant. Furthermore, they also stressed the fact that their culture degraded them as sex objects lacking political and economic power.

However, the most important idea to bear in mind is that Second Wave feminists did not pursue special privileges, but demanded the legitimate right to have full voice and an active role at any level (their individual lives, their families and even their country). They organized a movement that after starting in the United States, ended up being worldwide; a movement that strongly defended that the only way to achieve real equality was to teach the country to respect their rights, to accept their demands and to attend to their needs. For this reason, they expected real attention to their proposals in order to make society actually democratic, non-discriminatory and open to everybody.

In parallel to the development of the Feminist Second Wave, the notion of a feminist theatre was also an important achievement in the period from the 1960s to the 1980s. As Sally Burke points out, feminist playwrights faced a number of important obstacles to get their plays performed or produced. The same degree of marginality and invisibility that affected women's literature in general was also experienced by women dramatists, and much more if they exhibited any feminist perspectives in their plays. The theatre was a domain completely ruled by men in those times. Despite these circumstances, little by little some women playwrights started to struggle against a male-dominant cultural ideology and finally found a place to develop their talent. For this reason, feminist drama began to expose women's thoughts, actions and words that had been previously ignored. (Burke vii)

In this process, Second Wave playwrights¹ started to look for a transformation of both the stage and the society it reflected. Hence, in the late 1960s, some regional theatres and recently created feminist theatres began to produce a big number of plays written by women. In their way to revolutionize the current stage, these plays brought together the comic and the serious, combined musical and conventional theatre, joined individual and social aspects, and usually replaced the traditional lineal structure with a circular one. Moreover, gender roles were completely questioned, inverted or even abolished, thus following the examples set by previous women playwrights such as Alice Gerstenberg, Susan Glaspell or Sophie Treadwell, who had already paved the way during the first two decades of the twentieth-century. Trying to imitate these famous playwrights, feminist dramatists opened their works to the use of new techniques in order to portray the female mind, exploring women's oppression and their exceptional lives. Second Wave playwrights aimed to transform theatre at different levels (the stage, the actors/actresses and the audience) in order to promote women's consciousness of their situation and to support them in the creation of new alternatives to combat their oppression. These playwrights intended not only to express women's dramatic experiences but also to transform their lives. (Burke 142)

Likewise, they intended to fight against the general public's indifference and sometimes even ignorance about the issues affecting women, and for that purpose they

¹ I use the term "Second Wave playwrights" in reference to those women playwrights who developed their work simultaneously with the Second Feminist Wave, dealing with similar ideas and addressing similar concerns.

organized themselves in different alliances to show that, according to Julia Miles, women playwrights “exist, they are talented, and they are ready to enter the mainstream theatre” (qtd. Burke 143). Hence, in 1978, somehow as a reaction against the low percentage of plays produced by women in the theatre productions, Miles founded the so-called “Women’s Project at the American Place Theatre” in New York. This and many other organizations, including the “Women’s Program of the American Theatre Association,” the “Women Theatre Program,” the “Women’s Interart Theatre,” the “Women’s Theatre Council” or the committee for “Women of the Dramatists Guild,” worked towards the promotion of women playwrights that were still being widely ignored by the general public, until the celebration of the First International Women Playwrights Festival and Conference held in Buffalo in 1989 seemed to end that.

Playwrights such as Megan Terry,² Myrna Lamb, Adrienne Kennedy or Rosalyn Drexler, produced works that in a way anticipated the plays to come in the new era. They found inspiration in both the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, through which they portrayed women’s social subordination and the implicit inferiority of women as humans. The new era plays wanted to offer female audiences a depiction of the experience of women’s transition “from being the other to being the center” (Burke 144). As a result, the experimental playwrights of the Second Wave introduced many and varied changes in an attempt to defy and deconstruct conventional theatre. In order to do so, the playwrights of this period launched the use of a circular structure rather than lineal, adding elements like music, dance or poetry and acknowledged women as “desiring subjects rather than reflections of male characters” (Burke 190). Likewise, they usually abstained from the use of closing or resolution at the end of the plays, since they wanted the audience to leave the theatres reflecting about the possible solutions and the oppression they had observed and even undergone in many cases (Burke 189-190). In other words, the open endings were intended to serve as food for thought in both women’s and men’s minds.

In the next chapter, I will analyze *The Heidi Chronicles* in the hope to show how Wasserstein’s play reflects the social and political situation of women during the 1970s and 1980s that I have summarized in this chapter.

² Terry is known as the “Mother of American Feminist Drama.” She has written more than 60 plays that have been performed worldwide.

3. *The Heidi Chronicles* seen from the perspective of Second Wave Feminist Theory

Many women writers of this period found in theatre a great opportunity to express their worries and thoughts, in the same way that they used the stage to show themselves up to the eyes of society that could consider the possibility of a change in women's condition. Among many feminist playwrights that pursued this and other objectives, such as the exploration of the search of identity or the portrayal of oppressed individuals, the work of Wendy Wasserstein stands out as one of remarkable merit.

In this respect, *The Heidi Chronicles* captivated the audience because of the quality of the play, the fact that it received a number of different awards, its focus on women's condition and the way in which the author deals with the subject in question (combining seriousness and subtle humor). The play brings the public closer to the situation of an independent woman trying to define her identity as a woman in a world full of contradictions and obstacles. Therefore, we are dealing with a play in which the comic vision is essential to explore feminist themes with optimism and brightness rather than a unique dramatic vision.

Reading *The Heidi Chronicles* involves a journey through the thoughts, worries and anxieties of the women of the Second Wave, represented in the main character. The author draws a parallelism between the political and personal life of the women in the play, paying attention to the way in which the Women's Movement affected a whole generation of women differently. The play covers the development of the heroine from 1965 to 1989, showing typical elements of the feminist movement in that period through the experience of a woman that could perfectly be any woman of the time.

In the prologue to Act One, the author begins with the question of women in arts presenting for the first time the protagonist, an art-historian who is lecturing at Columbia University about women artists:

HEIDI. Sofonisba Anguissola painted this portrait of her sister, Minerva, in 1559. Not only was Sofonisba a painter with an international reputation, but so were her six sisters. [...] Although Sofonisba was praised in the seventeenth century as being portraitist equal to Titian, and least thirty of her paintings remain known to us, there is no trace of her or any other woman artist prior to the twentieth century in your current Art History Survey textbook. Of course, in my day, this same standard text mentioned no women, "from the Dawn of History to the Present." Are

you with me? Okay. Clara Peeters [...] whose undated self portrait we see here, was I believe the greatest woman artist of the seventeenth century. And now I'd like you to name ten others. (7)

This fragment introduces the character of Heidi Holland to the audience. The fact that she is lecturing at a university already sets the intellectual status that she has, at the same time that the very topic of her lecture marks her interest in women's issues. As a matter of fact, she is doing a clear critique of the disregard in which women artists have been historically held. She explains that there is no sign of any woman artist in the text books, and the case of Sofonisba Anguissola exemplifies how many talented women artists have been overlooked despite their unquestionable capacity. This painter has been recovered as an important figure within the feminist history of art since in spite of living in a period in which women were not very common in visual arts, she was widely praised due to the quality of her work. Furthermore when Heidi says "Are you with me? Okay," she is addressing the audience somehow looking for support among them, and wishing them to share her criticism. The last reference to Clara Peeters (1595-1657) is also important because she has been considered the earliest significant female painter of the Dutch Golden Age, unfortunately undervalued for a lot of years.

In scene 1, Heidi and her best friend Susan, both sixteen years old, attend a high school dance in 1965, where they meet a new boy called Chris, but Heidi refuses to dance with him and the two girls have the following conversation:

SUSAN. I can't believe you did that. Heidi, we're at a dance! You know, girl meets boy. They hold hands walking in the sand. Then they go to the Chapel of Love. Get it?

[...]

SUSAN. You know, as your best friend, I must tell you frankly that you're going to get really messed up unless you learn to take men seriously.

HEIDI. Susan, there is absolutely no difference between you and me and him. Except that he can twist and smoke at the same time and we can get out of the gym with an excuse called "I have my monthly." (10)

Susan clearly believes in the old-fashioned way for a boy and a girl to meet and start a relationship, something that is not so important for Heidi. When Susan tells Heidi that she needs to take men seriously, her implication is "if you want one of them to marry you," so to speak. Heidi's remark highlights two things: first, that she strongly believes that men and women are equal; second, nevertheless, she is also aware of how

the biological condition affects women more than men. After that, Susan rolls up her skirt in order to look more attractive to men and starts dancing while Heidi sits down and starts reading a book until Peter Patrone, the most important male character of the play, appears for the first time. Peter and Heidi have a short but intense conversation in which he says “Will you marry me?” but she immediately replies “I covet my independence” showing her early intentions of freedom and lack of interest in marriage. (12)

In the next scene, a new character appears, Scoop Rosenbaum, who will play an important role as well. At one point Heidi becomes so irritated and asks him “I was wondering what mothers teach their sons that they never bother to tell their daughters,” referring to the issue that Scoop represents the prototypical male, confident, determined, and strong-minded. This perfectly shows the force of patriarchy, that Heidi tries to deconstruct, first by wondering why boys and girls are educated differently but at the same time lamenting that mothers themselves transmit the patriarchal values to their sons, thus becoming complicit with the male system. Scoop and Heidi continue their conversation when the following situation takes place:

SCOOP. You mean if after all the politics you girls decide to go “hog wild,” demanding equal pay, equal rights, equal orgasms?

HEIDI. All people deserve to fulfill their potential.

SCOOP. Absolutely.

HEIDI. I mean, why should some well-educated woman waste her life making you and your children tuna fish sandwiches?

SCOOP. She shouldn't. And for that matter, neither should a badly educated woman. Heidella, I'm on your side. (17)

This excerpt shows many important aspects connected to the Women's Movement. Firstly, Scoop makes a clear reference to the political situation of the time in which women demanded changes in the effectual implementation of their rights. However, the mentioning of “equal pay, equal rights” followed by the obvious sarcastic tone present in “equal orgasms” also shows another important aspect of the Second Feminist Wave: the mocking tone used by many men in those times whenever they listened to women's demand of rights. After that, Heidi says one of the most powerful statements of the whole play: “All people deserve to fulfill their potential.” This is an

example of how women started to stand up for themselves, to speak up and to demand equal rights for both men and women. Scoop seems to agree and Heidi immediately questions him if a well-educated woman should spend her life preparing food for a man and his children, which she considers to be a waste of time. Although Scoop tells her that he is on her side, his tone in calling her “Heidella” instead of “Heidi” clearly reveals that, after all, he is not taking her seriously.

Scene 3 is very rich in terms of one of the most important elements in the fight for women’s rights during the Second Wave: consciousness raising groups, which took place inside activist groups. Their purpose was to make women conscious of their subordinated situation in order to be able to fight. This meant for Heidi a huge discovery because it turned out to be a place in which she found a high level of compromise and cooperation for the feminist cause:

JILL. [...] Heidi, Becky, since you’re new I want you to know that everything here is very free, very easy. I’ve been a member of the group for about five months, now. I’m a mother of four daughters and when I first came I was, as Fran would say, “a fucking Hostess cupcake.” Everybody in my life –my husband Bill, my daughters, my friends– could lean on perfect Jill. The only problem was there was one person I had completely forgotten to take care of.

BECKY. Who was that?

JILL. Jill (19-20)

Jill is willing to welcome Heidi and Becky in the group and explains that as any woman of the time, she used to devote her whole life to take care of her husband, daughters and friends, leaving aside her own needs and desires. This is the reason why she decided to join the group, because she wanted to feel surrounded by women with the same intention to change that. Likewise, it is also important to notice that during this scene, the music that sounds in the background is Aretha Franklin’s “Respect,” which became a sort of anthem of the Women’s Movement. After that, some other issues are raised, as the following dialogue shows:

JILL. Heidi, Becky, you should know that Fran is a gifted physicist, and a lesbian, and we support her choice to sleep with women.

BECKY. Sure.

FRAN. Do you support my choice, Heidi?

HEIDI. I'm just visiting.

FRAN. I have to say right now that I don't feel comfortable with a "just visiting" in the room. I need to be able to come here and reach out to you as my sisters. Okay, Heidi-ho?

HEIDI. Okay.

FRAN. Just don't judge us. Christ, we spend our lives having men judge us. All right, let the good times roll!

[...]

SUSAN. Becky, I was seriously considering beginning a law journal devoted solely to women's legal issues. But after some pretty heavy deliberation, I've decided within the male establishment power base to change the system. (20)

Here new topics are developed, for example Fran sharing her condition as a lesbian and the fact that the rest of the members support her unconditionally. This is a very important aspect since it reflects the diversity within the Women's Movement. Fran asks Heidi if she supports her condition but Heidi wants to remain neutral at first, so Fran reacts explaining that she is not comfortable with someone who does not fully involve herself in the movement. The concept of sisterhood was of paramount relevance in those days and women demanded commitment from other women. Heidi seems to understand when Fran says that she doesn't expect to be judged by women as well, since she has been sufficiently judged by men. As a matter of fact, this is an important element all the women in the room try to free themselves from: men's rule and control of their lives. Subsequently, Susan's short speech reveals the weakness felt by women at the time, being conscious as they were that it was quite hard to change things if you are powerless. Hence, some of them used the strategy of remaining inside the male system in order to get, at least, a minimum of power in order to later be able to modify it.

The last part of this scene presents what is for me the most important moment of the story, that is to say, when Heidi realizes that she has to stand up, and fully participate in the change of women's history, as Fran suggests:

FRAN. Heidi, every woman in this room has been taught that her desires and dreams of her husband, her son, or her boss are much more important than her own. Now the only way to turn that around, is for us, right here, to try to make what *we* want, what we desire, to be as vital to us as it would undoubtedly be to any man. And then we can go out there and really make a difference! (23)

The next scene deals also with the question of women in art. Four years have passed and Heidi is now part of the “Chicago Women’s Art Coalition” (1974). She has evolved and become an activist on behalf of the recognition of women’s art. As a matter of fact, she is speaking on a bullhorn and addresses the people outside the Chicago Art Institute, which is releasing a new exhibition:

HEIDI. This museum is publicly funded by our tax dollars. “Our” means both men and women. The weekly attendance at this institution is sixty percent female. The painting and appreciation classes are seventy percent female. Yet this “great” cultural center recognizes and displays only two female artists. And its current offering, *The Age of Napoleon*, includes not one female artist. (25)

This excerpt shows Heidi’s critique of the exclusion of women from important exhibitions, which actually mirrors the exclusion of women from many other cultural and political areas. She makes clear that although attendance and classes rest more on women than on men, still the cultural establishment ignores female talent. After this, Heidi and her associates start a march to the curator’s office:

PETER. Women in Art!

DEBBIE. I find your ironic tone both paternal and caustic. I’m sorry. I can’t permit you to join us. This is a women’s march.

HEIDI. But I thought that our point was that this is *our* cultural institution. “Our” meaning everybody’s. Men and women. Him included.

DEBBIE. Heidi, you know that this is a woman’s march.

PETER. Heidi, you march. I’ll wait for you here.

[...]

DEBBIE. God, I despise manipulative men. (29)

These lines show Peter as a sympathetic supporter of the women’s cause, but Debbie rejects his and any other men’s presence arguing that it is a women’s march and actually because she does not believe Peter’s intentions are sincere. Heidi’s opinion is clearly more naïve in thinking that the march could embrace both men and women. This difference between Debbie and Heidi highlights once more the diversity of views within the Women’s Movement. Some wanted men to participate in the process of changing things but others felt that men had been judging and oppressing them for so many

centuries that now they did not trust them to be on women's side. After that, and despite what Debbie said, Mark and Peter finally join the march organized by Heidi.

Act Two, scene 1 implies a movement forward in time, so that now it is 1980. A group of women, including Heidi, Lisa, Denise, Betsy and Susan, are gathered to celebrate Lisa's baby shower. They are chatting about the last changes in their lives when Denise, Lisa's sister and Scoop's sister-in-law, brings out for the first time the question of maternity to Heidi. Denise clearly shows an advance in the sense that she does want to have children but only after her career is in place and not before. Moreover, when Denise says "So we could have it all" she looks to Heidi and Susan as if acknowledging that the fight of women like them is what has made possible that other women can now "have it all":

DENISE. [...] And once my career's in place, I definitely want to have my children before I'm thirty. I mean, isn't that what you guys fought for? So we could "have it all." I mean, don't you want to have a family, Heidi? (45)

In scene two, the audience watches a T.V. interview in which Scoop, Peter and Heidi are invited to talk about the changes in the previous decades and in their own careers. The tone of the interview is very important because it shows that Heidi is left aside and the two men attract all the attention; Heidi is not taken as seriously as her colleagues and she is constantly cut off by the female interviewer (April) and Scoop. This clearly illustrates that although women began to be called and asked about their lives in public media, it was still men who actually received more recognition. As a matter of fact, Heidi's achievements are not treated with the same respect as those of the men's, as the next dialogue shows:

APRIL. If you've just joined us, I'm April Lambert, and this is "Hello New York." We're speaking today with members of the baby boom generation. The kids who grew up in the fifties, protested in the sixties, were the "me's" of the seventies, and the parents of the eighties. Here with us today are Scoop Rosenbaum, editor of the very successful and influential *Boomer* magazine, Heidi Holland, author of *And the Light Floods In from the Left* and director of *Womanzart*. Is that pronounced like Mozart?

HEIDI. Well, actually it's Woman's Art.

APRIL. Excuse me, Woman's Art. A group dedicated to the recognition of American women artists, and Dr. Peter Patrone, who is, according to *Boomer* magazine, for two years now the

leading pediatrician in New York under forty. Boy, I'm impressed! Good morning to all of you.
(49)

The interview continues with Scoop talking about his family and showing a new ideal of men, that became known as "the new feminized man," that is to say, a man who is sensitive at the same time that he remains the patriarchal figure, looking after his family but to the point of placing his kids even before himself. However, when Heidi is asked whether she is a superwoman or not, she's again cut off by Scoop, who wants to appear as a man committed to women's equality. After that, the inevitable question of the biological clock is raised:

SCOOP. April, I have two children, Maggie and Pierre. [...] Whether they make me an official adult or not, I really don't know. But having my own family has certainly pulled me out of any "Me Generation" residue. The future is about my kids, not me.

APRIL. Lucky kids. Heidi, there's a lot of talk these days about superwomen. Are you a superwoman?

HEIDI. Of Gosh, no. You have to keep many lists to be a superwoman.

[...]

APRIL. [...] Heidi, a lot of women are beginning to feel you can't have it all. Do you think it's time to compromise?

HEIDI. Well, I think that depends on...

SCOOP. (*Cuts her off.*) Can I interrupt and say that I think if we're asking women to compromise, then we also have to ask men to compromise. This year, my wife Lisa won the Widener Prize for her illustrations of *King Ginger Goes to Summer Camp*. I'm every bit as proud of that as I am of *Boomer* magazine.

APRIL. But Scoop, everyone isn't as capable as Lisa. For instance, a lot of my single women friends are panicked now about their biological clocks winding down. Do you find that's true, Heidi?

HEIDI. If you look...

PETER. (*Cuts her off.*) April, I run one of the largest pediatric units in this country. And I am here to tell you that most women can have healthy and happy children 'till well after forty-two.
(50-51)

In the next scene, Heidi meets Susan and her assistant Denise at a New York restaurant. The truth is that Heidi's intention is to meet her old friend after a long time, but Susan seems so busy that she does not seem to really appreciate Heidi's effort to be there and share a special moment, as in the old times. However, Susan meets her because she wants Heidi to act as a consultant on a series she is working on about three women like them. In other words, Susan is actually more interested in using Heidi for her own purpose. The dialogue that follows is quite interesting:

SUSAN. [...] Heidi, when I told Denise you called me yesterday we were both very excited. Besides for the obvious reason that we love you and miss you and you're one of our favorite people in the world. [...] For a while now I've been wanting to put together a half hour show about three women turning thirty in a large urban center. It can be New York, Chicago, Houston. There are at least ten other single women series currently being developed. But your story with women and art could make us a little different.

DENISE. They've already done doctors, lawyers, nurses, and detectives. But when you called, we realized that no one has touched art world.

SUSAN. What we're interested in is, say, a way-out painter, an uptight curator, and a dilettante heiress in a loft.

HEIDE. In Houston?

SUSAN. Wherever. You don't have to write. We'll hire a writer.

HEIDE. Susie, I'm an art historian and essayist... I'm very flattered by ...

[...]

SUSAN. [...] Heidi, you and I are people who need to commit. I'm not political anymore. I mean, equal rights is one thing, equal pay is one thing, but blaming everything on being a woman is just passé. (56-57)

Susan's point of view reveals two important aspects of the Women's Movement in the 1980s: first, her way of stereotyping women related to art as "a way-out painter, an uptight curator, and a dilettante heiress in a loft", shows that, despite all the efforts to the contrary, women artists ended up being trivialized by the art world, even by other women. And second, Susan's last words exemplify the evolution from a radical commitment to women's fight during the 1960s and 1970s to a more neutralized and even conservative stance in the 1980s. The rest of the conversation is equally illustrative of this evolution:

SUSAN. Okay, three gals on the town in an apartment. Curators, painters, sculptors, what have you.

DENISE. All we need is three pages. Who these people are. Why they're funny.

HEIDI. But I have no idea who these people are. Or why they're funny.

DENISE. They are ambitious, they're professional, and they're on their way to being successful.

SUSAN. And they don't want to make the same mistakes we did.

HEIDI. I don't want to make the same mistakes we did. What exactly were they?

DENISE. Well, like, a lot of women your age are very unhappy. Unfulfilled, frightened or growing old alone. (57)

Unlike Susan, Heidi does not understand what their mistakes were and Denise's response is quite frustrating for someone like Heidi, who doesn't see the relationship between having a career and the feelings of unfulfillment, fear or "growing old alone." In the following scene Heidi gives an important speech during a women's meeting, "Women, Where Are We Going," in which she publicly recognizes that she feels lonely and disappointed with some women that were her comrades during the "movement". She explains that now those women, who fought next to her in the battle for women's rights, seem to have betrayed the principles they strongly defended in the past.

In scene five, Peter tells Heidi that she's "a brave and remarkable woman. A proud pioneer. My Antonia driving ever forward through the unknown," (64) which shows that some men really appreciated women's effort in their struggle for better conditions. However, a doubt also emerges as to the real tone of Peter's words, for they might also be taken as a parody.

In the last scene, Scoop and Heidi meet at Heidi's home and she tells him that she has adopted a baby girl. Scoop asks her if she is happy now that she is a mother, which is a central point of the story because happiness and fulfillment for women are, in Scoop's mind, still associated with motherhood. After that, Scoop confesses Heidi that he wants to be in Congress and asks for Heidi's support as well as Peter's since they represent the single mother and gay men sectors of population, respectively. This is an example of how men aspire to higher positions and intend to "use" women for certain purposes, no matter the long friendship between them:

SCOOP. Hey, Heidella. If I do something crazy like announce I'm running for the Congress next week, will you and Peter be there? Gay men and single mothers for Rosenbaum. Grass roots movements. A man for all genders.

HEIDI. So that's why you sold your magazine. (75)

The very last words recall Heidi's and Scoop first conversation, Scoop's own appointment as "the hero" and Heidi as "the mother" (which implies no change in the traditional gender roles, after all), and finally present Heidi's baby girl as representative of a future generation of women or, at least, the hope that things will actually change :

SCOOP. All people deserve to fulfill their potential. Judy, that's what your mother told me in 1968 on the first snowy night in Manchester, New Hampshire. America needs heroes.

HEIDI. Scoop, you are many things, but... (*Scoop takes Heidi's hand*)

SCOOP. What do you think, Judy? A mother for the nineties and a hero for the nineties [...]

HEIDI. A heroine for the twenty-first! (75)

4. Conclusion

After a brief account on the history of Second Wave Feminism and an approach to the play *The Heidi Chronicles* from the perspective of the Second Wave Theory, I can conclude that the impact of feminism over the years has been so wide and deep at many levels that it has definitely transformed in a very profound way every single aspect of society and, most importantly, ways of thinking of men, women, institutions, politicians, legislators, educators, and so forth. This has involved practical changes in education, health management, and even in the images projected of women in the media.

The analysis of *The Heidi Chronicles* has meant an enormous pleasant process in which I have been able to learn that women of the Second Wave feminism needed one another, and that the strong alliances these women created are worthy of respect and admiration. Furthermore, analyzing a feminist play has been a really challenging task, something new that has helped me develop new skills and sensibility in this type of literature, in which the author has told her generation's story and managed to enlighten readers about a very rich historical period in the United States, filled with a diversity of nuances and perspectives about gender and political relations. *The Heidi Chronicles* illustrates the great evolution of the Women's Movement in the period that goes from the 1960s to the 1980s. The play explores women's struggle during those years showing that in spite of having accomplished many achievements, the work of the women's movement is far from complete. At the same time, it portrays Heidi's journey, which could be any woman's journey of the time.

Moreover, the socio-political scene of the time is represented specially through the notion that women had to work very hard and overcome many obstacles when facing the difficulties of balancing their careers and families. It ends with a positive vision: the heroine shows an optimistic image in which she, as many other women, hopes for a future in which women will be really independent and active individuals.

I have also learned that what started as a movement basically focused on the question of women's suffrage (the right to vote and the right to have property in the First Wave Feminism) turned out to develop into a strong and independent movement

with the arrival of a Second Wave, which undoubtedly meant a huge progress towards many of the aspects that shape women's lives today.

But the truth is that when I was reflecting about the topic of this project, I realized that the term "feminism" has wandered around my head for many years due to the misconception of the general public about its meaning and implications. Soon I realized that what is part of my identity and my interests in everyday life, for many people is still an attempt to give women undeserved privileges, and this is not what the Women's Movement ever intended. But the truth is that real feminism does not fight for women to hold a superior position over men but to give women the same opportunities, for the general improvement of society.

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