



THE INTERTEXTUAL ASPECT AND FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF U.S. POWER IN WENDY WASSERSTEIN'S PLAY "AMERICAN DAUGHTER"

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The paper explores the intertextual aspect of Wendy Wasserstein's play "American Daughter" (1997) in the context of feminist criticism of US power at the end of the 20th century. The study focuses on identifying and interpreting the intertextual connections between the dramatic text and real political and media events, primarily the so-called "Nannygate" scandal, which influenced the formation of public and political discourse in the 1990s. The study analyzes how Wendy Wasserstein's use of political and media intertextuality enables her artistic interpretation of the mechanisms of institutional and symbolic control that function in relation to women in the sphere of state power. Particular attention is paid to the role of intertextuality as a structuring principle of the play, through which the private history of the character acquires a generalized socio-political meaning. The article shows that intertextual references to legal and media discourses function as an instrument of feminist criticism, revealing gender asymmetry in the public sphere and the selectivity of mechanisms of political accountability. The methodological basis of the study is the provisions of the theory of intertextuality and feminist literary criticism, which allows us to consider play "American Daughter" as a form of political expression aimed at deconstructing notions of the gender neutrality of the American democratic system. The results obtained expand the interpretive potential of the play and can be used in further research on contemporary American drama, political theater, and gender studies.

ІНТЕРТЕКСТУАЛЬНИЙ АСПЕКТ ТА ФЕМІНІСТИЧНА КРИТИКА ВЛАДИ США У П'ЄСИ "AMERICAN DAUGHTER" ВЕНДІ ВАССЕРШТАЙН

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Статтю присвячено аналізу інтертекстуального аспекту п'єси Венді Вассерштайн "American Daughter" (1997) у контексті феміністської критики влади США кінця ХХ століття. У центрі дослідження знаходиться виявлення та інтерпретація інтертекстуальних зв'язків драматургічного тексту з реальними політичними та медійними подіями, насамперед, із так званим скандалом "Nannygate", який вплинув на формування суспільного та політичного дискурсу 1990-х років. Аналізується, як звернення до політико-медійного інтертексту уможливило художнє осмислення Венді Вассерштайн механізмів інституційного й символічного контролю, що

функціонують щодо жінок у сфері державної влади. Особлива увага приділяється ролі інтертекстуальності як структуроутворюючого принципу п'єси, за допомогою якого приватна історія персонажа набуває узагальненого соціально-політичного значення. У статті показано, що інтертекстуальні посилання до правового та медійного дискурсів функціонують як інструмент феміністської критики, виявляючи гендерну асиметрію публічного простору та вибірковість механізмів політичної відповідальності. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять положення теорії інтертекстуальності та феміністської літературної критики, що дозволяє розглянути "American Daughter" як форму політичного висловлювання, спрямованого на деконструкцію уявлень про гендерну нейтральність американської демократичної системи. Отримані результати розширюють інтерпретаційний потенціал п'єси та можуть бути використані у подальших дослідженнях сучасної американської драматургії, політичного театру та гендерних досліджень.

The problem area. American drama of the late 20th century, shaped by large-scale sociocultural and political changes, increasingly turns to analyzing the mechanisms of power, the specifics of public discourse, and gender factors that determine the functioning of the political space in the United States. Wendy Wasserstein's play "American Daughter" (1997) is a significant artistic text in this context, as it models the conflict between private female identity and institutional and media forms of state power. At the same time, despite the existence of scientific works by foreign researchers focused on a feminist understanding of W. Wasserstein's dramaturgy, the intertextual dimension of this drama and its role in criticizing power structures remain insufficiently understood and systematized in academic research.

The relevance of the problem is determined by the need for a theoretical understanding of the relationship between intertextual strategies and feminist interpretations of power in contemporary drama. The insufficient development of an interdisciplinary approach that integrates methods of intertextual analysis and feminist criticism significantly complicates the interpretation of W. Wasserstein's ideological and artistic concept and narrows the understanding of the play as a form of political and sociocultural expression. In this regard, there is a scientific need to identify, describe, and systematize the intertextual mechanisms through which play "American Daughter" criticizes US power structures, representing the gender asymmetry of public and political discourse.

Purpose and objectives of the article. The purpose of the study is to identify the peculiarities of intertextual strategies in Wendy Wasserstein's play "American Daughter" and determine their role in the formation of feminist criticism of US power structures. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are to be accomplished: to analyze the main intertextual elements of the play and their sources; to determine their function in the representation of

political and media discourse; to identify ways of artistic expression of gender asymmetry of power in the dramatic text.

The object of the study is Wendy Wasserstein's late 20th-century dramaturgy in the context of US sociocultural and political discourse. The **subject of the study** is intertextual motifs and the mechanisms of their functioning in the play "American Daughter."

The main body of the text. Contemporary drama, especially in the context of the poststructuralist paradigm, functions as a polyphonic space where text is realized not as an autonomous artifact, but as a dynamic system of dialogical connections with previous discourses. The genre dynamics of contemporary drama in recent decades have been characterized by intense transformations, most pronounced at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries [Vasylev, 2017, p. 381]. Innovative processes go beyond "secondary" genres (prequels, sequels, crossovers, etc.), being realized through the transposition of sign systems by means of representing codes of various media and art forms in dramatic text. Playwrights of the late 1990s and 2000s, seeking to harmonize literary and theatrical discourses, activate the resources of performance, plastic arts, music, cinema, television, and new media, which also constitutes the intermedial essence of dramaturgical texts [Zakalyuzhny, 2018, p. 126]. Of considerable interest is Yevgeny Vasylev's study devoted to genre transformations, modifications, and innovations in contemporary dramaturgy. In his monograph, the author considers a wide range of issues, in particular addressing the phenomenon of intertextuality. Ye. Vasylev analyzes intertextual connections based on the works of V. Nabokov and Eu. Ionesco [Vasylev, 2017].

The theory of intertextuality, formulated by Julia Kristeva in 1967, defines text as the "absorption and transformation" of foreign textual and cultural formations, which becomes particularly productive in drama as a genre of replicative structure [Kristeva, 1967, p. 440]. Intertext in theatrical discourse is a

semiotic operation of including precedent texts—quotations, allusions, paraphrases, hypergrams—in the characters' lines, generating a polyphony of meanings and ensuring diachronic interaction with the literary-historical tradition.

In the monograph “Intertextuality”, Graham Allen focuses on literary theory and the analysis of texts in general. The researcher examines novels, poetry, and prose, showing how texts are connected through quotations, allusions, and intertextual structures. Particular attention is paid to various models of intertextuality and ways of applying them in literary studies and cultural studies [Allen, 2000]. The researcher distinguishes between explicit and implicit intertextuality. Explicit intertextuality can be said to exist in cases where the author consciously records the interaction of texts, making it accessible to the recipient through formal means such as quotations, references to sources in footnotes or explanations, and the characters' speech. The main advantage of such marked intertextuality is the high accuracy of decoding and interpreting borrowings from other texts. At the same time, relying on the knowledge, experience, and preparation of the audience, the author often refrains from explicit marking, limiting himself to allusions to well-known statements, ideas, or personalities; in such cases, we are talking about implicit intertextuality [Allen, 2000].

The study examines the intertext of the play “American Daughter” through the prism of the concept of intertextuality formulated by Graham Allen [Allen, 2000]. The application of this theoretical model allows for a systematic analysis of various levels of textual interaction—from explicit and implicit references to ideological, media, and cultural discourses within which the artistic content of the play is formed. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of intertextuality as a feminist strategy that structures criticism of power mechanisms and gender asymmetry in the US political space.

According to D. Dolan, the play “American Daughter” by W. Wasserstein, which premiered on Broadway in 1997 at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theater, is probably really successful in terms of addressing national issues and combining them with personal questions of identity. Its politics and theatrical form fit comfortably into the liberal feminist canon in which most of the author's plays reside, as they describe women trying to break through established male-dominated power systems and even succeed and triumph in them [Dolan, 2017, p. 99].

All the problematic themes and social issues that concerned W. Wasserstein are reflected in this work for the stage. From the liberal-feminist idea that women can “have it all” to the conflict between professional and family life, as well as the fundamental inequality in how women's lives differ from men's, even in

the most privileged echelons of American society. *American Daughter* is perhaps Wasserstein's most relevant play, as its plot reflects the real political failure surrounding a political candidate during the presidency of Bill Clinton [Dolan, 2017, p. 99]. During his presidency, B. Clinton generally supported feminists, environmentalists, advocates of affirmative action, and activists for the rights of sexual minorities. For example, the 42nd US president fought against air pollution and for national parks, raised the minimum wage, and created AmeriCorps, which gave students the opportunity to participate in community service to pay for their education. In addition, African Americans, women, and Latinos became cabinet members, mayors, and department heads under the B. Clinton administration [Roark, 2012]. According to D. Salamon, W. Wasserstein admired the Clintons and closely followed the policies of their administration, considering them a “revolutionary couple”. The president's wife, Hillary Clinton, as first lady, took responsibility for reforming the healthcare system [Salamon, 2012, p. 328]. Therefore, it was important for W. Wasserstein to comprehend and respond to the so-called “scandal” directly related to the negative reaction to women, also in the context of the first lady's activities. However, the play “American Daughter” clearly has warnings about the political system to which the author's generation belonged. The plot of the play is clearly modeled on the political crisis surrounding Zoe Baird's nomination for U.S. Attorney General in 1993, which failed after the media exposed her unpaid taxes on domestic staff. W. Wasserstein transposes this event into a fictional context, transforming a direct historical event into the artistic world. This strategy allows the playwright to preserve historical recognizability while avoiding journalistic literalism, thereby placing the play within the tradition of political drama based on real events. W. Wasserstein found inspiration for “American Daughter” in the gender betrayals of the political duplicity of the Bill Clinton administration.

Attorney Z. Baird, whom B. Clinton nominated for the position of Attorney General, inspired to write the play “American Daughter”, which criticizes the victimization of professional women by the sexist “search and destroy” policies of a conservative, male-dominated society [Park, 2008, p.160]. Z. Baird was forced to withdraw her nomination because she did not pay social security taxes for her illegal nanny from Peru. Time magazine and The New York Times presented this scandal as “Nannygate” and tarnished Z. Baird's maternal abilities through moral condemnation rhetoric and gender-marked interpretations characteristic of the coverage of this scandal in the early 1990s [Balakian, 2010, p. 139]. The term “Nannygate” emerged in the American media in 1993–1994 and is associated with the failed

nominations of female candidates for high public office (the most famous cases being Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood), whose candidacies were rejected due to violations related to hiring domestic staff without paying the appropriate taxes and social contributions [Delaney, 1994].

According to Y. Balakian, W. Wasserstein was concerned about this sexism—a male candidate would never have been forced to withdraw his nomination because of his domestic staff. If she had paid her tax debt and penalties, the scandal could have been resolved, but the situation took on a much broader dimension, moving into the realm of gender politics. Z. Bairdes need for a nanny called her motherhood into question and implied that women cannot “have it all”. The message was that they should stay away from the male sphere, especially the world of politics (Balakian, 2010, p. 139).

The main character of the play “American Daughter”, Lyssa discovers that her own potential is also at risk when a fairly routine mistake becomes the subject of nationwide outrage. As in real historical examples, when Clinton’s style president who nominated Lyssa for the position of chief surgeon refuses to support her candidacy, despite their private friendship [Mandl, 1993, p. 10]. When the media learns that she once failed to appear for jury duty, this relatively minor offense is presented as a serious moral “crime”. The plot of the play is also reminiscent of the case of Lainey Guiner, when Bill Clinton nominated his longtime friend from Yale University, with whom he had been friends for a long time, for the position of chair of the Civil Rights Commission, but then rejected her politically, and the media dubbed her the “quota queen” and discredited her public image [Dolan, 2017, p. 101].

The play focuses on Lyssa Dent Hughes, a 42-year-old liberal doctor who is concerned with women’s issues and wants to enter politics to address women's health issues. The main character's father, Alan Hughes, is a conservative senator from Indiana, and her great-great-grandfather is Ulysses S. Grant, from whom she gets her name. Thus, Lyssa is closely connected to the American political patriarchy and is a direct descendant of Ulysses S. Grant. Lyssa’s line, “*Ulysses S. Grant's fifth-generation granddaughter charges in battle with Doone & Burkey purse*” [Wasserstein, 1999, p. 101], embodies a multi-layered intertextuality that functions as a means of social and cultural criticism. First of all, this fragment contains a historical and cultural intertext, expressed by an allusion to the figure of Ulysses S. Grant, one of the key figures in American national history, a Civil War general, and the 18th president of the United States. The mention of the supposed kinship with a national figure actualizes the mythologem of imitated political and moral legitimacy, which is traditionally

associated with American state ideology. According to G. Allen, this is an explicit historical intertext that appeals to the hereditary nature of political power and the symbolic significance of family dynasties in the United States.

Lyssa’s close friend Morrow and her husband Walter begin to destroy his wife’s career with a notorious interview on a talk show. Although Lyssa is clearly the best candidate for the position of chief surgeon, Walter “unintentionally” sabotages his wife. He tells a reporter, who is preparing her public image ahead of a possible nomination, about a jury summons that Lyssa received but subsequently lost and failed to comply with. When a principled reporter, guided by professional ethical considerations, deems it necessary to publicize this fact, the aggressive mass media interpret an accidental mistake as a manifestation of class superiority and a serious violation of civic duty.

Ultimately, although the protagonist’s qualification is impeccable, the perception that her class status helped her avoid civil liability makes her nomination too distasteful to pursue, and she withdraws her candidacy.

Act 1, Scene 2 begins with Walter watching television. The host discusses Lyssa’s nomination but does not mention her accomplishments. Instead, he emphasizes that Lyssa is the daughter of Senator Alan Hughes and a descendant of Ulysses S. Grant, and that she was nominated after a male candidate was rejected [Wasserstein, 1999, p. 15]. Journalist Timber Tucker asks questions that put Lyssa in a difficult position and provoke public anger, prioritizing his ratings over the truth. He does not ask about Lyssa's qualifications, but instead focuses on her as a woman, wife, and mother. “Timber, as a television reporter, delves into Lyssa’s sore spot—her jury duty—and frames it as a problem for Lyssa’s family, her character, and her career” [Park, 2008, p. 166]. He exploits the popular 1990s idea that “feminism is a curse” [Douglas, 1995, p. 276]. “Feminism was declared the cause of all problems; even the “Nannygate” scandal was seen as a product of the 1970s mythology of “having it all”” [Başer, 2018, p. 18].

Dialogue between the main character and Quincy:
 LYSSA: *No. Carmelita is our housekeeper and her Social Security is fully paid.*”

QUINCY: *Lyssa, don't you think that the entire nannygate incident was an outgrowth of the seventies' “having-it-all mythology?”* [Wasserstein, 1999, p. 39]. It is a multi-layered political and cultural intertext, which again refers to real public scandals in American politics in the early 1990s. This exchange of lines demonstrates explicit intertextuality, i.e., the rooting of the artistic text in the specific historical and political context of the 1990s and the documentation of the plot.

W. Wasserstein deliberately incorporates feminist discourse into the text of the work: Lyssa's remark that social benefits are "*fully paid*" sounds like a defensive formula typical of public apologies by political figures under media pressure. Thus, a private detail of domestic life becomes a trigger for a political crisis, reflecting the mechanism of a media scandal in which the personal supplants the professional. Quincy's remark and the phrase "*having it all*" directly appeal to the feminist and post-feminist discourse of the 1970s—the call to "*have it all*", popularized in American culture as the idea that women can simultaneously fulfill themselves in their careers, motherhood, and personal lives. Quincy interprets "Nannygate" not as a private violation, but as a structural consequence of a utopian gender project in which women are forced to delegate care for the home and children, while remaining vulnerable to moral and political condemnation. Importantly, this intertext functions not only as a historical allusion, but also as a media construct: Nannygate is a product of journalistic narrative, not legal logic. W. Wasserstein shows how the media transforms systemic contradictions in gender politics into a personalized scandal, while similar practices by male politicians rarely receive the same attention.

Talk show host Timber tries to discredit Lyssa's maternal abilities, just as the media discredited Zoe Baird's by asking questions such as:

TIMBER: Dr. Hughes, are you home when your kids get in from school?

LYSSA: Timber, would you be home when your kids got in from school?

TIMBER: No, I'd be in Rwanda. But my wife would be home [Wasserstein, 1997, p. 30]. Lyssa, who believes in equal rights for men and women, asks if Timber would be at home in the same situation. This personal question leads to a discussion of Lyssa's failure to fulfill her jury duties due to her busy schedule, which becomes the core of the scandal. Timber knows that what he is doing is unethical, but feels compelled to do it in order to survive professionally. This symbolizes the power and desire of men and the media to destroy women's lives [Balakian, 2010, p. 229].

This quote is considered an explicit historical-political intertext, as the author directly refers to a specific political situation involving Z. Baird, when the media and the program host exerted public and media pressure on the female politician, also with the aim of emphasizing the gender aspects of assessing her ability to combine family and professional responsibilities.

The nomination and subsequent withdrawal of Lyssa's candidacy are conceptually significant because they reveal the structural hypocrisy of the political system, the persistent negative reaction

to feminist positions, and the decisive role of the media in shaping and reinforcing this reaction. V. Wasserstein dramatizes another important issue in "American Daughter": why women have so few seats in Congress [Balakian, 2010, p. 142]. Z. Baird became a victim because she did not fulfill her duties as a mother. Similarly, the media focuses on Lyssa's statements about her mother, which gives rise to public criticism of the main character's motherhood and femininity. Above all, however, W. Wasserstein urges the reader/audience to ask themselves how the situation would have been different if the nominee had been a man. The story continues to resonate in the way how W. Wasserstein depicts the corrupted media and the selfish interests of those who present themselves as the country's intellectual and political leaders. Overall, this intertextual complex performs a critical function, exposing the processes of commodification of political and historical capital, as well as highlighting one of the key issues of the play—the dependence of female social subjectivity on media and marketing strategies.

By modeling the plot of "American Daughter" so closely on real political examples of the time, Wasserstein intended to offer an alternative interpretation of the consequences of media scandals. Her play examines events from Lyssa's point of view and traces the personal ruin caused by her public downfall. The depiction of the media scandal belongs to explicit ideological intertextuality. Wasserstein deliberately marks references to real events, showing how political and media discourses shape the perception of female politicians (Nannygate, Z. Baird's public questions).

The author demonstrates, that "intelligent, capable women are regularly excluded from important centers of power mostly by men" [Dolan, 2017]. According to D. Dolan, W. Wasserstein offered "a critique of the gender betrayals of the Clinton era" by presenting the different expectations that Americans had concerning women [Dolan, 2017]. In the 1990s, women remained active participants in the public sphere as long as they did not pose a threat, while men were still not expected to work in the domestic sphere, leaving this responsibility once again to women, who continued to work double shifts for equality.

Conclusions and prospects for further research.

The analysis shows that the key intertextual source of Wendy Wasserstein's play "American Daughter" is the political and media intertext "Nannygate" – a series of real scandals in the early 1990s in the US related to violations of tax legislation in the employment of domestic workers. This intertext functions in the drama as an implicit but easily recognizable reference to a specific historical and political context that determines the development of the conflict and the motivation of the characters. Reinterpreting "Nannygate" in the

dramatic space allows W. Wasserstein to demonstrate the selective nature of institutional and media power, as well as the gender asymmetry of public control mechanisms. The intertextual connection with real political events transforms the character's private story into a model of systemic pressure on women in the sphere of public policy, where formal legal violations are used as a tool for discrediting and excluding them from the public sphere. The carefully read play establishes a connection with reality through intertextual interaction with the political and media discourse of that period. References to television interviews, journalistic commentary, and legal rhetoric recreate the communicative environment of Washington politics in the 1990s. These elements function as a form of political-media intertext, embedding the fictional narrative in a recognizable discursive field shaped by real institutional practices. These intertextual layers form a critical field within "American Daughter" acts as a political feminist statement aimed at deconstructing the myth of gender neutrality in the American democratic system. Prospects for further research are linked to a more detailed analysis of the intertextual and intermedial aspects of the drama, in particular, the study of the functioning of television and news discourse as forms of intertext, as well as a comparative examination of the play in the context of other dramatic responses to political scandals in the United States, such as the presidential election campaign in 2016 of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

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