

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **Wendy and the Lost Boys: The Uncommon Life of Wendy Wasserstein.**

Salamon, Julie (Author)

Aug 2011. 446 p. Penguin, hardcover, \$29.95. (9781594202988). 812.

The Wendy of the title is playwright and essayist Wasserstein. The lost boys seem to be the various men, mostly gay, with whom she became involved, but ironically, this fascinating biography reveals a whirling dervish of a woman who seems much more lost than her boys. To those who thought that Wasserstein's writings, Pulitzer Prize notwithstanding, were heavy on navel-gazing, Salamon delivers the backstory. Wasserstein was born into a secretive family of overachievers, from whom she was never able to fully disengage. They formed the bases for many of her characters. And, of course, she was the quintessential baby boomer (a group that elevated navel-gazing to an art)—growing up in the 1960s, being indoctrinated with the idea that a woman can and should have it all, unwilling to limit her choices, and pretty sure she could outrun death. Unfortunately, after having a child at 48, she died of cancer at 55. Writing an authorized biography gave Salamon access not only to Wasserstein's papers but also to her family and friends. That allowed her to paint a sympathetic yet layered portrait of a warm woman who was able to elevate and belittle herself in the same sentence, who was both driven and never quite certain where she wanted to go. Salamon does what Wasserstein often couldn't in her work: she fully realizes the "Wendy character."

— *Ilene Cooper*