

Arts & Letters

FILM

[North Country]

A Woman's Place Is in the Mine

By Steve Sailer

FOR YEARS AFTER the Anita Hill brouhaha of 1991, the American news media obsessed over her sexually harassed sistren. Remember how shocked the press was when it discovered that Navy fighter jocks celebrating the Desert Storm victory at their 1991 Tailhook convention in a Las Vegas hotel did not behave like officers and gentlemen?

The press declared 1992 the Year of the Woman, and Bill and Hillary Clinton rode feminist outrage into the White House ... which posed a sticky problem. Governor Clinton had made uncounted sexual advances toward his state employees, and the laws of probability suggested that at least a few of them were unwanted and thus legally actionable. In December 1992, I wrote an article (which nobody would publish) forecasting, "Some enterprising reporter is going to think it worth his while to go Pulitzer hunting among the secretarial pools and law offices of Little Rock," and the revelations could threaten the Clinton presidency.

Indeed, David Brock's investigative reporting led to Paula Jones's sexual-harassment lawsuit—which Clinton eventually settled for \$850,000—in which Clinton perjured himself over Monica Lewinsky, causing his impeachment.

You might assume that the sexual-harassment issue died of hypocrisy in

1998 when feminists stood by the wounded Clinton, but the Left's long march through the institutions is immune to shame. The media is perhaps the key institution—because, as Orwell noted in 1984, "Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'"

So now we have "North Country," a thoroughly fictionalized retelling of the landmark *Jenson v. Eveleth* sexual-harassment case. Charlize Theron, the 2003 Best Actress winner for "Monster," stars as a gorgeous miner who learns that the men who labor in the open pits of the Mesabi Iron Range are crude. Ultimately, she wins a "hostile environment" lawsuit against the mine.

Unlike in "Monster," where Charlize famously had her lovely complexion artificially weathered, here she looks like what she is, a former model posing amidst vast heaps of rubble. (Charlize recently attributed her beauty to thinking nice thoughts, burbling to Oprah, "I really believe that we look physically the way we do because of the emotional impact that we've made on our bodies during our life." Well, sure ...)

Still, Charlize's face is bland, distinguishable from all the gaunt blondes in Hollywood only by a layer of adorable baby fat.

Her "North Country" heroine is equally dull. Feminist victimism has rendered actresses' roles more two-dimensional—notice how few *femme fatale* characters there are anymore?—denying them any less-than-saintly motivations while insisting, stupidly, that they compete with men in physical strength.

Still, "North Country" works fairly well until the cliché-addled courtroom climax. The supporting cast—Sean Bean, Sissy Spacek as the iron miner's mother, and Richard Jenkins as Charlize's long-suffering miner father—is

strong. As Charlize's best friend, the always terrific Frances McDormand dusts off the Northern Plains accent that won her an Oscar as the pregnant sheriff in "Fargo," but McDormand's mastery just highlights how vague Charlize's attempted accent is.

Strikingly, even an agitprop film like "North Country" is more informative about sexual harassment cases than most journalism has been. Screenwriters need dramatic conflict, so "North Country" explores the clashing interests of women, while the press coverage mostly bought into the fiction of female solidarity against men. Perhaps the best scene comes when the homemaker wife of Charlize's abusive boss screams at her to keep her hands off her husband at work.

Moreover, reporters took their storylines straight from the plaintiff attorney's press releases and thus ignored—because contingency fee lawyers focus upon the deeper-pocketed defendants—that the union is often more culpable than the corporation.

In contrast, "North Country" makes clear that the union members were more upset than the mine's owner by women entering the workforce. Well-paid industrial unions disliked admitting women members because doubling the potential supply of labor made high wages harder to sustain. Moreover, management finds it easier to browbeat women into believing they don't deserve a raise, and their presence undermines the fraternal solidarity needed for successful strikes.

It's no coincidence that industrial unions became moribund during the feminist era when the government forced heavy industry to hire women. With only 7.9 percent of private-sector workers unionized today, this latest denigration of organized labor seems like overkill. ■

Rated R for much vulgar abuse.

BOOKS

[*Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, Elizabeth Marquardt, Crown, 288 pages]

Broken Homes, Broken Children

By Mary Eberstadt

SPY SUPERNOVELIST John le Carré, as keen a psychologist as any, once captured in a sentence a simple yet profound fact of life. “As a child of a broken home,” he wrote of a character in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, the boy “was a natural watcher.”

Obvious though it may be to anyone with first-hand experience, this insight—that children of broken homes are somehow different and that this difference includes but is not limited to a unique wariness toward the outside world—remains ferociously resisted in sociology both academic and popular. And not only there. At a time when hardly an extended family in the country is without broken branches somewhere on the tree, and when the going piety among sophisticates is that a family is whatever two or more consenting adults in possession of a child say it is, practically no one wants to ask the exceedingly unwelcome question of what effect, if any, widespread divorce in particular might be having on kids.

Even so, some scholars have valiantly asked and answered just that. Thanks to the groundbreaking work of those willing to buck resistance to the bad news—Judith Wallerstein, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Sarah MacLanahan, Gary Sandefur, David Blankenhorn, Maggie Gallagher, Linda Waite, and others—an empirical record of the damages of broken homes has been available for some time now, welcome or not. Best-known among this scholarship is Wallerstein’s unique

25-year study, summarized in *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, which followed 131 children at intervals into adulthood.

Contrary to what almost all recognized authorities had been saying about divorce and its impact on children, what Wallerstein and her team found was exactly what no one wanted to see: widespread evidence of ongoing damage and difference. “Divorce,” as she summarized a quarter-century of research in the introduction to that book,

is a life-transforming experience. After divorce, childhood is different. Adolescence is different. Adulthood—with the decision to marry or not and have children or not—is different. Whether the final outcome is good or bad, the whole trajectory of an individual’s life is profoundly altered by the divorce experience.

This verdict—the social-science version of le Carré’s literary filipp—is now thoroughly vindicated by Elizabeth Marquardt’s bracing and important new book, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*. Based on a random survey of 1,500 women and men aged 18-35, as well as 70 in-depth interviews within that group, Marquardt and co-researcher Norval Glenn have delivered an empirical record that makes the appendices alone reason enough to study this book. In them one finds the fascinating differences of this random sample of young adults—half from divorced families and half from intact—manifest themselves repeatedly in the course of 125 probing survey questions.

Even so, the significance of this book goes deeper than its empirical contribution. In a bold move that will doubtless launch a thousand complaining missives from her fellow sociologists, Marquardt frames her discussion of these results in the first person, weaving her own personal story as a child of divorced parents in and out of the text. The polemical result ranges from effective to devastating. As a result, *Between Two*

Worlds achieves not only a breakthrough in empiricism but also in the quality most lacking elsewhere in current sociology: empathy for the children and former children of these homes.

Just how different is the difference that Marquardt and Glenn turn up between their samples? Begin with a few practicalities—say, whether the family operates as a center of gravity or not. For example, 32 percent of children of divorce say their family was not in the habit of sharing a daily meal—compared to 8 percent of the children of intact homes. Almost two-thirds of the divorced sample reports that “it was stressful in my family,” compared to 25 percent of the intact sample. Only one-third of the divorced sample can strongly agree with the statement “children were at the center of my family”—as opposed to 63 percent of the intact sample. Many more examples confirm the perhaps unsurprising point: broken homes have less time and room for kids than those that are intact.

Then there are the more nebulous but nevertheless striking differences in outlook. Wallerstein had perspicaciously cited as common among her subjects “the fear that disaster was always waiting to strike without warning.” This apprehensiveness is also confirmed by the subjects in *Between Two Worlds*. Simply put, the children of broken homes feel less protected and more embattled than their peers—an inner vulnerability that appears over and over in the gaps between the two samples. For example, although 70 percent of the divorced sample could report, “I generally felt emotionally safe,” this compares to 93 percent of the kids from intact homes. Numerous of Marquardt’s subjects—like the author herself—report a generalized apprehensiveness and dread of the world lasting well into adulthood. As one puts it and is echoed by others, “I always felt like I was watching out for something to go wrong. Not that I thought I was going to die or anything like that. But I always felt like things were lurking around corners.”