



All Shook Up

by James Bowman

This month's movies are about mix-ups in love. In *Dave*, a wife (a fictional first lady) realizes a persistent wifely fantasy and finds in her husband a new man—because he really is a new man. In *The Night We Never Met*, a married woman falls in love with a man she has never seen and so gets the wrong man when she goes astray. *Sliver* teaches the scary lesson that even voyeurism can be unsafe sex, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals why Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester must have been attracted to a little prig like Jane Eyre. In *Three of Hearts*, a lesbian hires a gigolo to break the heart of her bisexual lover so that she will come back to her, but reckons without the consequence that any movie-goer could have told her was likely to ensue—the pretense of love becomes the real thing. Something similar happens, more than once, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, an old favorite redone by the dashing Kenneth Branagh. This film also reveals that Shakespeare knew, some 360 years before the song was written, the answer to the question: Why do fools fall in love?

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Mix-ups in love are sometimes those of fictional characters, but these days they are more often, I think, those of their creators. For example, the politics in *Dave* (dealt with on the previous page by Victor Gold), are predictably infantile, but so is its more sympathetic love story. It is a fantasy, long beloved in Hollywood both on and off the screen, that just being really really nice is all a leader has to do to solve his and his country's political prob-

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lems when in fact, as Jimmy Carter discovered, mere niceness is a positive disqualification for leadership. It is equally a fantasy and equally typical of the entertainment industry that love is about finding The One Right Person.

This is a Harlequin paperback view of romance, but it has always been a standard one in Tinseltown. The idea that somewhere "out there" is to be found some ideal mate is likely to be destructive of real relationships and lead to promiscuity and infidelity on the one hand and futile attempts to remold our partners to our own specifications on the other. If you are going to get mixed up in love these days, that is how it is most likely going to happen: by clinging to a chimerical ideal—an ideal that the movies would convince you it's only a mix-up if you haven't got.

In *Dave*, Sigourney Weaver is not required by the plot to betray her marital vows, but only because the movie's creators thoughtfully provided a massive and ultimately fatal stroke to get rid of her husband, the president (Kevin Kline), whom they portray as corrupt, brutal, and power-hungry. Having got rid of the bad Kevin Kline, they can then match her up with her dream man—a gentle, funny, and childlike Kevin Kline. This kind of husband-replacement fantasy is encouraged by the assumption that men are of two types: coarse, rough, and brutally insensitive to women or soft, gentle, and sensitive. Under this increasingly common assumption, romance consists in getting the girl away from a Neanderthal type one and into the arms of some type-two girlie man who understands about "relationships."

The dream factory has another version of the same fantasy on display in *The Night We Never Met*. Kevin Anderson and Michael Mantell are type ones and

Matthew Broderick is the type two. The maiden in distress is Annabella Sciorra, a dentist's assistant who, like Sigourney Weaver in *Dave*, is linked for life to a lout (Mantell)—the kind of guy who takes a portable TV so he can watch the ballgame when she drags him off to a foreign film. He also shows his callous insensitivity by buying them a house in the suburbs without telling her. For these reasons we are meant to think that she is entitled to an affair, but, by mistake, she sleeps with a jerk (Anderson) who is even worse than her hubby. You can tell because he drinks beer, smokes cigars, watches football on TV, leaves a mess for others to clear up, and doesn't like the ballet.

Poor Miss Sciorra suffers. First there is her husband's neglect, then her lover's piggish insensitivity, and finally her husband's boorish inability to understand why she had to have the affair. After many vicissitudes she comes in the end to meet and hook up with her ideal, the man she thought she was trading for all along, viz. the soulful Broderick, a delicatessen attendant with the heart of a yuppie. She has fallen in love with him sight unseen on account of his caring and sensitive notes left for her in an apartment that both are subletting on different days of the week—notes about art, literature, houseplants, and sophisticated cookery. It is obvious that they will be very happy.

Sometimes, it is true, people really do find themselves in relationships with desperately unsuitable or even deadly partners, and this is another of Hollywood's favorite tropes, used or played off of in, among others, *Gaslight*, *Suspicion*, or *Dial M for Murder*. *Sliver*, the new thriller with Sharon Stone, William Baldwin, and Tom Berenger, is a variant on the formula in that we are invited to speculate as to which of Miss

Stone's two equally unpleasant suitors is actually a murderous psychopath—as if she needed this as an excuse to avoid either one. The trick is that the one who is not the killer turns out to be even more weird than the one who is. He gets a thrill from high-tech voyeurism for the paradoxical reason that what he picks up on his TV screens is “Real Life”—unlike his own, as Miss Stone says in her witty riposte to end the film: “Get a life.”

And that is the moral of the story, children, that spying on other people may be too real or not real enough but it is not nice, even if we might all be tempted, like Sharon Stone, by the power that video cameras and computer enhancement are giving us to look. That and a mildly twisted plot are about all there is to it, since the hot sex has had to be cooled for the R-rating. Likewise, *Wide Sargasso Sea* teaches that when sex is associated with the tropical sun, lush vegetation, drugs, and dusky maidens dancing to the beat of bongo drums, it is too powerful: it can kill you, or drive you mad, or put you, like Mr. Rochester, to terror-stricken flight back to the more temperate climate and the more prudish women of the northern latitudes.

Somehow we knew that too, although it is not a piece of information ever likely to be of use to more than a very few of us. So, too, *Three of Hearts* teaches that it is dangerous to cross a pimp and that a man (William Baldwin again!) who comes between two lesbians is likely to have trouble on both sides—as well as with his pimp. These are useful things to know if you move in certain social circles, but the film's main purpose is to teach another of Hollywood's favorite life lessons and the one that made it take *The Crying Game* to its corrupt little heart: that love is essentially unisex. That image is reinforced when Baldwin and his lesbian employer, Kelly Lynch, both of whom have found their long-sought ideal in Sherilyn Fenn and been dumped by her, walk off into the sunset arm in arm like best friends. Just two guys together.

Here, clearly, is a mix-up that insists that it is not mixed up at all. We're not supposed to laugh at the absurdity in this situation. I don't know what I think of the homosexual project to persuade us that single-sex

love is just the same as the heterosexual kind, adjusted for mere anatomical variations. Perhaps it is. But I would be much more willing to believe that if it took itself less seriously—if the mix-ups and the absurdities and the indignities of love were more often seen, as they are in Shakespearean comedy, as a part of love's very nature. To see what I mean, have a look at *Much Ado About Nothing*, Branagh's filmed version of which is Movie of the Month—in a bad month.

For there is much that is wrong with it. Of course the poetry is sacrificed to naturalistic acting, but that is pretty standard and one reason why Shakespeare rarely works on film. Even making allowances for that necessary *faux pas*, however, the picture is too loud, too boisterous, and too hearty in its jollity, so that much of the play's nuance is lost.



Neither the music nor the dancing seems to work here, being too overpowered with strings and romper, respectively, to bear undamaged the delicate emotional skein of Shakespeare's plangent hey-nonneys. The country-house setting makes it look as if Branagh couldn't stop remaking his precious and self-indulgent *Peter's Friends*, released here last winter. Add to all this the fact that he makes a complete mess of the Dogberry-Verges scenes, in which Michael Keaton is an appallingly bad Dogberry, and you begin to wonder if the picture can even be worth seeing.

Partly the answer is that there is a lot to ruin in a Shakespeare play: it takes a really monumental level of incompetence

to spoil one completely. And there are some good things about Branagh's movie—not least the performances of himself and his real-life wife, Emma Thompson, as Benedick and Beatrice. I also like the fact that it all but ignores the problem of Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard), the mercenary popinjay who deliberately and unjustly shames his bride, Hero (Kate Beckinsale), in public on their wedding day. There is every reason to think him a thoroughly discredited character in any plausible modern reading of the play and at the same time to believe that Shakespeare didn't care about that, or want it to appear in performance. For the play to come off on stage, he needed Claudio himself to remain, as well as to marry, a Hero—something that Branagh instinctively recognizes.

Branagh also—and this is his chief recommendation—recognizes that love is both serious and absurd, and he does right by the play's premiere image of that conjunction in Claudio's mourning for the supposedly dead Hero in preparation for marriage with her supposedly identical cousin (is this where “The Patty Duke Show” got its idea?). Likewise, Benedick will risk his own life to kill his best friend solely to please his lady, yet he continually takes his own seriousness too seriously, imagining for instance that somehow his decision to fall in love with Beatrice can be accounted for by the fact that “The world must be peopled.” Audiences pick up the comedy in that line because its over-rationalization is so typical of head-in-the-clouds intellectuals, but it also leads them on to share Hero's wonderment at how, in general, “loving goes by haps” and thus at the apparent contradiction between love's arbitrariness and its power.

Above all, Benedick, just like real people, has to unlearn the false and merely sentimental romanticism of the search for the ideal: his promise not to love “till all graces be in one woman” is immediately demolished by the information that the woman with whom he has just been finding so much fault is in love with him. Thus the real drives out the fanciful (even when the real is at that point fanciful too!) in at least one movie at your local multiplex. Thanks to Will Shakespeare. And thanks to Kenneth Branagh for noticing. □

This is one of those rare books that is best begun—as is the Bible—last chapter first. Both books hold another similarity, to wit, both are books of revelation; but whereas the Bible is also a book of piety, *The Real Anita Hill* is a book of the utmost impiety. Even now there are bookstores that have banned it.

The Real Anita Hill questions the veracity, the character, the whole public persona of she who would be our own Joan of Arc if various women of fevered brow had had their way. On October 11, 1991, Anita Hill was nobody. Twenty-four hours later she was a media giant. One week after that she was The Hope of all American women down there in the dungeon, rattling their chains so piteously while we guys up here laugh it up. Since then this woman of destiny has taken on mythic qualities.

St. Anita raised—so legend has it—“sexual harassment” to its rightful eminence atop the left’s catalogue of American outrages. Sexual harassment has indeed, as David Brock duly notes, become an outrage, but it is indicative not of American history but of recent liberal history. I have an axiom: most of the outrages that American leftists are most ardent to reform are, in truth, the unanticipated consequences of prior left-wing reforms. Consider the homeless: most are the result of such left-wing reforms as rent control and deinstitutionalization. Or urban poverty—begotten by decades of good-government reforms that have made the plight of the poor more wretched and intractable than ever in this century. Or the benighted condition of American education—begotten by endless experimentation in our schools. Such reflections lead to a second axiom of mine: any institution that comes under the dominance of liberal reformers eventually loses all sight of its original purposes, along with its capacity to accomplish them.

Like so many other contemporary

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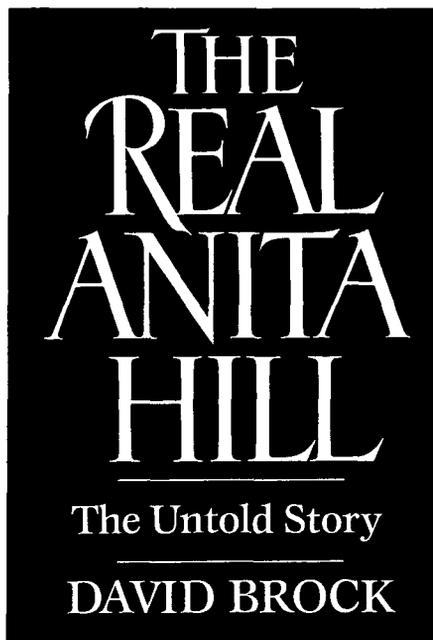
THE REAL ANITA HILL:
THE UNTOLD STORY

David Brock

Free Press/438 pages/\$24.95

reviewed by R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

outrages, sexual harassment is the unanticipated consequence of a congeries of reforms that the left was once fain to boast of as The Sexual Revolution. In the 1960s, the left led the way in breaking down barriers against sexual restraint, indecent language, and lascivious manners. When those of a prudish cast of mind objected, the left raucously derided them. When some feminists, however, noted that sexual utopia made them at times uncomfortable, the left was moved to action—not against the sexual revolution, which could stay in place, but against any American man who in any way had crossed an indignant woman. Clarence Thomas, Brock argues, did so, and in his speculations as to why St. Anita had become indignant, Brock demonstrates a far-ranging understanding of human psychology, far keener than



that demonstrated by any of the mediocrities in the United States Senate.

Now let me explain why *The Real Anita Hill* is best read from back to front. In its final three pages, Brock itemizes those of his conclusions that reveal the fundamental point about *l'affaire Hill-Thomas*, namely: St. Anita lied; Clarence Thomas told the truth. A fumbling

Senate panel and an incompetent press beclouded this point, leaving millions to believe that no one can ever know who lied. Well, Brock has rescued us from the clouds of unknowing.

Brock’s conclusions about Thomas amount to this:

(1) Prior to Hill’s charges Thomas had been found morally fit by four Senate confirmation hearings and five FBI investigations.

(2) Nothing Thomas said was “at variance with the established facts of the case.”

(3) Thomas’s opponents could not find anyone to challenge even his so-called “evasion” that since the *Roe v. Wade* decision he had not discussed its essentials.

(4) His testimony about his office behavior was supported by “practically every woman who had ever worked for him.”

(5) All who knew both Hill and Thomas believed Thomas.

(6) At the time Thomas was alleged to have been pursuing Hill he was seriously involved with another woman and at the point of engagement with her.

(7) The Justice Department had suggested Hill as a character witness, and the innocent Thomas “encouraged the idea.”

(8) Once Hill had made her charges behind closed doors Thomas could have withdrawn with his reputation intact and his place on the D.C. Circuit Court secure, but Thomas went through with renewed hearings, apparently either “power-mad” or confident of his innocence.

Brock’s conclusions regarding St. Anita are grimmer:

(1) St. Anita did not voluntarily come forward, as her dubious supporters sing;