



Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson play with their baby in the comedy drama "Heartburn," with screenplay by Nora Ephron, who also wrote the bestseller.

the movies
Dan Greenberg

Streep, Nicholson etch sharp images as married couple

"Heartburn" (R) is a major motion picture deserving the numerous awards for which it will undoubtedly be nominated. As one would expect of such a film, it is well polished at every turn.

Director and co-producer Mike Nichols assembled an award-winning cast and production team who represent the very best in motion picture arts and crafts.

Based on Nora Ephron's novel — she also wrote the screenplay — "Heartburn" is the story of a modern marriage in America where, as Mike Nichols puts it, "Most people I know are getting divorced."

Contrary to conventional Hollywood wisdom that only teenage rock movies prosper, "Heartburn" succeeds in appealing to all. It depicts a problem more than half the country faces — divorce and the great physical and psychic damage to everyone when a marriage self-destructs.

RACHEL SAMSTAT (Meryl Streep) is a New York food writer, a Washington correspondent, meet and, just like in the movies, it's love at first sight. However, contrary to that concept, may sound, Nichols directs the scene with class, tact and restraint.

Naturally, Nicholson and Streep have the talent to carry it off. That understatement will have to suffice, for space does not allow for all the plaudits their performances deserve.

Their relationship is characterized by warmth, wit and a realistic romanticism, unlike so many idealized film situations. After some last-minute hesitancy on the bride's part — her father's marriage as well as her first have left a bad taste — the ceremonies follow.

The scene preceding the ceremony is quietly comic, as Rachel lies on her bed debating whether or not to marry Mark. One after another, the principals discuss the issue with her while guests wait for the ceremony.

Children and old folks doze, the bartenders drink and exchange recipes while the groom kibitzes with the pianist. What might have been cliché is executed with finesse and great attention to detail.

NESTER ALMENDROS' cinematography — he won an Oscar for "Days of Heaven" and his credits include nine Truffaut films — is softened ever so slightly to project a romantic, comic atmosphere and avoid the harsh, acerbic quality normally associated with divorce. Warm earth tones color the scene in support of a pleasant atmosphere.

Ann Roth, whose costume credits include "Silkwood" and "Places in the Heart," continues the warm earth tones in her costume concept. Shifting therapy session locales particularly for Streep. While a goodly portion of the clothing reflects the New York-Washington business/political scene (dark suits and formal wear), the social/home



Nicholson, who plays a womanizing Washington columnist, waits in a courtyard, hoping to be reconciled with his estranged wife.

situations are costumed in browns, oranges and other warm hues.

Specifically, when Rachel is pregnant, her clothes have a high-fashion earthy-crunchy aura in celebration of maternal joy.

During the wedding scene, the camera's vision encompasses not only the breadth of the room but its depth as well, and a smiling, nodding guest at the rear of the room adds immeasurably to the sense of the ceremony's propriety.

As a matter of fact, Almendros composes a number of shots in that manner, with minor characters in the background sufficiently well-focused and well-distanced so that we can see and agree with their approval of the principals' foreground action. That richness of detail adds considerably to the positive emotional air and draws the audience into the film's point of view.

RACHEL'S MATERNAL joy is not without pain, but the scenes of daughter Annie's (Natalie Stern) difficult birth are filmed in a sensitive, but realistic manner, conveying the fear and danger of an emergency C-section. It speaks well for the entire production that realism does not involve offensive closeups.

Rachel and Mark are surrounded by a large and very competent cast of friends, relatives and acquaintances, among them Milos Forman in his acting debut as Dimitri, friend of gossip reporter Betty (Catherine O'Hara). These finely drawn portrayals are characters who, for the most part, provide Rachel with considerable support as her marriage founders because of Mark's infidelity.

These roles are also well-written, with Ephron providing numerous clever, revealing and humorous lines. "You want monogamy, marry a swan" intones Rachel's fast-talking, smart-aleck father Harry (Steven Hill), whose showbiz background, unfortunately, is developed obscurely and too late in the game to be meaningful.

Two of Mark/Rachel's closest friends are the Siegels — Julie (Stockard Channing) and Arthur (Richard Mauer). Since the novel and screenplay are autobiographical, a product of Nora Ephron's marriage/divorce to/from Carl Bernstein, it's quite clear Siegel is Bob Woodward. "Heartburn" is to be credited for avoiding Watergate overtones and concentrating on its main theme.

There are some flaws in the scenario, apparently less so to those who have read the book. Vera (Mareen Stapleton) leads Rachel's therapy group, but Vera and five group members appear in an ambiguous relationship as if they were family. Shifting therapy session locales doesn't make much sense nor does it clarify those relationships.

Such minor matters will not diminish your pleasure in seeing and formal wear), the social/home

Sneaky Pete's loses on all counts

Your traveling taster visits area eateries and rates them on a 100-point scale. Up to 30 points are awarded for ambience, which includes general atmosphere and service; 55 points for food, and 15 points for price/value rating. A total count of 59 points or less indicates a restaurant is not recommended; 60-74 points signify from passing to good; 75-89 points designate very good with some extraordinary features, and 90-100 points show that a very special dining experience awaits you.

SNEAKY PETE'S, 15231 Farmington Road, Livonia (261-5551), is a neighborhood spot for informal dining that is popular with local residents. We were quite disappointed with our visit there, however. The dining rooms are small with low ceilings, and for this reason the restaurant is quite smoky. Vinyl tablecloths and inexpensive furnishings can be appropriate, but the casual atmosphere should not have included dirty walls and tablecloths. The menu was cute and inviting with an assortment of burgers, pastas, Mexican dishes and specials. We did not have reservations but were seated immediately. Dinner took about

an hour and a quarter. General Atmosphere — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 8.

While our waiter was pleasant, he made a number of major mistakes. Most serious was his recommendation of the scrod, which was inedible. When we told him it was spoiled, he said it was the second table to return it that night. It was also inexcusable that, even though we asked and asked, we could not get water or get the table cleared. As a result we had our dessert with empty drink glasses, our old breads and potatoes and other assorted leftovers on the table. Service — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 6.

The potato skins with cheddar cheese and bacon bits (\$2.95) was one of the better dishes we tried. Although greasy from sitting on the grill, they had ample amounts of potato and cheese. The deep-fried vegetables (\$3.25) were so deep fried and greasy that we could not distinguish by taste or appearance what we were eating. Don't try them! The rolls and breadsticks were fair. The drinks were a bit weak. Drinks, Appetizers and Bread — 10 points maximum. Points awarded — 4.



a counting for taste

D. Gustibus

A choice of cole slaw or salad is included in dinner entrees. The slaw was dry and unappealing. Although the salad featured brown lettuce leaves, it was large and the ranch dressing was passable. Salad — 5 points maximum. Points awarded — 2.

The entrees were disastrous. The scrod daily special (\$9.95) was sent back to the kitchen. The roast beef special (\$8.95) came cold and looking like rolled beef. It tasted about as unappetizing as it looked. The best dish was a chicken parmesan special (\$9.95) in which the tomato sauce pretty well covered the taste of the chicken. The green beans were overcooked and reminded us of an institutional lunch-line vegetable. Entree, Vegetables and Garnishes — 30 points maximum. Points awarded — 10.

Dessert choices are quite limited, and our waiter told us they were bought outside. We tried the black forest cake and assume it was purchased at the local A & P. Dessert — 10 points maximum. Points awarded — 3.

Although the price was low, especially after the restaurant did not charge us for the returned scrod and gave us dessert "on the house," this was still a poor value. After all, if you don't find the food palatable, even at \$20 per couple the price is too high. Price/Value — 15 points maximum. Points awarded — 5.

A Counting for Taste — 100 points maximum. Total points awarded: 38. Giving the benefit of the doubt, maybe we had everything go wrong that could. Sneaky Pete's is busy, but certainly on the basis of our visit, there is little to recommend it.

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