

Mazursky successful with touchy subject

An *Unmarried Woman* has received some of the most favorable New York reviews given any American film in several years. In many ways, this is not surprising; the film is beautifully cast, acted — most conspicuously by Jill Clayburgh as the title character Erica — and directed by Paul Mazursky, from his own witty, inventive screenplay.

In addition, *Woman's* subject, the dislocations of a sudden divorce, is an almost universal experience, but has rarely been explored in a contemporary film in a thoughtful, unsentimental way. (*Annie Hall*, in some ways a companion piece to *Woman*, focuses on a relationship, rather than its aftermath.)

Many of the strengths of *An Unmarried Woman* are unusual rather than unique. It explores friendship among women, no longer the screen taboo it once was, with warmth and compassion.

Further, it is masterful in its use of character actors, those individuals whose distinguishing qualities — in acting or appearance — uniquely suit them to play specific types of roles. The Wall Street sincerity of Michael Murphy as the guy who desperately wants peo-

ple to believe him even though he never quite believes himself, is hardly a discovery — Altman has used it in some form in nearly half a dozen films — but it is perfect for the well-intentioned, likeable, empty husband here. Mazursky also has a fine eye for visual de-

when we sense the horrifying desolation, the loss of self-esteem — almost of identity — that can come from being suddenly rejected by a long-time spouse.

Mazursky shows us the world as Erica sees it, from her agonizing walk away from her rejecting

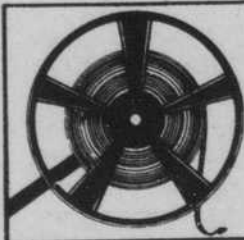
and throws her wedding ring (which almost doesn't come off) onto the pile. Here, as elsewhere, the film shows her loss of perspective toward herself, her emotions and men in general, without patronizing or sentimentalizing her or losing sight of the temporary nature of her anguish.

Mazursky is a master of using the same actions — a man stepping in dogshit, a group of friends sitting together — in different situations, as a measure of change. Erica meets with her friends several times, but each meeting feels different. In one they exchange gossip, in another, numb grief, in a third, help and support.

Perhaps the most conspicuous repetition is of Erica and her husband, talking as she jogs: in the first sequence, they quarrel and then decide to make love. In the

second, after the separation, she is so angry she refuses to talk with him and in the third, he asks for a reconciliation and she, by now released from the love that would make her want him back and from the anger that would give her pleasure from rejecting him, refuses, politely but firmly. Each sequence has its own purpose, but the three, taken together, mark Erica's spiritual evolution.

The film ends on a gratifyingly tentative note, as Erica equivocally rejects the protection of a charmingly macho lover for the more uncertain rewards of independence. With the final sequence, Mazursky celebrates with the same combination of irony and respect that he has shown throughout the film, Erica's resourcefulness and her self-confidence.



By DAVID COURSEN An Unmarried Woman

tails as small and telling as the clock in a therapist's office. Even *Woman's* upbeat ending, so uncharacteristic in an intelligent film in the apocalyptic cinema of the 70s, is not unique (c.f. Jonathan Demme's *Citizen's Band*, retitled *CB* by its local exhibitor).

In at least two important respects, the compassion it shows for the trauma of separation, and the sensitivity with which it views the world from a woman's point of view, *Woman* is unique. As Erica adjusts to being single, her confusion, numbness, pain, and anger all become part of the fabric of the film. There are even moments

husband to her joy in a too-lyrical ice skating sequence. Perhaps the most telling vignette in the film is a manic 3:45 a.m. gesture of revenge, as Erica collects her husband's remaining belongings

Dylan's film fascinating failure

Improvisation is a spurious undertaking in films. It exists somewhere in a murky clime between cinema verite on one hand and a Hollywood screenplay on the other. Only the most intuitive or experienced actors and directors successfully meet the exacting demands of an improvised scene that will work. More often than not, as in the improvisationally flawed *New York, New York*, limited actors are left with their mouths hanging open as if wondering what to say next.

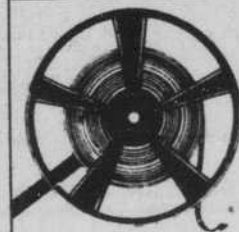
So Bob Dylan set no easy task for himself when he decided to direct (or, more accurately, to suggest) an improvisational film to provide a core for some expertly done concert sequences from his Rolling Thunder Revue days. And it comes as no great surprise that he fails in the task. Dylan's first spoken (unsung) words in *Renaldo and Clara* are "I am the Law." He subsequently becomes not only the Law but also De Lawd in this quasi-metaphysical post-existential *menage a trois* of a film that is surprisingly compelling for almost half of its all-but-four-hour length.

This is a movie that can make sense only to editor-producer-writer-director-auteur-star Bob Dylan himself, and I frankly wonder if it makes much sense to him. It wanders cannily among Dylan's amazing assortment of public masks — the angry punk-prophet, the hard-rocking folkie, the reclusive loner, the devoted family man, the apple-cheeked good ol' boy, the aging Prince of Rock, the impassioned and rejected lover. Dylan sometimes surprises with the detail with which he explores and exploits his real life; but as quickly as you see a glimmer of a revelation, he

changes hats, puts on a new mask and slips by you once more.

Renaldo and Clara rewards careful thought, structurally speaking, at least. By means of his own lackadaisicalness, Dylan forces you to struggle to put together the seemingly random pieces of foot-

A bit of Dylan singing "Little Moses" drifts by; Roger McGuinn croons a stirring verse of "Knockin' on Heaven's Door;" Allen Ginsberg enlivens any number of scenes with his starlike presence; Dylan sells the superficial sexism of "Just Like a Woman."



By BILL LINGLE Renaldo and Clara

age yourself. For example, Sarah Dylan enters as Clara in one of the film's most fascinating scenes. She purposefully stalks out of a church and down the street clutching a rope. The scene carries so much visual weight that you know it must be important, but it is not until much later that you discover she is the same Clara who will struggle with the Woman in White (a ludicrous Joan Baez) for possession of Ol' Bob himself, wearing his Renaldo mask.

Thus the film's first shot is also its aptest: A rock singer who bears an amazing resemblance to Richard Nixon is wailing Dylan's "When I Paint My Masterpiece." As the camera moves closer, you discover the mask is see-thru plastic, and underneath is Mrs. Zimmerman's son Bobby himself.

The structural proposition is to accept Dylan's challenge and construct a coherent film. The intellectual proposition is to figure out why anyone who had something more urgent to do, to pare his toenails, for example, would want to bother. But even without bothering, *Renaldo and Clara* has merit in its beautiful music and its several striking moments.

Further, the inescapable resonances of Dylan's personal life occasionally charge the air with the ozone of reality. I am not familiar with the chronology of the Dylans' marital problems. But, using only the film as evidence, you half-believe it's a statement to Sarah Dylan of his continued love, perhaps even a grandiose bid for yet another reconciliation.

But the Sarah Dylan of the film does not live up to her myth. She wears several masks, too — she's as sluttish as Sarah Miles in an embarrassing scene with playwright Sam Shepard, or she's sometimes as elegantly bored as Lauren Bacall — but she can never match in the flesh the incredible picture of a transcendently desirable Earth Mother-Bitch Goddess that Dylan immortalizes in "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" and "Sarah." He has perhaps already painted his masterpiece, and her name is Sarah Dylan. She apparently differs as much from Dylan's Sarah, in our eyes at least, as Lisa del Giocondo undoubtedly differed from Da Vinci's *La Gioconda*.

Dylan, on the other hand, con-

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