
The Graduate by Mike Nichols: Film Analysis

The movie *The Graduate* (1967) is a romantic comedy directed by Mike Nichols. It is based on the 1963 novel by Charles Webb. The main character, Benjamin Braddock is an early twenties college graduate. He has returned home to Pasadena, California. There he is bombarded with questions of his future and what he plans to do now that he has graduated college. Other notable characters include Mrs. Robinson, and Eline Robinson, who is Ben's love interest. Mrs. Robinson is guilty of seducing Ben and then he falls in love with Eline, which is Mrs. Robinson's daughter and she warned him to stay away from her. Overall, the theme of the film is about Ben avoiding his future and looking for a distraction. He needs to come to terms with his identity before it's too late.

In the film *The Graduate*, the story, editing, cinematography, sound, Mise en scene and most remarkable, the directing. All of these elements coincide to make an award-winning movie. However, the directing aspect of the film takes the cake. The film won an Academy Award for best director because of Mike Nichols. Nichols' camerawork revealed the emotional substance of the story and its characters so that the viewer always feels aligned with the rhythm of the story. Tightly cropped close-ups align us with the characters and give us insight into the emotional subtleties of their states of mind. Tight shots illustrate the claustrophobia and confinement that Benjamin feels in his situation. Another noteworthy element of Nichols' direction is his freedom with the tone, switching quickly between comedic and dramatic, finding the ludicrous in even the direst of circumstances. Consequently, this film received praise because of Nichols. After all, the director controls a lot of what goes on off the scene and on the scene.

In addition to the admired directory, the film also has an exceptional narrative. For example, the viewer understands that Ben is the protagonist and what his conflict is right off the bat. In the first scenes, and when he meets Mrs. Robinson the awkwardness that Ben felt, and how he felt intrigued by her at the same time. The next stage of Ben's character development occurs when he meets Eline, Mrs. Robinson's daughter. Eline later rejects him after finding out about his attachment to her mother. Ben's transformation as a character ends when he understands what he wants with his life and he decides to run away from society and then returning to his beloved. As a result, the narrative in the film is told simply, but is breathtaking because of Mike Nichols creating a feeling of gratitude and if you caught it, his hidden sarcasm.

Moving on to the editing in the film, "*The Graduate*" is an example of a picture, in which there is nothing redundant, and the content of the frame is carefully chosen as well as the history and atmosphere to unite all the unique characters and create a narrative space. For example, in the first scene, we are in Mrs. Robinson's house, where the hostess makes an attempt to seduce Ben. The combination of harsh light and contrasting colors creates a tense atmosphere. Another example is the smooth, but dramatic transitions between scenes. When one scene flows into another, it is an important reflection of the rhythmic relationships of the chosen surroundings and settings that reveal the protagonist and their senses, reflecting the spatial relations of shots. The characteristic change of frames is shown in the scene where Ben has fun in bed with Mrs. Robinson, he then gets up and goes out the door and now he is no longer in the hotel, but at home in his room. There he goes out and flops into the pool. Every detail,

including minor, contributed to the process of unnoticed capturing time. In consequence, it is hard to say that *The Graduate* had a happy ending. Even though he got his love interest, his future has no direction and seems quite vague.

The movie *The Graduate* played a big role in defining the New Hollywood. This is due to Mike Nichols' beautiful landscapes and peculiar editing. A scene that demonstrates brilliant cinematography is the party scene. For instance, the use of claustrophobic close-ups, the audience can feel the suffocation that Benjamin feels. We feel panicked for him. We can feel the breaths of air escape from me as he dodges guests left and right. Another instance, the scuba suit sequence. The use of POV when he's in the suit shows how Benjamin feels like he's sinking. He's underwater and has only a limited amount of oxygen left. And his parents keep pushing him down under, pressuring him, wondering when he is going to make something of his life. A final example of excellent cinematography is after Ben goes to Berkeley the film's style almost shifts to a French New Wave film. The shots pan and the actors seem to be given the right to roam. A more specific shot is when Benjamin is walking through an empty campus and stops right when the American flag is in the frame. An obvious symbol, yes, but the implementation was great. Overall, the cinematography in the film was a breath of fresh air, a different approach to organizing different scenes and props.

Another well-done aspect of the film is its *Mise en Scene*. The movie has rather interesting dialogue scenes. Nichols and Surtees said good-bye to tradition dialogue and had most of the body in the frames. This created an uncomfortable feeling. So, Nichols and Surtees tried to make the audience feel the same way that Ben felt. It created a feeling of dominance for other characters. The *mise en scene* is constantly built in an uncommon way, emphasizing some loss of Ben and his growing process. By using a hand-held camera during the party scene, the camera follows Ben, showing it close-up and not distracted by other details and people around. The camera is very mobile and stays close behind him. This also can imitate the feeling of anxiety, which is exactly what Ben is feeling. Thus, all the elements of the *mise-en-scene*, including close-ups, devoid of emotions, and quick transitions between scenes reflect the change that Ben is going through to create a comprehensive storyline.

The last aspect of the graduate is also the most innovative. The soundtrack of the movie is more than iconic. *The Graduate* is one of the first movies to utilize songs sung by popular artists. For example, Nichols used the works of Simon and Garfunkel, such as "The Sound of Silence." So, the music for the film *The Graduate* fits very well with the visual series and creates a sense of comical and dramatic feeling. "The Sounds of Silence," uses dark and light to represent people's inability to communicate, which is shown by Ben's nonchalant way of blowing people off by not answering their questions about his future.

In essence, the film *The Graduate* has the elements of narration, editing, cinematography, sound, *Mise en scene* and most remarkable, the directing. All of these aspects coincide to make an award-winning movie. The movie had strengths and weaknesses, like all films, but when it lacked in one area, it made up for it in another. Overall, the movie created a new standard for Hollywood films and revolutionized directing, as well as cinematography.