

THE GRADUATE

Produced by Lawrence Turman; screenplay by Calder Willingham and Buck Henry, based on the novel by Charles Webb; directed by Mike Nichols.

CAST

Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft); Ben Braddock (Dustin Hoffman); Elaine Robinson (Katharine Ross); Mr. Braddock (William Daniels); Mr. Robinson (Murray Hamilton); Mrs. Braddock (Elizabeth Wilson); Carl Smith (Brian Avery); Mr. Maguire (Walter Brooke); Mr. McCleery (Norman Fell); Second Lady (Elizabeth Fraser); Mrs. Singleman (Alice Ghostley); Room Clerk (Buck Henry); Miss De Witt (Marion Lorne)

Once in the course of every decade, thanks to an impossible-to-predict combination of timing, talent, and luck, a film appears which captures the spirit of the times, and allows America's youth to perceive in the action onscreen an image of themselves which they can both identify with and emulate. In the Fifties, it was *Rebel Without a Cause*; though originally shot as a youth-oriented exploitation film it metamorphosed into the central cultural experience of an entire generation. In the Sixties, the key film turned out to be *The Graduate*, taken from a clever but minor novel by Charles Webb.

The story, as adapted by Buck Henry and Calder Willingham, follows the basic premise of Webb's novel: Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman), a Holden Caulfieldish college graduate, returns home to Southern California and finds he's unable to commit himself to anything. Adoring friends and family wait to see what he's going to do with his expensive education, but Ben only hangs around his affluent parents' swimming pool, sensing a general repugnance for, and superiority to, the pretentious upper-middle-class lifestyle that surrounds him though he lacks the ambition and courage to break away from it. Then, Ben is propositioned by Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft), the frustrated wife of his father's law partner, and after first nervously rejecting her, the boy calls the older woman for a rendezvous. Their long-term affair, which Ben eventually finds decadent, causes complications when Ben is railroaded into a blind date with the Robinsons' college-senior daughter, Elaine (Katharine Ross), and finds himself falling in love with the girl, despite the hysterical objections of the distraught Mrs. Robinson.

Director Mike Nichols was, as a result of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, already established as one of the most promising young directors of the "New Hollywood." But *The Graduate* made him (for a while, at least) the most powerful and influential of those people who were reshaping the American motion picture product. First, Nichols decided to make a major motion picture with no name stars, and in so doing, introduced Dustin Hoffman, who would quickly become, ironically enough, the new name to be reckoned with. Second, Nichols employed a series of camera techniques that had been extensively used in television commercials and avant garde pictures, but were new to the Hollywood product. The camera seemed suddenly free from the old limitations: a shot of Ben driving across the Golden Gate Bridge suddenly sweeps us far into the air; the camera cuts at a rapid rate to convey a sense of Ben's subjectivity. Cinematographer Robert Surtees was given a chance to experiment with "arty" techniques like those used by his European counterparts, and created moments that were both original and effective; the best remembered example comes when Ben, rushing madly to stop Elaine's marriage to a fraternity row type, is seen running toward a camera that photographs him in extreme depth through a telescopic lens; though Ben runs at a phenomenal speed, the technique makes him appear to be running in place, never getting anywhere. Thus, the film's essential theme is wordlessly conveyed. Third, there was the equally important decision to change the notion of the musical score, and instead of just featuring music composed expressly for the picture, Nichols included currently popular songs by folksingers Simon and Garfunkel ("*The Sound of Silence*"; "*Scarborough Fair*") without necessarily correlating them directly to a scene.

The film, which might easily at any moment have degenerated into an enjoyable but forgettable bedroom farce, is continually turned into a deft work of social satire, establishing Nichols as a cultural humorist in the tradition of Preston Sturges and Billy Wilder. Numerous bits of Americana are effectively integrated into the story: when Ben visits Mrs. Robinson at her home, *The Dating Game* is blaring from the television set, adding a comic undercurrent to their relationship; when Ben tries to stop Elaine's forced marriage, he finds it taking place in one of those modern churches that look more like an experimental art museum than a place of worship. There are numerous scenes that have become classics, including Ben's nervous routine when checking into a hotel with Mrs. Robinson for the first time, encountering an unperturbed desk clerk (Buck Henry), and Ben's early attempt to escape the banal small talk of his parents by submerging in their swimming pool with diving equipment, where he stares, in exasperation, directly into the camera. But the most striking image of all was the last, in which Ben and Elaine rush away from her marriage ceremony and escape on a busload of old people, heading - they know not where. After their moment of exhilaration, they look down at Elaine's hand, and

stare at her wedding ring. Mike Nichols would later cynically comment, "I think Benjamin and Elaine will end up exactly like their parents; that's what I was trying to say in that last scene." But audiences (especially youthful, affluent audiences) did not perceive it that way. What Elaine and Ben accomplish in *The Graduate* appeared to them as a significant act of outright rebellion against the confining lifestyle of their parents. Understandably, Dustin Hoffman emerged as the most significant youth cult star since James Dean. With a deadpan expression and an uncertain voice, he offered an entirely new concept of how a star should act and look, just as the artistic techniques employed in *The Graduate* presented audiences with an alternative to the earlier ideas of how a Hollywood movie ought to be made.

The Films Of The Sixties : The Graduate

by Douglas Brode, ©1980

Book :

The Movies from The Sixties : *The Graduate*, 1983

When *The Graduate* was released in 1967, it became something of a cult film with the 18-25 age group. It represented a breakthrough for Hollywood with these young people - students and others went to see it again and again. Its popularity far outstripped the original expectations of its makers. There was even a 26-page article, assessing its merits, in the *New York Times*.

The year 1968 was to be a time of unrest around the world, particularly among students and other youth. In America that unrest eventually crystallized into opposition to the Vietnam War, but in 1967 the issue was not yet clearly focused - there was only a general dissatisfaction with the status quo. The anarchic mood of *The Graduate* perfectly matched the feelings of the time. It combined humor with satire on social and sexual customs, complemented by the music of Simon and Garfunkel.

Benjamin, the slightly unprepossessing hero of the film, is fresh out of college and uncertain whether to go on to graduate school. An innocent in a sophisticated society, he is seen by his elders as a means to fulfill their own ambitions, while he himself is trying to search out an honest and sincere way to live his life. Only Elaine Robinson, the daughter of his father's business partner and apparently the only other young person in his environment, is able to communicate with him. Benjamin has difficulty in relating to the world of his parents, from which he feels cut off by invisible barriers - as the words of Paul Simon's opening song, 'The Sound of Silence', suggest. Benjamin belongs to a wealthy family in Los Angeles, affluent members of the world's richest society - financial insecurity is no longer a problem as it had been in earlier films about the difficulties of youthful characters. At his homecoming party after graduation, a family friend whispers one word of advice in his ear: 'Plastics'. Benjamin retires to his room, realizing that he is estranged from a world in which financial success is the only measure of value.

Benjamin's alienation from his culture throughout the film is symbolized by shots through glass, cutting him off from direct participation in others' experience. At the party, the guests are seen in wide-angle distortion through the eye-mask of Benjamin's new diving suit. Mrs. Robinson's first approach to him is shown through a fish tank- she will be the predator in their relationship. Several times Benjamin's individual and nonconformist viewpoint is emphasized in subjective shots through the lenses of his sunglasses. When he finally runs off with Elaine, the audience sees the couple through the windows of the bus, creating a final barrier through which even their ultimate silence is unheard.

Although *The Graduate* brought the 30-year-old Dustin Hoffman to fame as a hero of youth culture, it did not establish him as a rebel in the Dean or Brando mold of the Fifties. Benjamin graduated with honors and was the debating champion. He is, above all, a nice guy who lives by his own standards of truth. He never really challenges the way things are; he just tries to remain personally genuine in a fundamentally hypocritical society. His uncertainty touches many chords in the audience: his difficulty in getting served at the bar, his fear of public embarrassment, his hesitancy and lack of social grace - problems every young adult has faced.

His naivety is at its height in his relationship with Mrs. Robinson, Elaine's mother, who is magnificently portrayed as an alcoholic but infinitely seductive bitch by Anne Bancroft. He not unnaturally assumes that physical sex and emotional intimacy should go together. He therefore cannot understand Mrs. Robinson's refusal to talk about herself and her interests even after they have made love. But Benjamin remains uncorrupted; he continues to call his mistress 'Mrs. Robinson', implicitly recognizing the distance between them in age, experience and outlook. He even explains to Mr. Robinson, who is contemplating a divorce that the affair meant no more to either of them than a gesture like shaking hands.

At the end of the film, Benjamin and Elaine remain the only two innocents. When he drags her off from the church, despite her just having married another man (whom she does not love), they get on a bus going . . . nowhere. The aims of the rebellion have not yet been defined. But Benjamin has made his protest felt.

Mike Nichols, the film's director, has said: 'If there is anything I like in *The Graduate* it is the last three minutes of it-sitting on the bus, stunned and very well aware that it's not the end of anything. They don't know what the hell to say to each other... Many things are possible - it's not an end. Benjamin has many choices open to him.'

The Movies from The Sixties : The Graduate

by Ann Lloyd, ©1983

CREDITS

After working off-Broadway in what was always a relaxed, family-style atmosphere, Dustin was shocked to find the Hollywood procedure something else entirely. What most bothered him was the sense of caste: "You walk into those shrouded studio temples, and nobody talks to the crew," he complained at the time. "And the extras are treated like scum. I got called 'Sir' so many times that I felt as though I were a Ken-tucky colonel." Besides, shooting a film for Nichols was not an easy experience. The director had never experienced a failure, which was a very different situation from Dustin's, who had lived with constant failure for years. "I never had the feeling he was happy with what I was doing," Dustin observed afterwards. "Oh, he would throw out a cookie occasionally, but I always felt like a disappointment. He walked around the entire time saying, 'Well, we'll never work together again, that's for sure. This is my most important work, and I'm going to get hit. I've done too many new things.'"

Eventually, even the thrill of starring in a major movie wore off, and it became a job -- and a hard one at that. One day, Dustin couldn't get his juices going, and was giving Mike Nichols very little of what he has to give. The director took him aside and whispered, "This is the only day we're ever going to shoot this scene, and no matter how exhausted or lousy you feel, I want you to remember that what you give me is going to be on celluloid for people to see forever and ever. I know you're tired, but when you go to see this film, if you don't like your work in this scene, just remember always that this was the day you screwed up." The words went through Dustin like an electric shock; he went back on the set, gave it everything he had, and brought the scene to life.

After the film's release, those young people who thought Dustin was inseparable from Benjamin had no idea of the difficulty he had experienced approaching this role. In no way had he been able to relax and, as everyone assumed, play himself -- Benjamin, as written, was that "walking surfboard" he had always been intimidated by. Besides, he was ten years older than the character he portrayed. "I looked at it as a character part, really, and tried to remember how I felt when I was that age back in 1958. I made no attempt at all to give it a feeling of the sixties. I've made a film that exploded, but I'm not responsible."

Now, fifteen years have elapsed since *The Graduate* "exploded" on the nation's theatre screens amid great hoopla and even greater hype; in 1967, the film proved so immediately influential -- literally, a cornerstone of a movement in movies -- that objective criticism was at first difficult, if not impossible. There was the flurry of early, laudatory reviews from the daily and weekly tabloids that confirmed the mass audience's wildest expectations about the picture. In *The New Yorker*, Brendan Gill called it "one of the liveliest gifts of the season"; in *The New Republic*, Stanley Kauffmann said, "The Graduate gives some substance to the contention that American films are coming of age." In *Saturday Review*, Hollis Alpert described it as "the freshest, funniest, and most touching film of the year... the American film may never be quite the same again"; in *The New York Times*, Bosley Crowther insisted it was "not only one of the best of the year, but also one of the best serio-comic social satires we've had from Hollywood since Preston Sturges was making them." Quite naturally, there followed more hesitant and analytical reactions in the monthlies and quarterlies, publications that justified their existence by offering their more esoteric readers' voices crying in the wilderness. In *The Nation*, Robert Hatch argued that the film "is consistently funny and frequently ironic, but it lacks the aphoristic wit of Sheridan or Congreve, and as it wears on it forsakes cynicism for chase and begins to resemble more Harold Lloyd than Mayfair dandy." In *Commonweal*, Philip T. Hartung wrote that "the acting throughout is just fine, but one... begins to become aware that *The Graduate* is more like a comic strip caricature than a convincing portrait of youth-versus-elders.... Director Mike Nichols uses so many clever tricks in photographing all this and the pace is so rapid that the viewer hardly notices that this theme has been covered before by Harold Lloyd and other comedians."

In *The New York Review of Books*, Edgar Z. Friedenberg stated flatly that the film "presents itself as chic, comic social commentary.... But it is waxwork detail, which the audience is expected to admire and marvel at. And a waxwork is

precisely not social commentary because the realism is supposed to take the place of historical or political insight... even though it captures the look and sound of much of the contemporary California scene so skillfully, *The Graduate* seems to be basically a copout." By year's end, the film journals had their say. A cocky, cagey critic knows full well he can create an immediate reputation by totally devastating a contemporary classic; Stephen Farber and Estelle Changas did precisely that in a *Film Quarterly* article that concludes with the assessment that "The movie as a whole is a Youth-grooving movie for old people... bankers and dowagers know that it's 'in' to celebrate the young, and in *The Graduate* they can join the celebration with a minimum of fret.... Yet young people are falling for the film along with the old people, because it satisfies their most... simplistic notions of the generation gap.

The thrust of the piece -- showing up the movie as superficial beneath its shimmering veneer and the masterful timing of its release - rests on their notion of *The Graduate* as "Youth-grooving," just as the earlier rave reviews also derived from this conception - or, more properly put, this misconception. The idea of *The Graduate* as a youth film certainly did not come from Hoffman or Mike Nichols rather from some desperate Embassy Pictures publicists who found themselves stuck with an offbeat product to sell. All around them, young people were suddenly transforming into self-conscious rebels against The Establishment, as the youth of the late sixties locked into a media-publicized and in some ways media-created Generation Gap conflict with their parents. This social calumny provided the perfect marketing pitch: *The Graduate*, with its tale of a young man who falls into an affair with one of his parent's friends, only to eventually find himself attracted to that woman's daughter, could be packaged and sold as the consummate generation gap tale. Understandably, the marketing technique worked on the public, and was probably more basic to the film's phenomenal success than any inherent qualities in the film itself.

But it's worth noting that when director Nichols spoke about his movie with college students of the time, who asked about the ambiguity of his ending ("But what's going to happen to Ben and Elaine?") Nichols shocked and angered his youthful audience by insisting the couple was definitely not going off to either make the world at large a better place to live or create the first hippie commune, but would rather "end up just like their parents in five or ten years." Young people wondered if it were possible Nichols didn't know his own characters, didn't comprehend the revolutionary statement his film made. Nichols, in fact, knew his characters full well -- enough to separate them as they exist in the film as apart from the characters as they exist in the aura created around the film.

Nichols made absolutely no attempt to turn Benjamin Braddock into a representation of the youth of the late sixties, though he does work in a series of complex ways to remove Benjamin as much as possible from the youth of his time. Though initially hailed as a liberating breakthrough in film technique and later lambasted as displaying about as much depth as a Pepsi commercial, the movie's camerawork is completely functional at conveying the alienation of Ben not only from his elders but also from his colleagues. The opening shot provides a close-up image of Ben's face, and then zooms out to reveal he is in a plane, surrounded by people of varying ages; at the outset, the point is made visually that even when surrounded by others, he is still alone. At the film's end, the reverse procedure is employed: we see Ben and Elaine on a bus full of people, but after revealing the couple in a two-shot, the camera then closes in on Benjamin's face to isolate him once again, insisting even after winning away the woman he wants from another man he is still alone. In between these two framing shots, further evidence of Ben's "aloneness" abound. During the title sequence, for instance, Benjamin -- having departed from the airplane that's carried him from an Eastern college back to California -- rides the moving ramp into the lobby, and we view him as a singular figure again, as the camera slips in to isolate his image onscreen even though we know, from his context, he is surrounded by others.

It is in his room, the physical manifestation of the self he escapes into, that Mrs. Robinson (Bancroft) pursues him, and their first encounter is shot through a fishbowl into which Ben is staring, studying the occupants as he will shortly be studied himself when his father (William Daniels) makes him test out a new diving suit in their pool. As we share his plight through a point-of-view shot which forces us to view the world from his narrow focus, Ben submerges to the bottom of the pool -- remaining there, so far, as we get to see, indefinitely. Realistically speaking, he must surface sooner or later; but by not allowing us to witness this act, we are implicitly led to understand that on some level, Ben never surfaces from that experience. The notion of a pane of glass (with water serving as a substitute symbol) which invisibly but irretrievably separates Ben not just from the older generation but from all normal human contact is repeated throughout the picture. As he makes plans for his first fling with Mrs. Robinson, Ben telephones her in the hotel bag from a booth only a few feet away to say he has the room key, as she -- and we -- see him peering from behind the glass of the booth; when at the end he arrives at the church where Elaine Robinson (Ross) is being married, he once again is separated from the object of his desire by a pane of glass -- paralleling the glass that separates him from Mrs. Robinson, thereby suggesting the Elaine-Benjamin coupling will in the end prove no more satisfying than the Mrs. Robinson-Benjamin coupling did. In addition,

there are the constant visual re-minders of Ben's unquestioning acceptance of the affluent upper-middle class lifestyle associated with his parents. He is throughout the neatest looking young person onscreen, and on his first visit to the Taft hotel for the Robinson affair, he is accepted without hesitation at a formal party he wanders into semi-accidentally, simply because he looks the proper Southern Californian. As Ben floats on the raft in his father's pool, sipping a can of beer and wearing dark wrap-around sun glasses that signal his unwillingness to make even eye contact with anyone or anything outside himself, he provides us with the most passive persona possible -- and a total contrast to the youth of the late sixties which, if it could be identified by any single word concept, was certainly activist. In fact, on his first date with Elaine at a drive-in restaurant, the couple find themselves surrounded by typically hippieish youth, listening to loud rock music; rather than appearing at one with them, Benjamin orders -- rather than requests -- they turn the radio down. And when they ignore him, he pulls up the convertible top on his Alfa Romeo, isolating himself and Elaine from the young people of their time.

The music itself is important: one reason Benjamin was widely interpreted as a generational hero was the musical score by Simon and Garfunkel which, according to most critics, lent the film a sense of timeliness by employing then-currently popular songs instead of a more conventional soundtrack. Actually, the S and G songs were not current hits, but golden oldies from the recent past; soft folk ballads ("Sounds of Silence," "Scarborough Fair,") of the type that had been popular just before the folk-rock psychedelic sound eased such softer music off the air. The songs the hippies at the burger stand are listening to ("Big Green Pleasure Machine") and which is associated with them, not Ben, is strikingly different in style from all the other S and G songs in the picture, sounding as though it were devised as a satire on such songs.

Though Benjamin exists in a world of his own making, he walks through two distinct worlds -- Beverly Hills in the film's first half, the Berkeley campus in the second, and while the two can certainly be taken as symbols of the political poles of the late sixties culture-conflict, what is significant is that Ben is equally oblivious to both. When he checks in at an off-campus rooming house in order to be near Elaine, the proprietor (Norman Fell) confronts him with 'You're not one of those outside agitators' Ben doesn't so much deny being one as he appears uncomprehending as to what the man is even alluding to. Any of the students we see here would make far better representational figures of the new youth -- they are both bearded and beaded. Also important here is Ben's age. We witness his twenty-first birthday party: an aging boy or a young man, Ben is both and neither, not so much caught in the crunch of the Generation Gap as left out of it entirely. The point is driven home further by the pivotal scene in which Benjamin goes to the Taft Hotel for the first fling with Mrs. Robinson. As he opens the front door, Ben finds himself stuck holding it for a seemingly endless string of old people, an image that caused many critics at the time to perceive the film as a Generation Gap statement. The point is, that is only *half* of the sequence; for when the old people finally do pass, a group of young people whiz by Ben from the opposite direction, and he is as excluded from their company as he was by the older generation.

But if the movie is not about what both its admirers and detractors have always agreed upon that it is about, what then is it about? Certainly something far less contemporary and more classical in its impact. When Mrs. Robinson first attempts to seduce Ben he fights her off, but only one scene later, we see him in a phone booth (his fish howl again) desperately attempting to arrange a date. What transpires between those two moments must then be interpreted as supplying his motivation for making that call, and the only sequence onscreen between the two scenes is a conversation between Ben and Mr. Robinson, in which the man tells Ben, among other things: "In many ways, I feel as though you were my son!" It is, later, Mr. Robinson who mouths to Ben all those clichés we expect his father to tell him, Mr. Robinson who sees Ben as the young heir apparent "guarding the old castle," Mr. Robinson who whispers to Ben that he ought to "sow a few wild oats." Later, then, the famous shot which carries Ben from his pool raft into a room of his own house that magically blends into the hotel room where he walks past Mrs. Robinson appears something more than merely a trendy transitional device when one realizes that at poolside Ben's mother was present, and during our view of Mrs. Robinson in what has metamorphosed into the hotel room, it's easy to momentarily think this is Ben's mother walking past him. Later, we are manipulated into an opposite confusion between the two women: as Ben stands shaving with the bathroom door ajar, we briefly assume it is Mrs. Robinson who appears next to him, then are mildly surprised to discover it is Ben's mother. Mrs. Braddock leaves the room, and Ben calls after her: "Wait -- wait a minute, please!" But in mid-sentence, the scene blends once again, without warning, and though his sentence starts as an address to his mother in their home, it ends as an address to Mrs. Robinson in the hotel room. There is, under the bright chatter and slick surface of the film, a discomforting but intriguing sense of the tragic this is no superficial comedy of modern sexual manners but an Oedipal myth played out in modern dress. Even this important undercurrent fails to convey the full dramatic power of Ben's doomed affair with Mrs. Robinson and subsequent pursuit of Elaine. The relationship between mother and daughter is cemented by the device Mrs. Robinson employs to lure Ben upstairs at her home: the portrait of Elaine. Ben is noticeably unenamoured with her image, despite the fact that this painting not only captures the surface of Elaine's physical beauty but also even idealizes it. Only later, when by accident the subject of Elaine arises during one of the hotel trysts, does Ben begin to show an interest:

MRS. ROBINSON: Don't talk about Elaine --

BENJAMIN: Why not? Tell me -- why is she a taboo subject all of a sudden? (Provocatively) Well, I guess I'll have to ask her out on a date and find out --

MRS. ROBINSON: Don't you *ever*!

BENJAMIN : (reassuringly) I have no intention ... (hesitantly) Well, why *shouldn't* I ?

Mrs. Robinson creates the attraction she fears by trying to deny even the remotest possibility of its existence. And when the first date transforms itself from an unpleasant experience into a delightful one, Ben tells the girl: "Elaine, I like you -- I like you so much!"

The key to the meaning is that although he's apparently sincere, we have seen absolutely nothing that legitimizes his emotions: she appears only a pretty, superficial simp. Critics of the film have picked out this scene for attack, labeling it bad romantic drama, though this is in fact the moment that establishes Nichols' intentions. For it is not Elaine herself, but the impossibility of the entire situation with her that Benjamin is drawn to. Significantly, Ben cannot even discriminate between the two Robinson women:

For the following day, as he drives through the rain to the Robinson home and a woman's figure appears at the door of his car, even the audience has realized it is not Elaine but Mrs. Robinson Benjamin does.

Notably, then, - it is Ben who tells Elaine about the affair, for this is something he has been chafing at the bit to do -- long before Mrs. Robinson threatened to tell Elaine herself. It is only by telling Elaine that Ben can achieve what he has been aiming at all along: he reduces himself to an observer. At this point, *The Graduate* becomes a case study of obsessive behavior; Ben drives by Elaine's house, taking both painful pleasure and pleasurable pain in seeing her but not being seen by her. And for as long as Elaine remains at home, this observation becomes Benjamin's life, or rather his unhealthy substitute for living. But when Ben notices Elaine being driven off to Berkeley by her father, everything changes. Since he can no longer lose himself in his preoccupation -- the object of his attentions more than his affections being removed -- he must necessarily act, though in a manner every bit as perverse as his previous inaction.

Benjamin's obsession grows in direct proportion to the apparent impossibility of achieving Elaine: he does not try to whisk Elaine off in the manner of a traditional hero in love. In fact, on the Berkeley campus, Ben does not approach Elaine at all, but rather resumes his observation of her from hiding -- resumes playing out his obsession, rushing away whenever there is the possibility of being discovered. When Ben: finally does approach her it is only when Elaine is totally 'out of her own element, and completely in his -- traveling, in this case on a bus. From the very first shot of the film, it is Ben who has been associated with various modes of travel: the jet airliner that returns him to California, the sports car he zips everywhere in, the raft on which he drifts aimlessly, even the bus on which he (and Elaine) are traveling in the film's final shot. Elaine not only flatly rejects Ben, but also does so in front of Carl Smith, a conventionally handsome man she's clearly more than mildly involved with. There now appears no way even a character as persistent as Ben can continue his obsession.

Necessarily, then, it is Elaine who at this point makes sure the obsession does not die, for she shows up unexpectedly, unannounced at Ben's room. The first time she does, he is shaving -- an image previously associated with Ben's mother at a time when she was becoming confused with Mrs. Robinson, so that the shaving device ties all three women together for the first time. The next time Elaine enters Ben's apartment, she wakes him from a deep sleep -- though by all appearances it is the middle of the afternoon. The situation itself decries Benjamin: he is not living so much as sleepwalking/daydreaming his way through life in the most extreme and also most negative connotation of that term, consumed by his impossible dream of Elaine, whose name suggests she perhaps ought to be analyzed in relationship to Elaine, the Lilly Maid of Astelot in Arthurian legend. Ben is surely no Lance- ' lot (at least not yet, though he will wield a Eros like a broadsword by the movie's end) but more of a Don Quixote, traveling not through the world of his time like Lancelot but, like Quixote, through a dream world. In essence, the movie is about dreaming; moreover, about Ben's growing desire to turn the dream into reality. But this he cannot accomplish without the cooperation of Elaine. Before she leaves, the girl drifts back into the room -- more as women do in men's dreams than in men's realities -- and, flirtatiously, asks him: "Will you kiss me?" The intense, immediate reaction of repulsion to his obsession has completely passed; noticeably, she is disturbed (but not unpleasantly) by his obsession and, when she kisses him, we see her clearly encouraging it, becoming a co-creator of it. As we will soon see, she does not love Benjamin -- the real Benjamin -- any more than Ben really loves her, though doubtless that is what each must surely believe about their own emotions for the other in order to legitimize those emotions to themselves:

BENJAMIN: Marry me?

ELAINE: (dreamily) I don't know...

BENJAMIN: You *might*? You *might* marry me'?

ELAINE: (mildly encouraging) I might...

The dreamlike way in which she moves, speaks, and gazes at him tell us that in no way does she hesitate because of any lingering bitterness or moral preoccupation over Ben's previous affair with her mother. She is in a state of rapture, as is he, over the purgatory they have fashioned.

Never in the film does either appear so blissful, so entranced. Elaine becomes so adept at manipulating his fantasy -- at first accepting, then to- tally embracing, his obsession -- that she ultimately appears far more unhealthy than he: "Good God!" he mutters afterwards, and with good reason, having sparked the object of his neuroses into grander, greater neuroses than even he was capable of imagining.

The Berkeley background then dissolves behind Ben and Elaine, as only their shared obsession counts. On a daily basis he proposes, and her ever more unlikely, untenable reasons for rejecting him elicit ever-stranger comments from Ben:

BENJAMIN: Marry me today?

ELAINE: (flippantly) I just don't think it would work out.

BENJAMIN: (doggedly) Tomorrow?

All at once she is cool and casual again, as though such a mysterious change in mood might be needed to keep the obsession fresh and alive: he the masochist, she the sadist, they make a perfect pair in their glorious misery. Then she introduces an entirely new dimension by announcing the need to speak to Carl: "Oh, I said I might marry him," she calmly admits. And once more, we must reassess everything we have thus far thought and felt about the character. Rather than a slick, sappy story of modern day true love, the film is a put down of youthful romanticism, a pessimistic appraisal of it:

BENJAMIN: Are we getting married tomorrow?

ELAINE: NO.

BENJAMIN: Day after?

ELAINE: I don't know... maybe we are... maybe we're not.

This sequence is filmed as in a dream -- as if Elaine hadn't so much woken Ben that time in his room as she slipped into the dream he was dreaming. Finally, though, Elaine ceases to be the- somnambulist long enough to let Benjamin know she ultimately wants a Lancelot, not a Quixote: "Why don't you just drag me off if you want to marry me so badly" she asks testily. At this point, Elaine abruptly stops being the woman that exists in Ben's imagination and now it is Benjamin who must enter into Elaine's dream of him. When he discovers she has left to marry Carl, we hear only the first words of her goodbye message: "I know what I'm doing is the best thing for you..." On one level the words provide the arch cliché, the ultimate Dear John letter; in the film's unique context, though, it is a reminder of the challenge, and Ben accepts it on this level. The "best thing" for him is not to disappear from her life but rather to remember her request to "drag me off," make her fantasy a reality...

So Benjamin's "quest" continues -- and the onetime Quixote/Benjamin, now the Lancelot/ Benjamin, catches up with his Holy Grail -- his Elaine of Astalot -- where a grail is of course to be found, in a church. In the book he arrives just before the marriage and spirits Elaine away in the nick of time. Nichols' change is a drastic one: as Ben rushes in, he witnesses the completion of the ceremony, sees Elaine kissing the groom -- without regret, with a smile of pure contentment on her face. She is more impossible than ever.-- Thus, more desirable than ever, lost in the grip of his old fantasy, he screams out her name. And now, the two fantasies -- his and hers -- at last come together. Hearing him, she turns, dreamlike, zombieish, the unwilling slave of a man who can make her fantasy a reality. "Why don't you just drag me off..." she earlier asked him. Now, at the most impossible -- therefore, the most pleasurable -- moment, here he is, doing just that: .has not been acting on his own accord, but merely following orders. Her slowly building scream -- "Ben!" -- is not an immediate reaction to a man she can't resist (he ironically is much less attractive than the man she has just happily given her hand to) but a call of recognition to and acceptance of the man who has overcome the challenge. She moves toward him as if driven by a power, which controls her, and the basis of the moment's strength is that she is drawn not by a sentimental concept of true love but by the frightening concept of an irresistible compulsion.

Understandably, then, when they beat their way out of the church -- leaving the people behind the great glass doors, finally completing the film's glass symbolism by reversing it, locking the world out instead of being locked out by it -- and hop on the bus, their emotions undergo a sudden transformation. At first we watch them giggle and grin with victory: they have *won*, they have beat all odds and are together. Immediately thereafter, though, from their point-of-view shot we see they are in the midst of a crowd solemnly staring at them, grim and uninviting. The smiles on Ben and Elaine faces

disappear, for by completing their fantasy -- by at last turning it into reality -- they "have also destroyed it. No wonder, then, that Nichols had only cynical things to say about their possibilities for eventual happiness. Throughout the movie, Ben wanted more than anything to talk: Mrs. Robinson's inability to respond to this need is part of what destroyed their relationship, while he and Elaine have been incessantly talking throughout every scene in which they were together. But in our last image of them, they at last have nothing to say: they are looking away from each other rather than, as in a conventional love story, into each other's eyes.

The film opened with Ben's first-class arrival in Los Angeles and ends with his classic exit. The similar but opposing images are significant, for Ben has at once come full cycle, while reaching the dramatically opposed pole to where he once stood; he has won what he wanted and, by winning, lost it. If he is far less typical than he once seemed of the youth of his era, he is one of those rare, unique screen characters whose off-beat personal story is removed from any particular time reference altogether, and is capable of touching us as only the most universal of human fables, from Oedipus the King to Hamlet, do.

In addition to his acting ability, Dustin works so well in the part because he is so wrong for it. One pundit observed, with tongue firmly in cheek, that "The Graduate is a movie about a Jewish boy with gentile parents," but it is the ironic casting of Hoffman as the "walking surf-board" of Charles Webb's novel that helps transform a minor novel into a major movie, and in addition to playing this physical type he always considered himself the opposite of, living out on celluloid the fantasy of being what he thought he could never be, he also played a character who -- shared, his tendency toward being an observer and also his need to be alone.

The critics were to a man impressed by his offbeat screen presence. Brendan Gill of *The New Yorker* said, "Dustin Hoffman makes a sensationally attractive movie debut as the troubled, virtuous hero." Stanley Kauffmann in *The New Republic* described "Dustin Hoffman, a young actor already known in the theatre as an exceptional talent, who here increases his reputation." Robert Hatch of *The Nation* said, "Dustin Hoffman has the right manner as the highly moral and readily seducible Graduate; he is at once gauche, disconcertingly direct and well armed by incredulity...." Hollis Alpert in *Saturday Review* proclaimed, Dustin Hoffman is the most delightful film hero of our generation.

Slightly undersized, totally unsmiling, he stares his way through a series of horrendous, harrowing experiences." And Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* said, "With Mr. Hoffman's stolid, deadpanned performance, he gets a wonderfully compassionate sense of the ironic and pathetic. Immaturity of a mere baccalaureate scholar turned loose in an immature society."

The Films Of Dustin Hoffman

by Douglas Brode, ©1983

Book :

"Dustin Hoffman", 1983

My Son, the Movie Star

WHEN CHARLES WEBB'S novel *The Graduate* was first published in 1963, Lawrence Turman, a 37-year-old independent producer with a couple of films to his name -- *The Young Doctors* and *I Could Go On Singing* -- read it, liked it and managed to acquire the rights in 1964 for \$20,000 from the ingenuous author. The book, written when Webb was only 24, crystallized many of the emotions of sixties youth, something Turman was smart enough to recognize. Having just produced the film of Gore Vidal's political play *The Best Man*, Turman started to consider making the movie from Webb's book. Some of its humor happened to remind him of his friend Mike Nichols, who had just begun making a career directing plays on Broadway with the hit Neil Simon comedy *Barefoot in the Park* and Murray Schisgal's *Luv*. Turman sent a copy of the book to the former comedian for his opinion on its filmic possibilities. The next day, Nichols awakened Turman with an early morning call. 'I like the book. Let's talk,' he stated.

They soon talked and agreed that the shortest novel had the potential to make a good movie. At that stage, Nichols had yet to direct a film. *The Graduate* looked all set to be his first, but Ernest Lehman, who was producing and adapting Edward Albee's acid drama of marital non-bliss, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, persuaded Warner Bros to hire the untried Nichols. It was a baptism of fire for the 35-year-old, who had to control the monstrously sacred couple, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. After the three less-than-convincing films they had previously made together, *Who's Afraid of*

Virginia Woolf? Brilliantly re-stored their credibility as performers, and Nichols's essentially theatrical but competent direction was nominated for an Oscar.

In his satirical cabaret days, Nichols used to do a sketch with Elaine May about a Jewish mother's shock at her son's choice of profession: 'Can you imagine me saying, "There goes my son the nurse?" Now Nichols's mother could say, 'There goes my son the movie director.'

Born Michael Igor Peschowsky in Berlin in 1931, Nichols arrived in the USA at the age of seven with his family after fleeing the Nazis. When he was twelve, his doctor -- father, a Russian-born Jew who had changed his name to Dr Paul Nichols, died of leukemia, leaving the family financially destitute. A bright and ambitious lad, Mike was able to continue his studies due to scholarships and almost as many odd jobs as Dustin would later have. While at the University of Chicago (where he met Ulu Grosbard), he made his living as a night janitor, hotel desk clerk and delivery truck driver. It was at university that he first began to perform, and he later went to New York to study acting with Lee Strasberg. After some years in theatrical revue and improvisational comedy in the Second City troupe in Chicago, he gained wide fame when he teamed up for a double act with Elaine May from 1957 to 1961, before becoming a successful Broadway director.

Turman, having finished producing the entertaining but flimsy *The Flim Flam Man*, was now ready to embark on *The Graduate* with Nichols as director, and Calder Willingham writing the screenplay. Because the novel is written mainly in dialogue, a spurious impression was given that it would be easy to adapt. But Willingham had delivered an unacceptable script, which was then completely reworked by Buck Henry. Nevertheless, the 45-year-old Willingham, co-writer on Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*, who made his name with his 1947 novel *End as a Man* (filmed as *The Strange One*), was later asked to do the screenplay of *Little Big Man*. Henry (born Buck Henry Zuckerman) who, like Nichols, had been a performer in an improvisational theatre group in Chicago, had written only one film, the offbeat and unsuccessful *The Troublemaker*, three years previously. *The Graduate* would be financed and released by Embassy Pictures, the company Joseph E. Levine had formed in the late fifties to exploit cheap European spectacles such as the *Hercules* films with muscle-man Steve Reeves, which brought in millions of dollars. Levine later went up market by helping to finance De Sica's *Two Women* (1961) and Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963), but with Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, and *The Graduate*, he was taking a chance on relatively new film talent.

Casting for *The Graduate* began in late 1966. The role of Elaine Robinson went to the pretty, auburn-haired, hazel-eyed 25-year-old Katharine Ross, an up-and-coming star. She had made four previous films: *Shenandoah* (1965), *The Singing Nun* (1966), *Mr Buddwing* (1966) and *Games* (1967) but only the first of these had any merit. Dustin's buddy, the little-known Gene Hackman, who had appeared briefly in three previous films, was cast as her father, and William Daniels and Elizabeth Wilson were to play Mr. and Mrs. Braddock, the graduate's parents. Others chosen were Brian Avery, Norman Fell, Elisabeth Fraser, Alice Ghostley and Buck Henry in the small part of the suspicious hotel clerk. ('Are you here for an affair, sir?') Momentarily glimpsed would be nineteen-year-old Richard Dreyfuss appearing in his first movie as a Berkeley student, with one line. "Should I get the cops? I'll get the cops!"

For the role of Elaine's mother, known only as Mrs. Robinson, the sexy older woman who seduces the young hero, Nichols wanted the semi-retired 48-year-old Susan Hayward. According to her biographers. Robert LaGuardia and Gene Arceri, however, Hayward 'wasn't anxious to do with her career what now had to be done: modify her image away from the old-guard glamour to fit the concepts of new directors like Mike Nichols... repulsed at the semi-nude hotel-room sex scenes she would have to play, she did not consider it.' It might have revived her career, as it certainly would have done for the 42-year-old Doris Day. It was an inspired idea to offer the part to the 'eternal virgin' of the fifties and early sixties, but Day, nearing the end of her career, turned it down because, 'It offended my sense of values.' Hayward and Day were obviously actresses who still clung to a perception of Hollywood stardom that no longer existed.

The contrasting Jeanne Moreau, once the darling of the then exhausted French nouvelle vague, was also considered, but Nichols and his team decided, after some thought, that her European quality might unbalance such an essentially American story. They finally came down on the side of 36-year-old Anne Bancroft, although she had seldom played comedy, having made her name in such powerful dramas as *The Miracle Worker* and *The Pumpkin Eater*. Born Anna Maria Louisa Italiano, the daughter of Italian immigrants, she had two Hollywood careers. The first -- from 1952 to 1957 -- was so undistinguished that it was difficult for filmgoers to believe that she was the same actress who returned to movies after five years on Broadway.

The main difficulty was in finding the right actor to play the title role of the 21-year-old Benjamin Braddock. While Dustin was doing eight shows a week in *Eh?*, Mike Nichols and Lawrence Turman, who were still struggling after six months to find their leading man, took in the show one night. They had read the reviews, and they wanted to see this new Buster Keaton for themselves. In fact, Dustin was not unknown to Nichols, who had seen him in *Journey of the Fifth Horse* and had auditioned him for the Broadway musical *The Apple Tree*. After the performance, they felt they might have found someone who could fit the part. Nichols went to see the play a second time, then a call went out to Dustin's agent, and arrangements were made to fly the actor out to his home town for a screen test.

Originally Nichols and Turman were going to cast Benjamin Braddock to type -- a tall, sun-bronzed Californian -- although the hero is never described in the novel. Nichols got Robert Redford to read the script and take a screen test but it was agreed that, because most of the story concerns Benjamin's hesitancy with women, Redford was too dishy to be convincing. Redford had previously turned down Nichols's offer to play Nick (eventually taken by George Segal) in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the year before Nichols began to think that it might be more interesting to cast against the 'walking surfboard' kind of guy that Dustin had always envied.

But Dustin was racked with doubts about himself and the part. When he was approached, he said, 'I don't think I'm right for the role. He's a kind of Anglo-Saxon, tall, slender good-looking chap. I'm short and Jewish. I'm getting scripts now, I'm doing better than I've ever done in my life Kerr says I'm as funny in *Eh?* as Buster Keaton.'

'Believe me, Benjamin is Jewish inside,' replied Nichols persuasively. Dustin flew to LA in late February 1967 (being replaced by MacIntyre Dixon in *Eh?*) in a state of anxiety and self-doubt. He arrived jet-lagged, tired and jumpy. 'I felt people were nudging each other and pointing at me at me and saying "Him, the juvenile lead?" I was sitting in the make-up chair and I felt like the ugliest piece of shit there ever was. I mean I always felt like that but this time was worse. And Nichols kept saying, "What are we going to do about his nose?" He wanted me to look as good as I could. He'd seen me read. He knew I could act. He wanted me.'

Dustin was one of a long line of candidates being screen- tested in a ten-minute scene with Katharine Ross. Of Dustin, Ross said, 'He looked about three feet tall, so dead serious, so humorless, so unkempt. I thought, the screen test was going to be a disaster.' At one point Dustin reached out and grabbed her behind. 'Don't you ever touch me again!' she yelled, rather inauspiciously if they were to be cast as lovers.

'I was so nervous and fatigued that I couldn't concentrate I blew lines repeatedly and did a terrible job, and I knew I wouldn't get the part.' Dustin was doing so badly that Nichols decided to allow the actor time to learn his lines and then redo the test. When Dustin returned, he fluffed more lines than before. 'I can't figure it,' Nichols sighed. 'You study the lines, and then you're worse!' After the screen test, Dustin approached the director. 'Well, you've seen me at my worst.' 'God, I hope so!' came the reply. As he dejectedly left the huge shed-like building that housed the sound stage, he slipped and a New York subway token fell out of his pocket. A crewmember picked it up. 'Here, kid,' he said. 'You're gonna need this.'

He returned to New York under a cloud of gloom and despair, though relieved in another way. 'I went back to *Eh?* after the screen test and said, "Don't worry about nothin', folks. I'll be here. I ain't getting that job." '

A day or two later, when Dustin was wending his way home over West 11th Street, he bumped into his neighbor Mel Brooks. They had often crossed paths until Dustin decided to introduce himself, having regained his confidence since his put-down by Zero Mostel. Dustin admired Brooks, who had yet to make a movie, for his TV work.

Brooks, soon to marry Anne Bancroft, talked about a film he was planning called *The Producers*, for which he wanted Dustin to play the crazy Nazi playwright. When Dustin told Brooks that he was up for the part in *The Graduate*, Mel said, 'But you're an ugly little rat. You're not going to get it.' It was not long after the test that Nichols called Dustin from Hollywood to say, 'I've seen the rushes. They're not so bad.' Dustin replied, 'I'm not right for the part physically.' 'Yes, there is the nose. But we'll let you know very soon.'

True to his word, Nichols was on the phone to Dustin again to tell him he had got the part. Nichols had seen, beneath Dustin's nervousness, the exact kind of confused, panicky character he wanted. He thought Dustin would understand the sufferings of Ben. 'It didn't seem good when we were making the test. He didn't know his lines terribly well and he was nervous. But it was good on film. It was special -- he made us laugh. He had a kind of pole-axed quality with life, but great

vitality underneath. On screen he appeared to be simply living his life without pretending.' 'I later saw the screen test,' commented Dustin. 'I was terrible. I always thought I got cast in *The Graduate* because I was one of the last ones to be seen. I mean Nichols was very pressured. In those days I don't think there was an average looking or homely looking person playing romantic leads. I mean, Alan Arkin had done *The Russians Are Coming* but that wasn't the romantic lead. No other director would have cast me, no other.'

Curiously, Larry Turman told Arthur Hiller that the thing that finally swayed them towards Dustin was his 45- second spot in *The Tiger Makes Out*. Thus can a minuscule particle tip the scales one way or another?

Certainly, Joseph E. Levine would not have considered him. When Nichols brought Dustin along to be introduced to the mogul in his imposing New York office, Levine, after greeting Nichols, turned to Dustin and said, 'The windows are over there.' 'What do you mean?' asked a nervous Dustin, suspecting the producer was suggesting suicide. 'Aren't you here to clean the windows?' Apparently he had mistaken the small man in jeans for the window cleaner he had sent for. It had rained very hard the night before and the windows of the office were extremely dirty. Dustin, realizing the error, decided to play along. He just smiled, took a handkerchief out of his pocket and started cleaning them. Nichols, watching this pantomime, quickly explained that this was the guy he had picked for the lead in *The Graduate*. 'Him!' shrieked Levine. 'You picked him?' Then the producer studied the actor more closely. Dustin became the 'incredible shrinking man'. After a long pause, Levine said, 'I'm beginning to see it. Yeah, I see why you picked him!' Yet, Levine, who died in July 1987, aged 81, could not have realized that he was making one of the best investments of his life.

The screenplay of *The Graduate* followed the novel in most of its essentials. Benjamin Braddock, who has just difference whether he gets there in time or not. As such, there is little difference between his relationship to Mrs. Robinson and his relationship to Elaine, both of them being essentially immoral.'

But Webb's strict ethical judgment that, once the ' couple had been pronounced man and wife, Benjamin was not entitled to put them asunder, disregards the fact that Benjamin has rescued Elaine from a loveless marriage before it is consummated. In contrast, Mrs. Robinson is trapped in an unhappy marriage. 'It's too late,' she screams at her daughter, at which Elaine cries, 'Not for me.' More importantly, the ending escapes the cliché in countless films of a marriage being halted in the nick of time although it most resembles the climax of a 1928 Harold Lloyd comedy, *Speedy*. Nichols claimed unconvincingly that, 'I think Benjamin and Elaine will end up exactly like their parents; that's what I was trying to say in that last scene.' What we see, however, is nothing of the kind. It is a happy but open ending, as the young couple, like most others, faces an uncertain future. Some adverse criticisms of the film's content came from The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, which gave the film an A-4 rating for Catholics as 'morally objectionable for adults, with reservations'. Another hostile group was Americans of Italian Descent (AID), which objected to the use of the word 'wop' in the movie. Nothing came of AID's protest, however: the film still contains the word 'wop', although you have to listen very hard for it. Dustin made dubious reparation to the Italian community by playing the slimy Enrico 'Ratso' Rizzo in his next movie, *Midnight Cowboy*, an adulterous Italian bank clerk in *Alfredo Alfredo*, and Vito, a thief of Italian extraction, in *Family Business*.

Just as for a play, Nichols had the luxury of three weeks' rehearsal on *The Graduate* before shooting began on location in Los Angeles, Berkeley and San Francisco. During filming in LA, Harry and Lillian would go down to the set and watch their son perform. (Dustin was not prepared to stay with his parents and had rented an apartment.) When on a shoot at the Taft Hotel, Dustin warned the Hoffman's, who were standing behind the ropes, to keep behind the barrier and also, knowing of his father's blighted ambitions to be a director, not to say anything. Nevertheless, after the day's filming, Harry introduced himself to Nichols. 'How do you do, I'm Dusty's father.' He then went on to congratulate Nichols on the job he was doing. 'That's a good shot you got there, but, you know, on the next one, I'd shoot it like this...' Needless to say, Nichols was unappreciative of the advice.

It rained on days when they needed sun and it blazed when Nichols wanted a rain sequence. Dustin had to drive a convertible in the pouring rain on a sunny day, rain being supplied by a water-spray truck driving along behind. Benjamin's parent's home was created by Richard Sylbert on a sound stage, but the underwater sequences, which Dustin practiced for a week, were shot in a real outside pool with a glass wall for photographic purposes. For the opening party, Nichols and Turman rounded up some of Hollywood's partygoers.

Given Nichols's theatrical background it is not surprising that some of the best things in the film came out of improvisation. 'He makes you feel kind of like a kite. He lets you go ahead, and you do your thing. And then when you're finished he pulls

you in by the string. But at least you've had the enjoyment of the wind. It was Mike Nichols's point of view that you should always be close to yourself in the most personal way to convey not only truth but humor. Real humor perhaps is the purest truth when it works.'

For the scene when Benjamin is trying to get a room key, Nichols suggested that Dustin find in his life what was the most painful thing for him to do that had a sexual connotation, in a public way. For some reason, Dustin could never go to a chemist and ask for condoms, although he had no difficulty in buying women's contraceptives. 'Although I had not had a sexual experience when I was at high school, I thought I should be ready, if and when it came, and so I thought I should stock up. I would always plan on a day when I felt brave and I would walk into the drugstore and see who was behind the counter. This was very important -- if it was a woman I would walk right out again -- I wanted someone young -- a kind of "big brother" image. I would ask for some Kleenex, some razor blades and I would get to that word and I couldn't do it.' So when he rehearsed the scene he based it on his experience at the chemist's, an example of his always having to make contact with a real, lived emotion.

'Everyone seemed to think Benjamin was a virgin, but I never thought of him as that, but that it was the first time he was making love to a woman who was old enough to be his mother, and who was his mother's friend.'

The fact that Dustin was only six years younger than Bancroft never seemed to bother anyone. 'Actually, it wasn't hard for me to play a man ten years my junior, because I was not only physically younger but I've always been emotionally immature.' The respected Broadway actress Elizabeth Wilson, who was playing his mother, was twelve years his senior. They lived in the same apartment block and often dined together, creating unfounded rumors that they were having an affair. In fact, they had already become good friends when she had played Mrs. Murray in *Eh?* With him at *Circle-In-The-Square*, and she had also been in *The Tiger Makes Out*.

During the third week of rehearsal, Gene Hackman was fired and replaced by the extremely different Murray Hamilton. 'We were urinating together, and Gene looked at me and said, "I think I'm going to get fired today." 'That was a painful experience... I think it was my fault,' said Gene. 'I just wasn't capable then of giving the director what he wanted.'

Ironically, the sacking proved to be the turning point in Hackman's career. A week later, Warren Beatty grabbed him for the role of Clyde's brother Buck in *Bonnie and Clyde*, for which he would gain an Oscar nomination. Beatty remembered him from three years before, when Hackman had a small but impressive scene in *Lilith*, Robert Rossen's final film, which starred Beatty.

After Hackman's departure, Dustin felt even more insecure, remembering that he had himself been fired a few times for not satisfying the director. Dustin never had the feeling that Nichols was pleased with his performance. Once the director took Dustin aside and said, 'This is the only day we're ever going to shoot this scene and, no matter how exhausted or lousy you feel, I want you to remember that what you give me is going to be on celluloid for people, to see for ever and ever. I know you're tired, but when you go to see this film, if you don't like your work in this scene, just remember always that this was the day you screwed up.' A somewhat sadistic variation on Warner Baxter's famous speech to Ruby Keeler in *42nd Street*: 'You're going out there a youngster, but you've got to come back a star.' Whereas on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The first-time director had been constricted by the wishes of the starry couple and the confines of the Albee play, Nichols now had far more power to exercise. He used it more on the unknown Hoffman than on the others.

'I hated making that film. I thought, if this is what movies are like in Hollywood, I never want to make another one. I never felt so inadequate. If there is any victory in this film it's not mine'. It has nothing to do with me. The film belongs to Mike Nichols. At the beginning everyone said it would get better as filming progressed. It got worse. Nichols knew every color, texture and nuance he wanted and worked like hell to get it. Of course I resented it.'

It is difficult to tell how much of Dustin's discomfiture during the making of the film seeped through into his portrayal, but it might have added something uneasy to the character of Benjamin.

'All through *The Graduate* Nichols thought he'd made a mistake in casting me. I wasn't allowed to see the rushes. No one was. You're no judge of your own work. If you can't look at the rushes, you come in every day wondering. They look at you and you know they've seen the work the day before. I asked Ulu Grosbard, who knew Nichols, to ask him what he felt about me: "I think he feels he has made a mistake. I can feel it." Grosbard told me, "You're not paranoid. Nichols does feel he has made a mistake." ' This was hardly reassuring.

Lawrence Turman, years later, admitted that when there were screenings at his house people would come up to him and say, 'It's a shame. You have a great movie here if only you hadn't miscast the lead.' As it turned out, it was Dustin's performance that was the film's greatest coup.

'Movies Aren't Made for Tuxedos'

AFTER THE GRADUATE finished shooting, Dustin returned to New York to live quietly with Anne and her daughter Karina in his small Greenwich Village apartment on West 11th Street, having absolutely no conception of how his performance or the film would be received and not fully realizing that the long days of anonymity would soon be over forever. Because the \$17,000 Dustin received for the picture was not enough to ensure any real security for himself, let alone Anne and the child, he was still not prepared to get married. In fact, when all his debts were paid off, the money was quickly spent and he soon found himself waiting to collect his \$55 a week on the unemployment line at 75 East 13th Street, where he happened to be caught by an eagle-eyed Life photographer before the film's release. As for work, he had auditioned for the role of the Dauphin in Anouilh's *The Lark* at the Lincoln Center, but he did not get the part. It seemed that nothing had changed. One day, in Times Square, Dustin looked up and saw his face for the first time on a billboard. 'I looked up and saw this person -- I didn't think of it as me. My first thought was, "That person up there is more successful than me. He's working, and I'm not."'

During the promotion of *The Graduate*, Anne and Dustin had visited Hollywood, and she made the rounds of studios and talk shows with him. 'I was intimidated by the extravagance,' said Anne, who had never even contemplated the possibility of Dustin's becoming a movie star, an occupation she then professed to despise. 'Everyone had their own hairdresser and make-up artist. As a dancer I was used to making \$125 a week. We had to wash our own hair and mend our own clothes. I was sure that everyone in Hollywood knew I had holes in my shoes and my under-wear. I felt like Plain Jane, and Dustin felt they had made a mistake in choosing him for the film in the first place. We were both nervous wrecks and we started fighting with each other.' The first inkling Dustin had of the film's effect on audiences was when it was previewed before the general public. It was in a cinema on 86th Street where he sat in the balcony wearing an old sports jacket and open-necked shirt. He was recognized by only a few, including columnist Sheila Graham. She wrote that he went into the theatre as an 'unknown boy beatnik', and came out 'mobbed by the crowd'. Miss Graham, who 'was taught fiction by F. Scott Fitzgerald, got it wrong. Dustin was neither a boy nor a beatnik, nor was he mobbed.

'It was the first time I'd ever seen myself on screen. And the audience really went with it. There were laughs and cheers at the end when the character I was playing is running to the church. Then a few days later we had opening night and I was in my first tuxedo. It was rented. I never returned it either. And the women were in their formals and they all sat down and there was not a laugh in the entire show. And all the opening nights since then have been the same. Movies aren't made for tuxedos.' But it did not matter one iota what the stuffed shirts, or even that first audience of regular people, thought. It was the critics that counted. Never before had Dustin been so exposed or felt such trepidation while awaiting their verdict on him.

As if realizing that these were the last days of his anonymity, he took to walking the New York streets at night, staring into people's faces. He got some kind of perverse pleasure out of this, thinking at the back of his mind that when *The Graduate* opened in the movie houses around Manhattan, the face would be seen magnified on a big screen and imprinted on audiences' minds. In March 1812, the 24-year-old Lord Byron woke up the morning after the publication of his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to find himself famous. The rather un-Byronic 30-year-old Dustin Hoffman must have had a similar experience on the morning of 22 December 1967 when he opened the newspapers.

'An amazing new young star', wrote the veteran Bosley Crowther in his final review for *The New York Times*. 'He gets a wonderfully compassionate sense of the ironic and pathetic immaturity of a mere baccalaureate scholar turned loose in an immature society.'

'He is the best American comedian since Jack Lemmon,' raved *New Republic*. *The New York Daily News* proclaimed Dustin a new star but stated, 'He is rather plain-looking, resembling both Sonny and Cher,' and, missing the point entirely, 'In addition, he'll never threaten Rock Hudson's image.' More perceptively, Lloyd Shearer in *Parade* wrote, 'With his short stature, hook nose, beady eyes, unkempt hair, he looks like a loser, and it is precisely because of that loser image that the younger generation have made him their winner.' There is actually nothing 'unkempt' about the squeaky-clean Benjamin in the movie. So 'kempt' is he, in fact, that he is thought to be a guest at a formal reception held at the Taft Hotel on his first visit. *The New Yorker* thought *The Graduate* merited 26 pages, and it provided a springboard for endless discussions about

modern youth. Whatever the views of the predominantly middle-aged critics had been -- and they were mostly favorable -- audiences in their teens and early twenties would still have found the film out and responded to it. From the opening, during the cold New York winter of 1967, the queues extending round the block outside Manhattan cinemas consisted mostly of young people hugging themselves and each other, and stamping their feet to keep warm, full of the expectation of seeing a movie that addressed them and their problems. Audiences grew when older people went to see what was attracting these young, mostly middle-class, college kids.

It is significant that, at the height of the student protests in America, Benjamin neither joins nor identifies with the draft dodgers, hippies or Yippies (the movement started by 'another more radical Hoffmann, Abbie). Why didn't Benjamin demonstrate against the Vietnam War instead of just lying around in his parents' swimming pool? For all his seeming rebellion against middle-class values, he remains essentially middle-class. He is just a confused young man going through a postgraduate crisis; a rebel without claws. Richard Corliss in Time magazine recognized that, 'The most reactionary middle-American could sit back comfortably and think that, if marrying a pretty girl is all my subversive son wants, maybe the kid isn't so bad after all.' Pauline Kael in The New Yorker felt that if Ben, who had nothing to communicate, had 'said anything or had any ideas, the audience would probably hate him... It's almost painful to tell kids who have gone to see The Graduate eight times that once was enough for you because you've already seen it eighty times with Charles Ray and Robert Harron and Richard Barthlemess and Richard Cromwell and Charles Farrell... What's interesting about the success of The Graduate is sociological: the revelation of how emotionally accessible modern youth is to the same old manipulation.'

Only in a Hollywood context could the film be called daring in its sexual attitudes and moral position. The older woman is the villainess of the piece and true love triumphs in the end. Compared with the anarchy of Bonnie and Clyde of the same year, The Graduate was rather cozy.

Six years after the film's first run, Andrew Sarris in the Village Voice of December 1973 took another look at it. 'Nichols and his writers wanted it both ways. They wanted Benjamin to be fuzzy enough as a fantasy figure so that everyone in America could identify with him without joining the Movement. On the other hand the Movement itself is placated by incidental jabs at square right-wing America, an easy target for Dustin Hoffman's off-Broadway theatre timing. Without putting down the West Coast loonies in so many specific words, Hoffman seemed to be putting them on with his canny deadpan expressions. They scrupulously avoid jabs at hippies, junkies, minorities, militants and any other sacred cows of the Counter Culture. With nothing but The Graduate to go on, one would think, for example, that Berkeley was ideologically indistinguishable from Pasadena and that California was one vast, overflowing, suburban swimming pool... Some movies age and some movies date. I would hazard the guess that The Graduate belongs in the second category.' With the deradicalizing of students in the Reagan years, Sarris's criticisms seem less relevant, and the film is less dated now than those made at the same time or a little later that did reflect the Counter Culture, such as Alice's Restaurant, The Strawberry Statement, Getting Straight and Zabriskie Point. Nearly a quarter of a century on, the philosophy of The Graduate now seems as touchingly ingenious as its hero, but the situations are still delightfully humorous in the best traditions of romantic comedy, tinged with certain sadness. Dustin and a super-cool Bancroft beautifully time the seduction scenes, but they have enough ambivalence to suggest his guilt and her loneliness, and the emptiness that brings them together. It is also rather moving today to see Dustin easily managing, with some help from adept make-up, to look far younger than his years, at the dawn of stardom.

The director plunges into the movie immediately with a huge close-up of the unknown Hoffman, as if to say, 'This is the new face of the movies. Look at it. Get used to it. This face belongs to a great movie star, although you don't know it yet. It will be around for a long time. Future movie stars will resemble him more than those you have been used to.' Dustin's face stares wide-eyed, unblinking; unemotionally ahead of him while on the soundtrack Simon and Garfunkel's 'Sounds of Silence' takes up the theme: 'People talking without speaking. People hearing without listening.' The use of songs, including 'Mrs. Robinson' and the irrelevant 'Scarborough Fair', instead of the usual music score, added to the film's attraction for young people, and started a never-ending and much-abused spate of movies, which are virtual illustrations to albums of pop songs. (Simon and Garfunkel were used as models for the untalented couple of nerds played by Dustin and Warren Beatty in Ishtar twenty years later.)

Although Dustin as the glum insecure centre of the film is amusing -- looking rather like Eddie Cantor on tranquillizers -- he is directed to within an inch of his life. Only rarely does one feel Dustin's personality breaking through the rigid mask Nichols has constructed for him. The face is continually seen hiding behind dark glasses, underwater goggles, and through a goldfish bowl, cutting himself off from those around him.

Mike Nichols stated that one of his ambitions behind the movie was 'to stop the Los Angelesisation of America', although it only added to the Los Angelesisation of American movies. Yet, the unambitious satiric intentions are fulfilled, the most successful sequences coming in the first fifteen minutes. The most widely remembered is the pithy and witty exchange that plays on Ben's alienation from the materialistic world of his parents and their friends. 'Ben.' 'Mr. McGuire.' 'Ben.' 'Mr. McGuire.' 'I just want to say one word to you.' 'Yes sir?' 'Are you listening?' 'Yes, I am.' 'Plastics. Think about it. There's a great future in plastics.'

The most telling symbol of the young man's alienation, which Nichols lightens and makes funny, is Benjamin standing awkwardly in the rubber underwater suit his father has bought him. A subjective camera, filming through goggles, picks out the inane faces and soundless mouths of his elders as he descends to the bottom of the pool where he stands silently and alone, away from the pestering people above. Skilful and creative editing enables Nichols to show a time-passing sequence as Benjamin moves smoothly from his bed to Mrs. Robinson's, from stretching out on a raft in the pool to stretching out on top of her.

Unlike his hero and Dustin, Charles Webb and his wife Eva (nicknamed Fred), protested against the Vietnam War and rebelled against their affluent background. Webb's father was a wealthy LA doctor who was outraged by the novel, which he considered mocked his lifestyle. Who was the model for Mrs. Robinson? 'That bit was not autobiographical, but a lot of the rest was based upon my own experiences,' Webb stated. Absent from the screenplay was an exchange between Benjamin and his father in which the former expresses his desire to live among 'ordinary people who don't have big houses. Who don't have swimming pools.' The film was made some months before the establishment of the Gay Liberation Front, and the passage in the novel where Ben describes his adventures on the road to shock his dad was omitted from the screenplay. 'What kind of people stopped to give you rides?' 'Queers.' 'What?' 'Queers usually stopped,' Ben says. 'I averaged about five queers a day. One queer I had to slug in the face and jump out of his car.'

Webb had sold the film rights for only \$20,000, but the movie made his book a bestseller and, over the next fifteen years, five more novels brought him \$150,000. But Charles and Fred were flower children who never wilted. Sickened by the sterile goals of the middle-class life into which they were born, they gave up everything and took off in a mobile home, fighting to be entitled to educate their two sons themselves.

'Fred and I were never interested in money,' the writer explained. They twice tried owning houses but found it too expensive so they gave them away, and Charles refused to accept any of his estranged father's estate. When money became scarce, he tried to go on welfare, but the woman official said, 'What's your problem, Mr. Webb? You're a famous author -- the writer of *The Graduate*, for goodness sake, a book I love -- how can you possibly be broke?' So, for many years, the couple made their living as hired help, and was doing so at the time of the film's success.

On 19 February 1968, the nominations for the Academy Awards were announced. *The Graduate* was up for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress (Bancroft), Best Supporting Actress (Ross), Best Screenplay (based on material from another medium), and Best Cinematography (Robert Surtees). Dustin commented: 'I hope to God I don't win an Oscar tomorrow night. It would really depress me if I did. I really don't deserve it. It wasn't that important a part anyhow.'

The Oscar ceremony on 10 April was held under unusually somber circumstances. The assassination of Martin Luther King six days before, only one of a tragic series in recent American history had caused the event to be postponed for two days. The funeral had in fact been held only the day before. For the same reason, the annual post-Oscar ball sponsored by Pat Brown, the Governor of California, was cancelled altogether. Oscar night did not seem particularly relevant to those uncertain days of vague social unease, political upheaval and, of course, the Vietnam War rumbling away inconclusively on the other side of the globe, yet brought home with a vengeance to the American people on nightly TV news broadcasts; and accordingly the attendant razzmatazz of the movie industry's Night of Nights was reduced to what was considered a decent minimum.

Despite his later expressed views about the distastefulness of holding the ceremony so close to the death of the Reverend King, and his saying that 'movies aren't made for tuxedos', Dustin, in hired white tie and tails, was there to present the best cinematography award with Katharine Ross. He retained his liberal credentials by escorting Mary Abigail McCarthy, the daughter of the anti-war Senator Eugene McCarthy, to the shindig, despite being warned by the Hollywood image makers not to ruin his box-office potential. (Anne was in New York with Karina.) McCarthy's bid to become the Democratic nominee for president was getting up steam, and his following included the liberal Hollywood establishment, among them Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Robert Redford and Warren Beatty. On the other hand, John Wayne was enthusiastically campaigning for George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama. 'The Duke' had sent Wallace

three \$10,000 checks; the last one inscribed 'Sock it to 'em, George!' It was the time when many stars started to come out of the political closet and openly voiced their support for one candidate or another. This was nothing new, as movie stars had supported John F. Kennedy when he ran for the White House. Nor is it very daring in the monolithic two-party system of the USA, where the narrow choice is between two rich, conservative (in a wide sense) white men, to offer allegiance to one or the other.

Bob Hope, the master of ceremonies for the umpteenth time, unfunny and inaccurately joked about Dustin's youthfulness, saying, 'They nominated a kid like Dustin Hoffman -- he made a picture he can't get in to see.' The winners were In the Heat of the Night and Rod Steiger for his performance in it, Katharine Hepburn (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?), George Kennedy (Cool Hand Luke) and Estelle Parsons (Bonnie and Clyde). Mike Nichols grabbed the film's sole award as Best Director (he was also similarly awarded by the New York Film Critics and the Golden Globe). Among the Best Actor losers, Dustin was in the prestigious company of Paul Newman (Cool Hand Luke), Warren Beatty (Bonnie and Clyde). Spencer Tracy, who was also nominated, for Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?, had died the year before.

After the ceremony, at around one in the morning, Dustin rang his friend, actor Stanley Beck (who would later appear in John and Mary and Lenny, and co-produce Straight Time), telling him he had nowhere to stay the night. Dustin asked if he could sleep at Beck's apartment, and if he would come and pick him up at the hall. Beck, who had been woken up by the Oscar-nominee, offered him a bed in the living room but told him to take a cab over. As Beck recalled, 'He came, he slept, he left without making the bed and I never saw him.'

Dustin's parents were thrilled by the reception and the money the film was making. After years of subsidizing their son, they were enjoying his fame. 'I never earned more than \$3000 a year before I was thirty-one. If my parents hadn't sent me money every week, I couldn't have survived.' Harry and Lillian subscribed to the movie trade papers and began tracing the film's grosses as it climbed upward towards an eventual \$40 million. Harry would often call his son in New York to tell him how much money the film was making in various cities, while Lillian phoned local LA cinemas to see how long the ticket queues were.

Dustin seemed to behave towards fame with a certain cynicism, rather like Ben Braddock at the party thrown for him by his parents to celebrate his graduation. But he was, in Alexander Pope's words, 'nor yet a fool to fame'. There were disadvantages he had to get used to. He found that fans kept pinching the plastic name bar on his mailbox, so he bought a hand label machine to replace it daily. He also read all his fan mail each evening, and answered all of the letters, by hand, except the cranky ones. One was a brief note from a girl in Duluth who wrote: 'Please come and share Passover with my family and me. P.S. If you're not Jewish tear this up.'

Only a day or two after The Graduate opened, someone came up to him in the street and said, 'You know some- thing? You look just like Dustin Hoffman!' It was just a step away from the immediate public recognition that he had to learn to live with. 'If I passed a group of people on the street, I could usually count three before I heard it -- "Eeeeeee!" Wham! All of a sudden you're on everyone's brain. You're offered everything. A clothing company (Petrocelli Suits) wants to give me \$2000 in clothes. Me, a stump of a man and they wanted to make me Cesar Romero. I said no... My biggest pitfall would be to grab the fat movie contracts, do commercials and go on talk shows and be a pompous ass who pretends he knows everything about sex, religion, philosophy, you name it.'

It was obvious that Anne had adjustments to make in accommodating his success in her life. She had since left the New York City Ballet, and was working as a counselor for the blind at both the Lighthouse and the Jewish Guild. 'The enormity of it scared us both. I wasn't ready for people to shove me aside. I was terrified I'd lose him to a starlet.' Her fears were justified and, initially, Dustin's relationship with Anne did suffer. They therefore decided to break up for a while because, Dustin said, 'I wanted my fling. I discovered that being a celebrity meant I had acquired power over women.'

As well as being revenge on others and on mortality, fame is equally an aphrodisiac, not only for the possessor of it, but for those in contact with it. The fact that many more men resembled Dustin than ever-resembled film stars like Cary Grant or Gary Cooper was irrelevant. The cities of America were full of Dustin Hoffman's -- just as every young woman seemed to bear a likeness to Barbra Streisand around the same time.

In May 1968, a young man registered at the Las Vegas Sahara Hotel under the name of Dustin Hoffman. He was given VIP treatment and was besieged by the media. He told the press that he attributed his sudden success in the movies to his parents for their unwavering support throughout the years. The interviews were already published when it was discovered

that he was an impostor. His real name was Harvey Pepper, a 23-year-old native of Montreal, who was a dead ringer for Dustin. Pepper explained in an interview, 'When I came to the hotel I was sort of looking for work. Then everybody said they saw *The Graduate* and I said I was Dustin Hoffman. So I let them think it and played the game.' He was arrested and spent twelve hours in Clark County jail. His sentence was terminated when Sahara officials bailed him out and said they would pick up the tab for the room but he would have to pay for his food and drink himself. Perhaps, when people have expressed negative views of Dustin's behavior and personality, we can charitably assume that his Doppelganger, Harvey Pepper, has been at work again.

A few years later, a homosexual friend of Anne's said that he had come across a man who looked like Dustin, who hung out in gay bars, telling everyone he was Dustin Hoffman.

Meanwhile the real Dustin Hoffman was waiting for a role to prove that he would have a post-Graduate career.

Dustin Hoffman

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