

## Hero's Journey Analysis – "The Graduate"

### ORDINARY WORLD

CU of Benjamin's (Dustin Hoffman) face  
On the plane as he flies from NY to LA

### Simon and Garfunkel's Sounds of Silence

He moves along the Travelator at the airport  
He's dressed in a suit and tie  
We are holding on him as others go past in the opposite  
direction

His suitcase comes down to the carousel  
He leaves the airport 2:40

He sits with an aquarium behind him  
He's at a party but he looks morose  
Father asks him why he's not down at the party  
He's worried about his future  
Wants his future to be – different

The Hero has stated his INNER NEED – rarely would this be  
so obvious and so early in the structure  
4:11

Comes down to meet his parent's friends  
Everyone is so proud of him  
Won some award

Mr McGuire wants to talk to him  
Just want to say one word to you  
Plastics  
Funny moment

5:40

Mother starts reading out his achievements

Captain of Cross Country

Debating team

Editor of newspaper etc

He runs away

Already we are sympathising with him

CALL TO ADVENTURE

Mrs Robinson comes in – looking for the bathroom

She's smoking a cigarette

This is also a MEETING WITH A MENTOR

He says he's disturbed about things

Congratulations

She asks if he will drive her home – CALL

He gives her his keys – REFUSAL

Asks her if she knows how to work a foreign shift

No

She throws keys in the aquarium

She asks him to come in until she gets the lights on –

CALL

Why?– Refusal

Would you mind walking ahead of me? – CALL

But it's light in there – REFUSAL

9:40

She goes to the bar  
What will you drink?  
He says he has things on his mind  
But she persists  
Says she doesn't want to be alone

She puts music on  
10:37

What do you think of me, she asks  
A nice person  
Did you know I was an alcoholic?  
Wants to leave  
She says her husband will be gone for a couple of hours  
Oh, no ...  
Mrs Robinson you're trying to seduce me  
Famous shot under her leg  
She denies it  
He feels bad  
Wants to be forgiven  
12:17

Have you ever seen Elaine's portrait?  
They go through to Elaine's room

She takes off her jewellery  
She asks him to come over

Will you unzip my dress? – CALL  
He doesn't want to – REFUSAL

He unzips her  
Takes her dress off  
He wants to leave  
But she keeps the conversation going

Benjamin, I am not trying to seduce you  
Would you like me to seduce you?

He goes to leave  
She asks him to bring up her purse  
He doesn't want to – REFUSAL

He is forced to bring it up  
CALL – REFUSAL  
CALL – REFUSAL

She comes in  
We see her naked in the mirror  
She says she is available any time  
Runs out  
15:31

Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant  
Possibly the best examples of the CALL and REFUSAL I have  
seen – sexy, funny, emotionally engaging

The husband comes home  
Tells him he's worried about his future  
He's 20  
16:44

Husband says he's at a great age

Asks him how long they've known one another  
A long time  
Says he almost feels like he's his own son  
Friendly advice  
Says he thinks he should be taking it easier  
Sowing a few wild oats

She comes down

He repeats the advice  
Within her hearing  
So it's funny

Husband says Elaine will be coming down Saturday  
Foreshadowing

19:23

Father wants to introduce Benjamin on this 21<sup>st</sup>  
Benjamin very uncomfortable  
His present is a wetsuit, aqualung and spear  
He comes out – we can see things from his point of view  
through the goggles

Hear his breath  
He dives in

21:40

Camera just holds on him underwater  
We are left with a sense of alienation

Hello – it's Mrs Robinson's voice  
He says he's been thinking  
Says he's at a hotel  
Has he booked a room?  
She'll be there in an hour

He's very nervous  
Sweating, anxious  
23:46

He lets a whole bunch of oldies through the door  
Comes in  
Walks up to the concierge  
We have his point of view

We feel his unease  
Are you hear for an affair, sir?  
He can't bring himself to ask - REFUSAL

Says that he's with this other party  
Gets introduced  
But they can't find him on their guest list

Funnily enough  
Not with your party

Goes back past the concierge  
Still can't do it

Sits in the bar  
Can't get their attention  
26:25

She comes  
We see her reflection in a table top  
Oh, how are you?  
Great writing and performing

Did you get us a room?  
No  
You want me to get it?  
Oh, no, I'll get it  
Beautiful

He goes up to the desk  
Looks like a different guy  
But he leaves  
And the same guy pops up from under the counter  
28:11

Asks for a single

A phone is brought over to her  
He's calling her from the lobby  
She says she'll be up there in 5 mins  
Something you want to tell me  
The room number  
Very funny – but poignant too

He goes up  
See him walking down a long hall

He goes into the room  
31:13

He cleans his teeth  
Knock on the door  
Hello, Benjamin  
He puts a Do Not Disturb sign on the door  
Latch  
She smokes

He kisses her  
Awkward  
Then she breathes out smoke

I don't know what to do?  
Why don't' you just watch?  
He folds his arms

She asks him for a hanger  
He goes to the cupboard  
Wood?  
Sorry?  
Wood hanger

Very very funny

She undresses

He bangs his head against the wall

Do you find me unattractive?

No of all my parents friends I find you the most  
attractive

Is this your first time?

35:10

He tries to deny it

She says just becaue you're inadequate in one way

He's offended

He shuts the window

CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

35:30

Hello, darkness my old friend

Benjamin lies in his sunnies on a lilo in the pool

He comes into the room as she dresses

She undoes his buttons

Rubs his chest

He rises

He's now at home

38:19

Another scene

He's in bed

As she gets dressed

Another Simon and Garfunkel track



No dialogue through this

39:22

He goes for a swim at his place  
Launches onto a lilo  
He's on top of her  
Father asks him what he's doing?  
Drifting – literally and figuratively obviously

Father thinks he should be looking at grad school  
Reasonable that a guy take some time off  
But after a couple of weeks ...  
Funny

The Robinsons are here  
Elaine is coming down from Berkeley fine

Say hi to Mrs Robinson  
He sees her through a haze

He shaves  
His mother comes in  
What do you do when you go off at night?  
I drive around  
Do you meet someone?  
He cuts himself

42:55

APPROACH

He's now with Mrs Robinson  
Could we say a few words to one another  
I don't think we've got much to talk about  
She turns off the light

She thinks he wants to talk about sex  
How about art?  
Good subject. You start it off.  
No, you. I don't know the first thing

He insists on having a conversation  
They are in the dark

He wants to talk about her husband  
How they manage to pull this off  
Separate bedrooms  
Haven't slept together for ages  
Why married?  
Had to marry him.

45:45

They were law students  
Art was her major subject at college  
I guess you kind of lost interest in it over the years  
Kind of  
We feel for her here

They did it in a car – a Ford  
She turns the light off  
Elaine got started in a Ford  
Don't talk about Elaine  
Then he says he'll date her  
She turns the light on – very effective way to indicate  
how she feels  
She says don't ever date her

He thinks it's that she thinks he's not good enough for  
her daughter  
He tells him to go to hell

He says he's not proud to spend his time with a broken down alcoholic

49:15

She backtracks

She just doesn't think they'd be right for each other

She starts to get dressed – saying she's not wanted

Famous shot of him standing at the door as she puts stockings on

Can she stay?

But makes him promise never to take out Elaine

This sets up the remainder of the film

Clearly the conflict is going to reach a climax when he does date Elaine

52:11

Father thinks it would be a nice gesture if he asked her out

Not good enough for you?

Mother threatens to invite all the Robinsons over

ORDEAL

Hear Ding Dong while he's still in the pool

Mrs Robinson isn't happy

TV show about couples plays in the background

The scene in the Robinsons is like a jungle

Benjamin tries to explain himself

Said this is better than the two families  
But she's extremely upset

Elaine comes in  
She looks great  
Mother looks like shit  
54:53

He drives his Alfa at speed  
As they talk  
What's he going to do?  
Graduate School?  
No.

He walks with her  
But very quickly  
Clearly this is perfunctory  
It's great that he's not falling for her straight away

Again there is a CALL here and he is REFUSING

ORDEAL

He takes her into a strip joint  
She is turned away from the stage

Benjamin do you dislike me for some reason?  
No

Woman does helicopters with the tassles on her breasts  
Humiliating  
She cries  
He breaks  
Apologises

She wants to be taken home  
She's crying  
Just want to tell you  
My parents forced me into this  
Obviously that's no great comfort  
He says he's not normally like this

He kisses her

They eat burger and fries  
Classic feast after the ordeal

Car next door has the music up loud  
He pulls the top up on the car  
We can't hear what's being said

Now they are parked outside her place  
She invites him in for coffee

1:00:53

But then he says that they he could go somewhere  
She suggests the Taft  
He drives the car up on the footpath  
Everyone at the hotel knows him

He pulls up in the car  
He says he likes her  
And it's not hard to see why

1:02:27

Great triangle has been set up  
He really wants this woman now  
But what a huge obstacle

She asks him

Are you having an affair with someone?

He says it just happened

Was she married?

Great dramatic irony

She's asking questions that we know the answers to

Did she have a family?

Is it all over now

Yes

She's glad

He takes her home

He wants to see her the next day

And she wants to see him

He drives up in the rain

1:04:22

THE ROAD HOME

Mrs Robinson gets into the car

She tells him he is not to see Elaine again

She is prepared to tell her everything

He doesn't believe her

Try me

Mrs Robinson is a SHAPESHIFTING TEMPTRESS

He perceives her differently now

He runs into her room

She's not dressed

That woman

That older woman

That married woman

The mother is at the door  
She looks  
Oh, no. Oh my God

Get out, get out  
Mrs Robinson looks broken  
1:06:47

This is another ORDEAL – the death of a relationship, or  
relationships

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?

As the song plays, we see a pensive Benjamin  
He looks at Elaine from the distance  
Leaving the family home  
Mother walks up  
But the car drives off  
And from this distance we feel her pain  
1:08:23

#### APPROACH

Ben says that he's going to marry Elaine  
He's going up to Berkeley today  
Parents ecstatic  
Let's tell the Robinsons  
Benjamin doesn't think that would be a great idea  
But then they find out that Elaine doesn't know this  
And that she doesn't like him

He drives up to Berkeley

The car drives across the Golden Gate  
He's on the camp-us

1:11:30

He sees her on campus  
But he looks doubtful now  
And she is with a very large man

He runs across the campus  
He takes a room  
Just visiting

1:13:13

You're not an agitator  
No  
Funny

He sees her walk past  
Thinks

She jumps on a bus  
It takes off  
She sees him running  
Wants to ignore him  
But he runs along  
And gets on

1:14:53

Sits behind her

How about this for a coincidence  
I'm meeting someone  
Where?  
At the zoo  
I might just ride out there with you

Is that him over there  
Benjamin I would like to know what you're doing here



He's just sitting in on classes  
Maybe we can get together some time and talk about it

A guy with a pipe rolls up  
We thought you said the monkey house, says Benjamin  
Carl Smith – tall  
He pus his arms around her and walks off

He's in pain  
Two monkeys look at him  
Another looks pensive

1:17:24

ORDEAL

He shaves  
She bursts in  
Why are you here?  
She thinks that he raped her mother – REVELATION  
He tells her what really happened  
She screams

Landlord comes to the door

I'll get the cops (It's actually Richard Dreyfus)

Landlord throws him out

REWARD

I'm sorry I screamed  
He says he doesn't feel much like talking now  
Doesn't know what he'll do now  
What are you going to do?  
You're going to have to stop asking me that?  
She doesn't want him to leave tomorrow

Doesn't want him to go anywhere until he has a definite plan

She leaves

He looks down as she leaves the building

1:21:47

REWARD

He wakes up

She's back in the room

Will you kiss me?

He does

Will you marry me?

She doesn't know

I might

She has to go now

She says she'll think about it

Everything looks good now

Something's going to have to happen

He's talking blood tests

She says it wouldn't work

He stands outside a whole class and waits

Why don't you just drag me off

I'll have to see Carl first

I said I might marry him

Asks how he asked

Down on his knees?

1:25:43

Are we getting married tomorrow?

No

The day after tomorrow?

Maybe, maybe not

She comes back and kisses him  
He goes into a jewellery store  
Buys a ring

He comes back with flowers

THE ROAD HOME

Comes in  
And Mr Robinson is waiting in his room

Why did you do it?

1:27:07

I don't resent you  
But you don't' respect me much do you  
No

The Robinsons are getting divorced

Why?

Why?!?

It didn't mean anything  
He says he'll have him prosecuted  
He says that he's to get Elaine out of his filthy mind  
You're filth, you're scum

1:29:05

Landlord is going to call the police

Elaine Robinson has left school  
Room mate is coming down with a note  
She says it would never work out

He drives in his car

As they play Mrs Robinson

1:30:45

He breaks into the Robinsons

Runs up stairs

Comes into Elaine's room

But it's Mrs Robinson

She calls the police

Says they have a burglar

Asks what they've done to her

Sorry we won't be able to invite you to the wedding

Arrangements have been too rushed

Police arrive

He races off

He drives back up to San Francisco

Goes to the College of Carl Smith

They're all blonde

Finds out they're getting married in Santa Barbara

Drives madly down the highway in his Alfa

Pulls into a service station

Wants to use the phone

Calls Dr Smith (Carl's father)

Says he's his brother

6 blocks up and 3 over

Takes off

Music stops

Car grinds to a halt  
No fuel

He runs  
1:36:32

He arrives at the wedding  
Looks through the glass  
As they kiss

He bangs on the glass

RESURRECTION  
He looks like Jesus framed against the glass

Mrs Robinson says he's too late  
But Elaine goes to him

He screams Elaine  
She screams Ben

Father attacks him

Mother tells Elaine it's too late  
Not for me  
She slaps her

He swings a cross at them  
Puts it through the door

They climb onto a bus  
Her in her wedding dress  
The two of them sit there  
He smiles broadly  
She turns to him

He shows no emotion

???

SUMMARY:

There is so much I like about this film and it is the best film Mike Nichols has made by a long way – and yet I feel quite flat at the end of it all. I loved the meet with Mrs Robinson, the Plastics scene, the scene where he hires a room, the seduction, and much more. But the final scene on the bus leaves me unsure what the director wants us to feel. Regardless of his intention, I'm feeling nothing and I don't want to feel nothing at the end of my 90 minutes in the darkness.

Does he want us to believe that these two people are right for one another or not? If he does, then the final scene doesn't really convey that. What's more, while the tension was built with Mrs Robinson, the attraction with the daughter isn't played as well. Elaine is too much of a cipher. She doesn't put up much of a fight, Benjamin gets her too easily every time, and so we aren't convinced of their rightness and can't feel anything at the end.

But maybe Nichols doesn't want us to think that she's right. But if not, then what is the film about? Benjamin starts out as a man who has no direction, and if Elaine is not his direction, where has he travelled through the course of the story? He hasn't really bucked the system because she is who his parents want him to marry.

While the final scene is dramatic and funny, I don't know what it says about how Benjamin has grown as a character. And without character growth – or tragedy – the journey is of questionable value.

A very very good film with great characters, memorable scenes and sensational acting, but ultimately emotionally unsatisfying for me.