

Some Comments

On

The Graduate and Tootsie

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11 AM

The Graduate and Tootsie are thematically similar but stylistically very different.

✓ In terms of thematic, both films deal with confusion about identity and sexuality, and both films depict a "rite of passage" or "inner awakening" of the character portrayed by Dustin Hoffman; in both The Graduate and Tootsie, then, Hoffman's character undergoes a process of self-discovery.

To what factors do you attribute this difference? While the composition of The Graduate is rich in imagery and symbolism, and the editing is used as much as possible to reinforce the thematic, Tootsie is bland and unremarkable by comparison, relying mainly on it's dialogue and Hoffman's portrayal to support it's thematic.

✓ The opening shot of The Graduate is a close shot of Hoffman; the camera holds on this shot while an off-screen voice announces: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to make our descent." The camera then pulls back to reveal Hoffman, whose character is called Benjamin Braddock, sitting in an airplane cabin full of people.

Indeed, Hoffman, at the beginning of both The Graduate and Tootsie, is presented as a man alone, about to begin "a descent" into the realm of self, a descent which will bring about both confusion and enlightenment.

During the titles of The Graduate, which is the next sequence, we see a medium profile shot of Benjamin Braddock, staring straight ahead, solemn, pensive, as he is moved along

by a "people mover." After the titles are over, the shot of Braddock cuts to a shot of his luggage being moved in the same direction by a conveyor belt -- a good example of one of the films many uses of associative editing. The luggage passes behind a sign which asks: "Do they match?" just before Braddock picks it up, emphasizing the association between Braddock and the piece of luggage. In both The Graduate and Tootsie, graduates and actors are like passive pieces of luggage, being moved along by the conveyor belt of society.

Both Benjamin Braddock and Michael Dorsey are conscious of this lack of control over their own fate -- they are both upset and confused by it. Benjamin retreats from society into a realm of silence, becoming like the diver in his aquarium. And, when Benjamin does put on the diver's suite, we see his POV as people speak to him but don't say anything; the parallel ^{Scene} ~~scene~~ to this is the one in the church, at the end of the film, when the members of Elaine's family mouth obscenities at her; their lips move but they don't say anything. These two parallel scenes strongly connect the two characters, Ben and Elaine, together. Benjamin's initial retreat into oneness, however, was upset by Mrs Robinson, and, in a great shot which foreshadows this, Mrs Robinson throws Ben his car keys; they fly past him, landing in the aquarium and knocking over the diver. Ben and Mrs Robinson's society of two is a sham (note the two-shot of their reflection in the glass table, in the cocktail lounge of the hotel, ~~on their first night~~), and Ben must hold everything in, even more confused, becoming

what does
Michael
do?

more and more like the sad clown whose picture hangs above the staircase in the Braddock home.

And here is where the main thematic difference between The Graduate and Tootsie enters in. While Ben must hold everything in, alone with himself, Michael Dorsey, hidden behind the fictional character of Dorothy Michaels, can speak her mind out to the world, and literally does so. Ben's process of self-discovery is inward, Dorothy's is outward.

Not only are their processes of self-discovery different, but what Ben and Michael discover is also different; while Ben discovers, or graduates into manhood, Michael, older and more mature, makes a more subtle discovery, namely, the feminine aspect of his inner self, or psyche. For a man to discover

Right.
Think, too,
of the changes
in Hoffman's
persons, & how
this later
role engaged
public.
aspects of his
star image
that were
not
developed
earlier.

Interestingly enough, both The Graduate and Tootsie also give us subtle psychological inferences about the main characters love interests. In The Graduate, Elaine, whose father is depicted as being very passive, wants an aggressive man who will just "drag her off," as Ben finally does. In Tootsie, the character who Jessica Lange portrays has lost her mother,

In both cases, and in Dorothy she finds a mother-substitute.

though, they are alone together, in the crowd. Both The Graduate and Tootsie end with two-shots of the main character and his love interest or mate, suggesting that the "self-discovered" characters, once alienated and alone, have easily re-entered back into the realm of society. An illusory suggestion which is not very realistic, to say the least.

classic comedy endings of these 2 films are merely formalist & conciliatory concessions to the genre?

X

The issue of Hoffman's star identity
wasn't within the scope of the project
you marked out for yourself here —

but that's another direction in which
you might have ventured, especially
with regard to comic acting style.

Your analysis is weighted somewhat
in favor of "The Graduate". You might
have commented further on the
handling of the medium with relation
to character development in the
other film just to round out the
emphasis. Or alternatively, you
might have accounted for the
very different use of film in

"Tootsie" in terms of its different
requirements.

Above all, though, this is a
clearly & concisely written paper,
full of perceptive observations. You

have a really excellent awareness

of aspects of the film medium — as
they are used to amplify character

& theme — a sharp eye for detail.