Essay Question #1 Notes

“In one sense, a framework of expectations refers to the ideals, beliefs, and assumptions a person holds about the nature of the cinema itself; we expect movies to foster cultural conversation, impart moral values, or simply provide entertainment.”

* “Can be shared by like-minded people and held in common in some measure by members of a culture or subculture”

A perspective “is their vantage point in life that harbors assumptions (or expectations) used to understand and think critically about movies.” but it can also refer to the perspective of the filmmakers

“Golden Rule” - “treat the film preferences of others as you would have others treat your own film preferences.”

OR

“Thorny Question” - “How can we critically engage film in imaginative ways that are mindful of and consistent with a faith perspective while also respecting the filmmaker’s vision and artistic expression?”

“Form” - “pattern and techniques used to tell stories”

“Content” - “film’s subject”

“Style” - “filmmaker’s distinctive use of patterns and techniques”

“Perspective” - “film or filmmaker’s point of view”

write an essay addressing the relationship between *perspective* and the idea of a *framework of expectations*, and, when applicable, the “golden rule” for film criticism and/or “thorny question

*The Graduate* challenges viewers’ framework of expectations by beginning with the conventional form of a romance and abandoning the classical ending in order to share the filmmaker’s perspective on the cultural problems of their day.

*The Graduate* teases the audience by first molding the story into a romantic story, and then later abandons the form to grab the audience’s attention and challenge their framework of expectations. To gain the trust of the audience, which probably expects that movies have a clear cut ending and that films should meet the basic requirements of one genre, the film lays down the foundation for a usual romance: the boy Benjamin falls in love with the girl Elaine, the boy loses the girl when she finds out about his affairs, and the boy rescues the girl from being married in an epic battle near the end. However, in the ending scenes, the film shows an ending that is anything but clearly defined and does not conform to the expected “happily ever after” ending that many people expect. While Benjamin and Elaine are riding the bus, they at first appear ecstatic as expected by the audience, excited to have rebelled against their parents in the name of love, but soon the light and the smiles fade away, and once again Benjamin wears the iconic, wistful look of feeling empty inside that he also wore during the start of the film. If not obvious enough, the filmmakers even play a song with lonely lyrics, such as “Hello darkness my old friend.” By “luring” the audience into the movie’s plot by adhering to the form of the romance genre, the film’s ending forces the audience to think about why the film abandoned a seemingly easy “happily ever after.” Moreover, the audience realizes by the ending that they did have an expectation, forcing them to think deeper about why they expected an ending to be a certain way in the first place. While many might believe that a film that breaks the rules of the genre it identifies with is worse than one that is more conventional, those viewers would do well to abide by the “Golden Rule” of watching films, where they try to judge a film not according to their own framework of expectations but rather by the style and the content and the delivery.

With the startling abandonment of conventional romance, the filmmakers not only challenge the audience’s expectations, but they also share the filmmakers’ concerned perspectives on the social issues of their day. Many of the issues post World War II were feelings of emptiness that inevitably arises when a generation grows up in unmerited prosperity. Many speculate these commonly held feelings of loneliness and emptiness caused the cultural rebellions, especially seen in the Woodstock concert. By ending the film ambiguously and by showing Benjamin with the same dejected and look of feeling lost or confused that he wore in the beginning illustrates the futility of Benjamin’s struggles and rescue of Elaine. The inner struggle of trying to find something different and something better than he currently has as an accomplished graduate reemerges in Ben’s mind once he realizes that what he sought couldn’t be fulfilled even by his love for Elaine. Using Ben as a symbol of the new generation born into prosperity and his parents and his old lover Mrs. Robinson as the older generation, the filmmakers believe that no matter the effort, whatever the new generation tries in order to quell the feelings of emptiness will never work forever. This perspective by the filmmakers may be disliked by the conventional movie goers who simply want what they expect, but those who identify with Benjamin, or those who seemingly have everything they want and even want more, will most likely embrace the somber and unconventional ending as it accurately represents their own lives.

By breaking the conventional rules in the ending scenes, *The Graduate* exposes people’s biases and expectations, while also sharing the filmmakers’ perspectives on social issues.