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# From Ecology to *Dead Poets Society*: Campus Voices, 1989-1990

compiled by Harvey Brenneise

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New writers are constantly appearing in the campus newspapers of Adventist colleges and universities. Their reports, reviews, and opinions provide a clue to the direction the church is taking. We are delighted, as a new school year begins, to share examples of two kinds of writing that appeared in North American Adventist college campus publications during the 1989-1990 school year. First are editorial, opinion pieces, and personal reflections. A number deal with topics of national and international significance. Second, are reviews of films. All of those reviewed are currently available on video cassette.

Harvey Brenneise, an associate professor of library science and the head reference librarian at Andrews University, surveyed North American Adventist campus newspapers and picked out what he considered to be the most interesting pieces. His work was supplemented by Norman Wendth, who teaches in the English department at Pacific Union College, and Rennie Schoepflin, who teaches American social and intellectual history at Loma Linda University, Riverside.

—*The Editors*

## Opinion Pieces

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### The Future Isn't What It Used to Be

by Mark Cimino, Pacific Union College  
*Campus Chronicle*, April 20, 1990

So when you have babies, are you going to use cloth or disposable diapers? For a while it seemed that convenience would be preferred. But in this age of ecological sensitivity, that is changing. Diapers now are a debatable topic. It is difficult to say which is better. "While disposables do account for more garbage, one study found that laundering diapers produces nine times as much air pollution and 10 times as much water pollution, consumes six times more water and

three times more energy, and produces 50 percent more sludge."<sup>1</sup>

As diapers and other things were highlighted during Earth Day's 20th anniversary, many people were critical of the media bash, paying only token or symbolic gestures to an important issue. In addition there was some controversy over corporations turning "green" for positive public image. Industry representatives cited significant changes and contributions achieved on their behalf,<sup>2</sup> while skeptics thought some corporations to

be hypocritical. "I think it's going to backfire on these corporations that think a plain, green wrapper is going to turn them into an environmentalist in the public's eyes," says Christina Desser, executive director of Earth Day 1990.<sup>3</sup>

The concern for the environment is hardly a passing fad. What we have seen since the first Earth Day in 1970 is the consistent development of conscience. Today the "Big Ten" environmental groups have more than 5 million members and some \$220 million in funds. To make the story more exciting, there are a growing number who are convinced that the "Big Ten" aren't moving fast enough. Among these is a group called EARTH FIRST! Or, call them eco-guerrillas who do a lot of "monkey-wrenching" and who "tear down power lines and pull up survey stakes; they sink whaling ships and destroy oil-exploration gear."<sup>4</sup> EARTH FIRST! claims 15,000 members and believes the militant faction of the movement is rapidly growing.

But most Americans don't identify with those "Kaddafis of the movement" and their illegal methods. Rather, Americans—and other people around the globe—are creating an ecological ethic as evidenced by new lists of "dos and don'ts" in our everyday lives. Developing this ethic doesn't come easy in an age when almost everything we consume has environmental repercussions. Take, for instance, the family who saves cans, bottles, and newspapers for recycling, but every morning Father,

alone, drives his truck to work; Mother, alone, drives her Cadillac to the women's club; and daughter, alone, drives her Corvette to the university. Here we have inconsistencies in "environmental ethics" that many struggle with. But the very fact that people are asking "What is right?" and "Is it better to . . . ?" is a positive step.

At this point, let's shift gears a bit and ask several questions. Do you think we, as Christians, have any spiritual or moral responsibility to nature? When we sing "This Is my Father's World" or "All Things Bright and Beautiful" in church on Sabbath, should it prompt us to act in certain ecologically sound ways? Lynn White, Jr. in 1967 gave a whopping blow to Christianity in *Science* magazine by stating that Christians' attitudes of neglect and domination of the land provide the historical roots of our ecological crisis. While Eastern religions often worshiped nature, Christians conquered it. "If so," he says, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt."<sup>5</sup> After careful research you may conclude that his use of history may be somewhat unfair and simplistic, but his point must be taken seriously.

And what about Adventists? Has the hastening of the Second Coming caused us to ignore other important social issues such as ecology? Would focusing on these social issues cause us to ignore our gospel commission? Here we could have a long debate. Ideally, we could emphasize both without compromising either. In a recent article in the *Adventist Review*, A. Josef Greig pointed out that some of our important doctrines such as the Sabbath, Creation, nonimmortality of the soul, and the health message are pro-ecology.<sup>6</sup> Will Adventism play an active role in this issue for the future?

And one last point. According to *The Washington Post*, a leaky toilet wastes 9,000 gallons of water a year; the average person uses the equivalent of seven trees every year; if every

person recycled one-tenth of his or her newspapers, 25 million trees would be saved; commuter cars carry only 1.3 riders on average; and each person uses about 190 pounds of plastic a year.<sup>7</sup> Do we call this economic development? Or is it overconsumption and materialism and greed? Beware, for these issues may radically change the way we live in the future.

#### Notes

1. *Washington Post* (April 18, 1990), p. A22.
2. *Washington Post* (April 20, 1990), editorial, "Earth Day and Corporate America."
3. *L. A. Times* (April 20, 1990), p. A1.
4. *Newsweek* (February 5, 1990), p. 24.
5. *Science* (March 10, 1967), p. 1203, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," by Lynn White, Jr.
6. *Adventist Review* (April 19, 1990).
7. See note No. 1.

## Witness to The Earthquake

Darrin Dee  
Pacific Union College  
*Campus Chronicle*  
October 26, 1989

I dunno, I guess I was driving out of San Francisco, well—and—so we were on the bottom part of the Bay Bridge. We just passed Treasure Island and the Bay Bridge—it bends twice, so after the first bend we were going along and then I noticed the car started to shake really violently, left to right. So I was concentrating on really trying to keep the car going steady and all the cars started to slow down and it dawned on me, "Maybe we're in an earthquake." So we slowed down and we came to a stop. It was really bewildering to me 'cause I thought, "If we were in an earthquake, I would wanna get outta there as quickly as possible." But we came to a stop. Some people got out of their cars and were like pointing down the road. And so I was trying to look down the road. About a hundred yards down I could see the

top of the freeway 'cause it kinda collapsed down in front and I could see it but I couldn't understand what it was and so I was sitting there staring at it and all of a sudden this water pipe on the left side broke and all the water started flooding out and I was in real confusion and so I thought for a second we were sinking, because you know you see the water coming out. But then, I was sitting here trying to evaluate it saying, "We're on a bridge," you know, "The water's below us," and stuff like that. And Anjelica, who was one of—Anjelica Eclar—she was one of my passengers. When we stopped she ran out to look around and she came back in at this point and she said, "We gotta get outta here." And the other passenger, who was sitting in the passenger seat, her name was (I was driving) Claire Gonzales. It was at that point that some people outside started screaming that the bridge was collapsing and people were starting to run back toward us going toward Treasure Island. So we got outta the car and we started, like, moving away from the car real quick, we were like five or ten feet away and you have your skeptical people sitting around, and they're going, "Well, the bridge is not gonna collapse, it's built better than this." So I looked at the two of them and they were looking at me like they wanted to know what we should do. And I said, "Well, let's grab our stuff." So we ran back to the car, grabbed our stuff, I locked the car and then we proceeded to make our way to Treasure Island. Just before we started running, or jogging, I told them, "Don't answer any questions. Don't say anything to anyone. Let's just get to the island and then we'll sort all this out." Well, we were just making our way out to the island. It must have been at least, well, it was almost a mile to get to Treasure Island, 'cause we were running forever. But then you know when you're panicked a little bit, time flies a lot faster than you realize. But it was a long ways and we finally got

back there. The girls stayed on the island the next couple hours and I went back to make sure they were okay but I was kinda checking on the car, finding out what was going on. (The bridge) was about one hundred yards (ahead of me) and I went back to check on my car and it was at this point, it was like, two hours after it actually happened that I decided I wanted to get as close to the collapse as I could so I walked about fifty yards, it was at that point that there was a CHP sitting there and he was stopping the people from going and I saw this car like teetering on its middle, like up front there 'cause that's where, you know, we couldn't get any closer than that, but it was just really eerie seeing the whole top just like, collapsed down like that pushing our deck down also and then I went back to visit the girls again to make sure that everything was okay. Claire was trying to make a phone call. Then about an hour later I ran all the way back to the car and drove it back out and we made our way through San Francisco, Golden Gate Bridge and then we came back up, got here about 11:30 p.m.

## We'll Spend a Mint on the Drug War

Harold Gamityan  
La Sierra, *The Criterion*  
November 16, 1989

As everyone probably knows by now, President George Bush and drug czar William Bennett have declared war on drugs and are seeking \$7 billion in ammunition. We can guess how this war is going to turn out if we look at such other multi-billion dollar wars as the war on illiteracy, the war on urban blight, and the war on dependency. Years and hundreds of billions of dollars later, the battlefield is strewn with would-be beneficiaries turned victims, taxpayers out of a lot of money, and government grown bigger while the

profiteers who waged the wars whimper, "Not enough commitment." Instead of declaring war we should decriminalize drugs.

Along with the sins of prostitution and gambling, drug usage has been with humankind for centuries. Do President Bush, Bennett, and the U.S. Congress expect us to believe that they will succeed when all of humanity before them has failed?

It is possible to eliminate drugs. Mao Zedong wiped out opium use in China by summarily executing drug sellers and users. Americans want to deal with the drug crisis, but do they want direct encroachments on our Constitution? Our task is to find solutions to the drug problem that will do the least damage to our liberties and to society.

The production costs of drugs such as heroin, cocaine, crack, and marijuana are very low. The street price, on the other hand, is steep, because prohibition requires sellers to bear the costs of smuggling and payoffs to officials, and to face the risks of going to jail or being murdered by a competitor. The addict, who would otherwise be able to get a week's fix for a few dollars, must pay hundreds of dollars.

For a people to use drugs and risk destroying themselves is tragic. But the tragedy isn't lessened when society creates conditions whereby addicts are desperately driven to destroy the lives of innocents through muggings, holdups, burglaries, and murder in order to have the wherewithal to feed their addiction. In addition, users and pushers have financial incentives to get others hooked. Streets become unsafe, like in the days of Prohibition, as a result of turf battles to establish a monopoly. Plus, there are incentives to corrupt public officials and infiltrate legitimate businesses.

The best way to put a dent in the crime wave associated with drugs is to decriminalize drug consumption. Drug pushers would be out of business because they could not

compete with low-cost legal production. We could establish age requirements, penalties for driving under the influence of drugs, and other laws to protect society; but more important, we could educate people against their use.

Some people might say, "Harold, if we decriminalize drugs, wouldn't more people use them?" I can't honestly say; but I'd ask you, "Is the fact that heroin and crack are illegal the only deterrent to your using them?" I'd bet not. Most aspects of our behavior are not governed by laws; they're mostly influenced by values taught to us by parents, family, community organizations, and churches, and enforced by social sanction, not law.

Here's my prediction on the war on drugs. President Bush and Congress are going to call for more drug-fighting money next year, and more the next year. This year or next, the White House will say, "Forget reading lips; we'll have to raise taxes to fight drugs." The drug problem will only continue, and will grow worse.

## Adventism and the Spirit of Democracy

R. James  
Walla Walla College  
*Collegian*, November 2, 1989

The other day I received my weekly issue of the *New Yorker* magazine. In it was a short story of a Chinese student dissident who organized the group of artists who created the "Goddess of Democracy" in Tianemmen Square. He managed to escape China when the massacre took place, five days after the statue was completed. He now lives on the East Coast of the United States.

His story was recounted to an author as they were on their way to see the Statue of Liberty, the inspiration behind the making of the

“Goddess of Democracy.” His awed comment upon seeing Miss Liberty went like this: “Wonderful! . . . Not as big as I thought. Should be bigger. But wonderful, yes.” In his mind our Statue of Liberty—what it stands for, the meaning it holds—stood very tall, an ideal for all humankind. A beacon of true freedom, only let it be taller.

This stirs my own fascination with the freedoms I enjoy as an American, providing opportunities I can take advantage of with my own will. I hope I never see a time in America’s future where my freedoms are taken away in the good of a national will. But many Americans may be too apathetic about exercising the rights they have now to guard against such national will.

Currently, Americans seem to be too divided over smaller, insignificant issues to see the big picture. Most Americans, I believe, have lost the zeal and true meaning of democracy. To me, democracy means more than my rights—it’s an ideal, an imagery, a way of thinking and doing. Not only does it mean I can exercise my will to vote or to voice an opinion, but it is a way I believe, a way I think and act. Of course what I believe, or the way I act or think, could infringe on another’s rights. But there are laws set up to prevent such infringements from happening and it is morally wrong to push your own rights onto fellow members of humanity.

We, as Adventists, tend to be very apathetic. Our beliefs have interfered with the good of humanity. We have been taught to be good stewards of this world and then counseled against getting involved politically or otherwise. We’re to “spread the good news” of Christianity, help the poor, the sick, feed the hungry, clothe and house those who have nothing, and yet we build hospitals and admit those who can pay, educate those who can afford it. We are more concerned with how to make more money for ourselves than in helping the homeless or the hungry.

Get the point?

The spirit of our belief is very much like the spirit of democracy . . . how to concern ourselves. I admire organizations like the Red Cross, Peace Corps, Amnesty International, and Greenpeace. Their causes and efforts to make us more aware of our situation on a global basis are commendable. They ask only that we be involved to help correct the wrongs imposed by ignorant people.

If we, as Adventists, believe in helping the hungry, the homeless, the environment, then we must become activists and become involved. When the second coming of Christ becomes reality, I believe Christ needs only to ask one question: “Were you a good steward?” Most of us, I’m afraid, must say No. It’s not enough to take part on community service day, to be in the Dorcas Society or Pathfinders, or to be a student missionary.

The days of missionaries are gone and the day of activism is now. Many forms of activism are available—many issues face the future of humanity. We, as Adventists, should have been concerned about the new \$20-plus million General Conference World Headquarters that appears to be extravagantly unnecessary. That money could have been better spent on housing the destitute families in the D. C. area. Protesting for clean air, or for freedom from apartheid in South Africa are worthy causes—as worthy as protesting human rights abuses in China or Panama.

Apathetic insolence is a sin—a sin against humanity. We in America have freedom to make choices, but soon, I believe, someone else will make a choice for us if we continue our present course. Our beacon of freedom will become a hollow image for the rest of the world, those who look toward our statue as a symbolic ideal to be achieved.

We, as Adventists, are part of the human family. We should start participating in that family. There are many issues and concerns. The question is, Are we willing to stand for a cause?

## Woodstock and Me (and You)

Brent Geraty  
Atlantic Union College  
*Lancastrian*, August 29, 1989

No, my connection to Woodstock didn’t begin by being conceived during a “love-in.” I don’t even believe my parents have ever been to that field in Sullivan County, New York. In fact, when I asked my mom and dad how they remembered Woodstock, they replied, “On Snoopy’s doghouse.” No, it has nothing—or everything—to do with my parents (and their generation).

I’m certainly no expert on what happened at Woodstock, but I’m not convinced it was as special as the participants would like us to think it was—at least not as important. Woodstockers were protesting the senseless dying in the war in Vietnam; one person died of an overdose at Woodstock . . . senselessly. They protested the structured life of their parents, and yet they called Woodstock “An Aquarian Exposition.” “Exposition” is defined as “a setting forth of facts, ideas, etc.; a detailed explanation.” They protested the suffocation of individuality; they got naked and exchanged venereal diseases. Yes indeed, pretty important and effective protesting. Do you get the idea they might have been fooling themselves?

Woodstock simply represents to me a generation’s rejection of a perceived set of values. And under that guise, I continue to participate in “Woodstocking.” We all do. We see clearly (at times) the faults of previous generations, and we steadfastly claim that we’ll never be like that.

What are the values that our generation is rejecting? The half-generation before us has been labelled the “me generation,” and we have tried to distance ourselves from the very threatening notion that we, too,

may someday discover ourselves to be shallow. We have become increasingly convinced of the importance of service as a way of life, and become more keenly aware of personal and societal responsibility . . . we hope.

Teilhard de Chardin writes, in *The Divine Milieu*, "The more I examine myself, the more I discover this psychological truth: that no one lifts his little finger to the smallest task unless moved, however obscurely, by the conviction that he is contributing infinitesimally (at least indirectly) to the building of something definitive." Our generation has embraced this

understanding that we cannot feel comfortable with our lives unless we are contributing to something more important than a boom economy.

And yet we want the "me generation's" material comforts, without the acquisition of such being the driving force in our lives. We want it all—wealth and a clear conscience. We want to have a house dripping with charm, in the neighborhood of our choice, while developing a society that is more sensitive to the homeless. We want to be able to afford any car we want, while we speak out about the disturbing number

of people who are falling below the poverty line. We want to affirm minorities through various programs, unless it means we'll lose out on a lucrative government contract.

We've all been to Woodstock, because we've all rejected the values of previous generations. Our generation has now rejected the "me generation," because of its insensitivity and greed; and we certainly couldn't be part of it, because if we were, we'd then be aware that we're fooling ourselves, too.

## Film Criticism

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### *Steel Magnolias*

L. Monique Pittman, Andrews University  
*Student Movement*, April 9, 1990

"I'm not crazy, I've just been in a very bad mood for 40 years!" This acid quip of Shirley McClaine's in *Steel Magnolias* typifies that film's witty and yet poignant examination of the nature of life. One of my male friends refused to see the movie because he thought it was "just another female bonding movie." This dismissal is certainly not merited and misses a major theme of the film. *Steel Magnolias* is much more than a female bonding movie; it is an honest look at life, death, and the continuing cycle of human existence.

The movie focuses on the interrelationships of a group of women in a small Southern town. Following a theme that intertwines femininity with life cycles, much of the movie takes place in a typically female location—the beauty shop. Another structural device used to further the theme of cyclical existence and its relation to the female as mother of the earth, is

the passing seasons and holidays. Throughout the movie, we watch as the beauty shop is decorated for Easter, Christmas, and Halloween. The movie opens with an important life change, a marriage that takes place at Easter, and, rather significantly, ends at Easter several years later, with the birth of a child to another character in the story. The sense of continuity in life is very much connected with the female capacity for reproduction, and this idea of renewal seems the focal point and hope of a movie that takes a serious, yet humorous, look at life.

Much of the humor of *Steel Magnolias* lies in the intriguing characters created by the author, who is, curiously enough, male. The eccentric, wealthy widow played by Shirley McClaine, the conscientious mother portrayed by Sally Field, and the busy-body hairdresser depicted by Dolly Parton, are just three of the

women comprising an impressive cast of characters. By highlighting the peccadillos and eccentricities of the various characters in the movie, the writer has enabled his viewer to laugh at and accept his or her own foibles, thus making life a little less difficult.

One of my friends objected that there were no strong or positive male characters in the movie. However, while at first the males seem either obnoxious, slovenly, or lazy, they, like the female characters, develop over the course of the movie and their inner, positive qualities are revealed. For example, Dolly Parton for most of the film has been supporting her husband financially, and yet he does not seem particularly appreciative. However, near the end of the movie, he surprises her by building her a second beauty shop. Her ecstatic response, "I'm a chain!" shows how she recognizes her husband's contribution and importance in her life.

The final scene of the movie asserts the validity of both sexes and caps off the theme of the cyclical nature of life. All the main characters are at a park at an Easter egg hunt.

During the course of the afternoon, Daryl Hannah's character goes into labor, and all the men work together to get her to the hospital, exemplifying their importance as well as the female's in the regenerating of humanity.

Ultimately, *Steel Magnolias* validates human existence, despite its sufferings, and affirms both genders and the ways in which they complement each other. The movie declares that even though men are supposed to be made of steel, as Sally Field's character comments, neither males nor females are of such metal, and as a result, both sexes share the same hardships and must learn to rely on each other to survive. Because it deals with the essence of human reality and is entertaining at the same time, *Steel Magnolias* is well worth seeing.

## *Driving Miss Creampuff*

Craig van Rooyen  
Andrews University  
*Student Movement*  
April 25, 1990

The cemetery scene in *Driving Miss Daisy* is a representation of the entire movie. The old widow, tending her husband's grave, hands Hope, her black chauffeur, a bunch of flowers to put on a friend's grave two rows over. Hope looks at the rows and rows of headstones, shakes his head and tells her that he can't find the Bauer grave because he can't read. "Well, you know your letters, don't you?" she replies.

"Yes'm."

"Bauer starts with a 'B' and ends with an 'R,'" Miss Daisy coaches. "You'll be able to recognize it now. Go on."

Hope looks doubtful. "Just a 'B' and an 'R'? You ain't worried about what's in the middle?"

*Driving Miss Daisy* is a 'feel good' movie. It's funny and nostalgic

and sentimental, but it leaves out "what's in the middle." Maybe that's why it won Best Picture. It's safe.

Set in Georgia during the 1950s and 1960s, the movie chronicles the relationship between an old crotchety Jewish woman and her black driver. Miss Daisy, who claims that she's not prejudiced, treats her hired help like children and tells her son to "stop socializing with Episcopalians." Hope accepts Miss Daisy's attitude with a subservient dignity, but takes every opportunity to assert his own manhood and make Miss Daisy face up to who she really is.

When Miss Daisy refuses to allow Hope to stop the car to relieve himself during a long trip, he stops anyway and says, "Miss Daisy, I ain't no child, and I ain't no back of a neck that you look at. I'm a man, and I know when my bladder is full. That's all there is to it." Hope refuses to be defined by the society he lives in and the people he associates with.

When Miss Daisy's synagogue is bombed, she refuses to believe it, claiming that the police are lying. Hope forces her to face reality and deal with her emotions. He tells her a story of sudden loss in his childhood—when he found his uncle hanging from a tree one morning with his hands tied behind his back. Miss Daisy starts to cry.

Of course a bond of friendship develops between the old black driver and the old Jewish woman. It had to happen. It was telegraphed from the first frame. It's a bond between two people who are fighting to maintain dignity in a society that doesn't place much value on old people or black people. The misfit nature of the two is verbalized by a traffic cop, who, after stopping the car to check for registration and Hope's license, turns to his partner and says, "Look at that old nigger and old Jew woman taking off down the road. Ain't that a sorry sight."

The climax of the movie is reached when Miss Daisy, after a fit of senility, gathers herself together,

takes Hope's hand and tells him, "You're the best friend I have, you know."

It's definitely a feel-good moment, but I wonder about "what's in the middle." It's too simple—just like Hope's reading lesson in the cemetery. Miss Daisy's prejudice is too easily resolved. The movie barely touches on the civil rights movement, and never shows Hope in his own environment, away from the comfortable surroundings of his employer. Issues that the country was tearing itself apart over were candy-coated in the relationship between Miss Daisy and Hope.

Of course a "feel-good" movie is not necessarily a bad movie. Parts of *Driving Miss Daisy* were superb. It's worth seeing just for the performances of Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman. They play roles that could easily have been overacted and sentimentalized to the point of nausea. Freeman especially succeeds in portraying a dignified human being through the shell of a subservient black who has been socialized to take off his hat while talking to white people and say "Yes, sah," and "No, ma'am." Freeman's body posture and mannerisms say "servant." His eyes say "man."

Technically the movie succeeds too. The lighting is very strong. In many of the indoor scenes directional light streams through venetian blinds and casts strong diagonal shadows on the set and the actors. For the most part the light is warm and yellow, adding to the nostalgia and sentimentality of a bygone era.

There are some interesting camera techniques. Often, when both characters are in the car, Miss Daisy is shown in the rear view mirror. In the scene when she comes out of the synagogue, the camera looks down from her vantage point on Hope at the bottom of the steps with the car door open and waiting. The strong angle emphasizes her superiority complex.

*Driving Miss Daisy* is a feel-good movie. I definitely felt a lot better

after watching it than when I left the theater after watching "Mississippi Burning." But that doesn't mean that it should have won Best Picture.

## From the Hip

Donna Teal

La Sierra

*The Criterion*

April 19, 1990

“Objection, Your Honor!”  
“Overruled!”

Sidebar . . . guilty . . . not guilty.

Robin Weathers loves it all. He wants to object and be sustained, pound on the table, wave his hands wildly in the air and raise his voice.

In his first year out of law school, Weathers is tired of doing research and filing for other lawyers at the firm where he is employed. He wants to be a part of the action and the limelight. He wants a case NOW. In his desperation, Weathers comes up with a scheme to finally be able to practice law and to get the attention of the partners of the firm.

His dream comes true due to a conveniently misplaced memo, and Weathers is given the Torkenson case. The client is being sued for \$50,000 for punching another man. In the scenes that follow, Weathers' brilliance is shown as he gains national media attention and a reputation as "Stormy" Weathers from his not-so-traditional methods. Among these are asking for a hearing concerning the admissibility of a profane word. Although the firm is unsure of Weathers' style of defense, they reluctantly make him a partner, since he brings in business.

The success of the Torkenson case leads Dr. Douglas Benoit to specifically ask for Weathers to defend his case, a certain "no-win" situation. Benoit is accused of murder due to incriminating evidence in his car, although a body was not found.

Weathers accepts, and proceeds to tear at the prosecution using means

such as a caged rabbit, a vibrator, and a hammer. Then he is faced with a revelation and must grapple with the question, "How can the ethical thing not be moral?" His agony in making this decision gives the audience something to think about in their own professions.

Judd Nelson stars as the high-strung Robin Weathers. He gives a riveting performance, and his intensity can be felt on screen. John Hurt plays Dr. Benoit, the seemingly benign English professor of Boston University, who is accused of killing a young woman. Elizabeth Perkins also makes an appearance as Weathers' supporting girlfriend.

The cast works together to make this movie worthwhile to watch. The arrogant Craig Duncan, the outraged Matt Cowens, and Weathers' two fun-loving coworkers make *From the Hip* a movie you won't want to overrule.

## Dead Poets Society: A Marrow-Filled Movie

David Valdes

Atlantic Union College

*The Lancastrian*

October 13, 1989

“I wanted to put to rest all that was not life . . . so that when I had come to the end of my life I would not find that I had not lived.” This quote from *Walden* by Thoreau serves as both the personal creed of Keating, a teacher in *Dead Poets Society*, and a foreshadowing of events to come in this bittersweet movie. Keating, played engagingly by Robin Williams, is an English teacher who inspires the older students at the private Welton School for boys in 1959, and serves as the catalyst towards self-discovery—and tragedy—in the movie. The plot follows the awakening of spirit and self-expression in the boys, especially the characters of roommates Neal and

Todd, with the help of unusual teaching practices by Keating. The lack of orthodoxy results in a clash between the boys' desire for independence and the repressive traditionalism of the parents, which leads to the surprising suicide of one of the characters. The movie, in plot and dialogue, seems to encourage its viewers to "carpe diem" (seize the day) and not only seize it but fill it up with "the marrow of life."

The strong points in this movie are numerous. Leading off, the acting is amazingly strong across the board (with the exception of the character Chris, a debutante). Greatest recognition goes to Robert Sean Leonard who played Neal with candor and appeal, making it nearly impossible not to be interested in his character. He'll get an Oscar nomination for sure, but likely as supporting actor in deference to Robin Williams. Williams himself is warm and remarkably understated in spite of his character's antics, and he manages to retain some of his comic style while exploring his dramatic capabilities. Kudos also to Ethan Hawke who was the essence of vulnerability as Todd and, with four words in the last scene, delivers the most memorable line of the movie, "O Captain, my captain."

Also noteworthy are the cinematography and direction by Peter Weir. The first half of the movie is filmed in the subdued half-light of late fall, intentionally symbolic of the waning days of youth and innocence. As the end of the movie approaches, winter takes over (in the spirit of Shakespearean metaphor) and acts as a harbinger of the sorrow to come. There is plenty to please the senses from the sound of bagpipes (played, at one point, by a lone piper on a mist-shrouded dock) to a scene where a flock of geese, disturbed by the clanging of the school bell, swirl into a scene of raucous boys running down a circular staircase. The images (and the imagery) in this film are impressive.

As with any film, there are flaws

in *Dead Poets*. The teen-romance subplot could have been a gentle portrait of passage to adulthood, but instead came off as the weakest part of the movie, using every cinematic cliché it could: the blonde cheerleader, the football captain, the nerd, et cetera. The director's eye for detail is more knowing in the larger sense than in attention to small things such as a chemistry textbook that is glaringly recognizable as a 1980s text. Lastly, I'm not convinced that the

suicide was necessary, but it did serve to graphically illustrate one of the film's morals.

It is its potent message that sets this movie apart from other recent movies with good acting. The movie would be uncomfortable for parents or educators who firmly believe in subjugating the will of young people to carry on the banner of their own values, unknowingly (or worse yet, knowingly) treading on the dreams of the young for the sake of "what's

best." The grave consequences of such narrowness, as seen in this film, should bother anyone who deals with teenagers, or anyone else for that matter. This movie is destined to be a classic and an Oscar winner. It is likely to be shown at AUC someday by well-meant SA officers who recognize its value, and, sadly, it may even be turned off by zealous educators who will never even recognize the irony of their actions.