

9.2.4 Recycling Dead Poets: An English Unit for the Upper Grades

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*Following the film's box-office success, the book *Dead Poets Society* (novelization by N. H. Kleinbaum, based on the screenplay by Tom Schulman) has been very popular with German and French students of English. In order to save their teachers' time, this paper identifies and briefly discusses the literary works quoted from in the novel. It also suggests ways of dealing with them in upper-grade English classes.*

Faced with the semestrial dilemma of finding reading matter that captures the imagination of eighteen-year-olds and keeps their attention for more than a dozen pages, I recently asked my grade twelve English class whether they wanted to invest their own time, money, and energy in purchasing and preparing for class-room reading a book of their choice. They much preferred this procedure to reading yet another specimen from the school's treasure trove of didactically incorporated, slightly dated, heavily scribbled-over textbooks.

The limitations I imposed on their choice were that the book had to be written originally in English and that it should not offend my (and, ideally, their) sense of human dignity.¹ Literary quality was not a required criterion and thus I did not feel entitled to complain when their choice fell upon *Dead Poets Society* by N. H. Kleinbaum, although my professional conscience cringed at the idea of reading a "novelization", i.e. a novel based on a screenplay. Moreover, my students soon began to enthuse about visits to the cinema and the local video outlets. Was my English class going to degenerate into video pedagogy and couch potato socialization? With these apprehensions I opened the book and I saw SHAKESPEARE. Upon perusal I found extracts from five hundred years of English poetry as well as excerpts from the American canon. The nightmare of having selected a novel that was incompatible with the exigencies of the curriculum gave way to wild schoolteachers' fantasies of getting "nimble young minds" (23)² to appreciate the beauty and worth of Shakespearean sonnets and Whitmanesque free verse.

For a poorly written novel, *Dead Poets Society* can inspire a reasonable amount of language activity. It provides an incentive to study poetry, prose, and drama, and to enjoy and analyze a Hollywood movie. Various kinds of text production can be practiced: interpretation of textual excerpts from the genres mentioned above, essay writing, composing poetry, and reciting poems.³

Preliminaries

In a class that is not at all familiar with the Anglo-Saxon school system and the social significance of American preparatory schools, a short outline given by the teacher or a student is called for. Other students are asked to work out vocabulary aids for their classmates. They will need help with terms they are unlikely to find in the dictionary, such as "brown nosing" (German: "schleimen") or "Mr. Mondo Jocko" (obviously meant to be read as "the greatest jock in the world", which calls for an etymological explanation that stresses both the athletic and the cruder masculine associations the word "jock" evokes).⁴ The pun based on the double entendre of "making out" for "doing"/"faring" (92) and "heavy petting" (90,97) will escape the notice of readers unaccustomed to American teenage lovelife.

A caveat to the teacher: try not to get caught in the web of literature, metaliterature, and classroom drama. *Dead Poets Society* is, among other things, a novel about the reading of poetry, about beauty and language. The book disparages purely academic literary criticism through ridicule. Following Keating's lead, the students are encouraged to let texts speak to their minds and feelings without the intermediary of a pretentious critical apparatus. Keating's students love his approach. So will yours. You may want to prove to them that formal analysis enriches the interpretation of literature; it is not meant to kill their interest and aesthetic pleasure.⁵

The Plot

In 1959, three hundred boys attend Welton Academy, a preparatory school in Vermont. At the welcoming ceremony and centenary celebration, the headmaster extols Welton's educational principles: tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence. To these, the new English teacher, John Keating, opposes values of his own: love, beauty, truth, and justice (73). His classes integrate passion and purpose, body and brain, ethics and aesthetics, language and lust.

Keating encourages the students to break established patterns, to think and act for themselves, "to make their lives extraordinary" (27). His example entices several boys to revive the "Dead Poets Society". They meet in a cave in the woods at night to read and write poetry. Dedicated and inspired, they take different approaches to "sucking

the marrow out of life" (46). Charlie Dalton most openly defies the establishment by giving himself a new, primitive identity and by playing pranks at school. These actions are criticized as counter-productive by Keating, who wants the students to beat the system from within. Knox Overstreet wins the girl he loves through persistence and poetry. Neil Perry finds fulfillment in stage acting, against his father's wish and without his knowledge. Todd Anderson overcomes his crippling self-consciousness.

The story reaches its tragic climax after Neil's first, successful stage performance. His father takes him away to enroll him in a military school. Neil commits suicide. His parents and the school administration hold Keating responsible for the boy's death. They get most of his classmates to sign a paper incriminating the teacher. Charlie Dalton refuses and is expelled. Keating is dismissed. Just before leaving, he sees the Latin teacher following his open-air approach to language classes. Defying the headmaster's intimidation, the boys pay Keating a final tribute.

Tracing the sources

What then are the poems that make Neil a martyr for art and beauty and Keating a seducer of innocent youth? What are the words and ideas that "have the power to change the world" (40)?

I will go through the list of seventeen poems and two prose texts following the order of their appearance in the novel. A more closely directed didactic approach may group them into thematic units, classify them chronologically or arrange them according to their formal features. The quotes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are dealt with in one unit, as the play's significance as a whole adds more to the understanding of the novel than the separate excerpts quoted.⁶

Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892): "O Captain! My Captain!" (23)

Written in the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination, this poem mourns the dead "captain" of the ship (of state), which returns victorious from battle (over secession). Keating, who was the "captain" of the soccer team in his student days at Welton, tells the class that they may address him either by his name or by "O Captain! My Captain!". Some of them take him up on it, thus acknowledging his guidance (46, 73, 165).⁷

The sinister forebodings of this elegy can be discussed in the context of Neil Perry's death as well as in the sacrifice of "Captain" Keating in the cover-up of the suicide. Charlie uses the shipwreck metaphor when he observes that the administration needs a scapegoat: "Schools go under because of things like this." (154)

Although the poem provides useful examples of internal and end rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and metrical pattern, I suggest neglecting formal analysis, at least in the initial phase of the teaching unit, for a discussion of tone, imagery, and historic background.

Robert Herrick (1591 - 1634): "To the Virgins, to make much of Time" (25)

The clever imagery used in this poem as a strategy to dissuade a young lady from chastity may come as a surprise to adolescents who have grown up on rather straightforward pop lyrics of the I-want-your-sex type.⁸ While Herrick's poem also contains references to death and even connects the themes of youth and mortality, its tone contrasts starkly with that of Whitman. The predominance of iambs add to the impression of lightness. Crossrhymes avoid the repetitive, somber effect that continuous rhyme may produce. Four lines are thus bound into a unit that develops one idea, one image within the space of a stanza.

A pedagogic exploitation of the poem can be based on its regularity. One playful approach is to present the lines all scrambled. As the first stanza is reproduced in Dead Poets Society, students can be asked to find the most plausible order for the remaining three. While formal and logical aspects prescribe a certain sequence, a version that, for instance, places the cosmological analogy after the human life cycle, may be accepted, or argued about. The author's definite version does not necessarily discredit others.⁹

Walt Whitman: "O Me! O Life!" (41)

Looking at the defective world around and within him, the poet questions the value of existence: "What good amid these, / O me, O life? / (Answer) That you are here - that life exists and identity, / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse." (Book XX, *Leaves of Grass*: 221) Quoted by Keating to encourage the boys to forge their identity in spite of the pressure brought on them to follow professional careers, Whitman's life-affirming phrase takes a tragic turn in Neil's case. He gets to act in a "powerful play", finds his true calling, but is not allowed to contribute more than a few verses. After his suicide, the powerful play of life goes on - without him. Keating proclaims: "Medicine, law, banking - these are necessary to sustain life. But poetry, romance, love, beauty? These are what we stay alive for!" (41) Whereas Mr. Perry only recognizes the former set as valuable, the reader is left to wonder whether his son has not overrated the second. When deprived of access to poetry and beauty, Neil has nothing left to stay alive for. His father learns the hard way that life-sustaining medicine,

the profession he had chosen for his son, cannot save him.

Formal analysis of *O Me! O Life!* should not neglect to address the accumulative effect of anaphora and alliteration. Both this poem and the first section of *Song of Myself* (60) can be studied as examples of free verse. It is no easy task to bring out the rhythm underlying the sprawling lines and the poetic diction that distinguish these poems from prose and from ordinary speech.

William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850): "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads (42)

After destroying Pritchard's simplistic model of poetry, Keating turns to "Wordsworth's notion of romanticism" (42). I assume that he refers to the famous preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,¹⁰ which aroused a controversy when it first appeared in 1800 and soon became the poetic manifesto of the first generation of Romantics. Opposed to the aesthetic concepts of Classicism, Wordsworth pleads for a poetry dealing with "incidents of common life", "low and rustic", with "elementary feelings" in "simple and unelaborated expressions" (Owen/Smyser 1974:122, 124).

Unfortunately, from this text alone the students will not be able to deduce the depth of Keating's intellectual involvement with Romanticism. He has more in common with the second generation of Romantics: his name suggests affinity with John Keats, who also was a voracious reader and an athlete in his schooldays, but he also shares some characteristics with Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose independent spirit earned him the sobriquet "Eton Atheist". (Cf. 110) Shelley believed that art and life, poetry and politics blended. He was summarily expelled from University College, when he refused to answer questions from the college authorities. (For all we know, Keating is not even given the chance to answer questions from the Welton authorities.)

In a class well steeped in literary history, brainstorming around the term "Romanticism" may produce associations such as "importance of feeling", "back to nature", "self-expression", "rebellion against conventions", or "death wish", which can be assigned to different characters of *Dead Poets Society*. Another class may be sent to research in the library. When Keating has thus been identified as a quintessential Romantic, his ideas may be perceived as less original, for better or worse. Headmaster Nolan's emphasis on realist literature further illustrates the deep gulf between his and Keating's respective philosophies (163). Realism depicts the world as it is, whereas Romanticism strives for the unattainable ideal. While Romantic literature is valued for imagination, realistic works are appreciated for their documentary quality, which often records social injustice to make read-

ers aware of the humanity of victims. One may reproach Keating and the "Dead Poets" for following their impulses in the secluded microcosm of Welton and losing sight of the larger social issues that affect American society in 1959. (Which may be a realistic description of prep school life in the 1950s.)

Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862): Excerpt from Walden (53)

The passage quoted from during the first meeting of the reconvened "Welton Chapter of the Dead Poets Society" is extracted from the second chapter of *Walden*.

I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, ... (Thoreau 1960:66)

The narrator retires to the natural surroundings of the woods to find deeper meanings through detachment from society and introspection. Not surprisingly, the search for "essential facts" and intensive involvement appeals to adolescents in search of a purpose and an identity.

At this point, the students may deduce the name of the school, Welton, from a jumble of the world's foremost boys' school, Eton (which evokes associations of a classical education, tradition and discipline), and Thoreau's *Walden* (which connotes learning from nature, without social intermediaries). The very first sentence of *Dead Poets Society* points to a contrast of culture and nature, with the view of the stone chapel set against the remote hills of Vermont.

Educational concepts clash even within the walls, as Keating's conflict with the school establishment proves. The stone walls assert their power against the woods. A Pyrrhic victory is won by the old school.

Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844 - 1881): "Ode" (55)

Words and songs attend the rise and fall of civilizations, across the generations. The poem's musicality contrasts with Lindsay's rather noisy *The Congo*, which, a few pages later makes the boys dance in the forest (58). It also enlarges the theme of past generations that are now dead, developed in Keating's first lesson.

In addition to examining the triadic structure and lyric character of the *Ode*, students may be asked to apply their productive skills to reciting it. If their

presentations are recorded, they may be compared and evaluated.

William Earnest Henley (1849 - 1903): "Invictus" (56)

As the title suggests, this poem boldly declares invincibility in the face of trial and danger. "I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul." The novel quotes only the first of four stanzas. The students may be asked to write more before being given Henley's entire text. They may also be asked to speculate about the poet's personal situation at the time composing *Invictus*. (It was the amputation of his foot and the subsequent stay in hospital.) The variety of their guesses will prove the degree to which the poet succeeds in turning his personal grief and pain into a poetical statement that appeals to people in very different circumstances.¹¹

Pitts derides Meeks for proclaiming his "unconquerable soul" (56). Both boys later succumb to the school administration's pressure to denounce Keating. Since they also stand up for him in the last scene, though, we are probably meant to believe that their tender adolescent souls have not been conquered after all.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 - 1861): "Sonnet from the Portuguese 43" (57)

A love poem that explores spatial and spiritual depth, passion and purity (Browning 1920:327). The stanza form is that of the Italian sonnet, with a decasyllabic octet followed by a sestet. The sevenfold repetition of "I love thee" gives the declaration its particular sense of passionate urgency, which is to some degree counterbalanced by the use of end-stopped lines, suggesting control. As *Dead Poets Society* only gives away the first two lines, the class may be asked to arrange the remaining lines or half-lines according to meaning and formal criteria. The rhyme scheme they come up with will confirm whether the *Sonnet from the Portuguese* is Italian or Elizabethan.

Students will be surprised to learn that there never were any original sonnets in Portuguese but that Elizabeth Barrett composed them during her courtship with Robert Browning. Her choice of a deliberately misleading title may launch a discussion about authorial voice and authenticity, personal feeling and public expression.

Knox Overstreet, who chooses this sonnet for reading, later composes a love poem (128). Contrasting it with the sonnet is a double-edged pedagogical undertaking: having recognized the difference in quality, the students may feel too inhibited ever to write poetry of their own.

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809 - 1892): "Ulysses" (57)

In a dramatic monologue the aged Ulysses looks back on his travels, describes his present situation and anticipates his last voyage (Campbell/Pyre 1971:397-398). There is a tragic foreboding in Neil's reading the passage in which the hero summons up courage and determination when facing death.

A cloze test based on the entire poem of 70 lines may produce intriguing results. The school library's literary encyclopedias should be put to good use by students not familiar with the Homeric epics.

Vachel Lindsay (1879 - 1931): "The Congo" (58)

With syncopated rhythm and vivid, grotesque imagery, *The Congo: A Study of the Human Race* is deliberately primitive, a white man's vision of black Africa and black American folk culture (Lindsay 1923:178-184). Magic spells intermingle with revival shouts in rhythmical language. The poet's detailed instructions for recitation are printed alongside the text.

Since this is the only poem in our collection that comes with its own recital directions, a class should be tempted to perform it. Students may find the rhythm as compelling as the Welton boys. The pseudo-African nature of *The Congo* needs to be clarified, however, otherwise students may fail to understand the implications of such naive appropriation of exotic cultures.

Walt Whitman: "Song of Myself" (60)

This extract from the first section of *Song of Myself* characterizes education as an individual endeavor, learning from Nature (Whitman 1976:24). The idea is developed more fully in Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (Whitman 1976-121), which is suggested for complementary reading.

Whitman himself was a schoolteacher in the 1830s. The students might imagine Whitman's classes in an essay for homework. Or they might play a scene between Whitman and the angry parent of one of his pupils.

Walt Whitman: "A Song of Joys", "Song of Myself" (70-74)

Keating's soccer instruction combines athletic and aesthetic elements in the pursuit of excellence. He makes the boys practice shots to the rhythm of classical music (Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* in the film) and quotes from Whitman's *A Song of Joys* (Book XI, *Leaves of Grass*; Whitman 1976:148). The quotes extol audacity.

Whitman's powerful plea for vocal expression, "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" (Whitman 1976:73) helps timid, inarticulate Todd find his poetic voice in a dramatic scene set in the English classroom. If there are any students who have not recognized the value of poetry at

this point, they should be encouraged to do push-ups in English class until they do.

Robert Frost (1875 - 1963): "The Road Not Taken" (87)

In one of his typical country images, Frost illustrates the importance of going one's own way even if it means going alone. (Allen/Rideout/Robinson 1965:668) It fits the picture we get of Keating as the classroom wizard as well as Hollywood philosophy that he shortens Frost's problem. Leaving out the descriptive and reflective passages, the doubts and regrets, gives the impression of a decision quickly taken.

If single lines of this poem are handed out to individual students, with the instruction to find the lines that come before and after theirs, there will be some physical movement in the classroom before they line up to say the poem. If the first version does not sound convincing, students will be asked to move around until a more satisfactory order is established (which need not be Frost's).

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616): "Sonnet 18" (96)

In contrast to Herrick, Shakespeare sets the fading of natural beauty off against the eternal charm of his beloved. Human beauty partakes of transitory nature and of transcendent art. The sonnet is a gift of immortality both for the person praised and for the poet praising.

The poem proves its own point. Four hundred years after it was written, we still read and enjoy it. Charlie Dalton uses it to make a pass at Tina, exploiting the fact that she is ignorant of world culture but receptive to art. Keating's prediction that poetry causes women to swoon (47) comes true.

In spite of some linguistic archaisms, the beginning of this sonnet appeals to the modern reader through the straightforward question-answer form and the simple imagery. How about writing a poem similarly based on a series of comparisons, or one that is also developed in questions and answers?

Lord Byron (1788 - 1824): "She walks in Beauty" (96)

Yet another poem that describes physical beauty as the reflection of an unblemished character. Charlie Dalton dedicates it to Gloria so as not to leave her jealous. Having compared dark Tina to a summer's day, he likens blond Gloria to the night. The error gives away his insincerity. The readers are allowed to chuckle at this insider-joke for the educated. Charlie uses a poem about purity and innocence to abuse a girl; but the bad joke backfires when Gloria decides that poetry "is better than sex any day" and makes him recite "well into the night" (104). The boy has misused his

privilege of higher education. The girl, in her cultural innocence, truly understands the beauty and the message of the poems.

Students may be given a choice between writing a descriptive poem about a person they admire or imagining the dialogue between Charlie and Gloria when she finds out that he is not the author of the poems he recited.

William Shakespeare: "Sonnet 116" (103)

This poem declares the permanence of love. The concept of spiritual love introduced in the first line is supported by references to religious rites and ideas (Anglican marriage, Doomsday, the Last Judgement). The ending of the sonnet reveals Charlie's plagiarism: "If this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved." This may provoke a discussion about language and love, "lines" and "passes".

e.e. cummings (1894 - 1962): "dive for dreams" (144)

Similarly to the excerpts from Whitman and Thoreau, this poem encourages people to embrace life and to follow ideals (Cummings 1968:732). Less technically innovative or visually striking than some of the author's other works, *dive for dreams* is written in simple language without any conspicuous typography.

Keating reads the poem to the boys during a meeting in Neil's honor. Little do they know that Neil is preparing to die while they listen to "and dance your death/away at this wedding".

The metaphors Cummings employs, the dynamic interplay between hortatory function and optimistic outlook should stimulate an evaluation in class. Students may compare their preferences for one of the stanzas and explain whether it is the message or the imagery that impresses them most. Hopefully, they will discover the unity of form and content.

Vachel Lindsay, "General William Booth Enters Heaven" (147)

The subtitle says: "To be sung to the tune of 'The Blood of the Lamb' with indicated instrument" (Lindsay 1923:123-125). The poem echoes the images and sounds of nineteenth-century religious revivals and closely parallels the kind of funeral sermon one may still hear in fundamentalist churches.

With the surname "Booth" one chain of associations comes full circle: John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln, the "captain" of the first poem. Keating recites the poem with the students acting as chorus: "Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?" While they are enacting this ritual, Neil gets ready to commit suicide. Vachel Lindsay, who

was born next to a house Lincoln had lived in, also died by suicide.

The correspondence between the death of Salvation Army General William Booth and that of Neil is underlined by the military-style rank of the religious reformer and the threat of military school hanging over Neil's life. The tertium comparationis connecting Booth's and Neil's death is, of course, the apotheosis of Christ. Neil wears Puck's crown of flowers, while Jesus wore a crown of thorn as a symbol of pain and glory. One may argue that the death of both is caused by an ambitious father. The students' judgement should decide how appropriate the comparison between Booth, Jesus Christ, and Neil Perry really is.

*William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream*¹²

If Schulman (who, in spite of his name, is a screenwriter, not a teacher) intended to have his character Neil perform in a play about generational conflict, he could have chosen *Hamlet*, which is quoted by Neil (117).¹³ Defiance of paternal authority is a secondary theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although it is mentioned very early in the play. In the first scene Egeus asks the Duke of Athens to reprimand his daughter for disobeying her father. Theseus addresses the daughter: *What say you, Hermia? Be advis'd, fair maid. To you your father should be as a god; One that compos'd your beauties; yea, and one To whom you are but as a form in wax, By him imprinted, and within his power To leave the figure or disfigure it.* (I, i, 46-51) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a romantic comedy about love, dreams, and art, with a play within the play, where tragedy turns into burlesque. Here it is a play within the film or novel *Dead Poets Society*. The audience or readership is not granted the kind of relief provided by the play's comic treatment of a tragic theme.

Dead Poets Society by Touchstone Pictures (1989)

Director Peter Weir won his first international recognition with another teenage tragedy with boarding-school background, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). The film's strongest points are actor Robin Williams' performance and the lyrical sequences that celebrate the boys' communion with New England autumn and winter.

The differences between the plot of the film and the novel are generally minor. Flat characters come across as twodimensional in both media. Mr. Perry is presented as a villain, and the director does not allow the figure to acquire complexity and humanity through facial expression or body lan-

guage. Both texts pander to the audience's sentimental sympathy in order to draw easy tears. Suggesting approaches to film analysis would surpass the scope of this paper.¹⁴ In spite of my earlier criticism of video in the classroom, I would advocate an education in cineliteracy to counter the lack of conceptual tools and experience in dealing with our culture's foremost narrative medium. Film and poetry analysis share an assortment of critical terms (index, icon, metaphor, metonymy, symbol, synecdoche, etc). Some students may gain a better understanding of their meaning and usefulness through film than through poetry.

Finishing up

Having distilled the message(s) of *Dead Poets Society*, the students should not wander off into vacation without putting Keating's approach to teaching into perspective and giving their personal comments. Questions to start out with could be: How does Keating mediate between cognition and emotion? Is he a pedagogue or a demagogue? In what way can school encourage individualism or conformity, realism or idealism? And what about ambiguity?

Annotations

- 1 I specified that the book to be read should be neither sexist nor racist. For the sake of simplicity I did not mention ethnocentrism, classism, ageism or any other manifestations of oppression that the politically correct have to avoid these days.
- 2 Page numbers without mention of author or title refer to N. H. Kleinbaum, *Dead Poets Society*, 1989.
- 3 One skill I had not planned to practice but that the book forced on us right in the first paragraph was letter writing. On page 1 of the 1989 edition it says: "a short, elderly man (...) led a procession of students carrying banners, robed teachers, and alumnae down a long slate hallway into the venerable chapel." As Welton Academy is depicted as a boys' school throughout the novel, the reader is left to wonder where "alumnae", i. e. former students of the female sex, may come from. On page 2, however, headmaster Nolan addresses the "alumni". Rather than propound theories of instant transsexuality, we believed in an error and wrote a letter to the author to enquire about this point. Thus it happened that the students learned about the salutation, body, and close of a formal letter before being able to tell the difference between a ballad and a sonnet. There is at least one factual error in the novel, although of very marginal importance. At the party Knox Overstreet attends, "This Magic Moment" by the Drifters is played (99). This record was released in 1960 and can hardly have been played in the fall of 1959 (Stambler: 1989, "The Drifters").
- 4 Flexner 1984:258. I would like to thank Charlotte Bergmann, Suzanne Kern, and Janice Windt for their

- help with brownnoses, jocks, thigh men and similar creatures.
- 5 Take care not to merge fact and fiction, life and the movies. This writer fell into the classroom acting trap. Having seen the film almost two years earlier, I did not realize that when dealing with Pritchard's model of rating literary quality (38-39), I moved and gestured and caricatured much as Robin Williams. Keating literally tears apart a chapter of the poetry textbook by "Dr. J. Evan Pritchard, Phd." *The British Library General Catalogue of Printed Books* does not list an author by that name. It rather resembles that of British social anthropologist Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, who has not been reproached with simplistic theories, however. There was a prolific British textbook author called Francis Henry Pritchard, who published works such as *Studies in Literature, Training in Literary Appreciation, Exercises in Interpretation*, etc. in the 1940s.
 - 6 Unless otherwise specified, the poems are found in *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250 - 1918*. The page number given for each poem refers to *Dead Poets Society*.
 - 7 In another novel set in a boarding school, *From Middle England* by Philip Oakes, the dormitory master is referred to as "the captain of this particular ship" (27). More suitable than Oakes' school for comparison with *Dead Poets Society* are the boarding schools depicted in Louis Auchincloss, *The Rector of Justice*, and, of course, Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*. For further texts, see the bibliography of: Richards (1988) or, in German, Maier (1972) and Kluge (1983).
 - 8 They may be amused or puzzled to learn that Herrick died a bachelor and that he wrote the poem after taking Holy Orders. A useful lesson in the distinction of life and literature.
 - 9 Of all the poems cited in *Dead Poets Society*, this lends itself best to intertextual studies based on the "carpe diem" theme. Of the English poems that might be cited for comparison, Andrew Marvell, "To his Coy Mistress" is the best-known. Pierre Ronsard, "Ode à Cassandre" is suggested for reading with students fluent in French, Ansonius or Horace with those trained in Classics. Old Egyptian harp lyrics (preferably in translation) add the historic depth of 3,000 years to such a comparison.
 - 10 *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Owen and Smyser (1974), features the prefaces both to the 1800 and the 1850 edition. I quote from the former.
 - 11 They may also be interested to know that Henley was the model for Long John Silver in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.
 - 12 The quotes are from *Dead Poets Society*
 III, ii, 402-404 (page 116)
 III, ii, 411-412 (page 117)
 II, i, 1-6 (page 135)
 II, ii, 41-44; 56-61; 64 (page 136)
 II, ii, 65 (page 137)
 V, i, 409-424 (pages 137-138)
 - 13 In the movie, it is Keating/Robin Williams who quotes from *Hamlet* and who also gives a hilarious parody of John Wayne acting the part of Macbeth.
 - 14 Two excellent introductory books are those by Gianetti (1987) and Boggs (1985). The latter has lists of questions for analysis on fictional, dramatic, and visual elements that are highly recommendable.

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