Cambridge 02138

“Meat Ball” music, selfless Dr. Rock, gays and the military

ENGLISH 10’S VIRTUES
I was sorry to read that a survey of English literature will no longer be required of Harvard English concentrators (“Humanities Rebooted,” May-June, page 52). It’s said that students don’t like surveys. I would have thought that a student who spends a year reading the likes of Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, Austen, and Woolf with anything less than exhilaration would owe at least one crucial discovery to the course: that she’s not, in fact, very interested in literature after all, whatever she might have thought beforehand.

There’s a big and questionable leap from the unobjectionable statement that chronology doesn’t offer the only way to approach literature, to the idea that a chronological survey doesn’t provide students with an irreplaceable orientation as they take up literary studies. No doubt physicians, of a kind, could be produced even if the traditional first-year course in gross anatomy were dropped owing to the boredom of professors or the distaste of students. But generations of doctors, like generations of scholars and readers, will testify that nothing brought them face to face with the nature of their enterprise more than that initial, sometimes bewildering immersion in the stuff of their vocation.

I offer the analogy with some apprehension that by comparing poems to cadavers I’m revealing a deadly, “academic” attitude toward literature, and that I might get Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned” quoted at me in a tone of rebuke: “We murder to dissect” (a gem I heard quoted in a tone of reproach, May-June, page 18), you describe how Seeger was blacklisted from performing in the 1950s because of his Left affiliations. One of the first to break that blacklist was the Harvard Society for Minority Rights, which sponsored “A Concert of Folk Songs by Pete Seeger” on April 24, 1955, in New Lecture Hall.

CHARLES GROSS ’57
Professor of Psychology, Princeton, and Emile Chi ’57, G ’60, Jim Perlestein ’57, and Michael Tanzer ’57, Ph.D. ’62
Former members, Harvard Society for Minority Rights

SEEGER’S SANCTUARY
In introducing the excerpt from the new Pete Seeger biography (“The Bible and the Almanac,” May-June, page 18), you describe how Seeger was blacklisted from performing in the 1950s because of his Left affiliations. One of the first to break that blacklist was the Harvard Society for Minority Rights, which sponsored “A Concert of Folk Songs by Pete Seeger” on April 24, 1955, in New Lecture Hall.

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HARD-TIMES TUNE
Many thanks for the article on George Martin Lane, professor of Latin at Har-
The words he taught me were considerably more grim than the words in the College Pump. In my father's version (probably closer to the original) the “wretched man” of the song ends up this way:

He grabbed a pistol from the wall and shot himself ’til he was dead.

If anyone is interested in the old words, they can e-mail me at editor@OurHerald.com.

M.D. Drysdale ’66
Editor and Publisher, The Herald of Randolph
Randolph, Vt.

DR. ROCK’S SELFLESS SCIENCE
I viewed your coverage of the John C. Rock papers with great personal interest (“A Pioneer in Family Planning,” May-June, page 54).

During my fourth year in medical school, in the fall of 1962, I managed to wangle an elective with the illustrious Dr. Rock at the highly unpretentious Rock Reproductive Center in Brookline. As a hopeful future obstetrician-gynecologist, I would be working with a man fresh from his triumphant and key role in the development of The Pill.

Rock felt that males could and should play a larger and more active role in fertility control. From his experience in treating infertility, he was aware of studies indicating that under certain conditions, such as undescended testicles, varicoceles, etc., an elevated intrascrotal temperature would result in reduced sperm count and declining male fertility.

Together, we devised an experiment to heat the testicles within the scrotum to a predetermined value. We set arbitrary lengths of times and intervals of heating to develop a therapeutic model. We needed a method that was safe and tolerable (in accordance with the Hippocratic code of “First, do no harm”), a schedule of heating times, and a group of males who would volunteer for the ordeal and also be willing to undergo pre- and then post-study sperm analysis. Using a baby bottle warmer, the design of the study was to immerse the subject’s testicles, starting at a tolerable temperature and then, over the course of 15 to 20 minutes, turn the dial up to the desired 105 degrees, a level more arbitrarily than scientifically decided upon by Rock and me.

As I was still a potential father-to-be, Rock, the only other co-conspirator, unhesitatingly volunteered to be the test subject. I read with fascination the tribute to the student (“Song for Hard Times,” May-June, page 54). You ask, “Who knew that ‘One Meat Ball’ got its start at Harvard?” But Lane and his connection with the song were written up as long ago as 1997 in Nota Bene, the newsletter of Harvard’s department of the classics (Fall/Winter 1997, page 9, on line at www.fas.harvard.edu/~classics/newsletter/index.html).

One might have hoped to see mention of the George Martin Lane Chair in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. It was given by Lane’s daughter-in-law, born Emma Gildersleeve, and his granddaughter, Katherine Lane Weems, a sculptor whose works include the two life-size bronze rhinos outside the Biological Laboratories.

Christopher P. Jones, Ph.D. ’65
George Martin Lane Professor of Classics and History
Cambridge

Editor’s note: That 1997 write-up reveals, in part, that Lane “published some works in the Classics, including a volume on Latin Pronunciation (1871), but his most famous production was a ‘ballad,’ ‘The Lay of the One Fishball’ [a text is given alongside]. ...The words seem so similar to a popular song of the 1940s, ‘One Meat Ball,’ that a comparison of the two texts, conducted with the proper scholarship, might produce interesting results.”
subject. He was 72 at the time, with a history of several heart attacks, and he had satisfied his childbearing yearnings.

So this dignified man of patrician bearing and national celebrity shed his trademark ascot, his well-tailored trousers, and his boxers and climbed into an empty bathtub. He carefully submerged his scrotum into the bottle warmer, a device that could just comfortably accommodate the package he was delivering. I then slowly increased the temperature to the designated target level. We determined that mankind, in this instance represented by a not-too-nimble 72-year-old cardiac patient, could tolerate this physical insult.

Several months later, after appropriate trials, we concluded that the procedure could work! Encouraged and guided by Rock, I wrote and submitted the results in a medical paper with both our names as authors. By the time it was reviewed, critiqued, and returned for revision, I had become an intern with absolutely no time for personal projects. The manuscript lay ignored, unpublished, and ultimately lost in one of our many family moves. It was, however, referenced in several other papers by Rock et al. during the next few years, with the designation “to be published” in the bibliography.

Dr. Rock has been gone now for 25 years (he survived this experiment by more than 20 years), so I am the only one with first-hand knowledge of this clinical “caper.” I tell the story to give further illustration of this great man’s dedication, his humanity, his humility and selflessness, his ever-present intellectual curiosity in the pursuit of benefit for mankind, and, yes, his great sense of humor.

Kenneth Scheer ’59
Brookline, Mass.

DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL
I read with interest your piece about U.S. Army Captain Anthony Woods, M.P.P. ’08, being discharged from the military under the policy known as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” after publicly acknowledging his homosexuality (“Anthony Woods: Taking a Stand,” January-February, page 74).

In a subsequent letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, I vigorously objected to Captain Woods’s dismissal and argued for the reversal of a wrongheaded policy that has deprived the American people of the military service of tens of thousands of similarly talented individuals.

“I was interested in helping to make Harvard affordable for students because I received financial aid. But I also needed to be sure I had enough money for retirement.”

K. DANIEL RIEW, M.D. AB ’80

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What's New on the Web

In recent weeks, Faculty of Arts and Sciences dean Michael D. Smith outlined FAS's stark financial circumstances; FAS announced a first round of cutbacks; and Ed Forst, the University's executive vice president, tendered his resignation. We reported these and other Harvard stories as they happened; visit harvardmag.com/financial-crisis to catch up on the stories you missed and read more detailed accounts.

Don't miss the next headline—subscribe to our news updates or follow us on Twitter (@harvardmagazine). And harvardmag.com is your best source for continuous coverage of Harvard. This issue's Web extras include an audio recording of jazz pianist Malcolm Campbell '10, profiled in the Montage section. And don't miss our start-to-finish coverage of Commencement festivities (see below).

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

The Dalai Lama Comes to Campus. A report on the spiritual leader's speech in Memorial Church, plus video and audio. harvardmag.com/dalai-lama

On the Medicalization of Our Culture. Scholars of history, law, anthropology, neuroscience, and literature assembled at Harvard to discuss medicalization, the process by which "common emotions and traits are turned into treatable conditions." harvardmag.com/medicalization

More on the Fat That Could Make You Fitter. You read about the intriguing properties of brown fat in our January-February issue. Research on this metabolic powerhouse is heating up; we summarize the new findings. harvardmag.com/more-brown-fat

Ashbery Gets a Medal. At an April 30 ceremony, John Ashbery '49 accepted the Harvard Arts Medal and recalled his days as a struggling young poet in Paris, translating cheap detective novels to pay the rent. harvardmag.com/ashbery

The Bells Return to Russia. A recent New Yorker article chronicled the Lowell House bells' journey back to the Danilov Monastery. We link you to articles like this one with Harvard connections; check back regularly to stay plugged in. harvardmag.com/bells

COMMENCEMENT CENTRAL

Audio, video, speech texts, photos—it’s all here. Find out what President Drew Faust, Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, journalist Matt Lauer, and General David Petraeus said on the Commencement stage. Whether you like the traditional (the Latin Oration) or the quirky (memorable mortarboard decorations), you’ll find it all at harvardmag.com/commencement.

LETTERS

As I've noted in the past, the military has long served as a pathway to full participation in American life and as an emblem of full rights of citizenship. It is no accident that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation guaranteed both freedom and the right to military service. As women claimed full rights of citizenship in the twentieth century, full inclusion in the military became an important badge of their equality.

It is time for the United States to give the same ratification of full citizenship to gays and lesbians. Anthony Woods’s discharge from the Army is a tragedy for him, but it is a larger tragedy for the nation that is deprived of his remarkable abilities and that fails to live up to its most precious ideals.

Drew Faust
President, Harvard University
Cambridge

Editor's note: Captain Woods was honorably discharged, but he was required to repay his $35,000 military scholarship to the Kennedy School. Faust's remarks at the 2008 ROTC commissioning ceremony are online at http://harvardmagazine.com/commencement/2008, for coverage of this year's ceremony, see pages 44 and 48.

ERRATA AND AMPLIFICATIONS

Concerning Anne Firor Scott’s Vita of Caroline Farrar Ware (May-June, page 38), Detlev F. Vagts ’49, LL.B. ’51, of Cambridge, cautioned “against a frequently encountered typo: re-naming Adolf Berle ‘Adolph.’ It is not necessary thus to distinguish him from Adolf Hitler.” Elliott Sirkin, ART ’91, also of Cambridge, praised Adam Kirsch’s essay on James Agee (“Vistas of Perfection,” May-June, page 28), but noted that although Agee may have seen “a favorite movie, Coquette,…seven nights in a row,” it did not star Helen Hayes. She played the heroine on stage; Mary Pickford starred in the movie, winning an Oscar. (And “Anon.” phoned to say that Michael Kearney, not Thomas Chalmers, appears with Robert Preston in the movie still from All the Way Home.) Charles F. Stromeyer IV of Concord, Massachusetts, observed that Courtenay Humphries emphasizes “neurons as the fundamental unit of the brain” (“Untangling the Brain,” May-June, page 40), but slights recent research on astrocytes, large glial cells that hold nerve cells in place and help them develop and function.

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