after that, dean Douglas W. Elmendorf withdrew Manning’s fellowship, saying HKS had been mistaken to extend the honorific in this instance, when an invitation to speak would have sufficed. That response created a further uproar, as critics charged the school with caving in to the intelligence community or discriminating against convicts (see harvardmag.com/jonesmanning-17). The incident thus overshadowed the traditional role the HKS’s forums have played in hosting wide-ranging, civil presentations extending across the spectrum of political, policy, and international discourse, and thus became more partisan ammunition amid many other heated debates about speech on campuses nationwide. The dean later announced that he was consulting widely to develop new standards and procedures for appointing future fellows; an “improved approach” should be in place later this year.

Final Clubs, Continued

The first Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) meeting of the year, on October 3, heard a news-filled annual report from dean Michael D. Smith detailing an initiative on inequality in America; growth and diversification of the professorial ranks; and improvements in FAS’s finances—at least temporarily, thanks largely to a substantial restructuring of the debt it has incurred to pursue House renewal. (These topics are covered in depth at harvardmag.com/fas-octmtg-17.)

But most attendees’ attention focused on the continuation of contentious business from last year: whether the College should take action against unrecognized single-gender social organizations (USGSOs: final clubs, fraternities, and sororities), whose membership policies discriminate on the basis of gender. Anticipating wide interest, the meeting was moved from the Faculty Room at University Hall to a large Science Center auditorium, and it was nearly filled.

Professor of music Suzannah Clark, co-chair of the USGSO committee appointed by Smith, presented its final report—which, surprisingly, conveyed three possible courses of action, not one: prohibiting student membership in such organizations, effective for undergraduates enrolling next fall; retaining the May 2016 policy, in effect now; or some mixture of en-

hancements in College social programs and spaces and education about inclusive community values. The regulatory approaches are meant to be an incentive to the clubs to modify their policies, and a lever to affect student choices; the third option relies on persuasion and cultural change.

Gordon McKay professor of computer science Harry Lewis, who introduced a motion last year opposing the sanctions, in the name of protecting students’ right of free association in legal organizations, produced a revised motion with the same aims. It is intended to assert faculty primacy in making policy governing student life, rather than ceding that role to administrators.

A Classicist’s Dylan

It took six months for Richard Thomas to draft the manuscript for his newest book, Why Bob Dylan Matters, a study, among other things, of the songwriter’s deep and abiding connection to the poets of ancient Greece and Rome. Thomas sat down at his keyboard a couple of weeks after the announcement last fall of Dylan’s Nobel Prize in literature, and by the following spring, the pages were in his editor’s hands. “I’m not sure how I did it,” he says.

In truth, though, the Lane professor of the classics—whose freshman seminar “Bob Dylan” always fills up fall-semester classrooms—has been working on this book for a very long time. In 2001, he listened to Love and Theft a few days after the album was released and heard Virgil’s words singing back to him in Dylan’s voice. “I’m gonna spare the defeated—I’m gonna speak to the crowd,” Dylan rasps in “Lonesome Day Blues,” the fifth track. “I’m gonna teach peace to the conquered, I’m gonna tame the proud.” This was the Aeneid. The language was unmistakable. Virgil’s lines, translated from book six of his epic, read like this: “Remember Roman, these will be your arts: / to teach the ways of peace to those you conquer, / to spare the defeated peoples, tame the proud.” It turned out that

Thomas’s two lifelong obsessions—Bob Dylan and the classics—were intertwined.

Academics have been poking around Dylan’s oeuvre since at least the 1970s, sifting for clues to his enigmatic meanings and origins and influences. But in the past 10 years or so, scholarly “Dylanologists” have begun truly plumbing the depths, dredging up connections to—and often almost verbatim quotations from—Milton, Keats, Tennyson, Pound, Eliot, Shakespeare. In Why Bob

Bob Dylan in 1965. Already, the classical world was starting to influence his writing.
Dylan Matters, Thomas—who reckons he has seen Dylan in concert perhaps 80 times over the years—adds Rimbaud, Twain, Burns, and the Civil War poet Henry Timrod to the list. And of course, the ancients. His book is the first, Thomas believes, to approach Dylan from a classics perspective.

It is also the first to offer a long look at one of the artifacts in the newly opened Bob Dylan Archive in Tulsa: a small spiral-bound notebook containing drafts of what would become “Tangled Up in Blue.” (In March 2016, the George Kaiser Family Foundation purchased from Dylan his career-spanning collection of 6,000-plus artifacts. The archive opened to scholars earlier this year; a Bob Dylan Center with public exhibits is planned for 2019.) The song drafts of “Tangled up in Blue,” crammed with additions and cross-outs and a list of rhyming words, reveal, Thomas says, a writing process not unlike what records show of Virgil’s: a morning spent composing or reciting lines, “then going back, deleting, changing, licking into shape.”

After Love and Theft, Thomas began listening for other echoes of antiquity in Dylan’s songwriting.

A native New Zealander, Thomas began learning Latin at nine. He began learning Dylan four years later, when “Blowin’ in the Wind” arrived on the local airwaves. His church choir performed the song in 1964, while watching the U.S. civil-rights movement from afar. A decade later, Thomas was packing Blonde on Blonde into the trunk he shipped from Auckland to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he would soon start graduate school in the department of classical studies. That album was one of only two he brought with him to the States (the other was Songs of Leonard Cohen), along with his well-thumbed undergraduate copies of Virgil and Homer, Horace, Ovid, Sappho, Catullus.

After Love and Theft, Thomas began listening for other echoes of antiquity in Dylan’s songwriting (and in his interviews and press conferences and memoirs) and discovered a whole universe of them, go-
Julius Caesar

Dylan performing in England in 2012. Age has added “compelling” edges and layers of meaning to the singer’s voice, Thomas says.

**Jupiter’s Darling, Helen of Troy, Alexander the Great, Spartacus**. “Whatever we think we are doing on such journeys,” Thomas writes, “what moves us is the sense of being at the wellspring of artistic creation, where creative genius began to form the art that would become central to our own lives and imaginations.”

Listening to Thomas talk about Dylan and his place in the firmament of classical literature, it becomes clear that this scholarship is not a sideline to his work on Virgil and Horace and Homer but an integral part of it. One reason he sees so many threads between Dylan and the ancient poets is because he considers Dylan to be one of them, an artist writing classic texts that outlast his own time. “It’s the same river,” Thomas says. “Just a different stage of it.”

—LYDIA TYLE GIBSON

---

**THE UNDERGRADUATE**

**Writing, Blocked**

by NATASHA LASKY ’19

I’ve always said that if you want to take every class at Harvard, work at the Writing Center. Think of it as scholarship meets improv: you’re sitting in a closet of an office, alone, until random undergraduates in classes you’ve never even heard of show up with papers they want you to fix, and you have to learn as much about the subject as quickly as possible in order to properly advise them. The first year I worked there, I saw an overwhelming number of freshmen scrambling through Expos 20—the mandatory first-year academic-writing class—but I also counseled chemists on their lab reports, helped design outlines for stressed seniors polishing their theses, and even guided particularly ambitious undergraduates through their law-school applications.

I worked a 9 a.m. shift, and because early appointments are like pesticide to perennially sleep-deprived undergraduates, those who signed up for my hour tended to be miffed, frazzled—this was their last resort.

So when a girl walked into my office, puffy-eyed and scowling, I initially thought nothing of it. She entered smoothing her stained white T-shirt and running shorts, only to slam her backpack down on the ground and collapse into the gray office chair across from me.

I asked her what she wanted to work on, and she sighed. “My Expos paper, I guess,” she told me, tightening her ponytail. “To tell you the truth, I already know what I need to work on, but my preceptor told me I had to come.”

Each time I asked her to explain an aspect of her paper, she would snap back with a reason why it was my fault I didn’t understand it. After about 40 minutes of this back-and-forth, she leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms, snidely mumbling, “It’s weird to me that you’re not getting it. After about 40 minutes of this back-and-forth, she leaned back in her chair and tried to think of what to tell her.

“OK, maybe you’re right, and it does make perfect sense and I just don’t get it,” I said, finally. “And it’s not like you have to change anything if you don’t want to. But I don’t really know what you want me to say, cause if I didn’t give you honest criticism, I wouldn’t be doing my job.”

---

Reprinted from Harvard Magazine. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746