

“NOT COLONIAL”: FROM JAMES DOULL AND ROBERT CROUSE TO “THE POSITION OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS IS UNASSAILABLE”

At my first meeting with Dean Summerby-Murray, he asked what made our Department so outstandingly successful. He had in mind our standing both within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and within Canada, where we are now the only department east of Toronto other than Université Laval, offering full undergraduate and graduate programmes in the Greek and Latin languages and their literatures, Greek and Roman history, philosophy, theology, and religion: Classical, late Ancient / Patristic, Medieval, and that we do this at a very high standard, with an international reputation, and for large numbers of students. I answered “Because we are not colonial.” I shall fill out that answer.

An essential of that successful mentality was in place in the momentous 1947 when James Alexander Doull, of the Pictou County Scots, a graduate of the Department, was appointed to its faculty, George Grant, with the same roots, was appointed to head Philosophy, and Robert Crouse from rural Lunenburg County became a student of both, that is, Dalhousie had the self-confidence to appoint its own. This had been true right from the beginning—the President of Dalhousie when I arrived as a student was a graduate, as was the second President. Generally King's took the opposed colonial course; when I came, its President was an Englishman, who was as bad at numbers as President Alexander Enoch Kerr a Nova Scotian Scots Presbyterian was good at them; President Puxley filled the King's post in Classics in 1959 by asking his Oxford College, and it essentially made the appointment! It could be argued that, after the Foundation Year Programme revolution at King's, the two exchanged positions and Dalhousie as a whole is now dominated, taught and administered by those who come from our West and South, but since that is not true of Classics, we shall say no more about it.

My making the appointment of Grant in the same year as Doull momentous signals that I judge the role of philosophy in our studies to be crucial, but perhaps this is not in an expected way. Before coming to that, let me say straightforwardly what I think the key to our success is. I find it best expressed in the Dedication by Dennis House of the 2001 issue of *Dionysius* to James Doull. Dennis said James wanted *Dionysius*:

to be a distinctively Canadian journal, not narrowly focused on some aspect of antiquity but instead publishing articles “which may be

regarded as a contribution to the understanding and criticism of contemporary culture and its antique origins.” Under Doull, he wrote, . [T]he Dalhousie Department acted in the confidence that...students, who sought to understand their world, were prepared to step outside of the skin of their immediate age, so far as was possible, in order to understand their world in its literary, philosophical and historical origins. The study of antiquity, in... Doull’s view, was dead if students were to be invited to learn only what is frozen in the particularity of the past. Their interest could only be won if the way forward was understood to be at the same time the way backward.<sup>1</sup>

This abides. Our work is never an exercise in archaism, Our students learn to ask these questions of texts:

“‘What is the author saying?’ and ‘How is it possible to think this?’ ...The questions asked in the Classics Department [are not] simply academic exercises nor [are] the texts artefacts.” I quote from Tory and Margaret Kirby.<sup>2</sup>

Ours are fully contemporary inquiries and this is actual when Jack Mitchell’s history classes hold up a mirror to present structures, social norms, and values, or Emily Varto exposes how we revealingly write ourselves into ancient history, or when Leona MacLeod lets the Greek poets exhibit the deep problems in the Western relation of practical reason and nature.

Eli Diamond tells us how Justin Singer’s just finished MA thesis on the mathematics of Plato’s *Timaeus* gives a perfect example: “Justin is passionately interested in understanding better how mathematical laws and principles express themselves in the natural world, and what this means ethically for the way we should relate to our natural environment.”

Justin himself put it like this: “Dal really got me thinking about the way I think. The way the Department of Classics teaches philosophy—it becomes something in which we actually engage. Part of that is being aware of how the political state of one’s community relates to the activity of intellectual inquiry in that community. If there’s a problem, if that inquiry is threatened, we have to act.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis House, “Dedication. Professor James Alexander Doull”, *Dionysius* 19 (2001): 7.

<sup>2</sup> Classics Newsletter Fall 2014: 22.

<sup>3</sup> Erin Casey, “Grad profile: A classic case of academic success,” *Dal News* 07/10/2014

Doull and Grant arrived back to Canada from Oxford with a deep sense of what fundamentally moved our world: global corporate capitalism and technology out of the control of human and political ends. Bound together in the university as agent of research and innovation, and using it as means, they had become evils destructive not only of the conditions under which Canada might continue with an independent culture and as a free society, but also of the Liberal Arts and intellectual freedom in the university, and of the very conditions of human life. I cannot here give the analysis on which they agreed, but I can sum it up in the titles of two of Grant's books: *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (1969) and *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965); the latter of which James insisted I promote among students and review. James in dialogue with Emil Fackenheim on the question of radical evil put the problem in Classical language: "In antiquity Prometheus could be subdued and taught to live under the power of Zeus. But now he has captured the citadel of Zeus and founded technology on the sovereign right of the individual. The principle of the modern age is the unity of theoretical and practical. A more dangerous principle there could not be."<sup>4</sup>

The prophecies in these writings are more than fulfilled. However, I can say that, even if not always by everyone all the time, the permanent members of the Department in the last 60 years have been in sympathy with what was common to the understanding Doull, Grant and Crouse shared and that this is crucial to the student attraction to our work.

For Doull, Grant and Crouse evil this fundamental could only be met by the transformation of our minds; for them personally this meant philosophical labour, though they knew that the building of alternatives in thought and practice must take place in every area of life and imagination. They disagreed about the possibilities for philosophy in our circumstances, James was not elegiac in the mode of Grant and set about thinking what we are told is unthinkable, and Robert Crouse followed him in that.

This is a birthday party so I avoid the negative, but we must remind ourselves of what Doull rejected in classical studies and why. Basically it was the Anglo-American model, especially as its norms were found in Oxbridge and the Ivy League. There the ancients and mediaevals were approached through

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<sup>4</sup> James Doull in discussion with Emil Fackenheim on radical evil in "Would Hegel Today Be a Hegelian?" *Dialogue* IX (1970), 226-235 at 235.

philosophical frameworks which determined in advance that the deepest substance of what they said was false. Thus Classics at Oxbridge became either aesthetic comfort or the most difficult of competitive games the prizes being jobs at the top of the system, provided the player did not betray the game by exhibiting any belief in the realities being studied. His time with Werner Jaeger at the less cynical Harvard, still naïve about what empire would cost in truthfulness and freedom, taught him that approaching Aristotle and Plato through the Heideggerian and phenomenological hermeneutic offered no substantial alternative. So at the end of his student days, when he took up his Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, Doull did not waste his time on Classics there, he studied natural science at New College because he was convinced that philosophy must have a true physics. Perhaps the greatest seminar he and I offered together began with Aristotle's *Physics* and concluded with Einstein and Heisenberg. I am delighted to see that Eli is teaching the *Physics* this year.

Although James worked through his understanding in a new and radical way, his approach was not altogether foreign to Dalhousie which its founder intended for instruction in “the higher Classics, and all Philosophical studies”.<sup>5</sup> When Arthur Griffin joined the Department in 1924 under Howard Murray, our great benefactor<sup>6</sup> he brought a PhD from UofT with a dissertation on *Aristotle's Psychology of Conduct*,<sup>7</sup> but Griffin never taught Aristotle or any other philosophy at Dalhousie. This changed with Doull. The year after he arrived he taught “Greek Political Thought” in the Classics Department and the next year Ancient Philosophy in the Philosophy Department headed by Grant; in 1960-61 Doull

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<sup>5</sup> It was founded for instruction in “the higher Classics, and all Philosophical studies”. (Lord Dalhousie at the opening of the College 1820). In the early years 4 years of Latin and 2 of Greek were required by 1890 only 3 of Latin were demanded and Greek became optional.

<sup>6</sup> **Murray, Howard**, B.A., (Lond.) LL.D., (Toronto). McLeod Professor of Classics, Dalhousie Univ. Son of the late Dr. George Murray; born at New Glasgow, 1859 to 1930. Canadian Gilchrist Scholar in 1881, B.A., Univ. of London, England; studied in Edinburgh, Univ.; married Janet, daughter of the late George Hattie, Halifax, 1890; successively teacher in Guysboro Academy, New Glasgow High School and Halifax Academy; Professor of Classics Dalhousie Univ. since 1894 and Dean of the College since 1901. Author of a book on “Classics, Their Use and Future Prospects.” In 1887-88 with a BA from the University of London he was Tutor in Classics. He seems to have been active until his death. He last appears as Head of the Department in the Calendar for 1930-31. He had taught Classics at Dalhousie from 1887 to 1931 and gave us our major endowment.

<sup>7</sup> Published in London in 1931. He succeeded E.W. Nichols a graduate of Dalhousie with a PhD from Yale. Griffin never taught in Windsor. Son of an Anglican clerical headmaster (St Clement's College), he went to Trinity, where he was Rhodes Scholar for 1915. He had Toronto and Oxford degrees but also spent time at Harvard.

was Head of both departments. Nonetheless and crucially, philosophy was a small part of his work and of Classics under his headship. James absolutely insisted that any philosophical study must be preceded and accompanied by the study of the languages, literature and history. Although I remember his metaphysics seminar, I started with him in first year Greek and spent two years as an undergraduate reading six of Sophocles tragedies with him. Regular classes introducing Ancient and Mediaeval philosophy were only started by A. H. Armstrong and Robert Crouse.

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### **A Classics Time Line From Compulsory Greek or Latin to Unassailability**

1920-21 Both Greek and Latin are required for admission. Three years of one or the other required for the BA. The BSc required one of Greek or Latin. Classics has 5 faculty, History, English and Philosophy each have 1.

1922-23 The degree requirement became two classes in Greek or Latin. The BSc requirement remained the same.

1939 Doull (1918-2001) graduates in Classics

1947 Doull appointed (to 1982 at Classics; Chair 1959-1970), 1941 MA Toronto, Rhodes Scholar; Grant appointed [1918-1988] also a Rhodes Scholar (1947 to 1960 heads Philosophy at Dal); Crouse entered, came back 1963, retired 1996.

1948-49 New classes in "Ancient Civilization": Doull taught "Greek Political Thought" and there was a class in "Classical Life and Literature" (with a Latin prerequisite!), Classics had 3 members, Philosophy including Grant had 3; English had 4, History 4. Degree requirements for both the BA and the BSc remain the same. Doull taught the Ancient Philosophy Class in the Philosophy Department.

1957-58 Students arriving with Senior Matriculation Latin or Greek could avoid taking any class in them. They could replace Latin 2 or Greek 2 with Classical Literature in Translation.

### **Classics Time Line: the 60s Compulsory Classics Disappears**

1959 JP Atherton, King's appointment made by President Puxley, Chair 1976-81 and 1992-98, retired 2000

1963 The First Return: RD Crouse, Chair 1971-76, retired 1996

1965 Turning to continental Europe

Failures uniting Classics and the Ancient Near East: B.W.W. Dombrowski (1965 Aramaic) & Eric Segelberg (1968 -1990 Coptic) appointed

The Success. Greek Language and Literature: Rainer Friedrich, the first specialist, appointed 1965, 1981-92 Chair, retired 2001. He was succeeded by his student Leona MacLeod PhD 1999, appointed 2001.

1966-67 Requirement for Latin or Greek or Classical Literature in Translation removed from the curriculum. From this point on doing Classics was entirely a matter of student choice.

The result is the opposite of what you would expect.

### **A Classics Time Line: the Fabulous 70s. After compulsion Classics Expands at home and abroad.**

1970 A.H. Armstrong arrives

Introductions to Ancient and Medieval philosophy established in the Classics Department by Crouse and Armstrong as well as advanced classes in Patristics and Neoplatonism.

1972 Foundation Year Programme started: Hankey, Atherton, Crouse. 42 years later Classics remains essential to the Programme.

The Second Return: Hankey 1972 FYP, from 1982 Classics; Colin Starnes 1972 FYP, PhD 1976, retired from Classics 2005.

At Kings Angus Johnson MA 1974, PhD 1986 at Kings from 1977, Tom Curran MA 1975, Neil Robertson MA 1986, Kings from 1989, Kyle Frazer MA, 1998.

1975 Dennis House appointed, Chair 1998-2006, retired 2007.

1977 Doull, Armstrong, Crouse & Atherton found *Dionysius*.

1977 James Lowry first PhD, Dissertation on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*

1977 Peter Kussmaul appointed. The first specialist historian. Retired 2008.

1981 Patricia Calkin, PhD taught until 2003.

### **A Classics Time Line: The New Millennium and an Unassailable Department of Our Own**

The Third Return: Peter O'Brien, 2000 (MA 1992), Leona MacLeod, 2001 (PhD 1999), Gary McGonagill, 2003 (MA 1992)

2001 Dr Christopher Grundke first teaches for the Department (Hebrew).

Doull's 1965 plan partially realized, a new synergy, and growth: Religion Studies: Alexander Treiger 2008, Christopher Austin 2009, Arabic, Rodica Firanescu 2005, History, Jack Mitchell 2009

The Fourth Return: Michael Fournier, 2006 (MA 2001), Eli Diamond, 2008 (MA 2001), and Emily Varto, 2010 (MA 2004). A Canadian Department in Doull's sense.

2011 Pythian Games founded.

Ups and Downs: From 11 Classicists (1981), and 1/3 the present number of students, to 5 and back to 7 with our three colleagues in Religious Studies and Arabic and the largest number of programme registrations and biggest graduating classes in our 225 years.

**"The position of the Department of Classics is unassailable."**

Dr Summerby-Murray to Wayne Hankey during his last budget meeting with the Dean as Chairman of Classics when the Dean approved our budget for 2015-16 on All Hallows' Eve 2014