

Classics News

Spring/Summer 2010

A Cheerful and Steadying Word Message from the Chair

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Perhaps it is because this is the first Spring in Spring here I can remember, but, in any case, I am bursting with good news to share. Here is some of it in no particular order. Dr. Jack Mitchell's appointment to the tenure track post in Roman History—some claim that his is the only tenure track appointment made in Classics in Canada or even North America this year! We are hoping to celebrate his energy and creative imagination with Pythian Games in the Department next Spring encouraging all our poets, dancers, and orators. There is also the very welcomed return for a second year of our own MA

graduate, Emily Varto, now a PhD from UBC to teach Greek History; Dr. Christopher Austin's very successful completion of his first year as our specialist in Hinduism and Buddhism and the increasingly real prospect of an endowed Chair in Jewish Studies, hopefully to be part of a re-enactment of *convivencia* in our Department; Seamus O'Neill's PhD from us and its fulfilment in a tenure-track post for him in Ancient Philosophy at Memorial University; three excellent visits of guests who led our Departmental seminar and our seminar classes, one of them our own Michael Harrington who now teaches Philosophy at Duquesne University where he joins another of our graduates, Laurel Freeman.

This reminds me of a list I have been compiling of recent graduates of our Department who have started, are now doing, or have just finished PhDs here or elsewhere (everywhere from Finland to California): I have more than 30 names and what, besides the number itself, and the fact that all of them have been funded, most impresses is the range of the doctorates they pursue: most are in Philosophy, closely followed by Classics, then come Religious Studies and theology, including Jewish Studies, Patristics, Medieval Studies, History, English and Library Science.

Nor is the stream drying up: we are looking forward to the biggest intake of graduate students in many years in what is the second largest graduate programme in Classics in Canada. And the quality is stunning! Seven of our MA students will hold Canada Graduate Scholarships (taking about one-third of these national fellowships awarded for MAs at Dalhousie); three of them will have Dalhousie's own highest scholarship (the Killam) taking one-quarter of the new MA Killams this year. Our present faculty, graduate students, and alumni have dominated two international conferences on Neoplatonism recently: one in Steubenville last Spring, the other in Quebec in 2006.

With an important part of our success in graduate studies to his credit, Dr. Peter O'Brien is handing over responsibility for it to Dr. Eli Diamond, but, before going, he has added to his two awards as Dalhousie's most outstanding teacher and an award as outstanding Graduate Advisor. Next year he will be Co-ordinator of the Ancient Section in the Foundation Year Programme at King's which counts almost a score of the graduates of the Department among its professors,

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A Message from the Chair (continued)

Moreover, the practical skills of Dalhousie Classicists are getting recognition: Roberta Barker is Chair of Theatre at Dalhousie, Kim Kierans is the new Vice President of King's, Barry Craig will hold the same post at St. Thomas University, Peter Bryson is now seated on the Bench of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court and will receive a Doctor of Canon Law from King's at the May Encaenia, Tory Kirby is Director of the Centre for Research on Religion and Professor of Ecclesiastical History at McGill, Barry David is Chair of Philosophy at Ave Maria University and Richard Upsher Smith is Chair of Classics at the Franciscan University of Steubenville. We have two bishops, both of whom were recently honoured with Doctors of Divinity by King's: Laish Boyd in the Bahamas and Michael Hawkins in Saskatchewan.

All this growth, cheer and change may provoke a little worry that we have lost our focus. Let me close with a few steadying words. Although we are now teaching Ancient Hebrew and Arabic, as well as Greek and Latin, and hope to add Sanskrit, and although we administer the Programme in Religious Studies where Hinduism, Buddhism and Far Eastern religions, as well as Judaism, Islam and Christianity, are taught, and although we provide a home for a full-time professor of Arabic, giving us ten full-time faculty members overall, the Department of Classics remains distinct and self-governing with seven of its own tenured or tenure-track chairs. Those seven maintain the curriculum in Greek and Latin language and literature, Greek and Roman history, ancient, patristic, and medieval philosophy and religion, and run the journals *Dionysius* and *Pseudo-Dionysius*. It is this activity which attracts our superb students and gives us our outstanding international reputation. There has been no decrease in our core work because of our added responsibilities; on the contrary, they have allowed us to develop synergies and connections which are not only attracting new students but also enhance what we give all we teach. Those of you as old as I am will remember that through the 1960's and 1970's the Department attempted the kind of extension of its work which we have now undertaken again. When Classics added Coptic, Aramaic and studies of ancient Middle Eastern history and religion, it was attempting to study the interplay of Hellenic and Eastern cultures which in real history has made us who we are. That experiment led by our guiding Genius James Doull broke up on the rocks of several circumstances, but it remained as our animating and steadying hope. In our innovations, we are following the old divine command: *State super vias et videte et interrogate de semitis antiquis, quae sit via bona, et ambulate in ea.*

Wayne Hankey
Chairman

Alumni News Where are they now?

David Puxley



David Puxley first came to Nova Scotia from Prince Edward Island directly after high school, drawn by the prospect of studying in the Foundation Year Programme (FYP) at the University of

King's College where he found himself fascinated by the works of Plato, Plotinus and St. Augustine, as explored in lectures by Drs. Dennis House, Wayne Hankey, and Colin Starnes, respectively. David undertook further study in Classics, a discipline that involves "the whole range of human traditions," and earned a Bachelor's degree from King's in 2002.

Rebecca Coughlin

After growing up in Hamilton, Ontario, Rebecca Coughlin began her undergraduate studies at McGill where she had originally planned to focus on literature and philosophy. Instead, however,

she became fascinated by Religious Studies and graduated with a Honours BA in Religious Studies. During these years Rebecca became increasingly interested in Neoplatonic philosophy, in part due to a course in ecclesiastical history taught by Dr. Torrance Kirby (MA 1980), who suggested that she consider undertaking further study in this area at



Where are they now?

David Puxley (continued)

During the next few years, David exercised both intellectual and physical aspects of his historical interests. He worked as a tour guide at Canadian war monuments in France and assisted in the mapping of German tunnel complexes around the village of Arras. He also studied at the Institute of Augustinian Studies in Paris and stayed for a time at the Rosminian monastery in Rome.

In 2003, David returned to Halifax to begin a Master's degree in Classics at Dalhousie. He found that his degrees in Classics have helped him gain two rather different kinds of employment. A local temp agency was impressed by his facility with languages and he was also engaged as a teaching fellow in the FYP at King's.

After teaching in the FYP for four years, David found himself changing focus. Despite his enjoyment of teaching, he had decided against a PhD in favour of a calling that would allow him to engage people on matters that were intellectual, spiritual and practical. He has recently begun theological study at the Atlantic School of Theology where he is a postulant in the Anglican tradition. He credits the prompting of his wife, Katie, and the encouragement of Rev. Gary Thorne and the members of the chapel community at King's. He hopes to integrate theory and praxis in Christian ministry. "I don't want to be an armchair theologian; I want to act on the basis of new understanding."

David remains closely connected with the Department of Classics at present through the copy-editing for *Dionysius*.

We want to hear from you!

Do you have an interesting story that you would like to share with us? Do you know of a former classmate who is doing something exciting and news worthy? Or perhaps you want to comment on something you saw in this edition of the Department of Classics' Newsletter?

We want to hear what you have to say!

Please send all comments, suggestions, ideas or inquiries to fassalum@dal.ca.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Rebecca Coughlin (continued)

Dalhousie in the Department of Classics under the direction of Dr. Wayne Hankey. This she promptly did, researching the links between Greek philosophy and Christianity in late antiquity and the early mediaeval era. With us she particularly enjoyed the rigorous study of ancient languages, poetry, and tragedy and fondly recalls the camaraderie and scholarly engagement of the professors. Rebecca completed the MA in 2006.

For three years thereafter, Rebecca employed her mind and energy in both theoretical and practical fashions. She remained involved with the Department as a teaching assistant in classes dealing with history, mythology and the representation of myth in film. She also reached wider audiences: in 2006 she presented a paper at the International Society of Neoplatonic Studies Conference in Quebec City. Dr. Hankey recalls Rebecca's presentation: "Rebecca stood alone at the head of an ancient stone room in the Séminaire de Québec. In front of her, among others, were the two most eminent senior scholars in the world on her subject and the young rising star in the field, all three care passionately about her topic and are notorious for their hypercritical enthusiasm. Also present were the two leading experts in another field whose work she was using to revamp the standard interpretation of her subject. Her topic was full of traps; her task required fording rivers, wading through swamps, finding her way through dense forests and climbing mountains. Evidently (and properly) terrified but strong, she delivered the most memorable and admired paper by a graduate student at the whole three-day conference. A very great triumph." Not surprisingly, in the following year, she was invited by the present Dean of McGill's Faculty of Religious Studies to participate in a Symposium on Late Antiquity in the Levant. She also served with several organizations addressing women's concerns in society and on the boards of the Dalhousie Women's Centre and YWCA Halifax. Rebecca coordinated projects for Silent Witness Nova Scotia, a grass-roots organization that seeks to educate the public concerning domestic violence.

In the autumn of 2009, Rebecca returned to Montreal as a PhD student in Religious Studies at McGill, pursuing research under Dr. Kirby's direction and building directly on her earlier work. Such single mindedness from one's undergraduate days is seldom seen! She remains deeply interested in early Neoplatonism and its reception in the Middle Ages. Nor, as she notes, are such studies of purely historical interest; they help to illuminate the present relations within the religious traditions of the European West and beyond.

Alumni Profile The Honourable Justice Peter Bryson

From an everyday university student to a Judge on the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, the Honourable Justice Peter Bryson, Q.C., looks at his time and experiences at the University of King's College and Dalhousie University as important keys to his success.

Born in Nice, France, Peter moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1966. He attended the Halifax Grammar School where he acquired a strong interest in liberal arts. When considering post secondary education, Peter was attracted to the historical and interdisciplinary approach of King's Foundation Year Programme (FYP) where he encountered gifted professors and like-minded students. After the FYP Peter was drawn to Classics.

For some, the cultural turmoil of the 1960's and early 1970's naturally prompted a renewed interest in the origins of our western traditions. Classics provided an obvious beginning for students, like Peter, whose curiosity about Western cultural origins had been excited by the FYP.

Like many of his contemporaries, Peter took full advantage of the vibrancy of the King's community, playing hockey and swimming for the University and eventually serving as Vice President of the Students Union. Then, as now, King's encouraged participation in extra curricular activities.

Peter has always been struck by the happy symbiosis between King's and Dalhousie. The former's intimacy is complemented by the latter's cosmopolitanism. Peter has fond memories of his professors in the Department of Classics: James Doull and the Rev. Dr. Robert Crouse especially stand out for him. While writing his Master's thesis Peter would make weekly visits to Professor Doull's home in Chester for regular "critiques" of each new chapter. Peter is also especially grateful to Dr. Wayne Hankey whose didactic gifts were legendary and to whom Peter owes his interest in Classics.

Peter notes that there are often misconceptions surrounding the value of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Some see it as impractical or even useless, but Peter strongly disagrees. "You can do anything (with an Arts degree). It makes you a more complete person."

During his years practicing law at McInnes Cooper, Peter had the privilege of working with a variety of business leaders. As a result, his advice for students considering an Arts degree is that businesses are looking for good communicators and self-starters with a capacity to learn new skills sets - all things at which Art students and graduates often excel.

"You will not be limiting yourself by taking an Arts degree", says Peter. "Doing what you love can be practical. First you are likely to enjoy it more and do it better; you are likely to obtain higher achievement in what you love. Second, this will better position you for further graduate or professional study. Your undergraduate success will make you more competitive and make you a better judge of a meaningful career. On the other hand trying to be 'too practical' and focusing on a narrow skill set can be too limiting, especially if you lack a broader education."

After completing his BA (1976) and MA (1978) in Classics at Dalhousie, Peter went on to receive his BA (1980) in Jurisprudence at Oxford University. He then returned and obtained his LLB (1981) from Dalhousie. He immediately joined McInnes Cooper, becoming a partner in 1988.

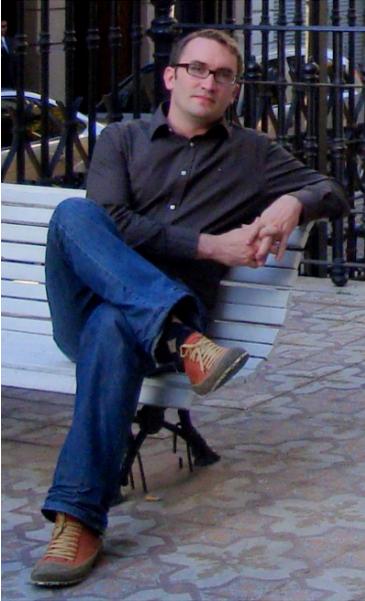
Peter taught Equity and Trusts at Dalhousie Law School (the Schulich School of Law) from 1983 to 1993. In the fall of 2009, Peter was appointed a Justice of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. This spring Peter will receive an honorary doctorate from the University of King's College.

Peter currently resides in Halifax with his wife, Patricia. They have three children, James, Barbara and Patrick, two of whom are graduates of both the FYP at King's and the Department of Classics at Dalhousie.



Department Updates

Dr. Jack Mitchell



We are pleased to announce that Dr. Jack Mitchell will join the Department of Classics this summer as a tenure-track assistant professor in Roman history. Jack, a native of Sackville, New Brunswick, grew up in Ottawa and has also lived in Montreal, Paris, San Francisco and Toronto. After earning a BA with Honours in Classics from McGill University in 2001, Mitchell began postgraduate study at Stanford University where he earned his PhD in 2006. In his dissertation he analyzed rhetorical education in the Imperial period, laying special emphasis on the relationship of ancient literary theory to the performance of epic. He has already published several articles dealing with aspects of ancient criticism, translation theory and Roman history. Nor is his academic experience limited to research and writing; Jack has taught courses on various aspects of the Greek and Latin languages and literatures at Stanford and at the College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, Massachusetts), where he earned the reputation of being an engaging lecturer and communicator. No foe of modern technology, he is a contributor to the well-known online *Perseus Project*.

Jack's academic interests have also lent themselves to practical modern expression in poetry and prose. Readers may already be familiar with his rhapsodic epic "The Plains of Abraham", a performance piece ranging in length from 20 to 70 minutes, performed entirely from memory (see www.plainsofabraham.ca). He has given recitations of this work on two cross-Canada tours (via motorcycle in 2000, and again in 2005) and occasional performances by invitation since then, including an appearance at Dalhousie last spring. Not only does Jack compose English poetry, he even translates Latin verse into English verse; portions of Juvenal's *Satires* and Propertius' *Elegies* are currently receiving his attention. He enjoys the challenge of Latin verse composition and has also found time to write three historical novels for young adults, drawing upon his knowledge of early Imperial Rome. Such a union of scholarship and artistic expression is not commonly found.

We look forward to the strengths that Jack will bring to the Department of Classics. Indeed Dr. Hankey has announced that in honour of his appointment the department will inaugurate Pythian Games in March 2011 with prizes for Greek and Latin orations and poems. Expect more on this soon.

Welcome aboard, Jack!

Dalhousie University Award for Outstanding Graduate Advisor



Congratulations to Dr. Peter O'Brien, who has been awarded the 2009-2010 Dalhousie University Award for Outstanding Graduate Advisor.

Peter has been graduate coordinator in the Department of Classics since his second year at Dalhousie University in 2001, and under his watch the graduate programme in Classics has flourished.

Peter can add this award to his expanding academic trophy collection. In 2006 he won the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Award for Excellence in Teaching Award and in 2007 he won an Alumni Association Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Congratulations, Peter!

Religious Studies

In September 2010, the Religious Studies Programme at Dalhousie will be entering its third year. Two core appointments (in Western Religions and Eastern Religions) have been made, and the launching of the Simon and Riva Spatz Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies is planned for the near future.

Proposals for endowed chairs in Islamic Studies and in Eastern Christian Studies are currently being developed. Once this triad of chairs has been established, it will be possible to recreate, in Dalhousie's Religious Studies Programme, the traditional *convivencia* between Jews, Muslims, and Christians in the Middle East and to provide an interdisciplinary academic environment for the three religious communities in Halifax and the Maritimes to study aspects of their identity and their cultural and intellectual heritage.

With the new appointments, a wide and steadily expanding range of classes has become available to Dalhousie and King's students. These include general ones on World Religions, others on individual religious traditions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholic Christianity, and Orthodox and Oriental Christianity), and seminars that explore different aspects of these traditions (e.g. medieval philosophy, Islamic mysticism, Indian narrative literature, Arab culture, and Middle Eastern Christianity) as well as the interactions between these traditions.

The Department of Classics has also reshaped aspects of its offerings to provide teaching which supplements and supports Religious Studies: "Meetings between Hellenism and the East to Philo the Jew", "Meetings between Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam until the Renaissance", "Philosophy and God", "Magic, Religion and Philosophy", and "Paganism". The Department's writing-intensive "Classical Mythology" class has been cross listed with Religious Studies. In addition, the Programme draws on departments within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and King's College to offer a rich array of instruction on subjects from the Philosophy and Sociology of Religion to Religion and Science.

A number of new classes have been developed for the next academic year. These include the seminar "Topics in Religious Studies", which constitutes a core requirement for students majoring in Religious Studies; "Nature, the Human, Community, and the Divine in the Pre-Modern West", which is an approved elective in the College of Sustainability; "Buddhism in India and Tibet"; "Magic, Religion and Philosophy" which explores the intersections of these aspects of culture in antiquity, and "Philosophy and God", which will explore the answers to the most fundamental questions about the nature of existence, provided by ancient Greek philosophers and their Pagan, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim followers.

The number of students majoring in Religious Studies is steadily growing, with 20 students as of September 2009, and a significant increase expected by the next academic year. As their numbers grow, the reputation of the Programme and the quality of the students attracted to it increases in equal measure.



For more information on the Religious Studies Programme at Dalhousie University please visit www.religiousstudies.dal.ca.

Odyssey Live!

From January 22-23, 2010, The University of King's College was the scene of "Odyssey Live!," a 24 hour, real-time presentation of the 24 books of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The event was conceived as a fundraiser for Halifax Humanities 101 (HH101), an educational outreach programme that offers university level instruction in the liberal arts to adults living below the poverty line. Since 2005, over 40 students have graduated from the eight-month long programme in Halifax. Many have subsequently gone on to join the "Clemente Seminar" in which graduates can focus more intensively on a limited number of texts or ideas to which they've been introduced in the previous year. HH101 follows a chronological course of great books in a pattern similar to that of the FYP at King's. Given the connection, it is not surprising that several Classics alumni (and King's) were instrumental in the establishment of HH101, including Gary McGonagill, Neil Robertson, Gary Thorne and Angus Johnston.



Dr. Eli Diamond reading from Homer's *Odyssey*.

In the course of "Odyssey Live", 24 teams comprised of HH101 supporters (including current students, teachers, university faculty and presidents, local media and political personalities and others) read, acted, sang or spoofed each of the ancient epic's books in sequence, at one-hour intervals, beginning at 7pm on January 22 and continuing throughout the evening and into the wee hours of January 23. The event, which was open to the public, concluded with the presentation of *Book XXIV* at 6pm on January 23, after which participants and audience members retired to the President's Lodge for appropriate libations. The Department of Classics was represented by a team made up of teaching faculty (Eli Diamond, James Fleming, Christopher Grundke and Peter O'Brien) graduate students (Emily Parker and Chris Gibson) and alumni (Reuben Penner and Dr. Vernon Provencal, who now teaches at Acadia), as well as by a team of undergraduates (led by Mike Borich) and other teams which included alumni (Bethie Baxter, Rachel Solomon, Dan and Michelle Wilband, Ben Frenken and Nick Hatt).

The *Odyssey* was an obvious choice for a public event like this since it is one of the most popular and resonant texts in the HH101 reading list. Many HH101 students come to see the story of the Greek hero Odysseus' long, tortuous homecoming from the siege of Troy as emblematic not only of their own voyage of intellectual discovery throughout the year, but also of their own lives, as they seek to find a meaningful role for themselves in today's society.

The event was a resounding success, not only exceeding the \$24,000 pledge goal but also bringing lots of people together and giving the cause much excellent publicity.

For more information and to view photos and video clips of the event please visit www.halifaxhumanities101.ca/events.htm.

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Dalhousie Alumni and Friends

Keep In Touch

Please visit www.alumniandfriends.dal.ca to update your contact information and stay connected with Dalhousie University.

Reunions

Are you interested in planning a reunion? We can provide the assistance you need to make your reunion happen.

For more information please contact Katie Maskell, Alumni and Donor Relations Officer, at (902) 494-6288 or katie.maskell@dal.ca.

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