

Ingrid D. Rowland

The Public, Intellectuals, and the Classics: Whither the APA?

As Salvatore Settis has recently noted, if the heroine of a Japanese *manga* comic is named Nausicaa and Osama Bin Laden, in September 2001, could liken the United States to a Cyclops suddenly blinded by Noman, what, if any, is the position of the classical heritage in the West? Have we any special rights to it, any relationship through historical accident or ancestor cult, or has it become a globalized commodity? Settis feels strongly that culture should not be commodified, and writes eloquently in defense of broad historical understanding and rigorous examination of ideas. As Rector of the Scuola Normale in Pisa and formerly as director of the Getty Research Institute for Art and the Humanities in Los Angeles, he has had extraordinary opportunities to pronounce both as a scholar and as a thinking person on the state of the classical heritage in a contemporary world, and he has used those opportunities with courage and judgment. So, in other venues, have scholars like Jasper Griffin and Daniel Mendelsohn, or even unabashedly popular writers like Michael Wood, whose searches for Troy and Alexander have engaged as many viewers of public television as they have enraged more pure-minded classicists.

This panel addresses the gap between professional classicists and the literary world at large. This paper argues that the reasons for that gap are not only evident, but also as ancient as the classics themselves. Much of classical literature has survived because it is so readable, but what may be a virtue for an *auctor* has seldom been seen as a virtue for a scholar, in any era. Writing, as Plato so famously pointed out in *Phaedrus*, is anything but hermetic in its habits—it will go wherever it can, passing under the eyes of the learned and the ignorant. Anyone can read the *Odyssey*, and everyone has, from here to Toyko. But not everyone can athetize its lines. Does this mean that no one but a textual critic has a right to read, or, more urgently, to respond to the *Odyssey*? Surely not. But textual critics do not often appear in mainstream media because their professional training fits them for something else entirely. They are encouraged to write not as *auctores* in their own right, but as scholars, by a set of internally established standards, one of which is to head off the problem Plato noted about writing by writing in a way that virtually ensures a restrictive readership. Again, the problem is an ancient one. The results of an equivalent mindset can be seen in decisions like the choice of Speusippus to succeed Plato at the head of the Academy in Athens when the Academy could have had Aristotle. Aristotle, of course, went off to Macedon and tutored Alexander the Great, who did more to spread the classics by founding Alexandria than nearly anyone then or now. Institutions have always had trouble accommodating individuals with large, new things to say. The APA is no different.