

The APA and the Regional Associations

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I have been attending APA, regional, and other Classics meetings for now well over fifty years. One reason why my wife and I still go to these functions is that they are a pleasure, not merely for the social feature of seeing and talking to dear old friends, but because I was educated by fine humanists who taught me that this endeavor of ours is worthwhile, that we are the salt of the academic earth, and that the highest secular aim in life is the teaching of Latin and Greek; the rest is all decorative accompaniment. I could expatiate further on this topic, which is very dear to me, but that is not my present aim.

I want to write about item #2 on the questionnaire which was presented to our candidates for APA office in the fall of 1992. This question read: "How should the APA more effectively collaborate with the other Classical Associations . . . in fostering Classics on the secondary level?" I found it maddening, not only that half of the candidates did not even deign to offer their suggestions on this point, but that those who did so (except for Sider, Miller, and Babcock) did not confess to the slightest notion of what we all know has been going on for years. Put plainly, the big-wigs and careerists, those who sit in the chairs of the mighty, have deserted the regional associations en masse, and give the appearance of turning up their noses at school teachers and those others of us who take a serious interest in improving the base from which we operate. Presumably their excuses would be two: one, that such activity does not bring promotion and pay—or takes up time more profitably devoted to writing grant proposals—and two, that either the papers read or the people there assembled are beneath their notice. As to the first, all I can do is repeat the question asked of me and my wife in Turkey one time by some well-travelled Americans we met there: "Do these folks never travel without a grant?" As to the second, who do they think they are, with their tiresome and lengthy expositions of the latest fad in French literary criticism or whatever? And where did they get the notion that there is this great gulf fixed between the APA and the regional associations? Nearly a quarter of the present membership of CANE are also in APA, and many of these are not college teachers.

Our incoming president, Professor Segal, wrote in his answer to question two that "the APA should annually review and coordinate the work of ACL

etc. . . . and report it more visibly to the membership.” This should be put in the same place with the remarks of others who want us to appoint a representative, some intermediary, to communicate with these lowly personages. It’s obvious that what they aim at is to distance themselves from the human side of the problem. To phrase it simply, the obvious and most effective collaboration with the workers of the Classical world is to attend their annual meetings as friends and colleagues, sharing with the lesser breed (harder worked, less well paid, *πονῆροι*, as the Greeks might have said) the benefits of our high-priced charm and wisdom.

It is hard to talk about this without being sarcastic and unpleasant. I spoke with one of the kindest and most gentle-mannered members of our profession recently to ask him if my approach was too antagonistic, and he replied, “Their conduct is shoddy, and the only approach possible is public obloquy.” It is true of course, that many notable scholars are stiff and distant and unclubbable—Pooh-Bahs, especially when in contact with simpler folk who have nothing to offer except their hard work and their lives—but it is never too late to start learning to be a human being. Actually, they might even find that some of these people who bear the burden and heat of the day, struggling with recalcitrant students and benighted superintendents, are eager and vital men and women. They come to our regional meetings for a fresh lease on life, and they listen to some papers which are almost as boring and badly read as many of those at the APA meetings.

There is one more point I should like to make. It is perhaps impossible to make these old dogs learn new tricks, hardhearted in their iniquity as they are. And in fact, if they all were suddenly to turn up at CANE or CAAS or CAMWS, who would want to talk to them? They are, that is, a lost cause. But our problem is for the future. I have it on good report from two younger college professors that they were specifically steered away from this sort of action by their graduate-school mentors, and at least one of last Fall’s candidates implied the same in response to question #2. We are not going to improve communication between the so-called higher learning and the intermediate schools if we continue to indoctrinate young Ph.D.’s with such scandalous attitudes. Money will not solve this problem. The AMA should be a good example: anybody knows that the more money our doctors make the less attention they pay to their patients. Nor will prizes do, though I heartily approve these new teaching awards we are giving out. What is needed are graduate students trained as only our Classics can do in some of the greatest documents of social and ethical life that still exist outside the Bible, and in the constant confrontation with the effort to tell the truth about the past. I sometimes wonder

if perhaps some of our present-day special interests have not distracted us from the main goal to which the humanities can attain.

The CANE programs year after year show clearly that school teachers want and profit from straight-forward presentation of classical learning, and can supply a good bit of it themselves. What the regional associations lack was made shamefully clear several years ago by Ward Briggs in his presidential address to CAMWS (*CJ* 86 [1991-2] 272), and rephrased more gently by Allen Ward in his opening remarks in our newsletter for the past year (*NECNJ* 19.4 [1992] 2): "CANE needs to encourage restoration of the close cooperation which once existed between teachers of Classics in the schools and colleges."

The APA and the Regional Associations: A Reply

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I have profound sympathy for the concern and frustration expressed by the author of "The APA and the Regional Associations." He feels, as many of us do, that regardless of some of the more positive diagnoses which have been made recently, the profession of Classics is in a parlous state. Nor is he mis-directed in looking to the American Philological Association for encouragement, even action. It is his hope that closer cooperation between its membership and regional organizations will slow or reverse the Classics slide into dysfunction at the secondary level.

To draw attention to his appeal, he expresses deep dismay at the seeming callowness of the APA's membership toward regional associations, suggesting that many members comport themselves like nabobs, oblivious to the problems of the profession, immersed in the lotus pool of their specialties and intolerant of those who do not share their interests.

It is with this generalization that I take issue, while at the same time admitting that there are specialists in every profession who live in other worlds and breath other air. I will even go so far as to insist that it is important for the survival of Classics that these specialists—among other pursuits—subject Latin and Greek texts to "the latest fad in French literary criticism or whatever." Our discipline (and every other significant discipline) has traditionally been tested against the "whatever," has profited from it, and has survived it. We are,