

## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

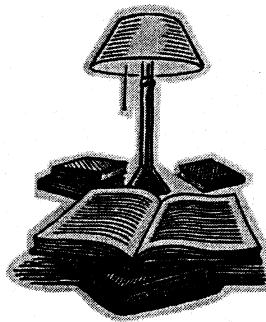
By Danny Jacobs

In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, T. S. Eliot (1953) underlines how important individual artistic talent is related to that artist’s knowledge of his or her artistic tradition. For Eliot, to be a good artist, one must know and ingest all of the art that came before them. To Eliot, the most important art in any field, whether it be poetry, writing, or painting, is influenced by, and influences, the whole history of that art. Eliot states that “no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists” (p. 23). According to Eliot, no true artist creates in a bubble.

This issue of YA Hotline – “Back to the Classics” – wishes to explore how important looking back to the past is, and

how many of the books and movies teens enjoy are influenced, at least in part, by works that have come before them. In these pages, we wish to suggest how one can show teens that works that have come to be known as “the classics” have influenced so much of the books they read today, how they are still relevant, and how they can still be enjoyed on an individual level. The issue will look at how teens can better appreciate classic works of literature through programming, access, and different

mediums. Linda MacAfee illustrates in her reading of Calvino on page (?) that it is hard to pin down what a classic can be. Are some books objectively classic



works? Can any book be a classic depending on the individual who reads it? “Back to the Classics” in no way attempts to argue that the classics are the only thing that teens should read, not does it suggests that there is a definitive rubric that defines a classic.

However, the issue suggests that works which have remained relevant socially and culturally over time can still be valuable to teens.

The idea of the classic can be scary for teens. Often, classic works maintain the often false aura of institutionalization due to their frequent mention in high school classrooms. Some teens may find it easier to dismiss a book because it is older or because it is praised by the same individual who grades them. "Back to the Classics" suggests that this hesitance is understandable but perhaps unnecessary. One does not need university degrees to appreciate literature. One of the best places to attempt to shed the academic stigma from the classics is at public libraries. The library, for many teens, is a place of freedom and acceptance. It is a forum where teens can make their own choices, especially regarding what they read. Librarians, therefore, are there to defend that freedom to read but also to suggest books to

teens that they may have not thought to try. It is at this stage of Reader's Advisory when librarians can plug the classics—books that have become ubiquitous because of their lasting appeal. There are many ways to suggest classics to teens and many classics to be recommended. As the issue illustrates, turning teens on to the classics can be done through programming, film, accessibility, finding books with appeal factors, and creating read-a-like lists. "Back to the Classics" is meant as a primer outlining how to link teens to books that are influential, culturally important, beautifully written, and above all, enjoyable for the reader. One of the goals of librarians should be to frame important literary works for teens not as mere instructional texts that are "good for you" but as books that will create lasting memories of positive reading experiences.