

Dull

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (February 2025)

J'Accuse... Poets of the Machine

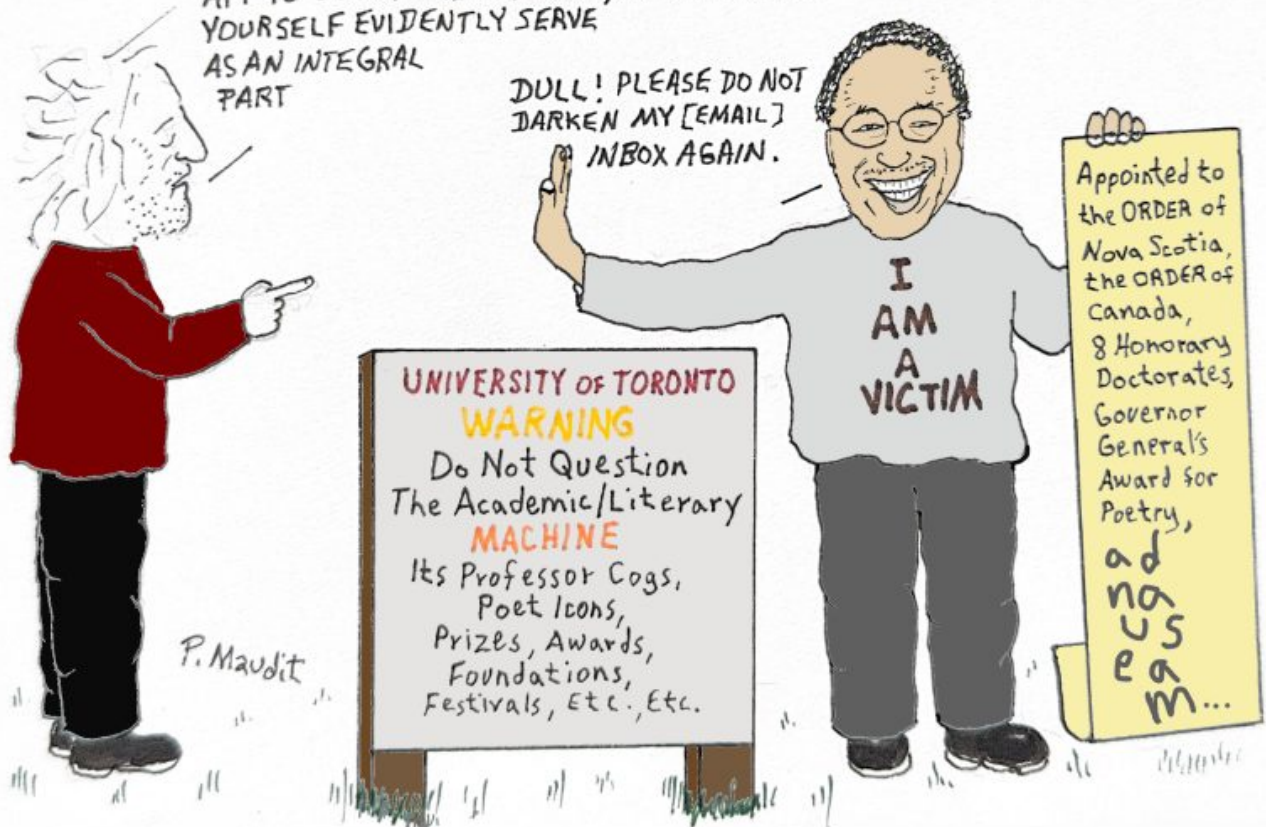
Their M.O. of Backslapping, Self-Congratulating, and Virtue-Signaling

Featuring Poet Professor George Elliott Clarke, Department of English,
University of Toronto

Let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine.

—Henry David Thoreau

J'ACCUSE... THAT YOU, AS A FORMER GOVERNMENT POET
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PART



NB: Sadly, most poets strive for recognition, not rude-truth telling. Clarke's response was to my criticisms with his (that!) regard. Never did Clarke attempt to disprove any of them. On very rare occasions, a machine cog crosses the line inadvertently and receives the slight ire of the machine. Clarke had done that when it became known that he had befriended a white poet, who'd murdered a native-American prostitute. In vain and for the sake of his students, I attempted to interest him in *The American Dissident*, as well as my being banned from a Canadian poetry festival. Democracy demands courage and opening the doors to debate. Ideological adherence and career, however, demand cowardice, conformity, and closing the doors...

Let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine. –Henry David Thoreau

Was Thoreau “dull”? Perhaps that was the conclusion of those he’d criticized during his day. And for those who I criticize during my day, surely I too might be dismissed as “dull,” the simple conclusion of a University of Toronto professor and former poet laureate of both Toronto and the Canadian Parliament, George Elliott Clarke.

If one wishes to get ahead, to succeed, to climb the ladder, to become a professional, one prime cardinal rule that must be obeyed is thou shalt not question and challenge the academic/literary machine. In essence to become a professional poet (winner of prizes, awards, recognition, a university tenure position et al), one must turn a blind eye. It is amazing, at least to me, that most poets willingly follow that cardinal rule. Simply examine the websites of “recognized” poets. All have one thing in common: unabashed boasting of their prizes, awards, and titles ... and complete absence of any questioning and challenging as, for example, who constitute the often faceless judges dishing out the latter. Are they somehow perfect? Are they unbiased? Most poets are shamefully in-lockstep cogs when it comes to what I’ve termed the academic/literary machine! The Poetry Foundation is obviously an integral part—a major part— of that machine, funded by \$100 million of Lilly drug money (now \$200 million). Dare criticize it, and it will simply erase you!

My decades long experience of questioning and challenging has led me to the conclusion that poets, artists, editors, professors, etc., in general, despise outsider criticism and simply do not/cannot deal with it in an intelligent manner. The usual response to it is silence. Well, Gaston Bellemare

responded, though not verbally or in writing, by [refusing](#) to invite me back to his Festival International de la Poésie de Trois-Rivières. Now and then, an ad hominem response results. The following are a few examples:

“Ha boy are you ever pathetic ... Go away troll” (esteemed, self-proclaimed “dyke poet” Ellen Myles)

“Silly Slone, I was trained in literary studies during a decade in graduate school with some of the foremost critics of the time. Your idea of criticism, from the shrillness of your rants, excludes any sense of illumination.” (Chris Busa, founding editor of *Provincetown Arts*)

A space of perennial negativity becomes exhausting, because nothing can be created or affirmed there. I wrote that yesterday. As well as this, which was in my journal:

Slone’s cruelty has resulted in more creativity than probably would have been standard. I can at least give him that. (self-proclaimed anarchist Alex Buchanan)

Now, did I echo the hissyfits of those criticized? No! From the dross, I create. So, I sketched cartoons, wrote essays and a *dialogue de sourds* (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).

Another interesting exchange I had was with Professor Steven Wingate (now, at University of South Dakota), former editor of University of Colorado at Boulder’s Program for Writing and Rhetoric literary journal [Divide](#) (defunct?), which oddly boasted: “We are committed to fostering creative and intellectual debate, and to placing side-by-side ideas which would not easily rest together elsewhere.”

Dear Mr. Slone: We thought and talked for a long time about publishing "The Cold Passion...", since much of what you say in the core of your essay struck us as right on the money. Unfortunately, we couldn't get past the vituperative nature of the bulk of this piece, which obscures its essence. So sadly, we must join the litany of magazines that have turned "The Cold Passion" down.

Steven Wingate, Founder and Publisher, divide [sic]

The logic in Wingate's [response](#) was evidently lacking for how could someone declare agreement with "much of what" was said, while at the same time argue the piece to be obscure? I challenged that lack of reason, and Wingate again responded:

Blah, blah. blah. Boring. We figured you couldn't leave well enough alone, Mr. Slone. But since you find a way to challenge my use of the word 'vituperative,' let me speak a plainer truth: nobody wanted to deal with you because you seem like such a creep.

Now, how not to laugh! Was Wingate's response unusual for a university professor boasting openness to debate? Perhaps not. Wingate had evidently been doing the right things regarding a career in academe and literature. However, only by doing some wrong things might one truly learn and progress intellectually. For the full correspondence of my exchange with Wingate, see [here](#). For other no less astonishing responses, consult the "[Literary Letters](#)" rubric in each issue of *The American Dissident*. Also, [consult](#) T. R. Hummer of the *Georgia Review*, [Garrick Davis](#) of the *Contemporary Poetry Review*, and Professor [Phil Hey](#) of the *Briar Cliff Review*.

From the dross, I came up with the idea to create a [Curriculum Mortae](#), as opposed to the usual Curriculum Vitae. Imagine sending it out for a job position at the University of Toronto, for example, or to obtain a poetry invitation or government grant. And yet it is a summary of actual questioning and challenging. Is not truth attained via the latter, as opposed to professional team-playing and turn-a-blind-eye conformity? Ah, but those on top of the ladders, be they university chairpersons or poetry festival organizers and poetry foundation directors, do not want truth. Jack Nicholson was right: “you can’t handle the truth!” They want conformity.

As for Professor Clarke, I’d read an [article](#) on CBC, “U of R rejects calls to cancel MMIWG lecture by renowned poet over friendship with Indigenous woman’s killer” And so, I’d sent an email to the professor.

Salut Poet/Professor George Elliott Clarke, University of Toronto: As a poet and professor, I thought you might like to take a look at my webpages devoted to my personal experience as an invited poet at the Festival International de la Poésie à Trois-Rivières (Québec). Out of 150 other invited poets, I was the only poet to speak out against the organizer’s odd ban on all debate regarding poetry during his 10-day festival. And, sadly/unsurprisingly, I was never again invited back. Not one newspaper or literary journal in Canada (with the exception of now defunct *Steak Haché*) would publish my accounts of the Festi (poems, essays, cartoons). Criticize the academic/literary establishment (its diverse cogs, etc.) and be ostracized into oblivion. That certainly reflects my diverse experiences as a former professor, poet, and editor. Your students might be interested in this [webpage](#). Perhaps you might also consider getting your university library to be the only university in Canada to subscribe to *The American Dissident*

(only\$28/year). BTW, I came across your name in an [article](#) regarding you and Steven Kummerfield et al.

To my surprise, Clarke responded (or sort of). Professors (and poets!) rarely respond when I contact them. And I have made numerous contact efforts over the years. But Clarke did not address the points made in my email.

Dear George Slone:

Given my own personal experience with mob persecution—ignorant and intolerant cancellation campaigns—I am sympathetic to the ostracism visited upon thee. I continue to speak out against and protest these renewed, McCarthyite witch-hunts proposing to silence everyone who doesn't vow allegiance to one political agenda or another. Indeed, my cancellation began 5 years ago, and continues—due in part to the one-sided news stories to which I was subjected by Radio-Canada and CBC.

Because you have read one such item, I attach to this email a review of my book, *J'Accuse*, which answers back to the "digilantes." Blessings unto thee.

—GEC

Well, I was not really interested in his story, but rather in trying to pierce the Canadian brick wall, as noted in my e-mail. And so I wrote back.

To Poet/Professor George Elliott Clarke, University of Toronto:

Well, I'd made a purposeful effort in my email to you, avoiding the obvious that you, as laureate and prize-winning poet boaster, are inevitably/evidently a cog of the academic/literary machine, certainly NOT a rare poet apt to heed Thoreau and risk his CAREER via "let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine."

Thanks for the demi-réponse, though, in essence, you turned it into you and only you. I suppose being slapped on the back so many times by the prizes, awards, and titles would make it quite difficult not to become an egregious egotist. How sad that you did not even bother to respond to my criticisms of the Canadian-government-funded Festival et al! Perhaps you are a friend of poetry/tourism controller Gaston Bellemare, organizer of the Festival? That certainly would not surprise me.

In any event, I am currently writing an essay with your regard. I will send it to you and others when finished in a week or so. Rude-truth tellers do NOT receive prizes, awards, and invitations. They do not become laureates and are not featured like you on Ruth Lilly's \$200 million Poetry Foundation web page. How sad that the bulk of poets today are so easily purchased by the money machine ... via the ole Faustian Pact: willful co-option, castration, and corraling in exchange for titles, professorial positions et al. Anyhow, rather be a dissident poet working at a Horton's, than a machine cog poet in a comfy academic slot. Now, don't simply dismiss me as angry or even jealous because I certainly am not. From the dross, I create...

Au plaisir,
Tod

Clearly, for a thinking individual as opposed to a conformist ladder climber, a poet laureate of Toronto and Parliament, for

example, is a poet who dares not criticize the local hack politicians and hack poets who make the anointment. The same would be for an inaugural poet of the United States like Amanda Gorman (examine the front cover and editorial for [issue #41](#) with her regard here. Clearly, Gorman does not write poetry critical of the hacks in power who anointed her. Poets who don't make waves are rewarded. Is that what a poet should be ... see-no-evil friend of hacks?

Now, somehow Clarke ended up believing that he had become an outsider, no longer a poet of the machine. And so, what was his "crime"? Quite simply, he'd made it known that a white poet, who'd murdered a native-American prostitute—uh, sex-worker—and served six years for the crime, was his friend. Kind of strange considering that as a POC, Clarke seemed to be fully embedded in the realm of identity politics, favored by the academic/literary machine.

Clearly, Clarke was not heeding Thoreau's advice, which ought to be the advice for all poets! His record as a lifetime establishment Canadian poet is clearly outlined on Poetry Foundation's laudatory [page](#) with his regard. Hell, I'm an American poet and founding editor of an American literary journal, yet I certainly am not featured on that Foundation's website. Why not? Well, I have been [openly critical](#) of the Foundation and its money control over poetry.

How to co-opt, castrate, and corral poets and their verse? Money! Clarke's own [webpage](#) clearly indicates Clarke's acceptance of and ingestion by the machine. Regarding the controversy, at least Clarke managed to get the literary machine to present his side of the [story](#), something I never succeeded in doing regarding my story and the Festival, despite numerous [attempts](#). Clarke's apathy regarding my being permanently banned from the Festival simply echoes that of the numerous other Canadian poets, as well as editors and journalists, I'd contacted over the years. The intrinsic plague co-opting, castrating, and corralling poets and poetry

is MONEY, often government money. Clearly, Clarke and many other poets have profited immensely from that money. And that would be an interesting topic for them to explore, though likely they will not ... for evident reasons.

Finally, never have I stated that all poetry should be critical. What I have unsuccessfully proposed is that the machine and its cogs open their hermetically-sealed doors, even just a crack, to criticism ... with their regard. Why not just a quarter of a page in the back of a poetry review or foundation website for such criticism? Nope! Now, will I get an award or prize or invitation or grant or laureate anointment for standing up to speak rude truth vis-a-vis the academic/literary machine and its diverse cogs? Ralph Waldo Emerson certainly hit it on the bull's eye: "I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways." Follow that advice, however, and risk being ostracized into oblivion...

N.B.: This essay was sent to Clarke, as well as to the Editor-in-Chief (she/her) Eleanor Yuneun Park and Opinion Editor Charmaine Yu, of *The Varsity*, "The University of Toronto's Student Newspaper Since 1880." It was also sent to the *Literary Review of Canada*, which had published Clarke's response to the criticism he'd received for being friends with a convicted poet murderer. No response was received.

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G. Tod Slone, PhD, lives on Cape Cod, where he was permanently

banned in 2012 without warning or due process from Sturgis Library, one of the very oldest in the country. His civil rights were being denied because he was not permitted to attend any cultural or political events held at his neighborhood library. The only stated reason for the banning was “for the safety of the staff and public,” yet he has no criminal record and has never made a threat. His real crime was that he challenged, in writing, the library’s “collection development” mission that stated “libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view.” His point of view was somehow not part of “all points of view.” In November 2022, he requested the library [rescind its banning decree](#), which it finally did. He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of [The American Dissident](#).

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