

A Critical Note on the Writing Industry

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (October 2024)



The Critic (Arthur Dove, 1925)

When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. –George Orwell, Why I Write

Criticism, real criticism, seems to be absent–nonexistent–within the writing industry/community in the same darkness as in the arts industry/community. When the chambers of commerce and tax-payer money-distributing state cultural organizations support those industries, evidently that is indicative of a certain writers/artists castration and cooptation. To criticize, really criticize, those industries and their diverse cogs is essentially a prohibited activity, punishable usually by ostracizing, rejection of debate, and perhaps a little sprinkle of ad hominem.

The [Cape Cod Writers Center brochure](#), which I picked up at one of the Cape libraries, incited me to write this essay. First, however, it provoked me to sketch a satirical cartoon on the Center and its Keynote Speaker. And, of course, as I usually do, I sent it to the targets who, as they usually do, chose not to respond. Silence is golden for those who detest debate (i.e., democracy).

The Writers — Inliers, Not Outliers

Featuring Cape Cod Writers Center Board of Directors Pres. Barbara Eppich Struna; Exec. Dir. Nancy Rubin Stuart, and Keynote Speaker Verlyn Klinkenborg, Yale Univ. English Lecturer, and Former *NYTimes* Editorial Board Member

When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.

—George Orwell, "Why I Write"



NB: Now, wouldn't it be nice if the "writers" would open up to a little criticism with their regard? The Center, unsurprisingly, chose not to respond to my various writing crimes committed on Cape Cod and elsewhere...

As a Cape Cod *washashore* writer and cartoonist, who never took a writing workshop course and whose writing is often provoked by vacuous statements issued by "esteemed" and "distinguished" writers of the emerita ilk, I have been excluded (fully ostracized) on the Cape, so I sure as hell know what "inclusion" really means. In essence, it simply means thou shalt not criticize (question and challenge) the elite hypocrites manning the diverse cultural helms and usually bellowing Diversity, Equity ... and, of course, Inclusion. My

lengthy [list of bona fides](#) of DEI-Exclusion, besides the Center, includes Mid-Cape Cultural Council, *Cape Cod Poetry Review*, *Cape Cod Times*, *Provincetown Arts*, and the Cultural Center of Cape Cod.

In 2012, I'd written and disseminated a free-speech broadside, "[CAPE COD WRITERS CENTER: Proponent of Censorship, Ostracizing, and Banning.](#)" Unsurprisingly, it did not elicit a response, nor did the tract distributed in 2014, "[J'accuse Cape Cod Poets, Writers, Artists, Journalists, and College Instructors for Grotesque Apathy Regarding Issues of Basic Human Rights and Democracy.](#)" Again, silence is golden for those who detest vigorous debate (i.e., democracy).

In any case, the writing statement of privileged Keynote Speaker/Yale University English Lecturer Verlyn Klinkenborg (see below), part of which was highlighted in the cartoon, was amazingly anodyne and was, essentially, the opposite of George Orwell's statement above, which reflects why I tend to write and, of course, explains my being DEI-excluded. Sadly, writing has largely become another arm of the establishment industry. The writing workshops, writing professors, writing conferences, writing agents, writing scholarships, grants and awards, writing degrees and courses, writing magazines like *Poets & Writers* and *Book Pages* are integral parts of it. Few writers dare criticize the writing industry and those making careers out of it. Do so ... and be prepared for full ostracizing. Below is Klinkenborg's full statement, as it appears in the Center's brochure on page 3.

Why Write

We assume the answer is somehow implicit and that it's a question barely worth asking. We write to express ourselves, of course, to join the global conversation of writers. We write because it's culturally acceptable and

desirable—an approved activity—and because good writers seem to accrue respect and admiration. But if you let the question— “why write?” —sit with you, you begin to realize there’s something strange and almost indecipherable in it. It’s a radical question—a troubling one that’s always been worth thinking about. My hope in my keynote talk is to look closely at this question—and in doing so, perhaps trouble you in ways you may find useful.

Why write, according to Klinkenborg, is “a question barely worth asking,” and yet he asks it. His response likely reflects the writers at the helm of the Center: “to join the global conversation of writers.” Yet that is certainly not why I write. And so somehow I am not part of Klinkenborg’s all-inclusive term “we.” My first criticism thus would be for writers like Klinkenborg to avoid that term, used perhaps by most political hacks today. As far as those like him, I am certainly not part of the “conversation,” not part of “we.” The most absurd part of his statement is that “we” (all writers) somehow write to become acceptable, desirable, and approved. Orwell must surely be rolling in his grave. I sure am... and yet I’m not even dead ... yet. Soviet-State Poet Gorky must surely be clapping in his grave. Recall he praised Stalin’s gulag concentration camps.

It is aberrant that an educated person like Klinkenborg would argue that so-called “good writers seem to accrue respect and admiration” without wondering or noting by whom. Clearly, the admirers tend to be the privileged establishment academics and other cultural apparatchiks with voice who deify writers, as laureates, honorable, and acclaimed. If a writer is openly highly critical of the writing/money machine, he or she will certainly not be respected and admired by machine cogs like Klinkenborg. Most writers learn to obey the prime writer’s taboo: thou shalt not criticize the hands that feed (e.g., the distributors of tenure, grants, invitations, publications,

awards, etc.). And in the absence of hardcore criticism, as in “let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine” (Thoreau), the writing machine (e.g., Cape Cod Writers Center) will prosper and continue to co-opt and castrate writers... in the darkness of “selling more books on Amazon.”

Klinkenborg states, “But if you let the question— ‘why write?’ —sit with you, you begin to realize there’s something strange and almost indecipherable in it.” In reality, perhaps it is something the “we” cannot contemplate, but it is not really strange at all, at least no stranger than why we exercise, why we travel, why we watch the news. Death obnubilates everything, which is why society (the establishment) likes to ignore that fact. In essence, I write because writing helps me deflect from the reality that death is indeed waiting around the corner to annihilate me and everything I’ve written. Society depends on death denial and the rule of insanity.

The Center has a definite stench of elitism, which reflects that of writing and art in general. Its 2023 conference, for example, takes place at “The Resort and Conference Center at Hyannis.” Self-glorification seems to have become its m.o., as in “our distinguished faculty,” “acclaimed authors teachers,” and “vibrant, nationally recognized literary organization.” A thinking individual would, of course, wonder who made the “distinguished” and “acclaimed” designations and why. Twelve Conference “faculty” designates and three “agents” have been chosen to teach the courses.

As for the monetary aspect of the Center, pages 17 and 18 of its brochure inform that to attend, the cost is \$80; and to listen to Klinkenborg, the cost is an additional \$30. The writing courses are as high as \$170 (for three sessions). For a one-hour manuscript evaluation by a chosen “mentor,” the cost is an additional \$150. The Center is financed partially, if not largely, by public tax dollars via the Mass Cultural Council and the [Arts Foundation of Cape Cod](#). The Cape Cod 5 Cents Savings Bank is also a funder. A few of the course

titles that stand out, at least for me, include "Selling More Books on Amazon," "Query Killers," "Agent Panel," and "Poetic Form: Thinking inside the Box." The last one seems to sadly incarnate poets and writers today. As for "Tone in Poetry," another course, I wrote the following poem a few decades ago. Do you think the Center would like it? Do you think it would like me to read it at the Conference and discuss the need for real criticism and debate in the field of writing? Well, I sent this essay to the Center. No response was ever received. (See my email below, as well as the one I sent regarding the cartoon I sketched on the Center.)

The Tone *Is* the Message *Is* the Tone

*I like what you're saying but
you've got the wrong tone,
wrote an editor, then
another and another and another.*

Grab a flap of flab from the belly literati,
twist and tug, twist and pull,
bring forth hesitant, repressed indignation.

*If you want to increase your congregation,
replied yet another... tin soldier
of the vast ocean army of invincibility,
you've got to smoothen out
the wrinkles in your voice.*

Speak rude truth, and rage, rage
through the dying light of the establishment,
and educe ineluctably
the buried anger of crushed individuality.

*I'd like to publish some of your work,
wrote another tin man, though
disguised in mask of freethinker.*

*You make some very interesting points,
but I don't think our niche of readers
would appreciate your peculiar bluntness.*

With the ax, fall revenues,
with the sword, tumble advertising dollars,
with the shotgun, shrink subscribers,
with the right tone, wane truth and justice,
with the pen of thin skin, butchery behind charade.

*I'd like to see more of you in our publication,
wrote another editor,
but your discourse needs to be more civil.
It even makes me feel a bit uncomfortable,
so I could imagine our audience might also feel that way.*

Kill the voice and the word be sameness
Kill the discrepancy and business be usual
Kill the messenger and the message be no longer

*I think what you need is to add a little humor,
wrote a friend,
to get more people on your bandwagon, then
you could turn the blade on your laughing readers.*

Ever humorless, though, and angry, raucous and uncivil,
fed with the fodder of consistency on how to build a
constituency,
I still choose the coffin of anonymity...

From: George Slone <todslone@hotmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, November 22, 2023 1:32 PM

To: verlyn.klinkenborg@yale.edu <verlyn.klinkenborg@yale.edu>;
writers@capecodwriterscenter.org
<writers@capecodwriterscenter.org>

Subject: A Critical Essay on CCWC and Klinkenborg

To the CCWC,

Below is a critical essay I wrote with your regard. Did you like the cartoon I sent you in June? Is real criticism even permitted in the realm of elitist establishment writers? Evidently, it is NOT! As noted in my previous email, I am a fully ostracized critic of poets, writers, curators, journalists, and other censors on Cape Cod and elsewhere...

Au plaisir,

G. Tod Slone (PhD–Université de Nantes, FR), aka P. Maudit,
Founding Editor (1998)

The American Dissident, a 501c3 Nonprofit Journal of
Literature, Democracy, and Dissidence

www.theamericandissident.org

www.theamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com

todslone@hotmail.com

From: George Slone <todslone@hotmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, June 25, 2023 2:21 PM

To: verlyn.klinkenborg@yale.edu <verlyn.klinkenborg@yale.edu>;
writers@capecodwriterscenter.org
<writers@capecodwriterscenter.org>

Subject: VK and CCWC satirized in a new P. Maudit cartoon

To the Cape Cod Writers Center (President of the Board of Directors Barbara Eppich Struna and Exec. Dir. Nancy Rubin Stuart, as well as Keynote Speaker Verlyn Klinkenborg):

VK and your Center have been satirized in a new P. Maudit cartoon, which will appear in the next issue of *The American Dissident*, published on Cape Cod. You won't find the journal at any Cape libraries because not one of them has been willing to subscribe. Sturgis Library even rejected a free subscription offer. That said, perhaps you'd like to invite me

to one of your events to speak about the journal, why I write, and my various crimes of the pen punished by banning and ostracizing. Fear not. I do not bite! But I do write.

Au plaisir,

Tod Slone (PhD—Université de Nantes, FR), aka P. Maudit,
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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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