

The Professional Poet—A Challenge to the Academy of American Poets

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (July 2023)



Member's Only, Curt Frankenstein, 1965

Advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket. —George Orwell, Why I Write

Caveat: Once upon a time (2007), I posted a comment on the

website of the Academy of American Poets. That comment was then censored (removed), and I was banned from posting any further comments on the site. Today, the Academy has eliminated comments sections and erased all previous comments from its site. For actual details, including the names and statements of Academy censors during that time of attempted vigorous debate, [examine](#) "The Academy of American Poets ... Censors, Bans, and Hates Freedom of Speech and Vigorous Debate, Cornerstones of Democracy."

For the sake of democracy and poetry, one ought to be able to speak/write openly, especially regarding state-sponsored pronouncements (i.e., advertisements). Unfortunately, the Academy of American Poets does not believe in democracy and thus prohibits alt-opinions, including critical poetry, within its realm. Nevertheless, as an independent poet, I stand not as a state poet. Instead, I exercise overtly my purported right to freedom of expression, no matter how abhorrent in the eyes of the Academy and its diverse poet cogs.

The Academy features a statement of vacuity, normally from a known poet, on its [website's main page](#). A quote by Joy Harjo was featured for quite some time: *My role as a poet is as a healer. Poetry is a healing force.* Examine the prohibited satirical [cartoon](#) I sketched with that regard, "The First Native-American Medicine-Woman Poet Laureate." More recently, a quote from "the Nebraska State Poet" Matt Mason was featured:

Poetry itself is one of the very real foundations of community.

And so, I contemplated and responded. And of course, the esteemed, distinguished poets recognized by the Academy would not like that. Those who dare not will always belittle those

who dare. In essence, how was Mason's statement possible when most people didn't even read poetry, nor really give a damn about government poets like Mason himself, who evidently was not living in the real world, but rather on that of the Academy Cloud 9? Moreover, "community" inevitably implies a certain degree of conformity and absence of independent hardcore dissidence. Should not poets rather stand for truth, as opposed to conformity? Rare poets, who dare challenge the chambers-of-commerce poet modus operandi of conformity, are inevitably shadow-banned to the point where they don't exist, at least not publicly. When poets become palatable for the chambers of commerce, college and university deans and presidents, and the Academy itself, they become neutered and end up serving as court-jester entertainers. Presidential poets illustrate that deplorable occurrence. The Biden inaugural poet hoopla magnified it (see "[The Ornamental Role of the Poet in a Democratic Society](#)"). Rare poets like François Villon, for example, who dared criticize the Catholic masters of Paris in the mid-1400s, are simply ostracized (Villon was exiled in 1463 and never heard from again). Poets who dare not criticize the Academy willfully self-castrate, self-co-opt, and self-corrall. After all, how else can a poet win awards, obtain grants, invitations, and tenure, as well as state laureate-anointments?

In the Academy interview, "[Poets Laureate Fellows Interviews: Matt Mason](#)," the

interviewer was unnamed. Why hide behind anonymity? Poets, perhaps more than others, ought to be courageous and speak openly without hiding in anonymity. Why does the Academy not encourage openness? In any case, "What do you hope for the

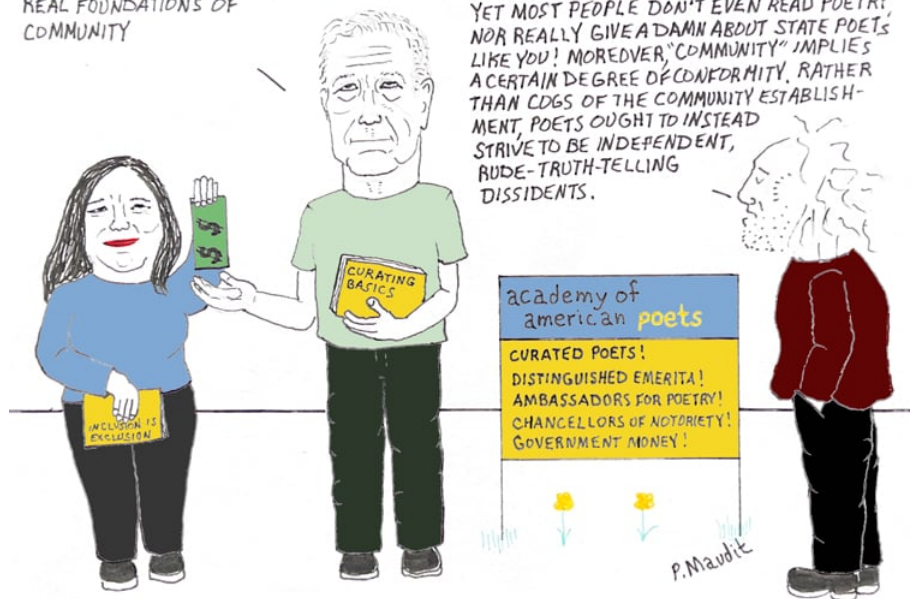
future of poetry in Nebraska?" was the first question posed by the anonymous Academy apparatchik (poetic alliteration!). Now, how about a future where all poet voices are permitted to express themselves, even when against the grain? Nope! "I would love to see Nebraska poets get more recognition," responded Mason. "Recognition," not truth and courage to exercise real, visceral freedom of expression! And then Mason names a handful of recognized poets. So, for him, increased recognition for the already recognized seemed to be the goal.

What to expect from the mouth of a state poet, if not hype and positivity on steroids? "When I go into schools and colleges in Nebraska, the writing done by students here is electric; there is something special happening here that I think demands to be more widely seen," declared Mason. Might that "electric" include CRT-indoctrination and inclination? Indeed, one might wonder to what degree CRT has penetrated the poetry industry (e.g., the Academy). Would encouraged criticism of the latter be deemed "electric"? Unlikely. Mason stated:

The State Poets—Curated Poets Curating Poets

Featuring Tess O'Dwyer, Chair of the Board, Academy of American Poets, and "the Nebraska State Poet" Matt Mason

POETRY ITSELF IS ONE OF THE VERY REAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY



NB: Mason is featured on the Academy of American Poets website. Professional poets like him form the core of poetry's problem: the pushing of poetry palatable for professionals. Yet why must poetry be pushed like EVs? Climate change? Money!

I left my full time job last summer to see if I could make my living as a poet and a speaker, something there's no good road map for here. Anything else which could help make this more likely, even a small cushion, would go a long way in expanding what a state poet can do for Nebraska.

But the fundamental problem of those able to live off their poetry is that they have to ineluctably be sellouts to a certain degree. State-poet Gorky, who praised the Soviet slave labor, still serves as a prime example. Solzhenitsyn wrote in his preface to *The Gulag Archipelago* (see pdf [here](#).)

Material for this book was also provided by thirty-six Soviet writers, headed by Maxim Gorky, authors of the disgraceful book on the White Sea Canal, which was the first in Russian literature to glorify slave labor.

Let's not forget state-poets laureate and tenured-poet academics, who praise their colleges and universities. Mason proclaimed:

Being named state poet does force me to try harder to act as an advocate for poetry and poets and the arts. As the old Spider-Man adage goes: "With great power comes great responsibility." So I need to use this position to shed light on other writers, and to show how writing poetry benefits us all.

But Mason forgot to also mention advocating for the chambers of commerce! And how precisely does writing poetry somehow benefit everyone? Only in the eyes of poets who seek to deify themselves (and their poet comrades) and their verse! And that in itself incarnates the intellectual plague metastasizing in the heart of poetry today. Poets are NOT gods. But if an independent mind examines the Academy's website, they are definitely depicted thusly. It is surprising that there is not an Academy of American Academics with the goal of deification of professors! And why isn't there an Academy of American Artists ... and an Academy of American Hack Politicians?

And so the anonymous Academy apparatchik asked, "How can a poet, or poetry, bring a community together?" How about praising the gulags? Or how about encouraging in-lockstep with CRT indoctrinates? A poet ought to be in the business of truth and individuality, not in that of smiley-face togetherness. Leave that to the political hacks! But Mason instead responded, though a tad critically, though in self-interest of course:

Granted, many communities ignore their poets and, instead, shower their riches on college football coaches and the like, but I like to imagine a world where the voices of our poets ring out more loudly.

Those in power, including laureates, have a tendency to speak generalities. One must ask why Mason didn't mention any personal experiences with speaking truth to power and testing the waters of democracy in Nebraska? Well, such experiences would have likely prevented him from being ordained as a state poet. Why doesn't Mason stand up and actually dare question and challenge the poetry establishment—the poetry money machine serving to emasculate poets and poetry? Well, he

wouldn't have gotten an Academy fellowship, as in "That said, thank you, Academy of American Poets, your laureate fellowship is giving me the time I need to try and figure this all out!" Mason, of course, forgot to mention the moolah!

At the end of the interview, the anonymous Academy apparatchik then asked the state poet, "Is there a poem on Poets.org [the Academy website] that inspires you and your work? How so?" And so Mason responded:

In the two months after seeing Kinnell read (and, briefly, talking to him and finding him incredibly kind and encouraging), I wrote all the poems which got me into graduate school at the University of California, Davis, where I really started to pursue poetry professionally. I owe Kinnell and that single poem more than I can express.

"Pursue poetry professionally." Well, that alliteration beats mine. "Professional" inevitably implies making money, a certain conformity, and a certain absence of courage to break out of the herd. Professional poets are precisely at the core of poetry's problem today. Mason is in the professional business of pushing poetry—advertising (i.e., "rattling of a stick inside a swill bucket"). Yet why must poetry be pushed like EVs? The only answer to that is because it will benefit the professional poets and apparatchiks at the top of the establishment totem pole (oops, cultural appropriation). Professionals are inevitably cogs of the establishment machine, which Thoreau targeted with a fundamental comment: "let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine." And that machine of course includes the Academy ... and "[Poets Laureate Are Part of the Machine](#)." Mason ought to stand up and encourage students, during his "Nebraska Poetry Pen Pal Program" tours at schools and colleges, to whom he lectures,

to contemplate that statement and to question the inherent meaning of “professional.” Wouldn’t it be nice if poets encouraged independent thinking and overt questioning and challenging, instead of praising themselves—their buddies and icons—and begging for increased recognition? Why do state poets not have any grit? Well, evidently, if they had grit, they wouldn’t be state poets. Perhaps Mason ought to read and study George Orwell’s essay, “[Why I Write](#),” which seems to be the opposite of why he writes. In any event, this essay and a cartoon were sent to Exec. Dir. Matt Mason, Nebraska Writers Collective, and to a bunch of staff members of the Academy of American Poets. Unsurprisingly, not one person responded.

From: George Slone

Sent: Monday, February 27, 2023 2:55 PM

To: info@newwriters.org <info@newwriters.org>

Subject: Matt Mason satirized in a new P. Maudit cartoon

To Exec. Dir. Matt Mason, Nebraska Writers Collective:

Attached is a critical cartoon I just sketched on you. Is that even permitted in the highly-controlled world of poetry today? Hmm. Your comments are most welcome!

Au plaisir, 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

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todslone@hotmail.com

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From: George Slone <todslone@hotmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 28, 2023 9:58 AM

To: kmattawa@umich.edu <kmattawa@umich.edu>;

bzongker@loc.gov <bzongker@loc.gov>; gregerso@umich.edu
<gregerso@umich.edu>; mhowe@sarahlawrence.edu
<mhowe@sarahlawrence.edu>; kdawes4@unl.edu
<kdawes4@unl.edu>; natasha.trethewey@northwestern.edu
<natasha.trethewey@northwestern.edu>; inquiries@mellon.org
<inquiries@mellon.org>; mfa@pacificu.edu
<mfa@pacificu.edu>; Forrest_Gander@Brown.edu
<Forrest_Gander@Brown.edu>; dstjohn@usc.edu
<dstjohn@usc.edu>; academy@poets.org <academy@poets.org>;
aarios@asu.edu <aarios@asu.edu>; bhillman@stmarys-ca.edu
<bhillman@stmarys-ca.edu>; info@newwriters.org
<info@newwriters.org>

Subject: The Professional Poet—A Prohibited Challenge for
the Academy of American Poets

To the Academy of American Poets,

Please consider publishing the following prole poet
critique either on your website or in your American Poets
Magazine. Do you and your preferred poets stand for real
freedom of expression and vigorous debate, cornerstones of
a thriving democracy? That is the question, the one we all
know the answer to! Not one of you responded to my email
sent in 2019! (See below)

Au plaisir,

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

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[Table of Contents](#)

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 are being denied today because he is 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.” He has no criminal record at all 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.” He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of [*The American Dissident*](#).

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