



## ***The Motorcyclist by George Elliott Clarke***

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### **About the author:**

A revered poet, George Elliott Clarke was born in Windsor, Nova Scotia, near the Black Loyalist community of Three Mile Plains, in 1960. A graduate of the University of Waterloo (B.A., Hons., 1984), Dalhousie University (M.A., 1989) and Queen's University (Ph.D., 1993), he is now the inaugural E.J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto. An Assistant Professor of English and Canadian Studies at Duke University, North Carolina (1994-99), Clarke also served as the Seagrams Visiting Chair in Canadian Studies at McGill University (1998-99), and as a Noted Scholar at the University of British Columbia (2002) and as a Visiting Scholar at Mount Allison University (2005), and as the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professor in Canadian Studies at Harvard University (2013-14). He has also worked as a research, editor, social worker, parliamentary aide, and newspaper columnist. He lives in Toronto, Ontario, but he also owns land in Nova Scotia.

George Elliott Clarke's books include *George & Rue*, longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award; *Execution Poems*, winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry; and *Whylah Falls*, chosen for CBC's inaugural Canada Reads competition in 2002.

His many honours include the Portia White Prize for Artistic Achievement (1998), Governor-General's Award for Poetry (2001), the National Magazine Gold Medal for Poetry (2001), the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award (2004), the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Fellowship Prize (2005), the Dartmouth Book Award for Fiction (2006), the Eric Hoffer Book Award for Poetry (2009), appointment to the Order of Nova Scotia (2006), appointment to the Order of Canada at the rank of Officer (2008), and eight honorary doctorates. In 2015, he completed his three

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year term as the City of Toronto's Poet Laureate. On January 1, 2016, Mr. Clarke became Canada's seventh Poet Laureate.

Source: Parliament of Canada website (<http://www.parl.gc.ca/>)  
Publisher's website (<http://www.harpercollins.ca/>)

### **About this book:**

Carl Black is an intellectual and artist, a traveller, a reader and an unapologetic womanizer. A motorcyclist. He burns for the bohemian life, but is trapped in a railway porter's prosaic—at times humiliating—existence. Taking place over one dramatic year in Halifax, Nova Scotia, *The Motorcyclist* vividly recounts Carl's travels and romantic exploits as he tours the backroads of the east coast and the bedrooms of a series of beautiful women. Inspired by the life of George Elliott Clarke's father, the novel tells the story of a black working-class man caught between the expectations of his times and gleaming possibilities of the open road.

In vibrant, energetic, sensual prose, George Elliott Clarke brilliantly illuminates the life of a young black man striving for pleasure, success and, most of all, respect.

Source: Publisher's website (<http://www.harpercollins.ca/>)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How did you experience the book? Were you engaged immediately, or did it take you a while to "get into it"? How did you feel reading it—amused, sad, disturbed, confused, bored...?



2. Describe the main characters—personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.

- Why do characters do what they do?
- Are their actions justified?
- Describe the dynamics between characters (in a marriage, family, or friendship).
- How has the past shaped their lives?
- Do you admire or disapprove of them?
- Do they remind you of people you know?

3. Are the main characters dynamic—changing or maturing by the end of the book? Do they learn about themselves, how the world works and their role in it?

4. Discuss the plot:

- Is it engaging—do you find the story interesting?
- Is this a plot-driven book—a fast-paced page-turner?
- Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character?
- Were you surprised by complications, twists & turns?
- Did you find the plot predictable, even formulaic?

5. Talk about the book's structure.

- Is it a continuous story...or interlocking short stories?
- Does the time-line move forward chronologically?
- Does time shift back & forth from past to present?
- Is there a single viewpoint or shifting viewpoints?

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- Why might the author have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did?
  - What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the book?
6. What main ideas—themes—does the author explore? (Consider the title, often a clue to a theme.) Does the author use symbols to reinforce the main ideas?
  7. What passages strike you as insightful, even profound? Perhaps a bit of dialog that's funny or poignant or that encapsulates a character? Maybe there's a particular comment that states the book's thematic concerns?
  8. Is the ending satisfying? If so, why? If not, why not...and how would you change it?
  9. If you could ask the author a question, what would you ask? Have you read other books by the same author? If so how does this book compare. If not, does this book inspire you to read others?
  10. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

**Source: Litlovers.com** <http://www.litlovers.com/run-a-book-club/questions-for-fiction>

**Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:**

- eBook