

Poets Laureate Are Part of the Machine

by [G. Tod Slone](#) (January 2021)



Bildnis des Dichters Frank, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1917

Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.—Henry David Thoreau

As I often write, poetry has become co-opted, castrated, and corralled. Poetry is not dangerous to the elites in power, unless of course one is referring to those in Cuba, China, North Korea, and Venezuela. In America, money, the media, and politicians have succeeded in rendering poetry innocuous, at least the poetry that is accorded a public platform. Little questioning and challenging exists regarding the poetry machine—the monied foundations, government cultural councils, universities, festivals, and magazines. The media simply echoes the machine, as publicist for favored poets. In that sense, it is also clearly part of the machine.

In all the years I've been writing poetry, the machine has failed to co-opt and corral me. Evidently, the compulsion to speak and write truth exists deep within my being to the extent that I would rather speak and write truth than obtain publications, invitations, grants, laureateships, tenure, and general limelight. Why, I am left wondering, do the bulk of poets prefer the latter and behave more like politicians than parrhesiastes (truth tellers)? The power of groupthink and conformity, as opposed to staunch individuality, evidently overwhelms most poets today.

The article written by *Boston Globe* correspondent Grace Griffin, "[censored my comments](#)" and banned me from its forums, the amount in its coffers is simply not revealed on its website, but it received a 4.5 million-dollar grant in 2020 from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which will be distributed only to elite poets laureate of the machine. In fact, examine NPR's article, written by another service journalist, Elizabeth Blair (yes, Eric must be rolling in his grave), the "[Olayiwola's Boston City web page](#)", the poet notes:

Often times, those intersectionally-marginalized are not given a voice nor resources to dictate their circumstances. Porsha's writing uses a dangerous imagination that allows folks of the queer, woman, and black diaspora to dream up their best selves, outlive their oppressors, and dictate their joy.

Well, Olayiwola certainly can't lament being "intersectionally-marginalized" given her status as poet of privilege! According to Griffin, Olayiwola's first virtual (home) reading will be presented by former black Boston poet laureate of privilege Danielle Legros Georges (see my cartoon, right), which will be followed by an open mic hosted by Puerto Rican POC of privilege "poet and teaching artist" Anthony Febo. "Intersectionally-



marginalized” or rather intersectionally-privileged?! Well, identity politics rules in the poetry milieu today! Truth certainly does not!

According to Griffin, Olayiwola’s series will collaborate with staff at the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture. Machine politician Mayor Walsh, unsurprisingly praises Olayiwola: “Her commitment to bringing our communities together is so valuable during this time. We greatly appreciate her ongoing efforts to make Boston a place where everyone can express themselves creatively.”

Why are journalists seemingly incapable of criticizing poets embraced by politicians? And might poets who criticize, as I do, be permitted to express themselves creatively? Or is the inclusivity mantra likely nothing but Orwellian exclusivity? That’s certainly what I experienced when I openly criticized the Boston National Poetry Month Festival, See my cartoon, below, on its director, Real Estate-Broker Poet Harris Gardner.

Evidently, I am against lofty poet titles accorded by faceless judges of the machine, as well as poets cozying up to political hacks. The City of Boston’s poetry site (

The Poets: Angel of the Innocuous

Harris Gardener, Real Estate Broker Poet, Pusheart Nominee, Director, Boston’s Annual National Poetry Month Festival, And Author of *Among Us*, Poems about Angels

