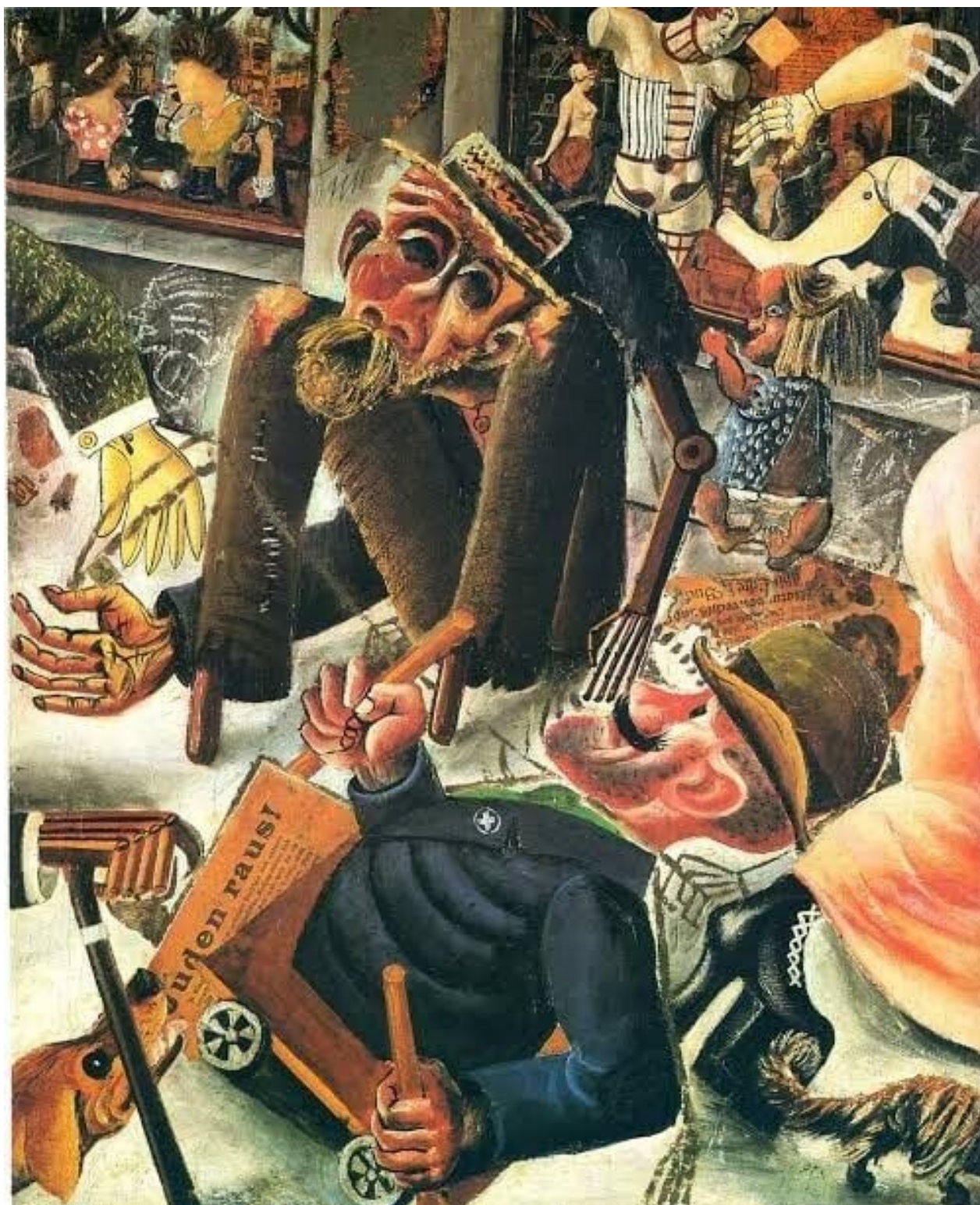


Notes on Partially Paralyzed Poets

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



Prague Street (Devoted to my Contemporaries)– Otto Dix,

1920

Police officers are all too aware that there are individuals in society who believe that to feel insulted or offended is a police matter. –General Secretary Callum Steele, Scottish Police Federation

Stay on the edge of truth, and it will not be at all difficult to counter criticism lodged by those on the edge of ideology. Democracy is on the decline. Censorship and ostracizing, as a means to deal with unwanted criticism, are on the incline. Freedom of expression is being replaced by pc-groupthink and mandatory identity-politics re-education.

An anonymous critic, Christine D, made some interesting points. Well, interesting because they summarize and echo the criticism I've been receiving for the past several decades. For Christine's full comments, as well as my full responses, see [here](#) and [here](#). Her comments center around two cartoons I sketched, beginning with the one on gay Chinese-American Chen Chen, one of the "10 Poets Who Will Change the World," according to *Poets & Writers*, whose editors are featured in the second cartoon. The fray, battle, or debate began when I sent the Chen cartoon to Chen and his creative-writing colleagues at Brandeis University, none of whom, including Chen, deigned to respond (i.e., point out an untruth or a fault in logic).

To Chen Chen, Visiting Poet-in-Residence, English Department, Brandeis, University:

You have my permission to introduce your students to my criticism with your regard and the sad state of affairs of

poetry in general. For the cartoon I sketched on you, see <https://www.theamericandissident.org.blogspot.com/2020/11/cheng-cheng.html>. For my criticism of tons of other establishment poetasters like you, simply examine my blog site. Please do introduce the site to your students... and colleagues! BTW, I am a fervent advocate of free speech and vigorous debate, two cornerstones of democracy despised not only by Communist Chinese apparatchiks, but also by apparatchiks of the American Academic/Literary Establishment, where silence is always golden...

Either Chen or one of his academic colleagues likely informed four different women, each of whom responded. It is interesting how anything at all in the cartoons can easily deflect the attention of the critics entirely away from the crystal-clear message. In fact, it is still quite amazing to me that not one of the critics understood or dared mention the message in the Chen cartoon: the utter inanity of *Poets & Writers* magazine anointing "[10 Poets Who Are Going to Change the World](#)." That insane title exists on the front cover, though in small type, of a [2018 issue](#). I wrote a critical essay with its regard, "[10 Poets Who Definitely Will Not Change the World](#)," and sent it to the *P&W* editors, who chose not to respond.

Chen noted that he likes to do his laundry. Perhaps I should not have drawn Chen in a dress. Evidently, I was a bit [over-influenced](#) by Harvard University prof/poet/critic cross-dresser Stephen Burt. Perhaps also I should not have referred to Chen as "she." Certainly, I'd be willing to bend on both of those points. Still, no doubt, even without those two points, the critics would not have been capable of focusing on the crystal-clear message. The first respondent, Katherine Meade, wrote:

Hello,

My name is Kat Mead, a writer and an academic. I'm writing to tell you to stop sending racist, homophobic cartoons to people. It isn't a matter of free speech – it's offensive and it's harassment. It's hateful and malicious, and utterly pointless to boot.

Stop wasting your time and others'. I should think you'd at least value your own time more highly, if not actually have the decency to respect other people's basic humanity.

Kat

Interesting, right? A direct order sent by a future New-Stasi officer? As mentioned, the message of the cartoon was quite clear, but Kat could not grasp it. Why would perhaps most poets believe my criticism to be beyond the borders of acceptable criticism? Mind-numbing indeed! Katherine Morgan wrote essentially the same thing as Kat:

Hi Tod,

I'm curious what you were hoping to get out of providing someone with a racist, hurtful, and homophobic cartoon. I feel like there must be something wrong inside of your heart, thinking that this would be a good idea to draw and also send to someone. People deserve kindness. What you didn't wasn't, and now you've hurt someone for making fun of who they are. I know that it sounds childish, but how would you like it if someone did that to you? Would it make you feel good? Smart? Handsome? Kind? I hope that one day you apologize to Chen Chen because that's what a good person does. I know that you can be a better person than this.

Katherine D. Morgan

The third email I received was from Claire Rudy Foster, a self-professed “queer, nonbinary trans writer” from Portland, Oregon. Now, her or his or them’s letter might make a thinking individual chuckle. Note the absence of reason, supplanted by ad hominem and an array of other disparaging epithets.

Hi Tod,

It’s been brought to my attention that you disseminated a racist cartoon of a friend of mine to my friend and his colleagues at Brandeis. Apparently you are offended by my friend’s presence in academia and his recent essay about universality. Your bizarre, groundless comments about “Community Chinese apparatchiks” is racist and vile. You should be ashamed of yourself for pursuing such a low and valueless line of thought. You are quick to tout your PhD, but with actions like these, one wonders how smart you really are.

Your immature little prank is not criticism, satire, or humor. You aren’t funny. In addition to being in bad taste, your harassment of my friend calls your intellect into question. You are not a rebel; you represent a vast and disgusting demographic of half-baked, armchair brains who think it’s “edgy” to perpetuate xenophobic and homophobic stereotypes. Punching down just to get a reaction is a cheap move: any bully can do it. If that’s the only way you know how to get attention, I feel really sorry for you. Maybe if you put that energy into crafting an original thought, you’d come up with something worthwhile?

I am glad that my friend has taken steps to protect himself. I am not a member of the academic establishment,

nor do I have a reputation to preserve, so I feel fine telling you to go fuck yourself.

Go fuck yourself.

Sincerely,

Foster

Dare criticize the communist Chinese, and be deemed a racist! For the cartoon I sketched on Foster, see www.theamericandissident.org.blogspot.com/2020/12/claire-rudy-foster.html. Now, of course, I wrote back to each person in a vain attempt to explain why the cartoon had been sketched in the first place. Below, I list the essential, negative–oh–so–hurtful–comments received from them and my response to each. We are ever nearing a “brave new world” status, where citizens are very easily offended, unwanted opinions are censored, Orwellian terminology is prevalent, and ideology supersedes reason and facts.

♦ *Stop sending racist, homophobic cartoons to people!*

It is not automatically racist or homophobic to satirize a POC and/or queer person. Also, I have a legal right to send cartoons to people, at least I hope so.

♦ *It isn't a matter of free speech—it's offensive and it's harassment!*

It is obviously a matter of free speech, which includes anything that offends the sensitive. Harassment has a legal workplace definition. For it to be a legal matter, one must bully a person, not just once, but a number of times to the extent that a reasonable person can no longer perform his or her job.

♦ *It's hateful and malicious, and utterly pointless to*

boot!

What is hateful for the offended female and/or Chen might not be hateful for me and vice versa. Highly subjective terms are meaningless and deflect from reason.

♦ *Stop wasting your time and others'!*

Well, it is a creative activity, something I really enjoy doing. Also, to criticize those like Chen, who likely never get criticized at all, could possibly provoke thought. So, it is not a waste of my time.

♦ *People deserve kindness. What you didn't wasn't, and now you've hurt someone for making fun of who they are. I know that it sounds childish, but how would you like it if someone did that to you? Would it make you feel good? Smart? Handsome? Kind?*

Did Stalin and Castro deserve kindness? Generalizations are by nature faulty. If indeed, I somehow "hurt" Chen, then he should get the hell out of the poetry limelight! If someone did a cartoon on me, I'd be honored or, if negative, I'd question and challenge it with reason and facts, certainly not with whimpering and/or ad hominem.

♦ *Apparently you are offended by my friend's presence in academia and his recent essay about universality!*

Never did I state that Chen's presence in academe offended me! Never have I read or even heard of that essay.

♦ *Your bizarre, groundless comments about 'Community Chinese apparatchiks' is racist and vile!*

The term I used was not "community," but rather "communist." Should I be praising communist apparatchiks? Wow. And indeed, BTW, I am a fervent advocate of free speech and vigorous debate, two cornerstones of democracy despised not only by Communist Chinese apparatchiks, but also by apparatchiks of the American Academic/Literary Establishment, where silence always seems to be golden ...

♦ An anonymous commenter wrote: *Why the fuck would you send this to his work colleagues? Why would you send it to him?* It is amazing to me how some people are afraid to stand up and use their real names, when opining. Indeed, perhaps they shouldn't opine if they are so fearful. I sent the cartoon because it was valid criticism. And it is my humble opinion that academics should not be protected from the latter.

As for "Christine D.," the following is a handful of her comments and my retorts. D. states she is an electrical engineer. She sounds intelligent, though often deflects via a kill-the-messenger-avoid-his-message nonresponse, a rather common tactic that in reality does NOT undermine or otherwise disprove the message.

♦ *You think everyone is out to get you, and so you attack a man who did nothing to you. What kind of normal person keeps getting banned from entering libraries?*

Well, I do NOT think, nor have I ever stated that everyone is out to get me. Chen is in the poetry limelight, so should be wide open to criticism, not just tedious hagiography. Well, I got banned twice, once by [Watertown Free Public Library](#) and once by [Sturgis Library](#). Twice is not the same as "keeps getting banned." True, I am definitely not a "normal person" because I overtly question and challenge the academic/literary establishment. In the case of the libraries, I questioned and challenged director hypocrisy, in particular, regarding the collection development statement that "libraries should provide material and information presenting all points of view." My points of view and those I publish have been permanently banned from Sturgis Library, my neighborhood library.

♦ *But I am struck by the recursive content of your speech, it all seems to be about ... the trammeling of your personal speech.*

From personal experience with corruption and personal testing the waters of democracy in diverse institutions, something far too many poets lack and do not have the courage to do, I have extrapolated. Without such personal experience, one will likely end up with a distorted reality. From my experience, I have learned the difference between de facto and de jura freedom of expression rights. I have learned that career always stands before truth and the courage to speak it openly. If my speech is "trammeled," then others ought to stand up and help protect it rather than seek to diminish it. If someone else's speech were "trammeled," I would stand up. Poets, in general, remain seated. Chen remains seated. Christine D. remains seated. Democracy cannot survive when citizens remain seated. Thankfully, poet Russell Streur did not remain seated and contacted the State Secretary of Records of Massachusetts regarding the banning (see sturgisbansdissident.blogspot.com).

♦ *As for them banning you, unfortunately because of certain overlap in manner with another type of person found in libraries, they have perhaps perceived you as 'mentally unstable in a way they find physically threatening'!*

That of course is the perfect ploy for killing freedom! And indeed, Sturgis Library director, Lucy Loomis, used it and wrote "for the safety of the staff and public." Criticize in writing and be deemed by those criticized as "mentally unstable" and a possible physical danger. No proof of the accusation required! Not one person at that library has ever been threatened by me. And not one person ever claimed to have been threatened! Yes, I am dangerous ...

♦ *Anyway, I am against censorship, but I am for personally being mindful of the reasons for people's feelings.*

Well, I guess we should put D. in Salman Rushdie's "but brigade," as in I believe in free speech, BUT ... Or I am against censorship, BUT ... In essence, she really does NOT believe in free speech and is NOT against censorship. And for some reason, those like her cannot admit that reality. Recall Rushdie's statement made after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in 2015:

So anyway, the thing that I come to—I used this phrase on TV the other day—the rise of the “but brigade.” I got so sick of the goddamn but brigade. And now the moment somebody says ‘Yes I believe in free speech, but,’ I stop listening. “I believe in free speech, but people should behave themselves.” “I believe in free speech, but we shouldn’t upset anybody.” “I believe in free speech, but let’s not go too far.”

♦ *They [poets] all go to workshops and criticize each other's writing to the extent it partially paralyzes them sometimes.*

Well, not ALL poets go to establishment workshops. I sure as hell do not. Also, not ALL poets end up partially paralyzed when criticized. Truly, there is something wrong with a poet like Chen, who ends up partially paralyzed. Again, a poet like that needs to stay the hell out of the limelight! A vibrant democracy demands vibrant debate and vibrant criticism. One will NOT receive such criticism at an establishment poetry workshop. After all, workshop leaders surely would not want to

partially

paralyze

paying

poets!

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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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