

Tenure: An Heraclitan Feat

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Among the most famous frescoes of the Italian Renaissance, Raphael's *School of Athens* commissioned to adorn the papal apartments in the Vatican, features the intellectual and cultural elite of the classical and early modern world milling about the central figures of Plato and Aristotle. At the fresco's foreground and quite set apart from the action is a pensive Heraclitus (modeled after Raphael's great rival, Michelangelo), also known as "the weeping philosopher."

While this choice of detail - of Michelangelo depicted as a philosopher noted for melancholia -- may seem a dismal choice of image to accompany the crop of tenure lectures contained in this volume, it becomes more apropos when one is reminded that it is to Heraclitus that we credit the philosophy of eternal change, remembered more commonly in the popular imagination in the aphorism - "you never step in the same river twice." Like the Heraclitan river, the academe as an institution embodies both seeming permanence and eternal flux. This volume's essays, most of them delivered in a rite of passage towards academic tenure, similarly signal both change and intransience.

Tenure-track academics ensure the continuity of tradition even as they represent the cutting edges of that tradition. This volume's lead essay, Lori Santos "A Truth Universally Acknowledged?: Rewriting Jane Austen's

Marriage Plot” exemplifies this idea through an insightful reading of the trajectories of Jane Austen originated fictions. Understood as “(post)feminist” engagements with Austen, the texts subject to examination – an alternative perspective retelling, a choose your own adventure type novel, and a novel outlining the adventures through the mythical theme park called *Austenland* -- reveal themselves as at once canonical and iconoclastic. No less probing and inventive is Michaela Atienza’s “Strange Technology: Fictocriticism and the Cyborg” that interrogates the edges between creative and critical writing. Commonly held as a sacrosanct dichotomy in the profession, Atienza demonstrates the radical viability of creative writing as critical writing in her fictocritical take on the figure of the cyborg and convincingly shows the potential of this new critical form to “open up a space of possibility” that “forces us to see knowledge as provisional rather than given.” Sandra Roldan’s creative nonfictional essay similarly explores the permutations of one such space of possibility, of “the still point,” to isolate its significance to the writing process in an essay at once autobiographical and erudite. Anna Sanchez, on the other hand, investigates the representations of intellectual disabilities in the genre of Science Fiction in order to at once expose and explode the limits of representation. “Science fiction,” she argues “can magnify the diversity of experience in the realm of developmental disability... [In addition,] the lens of disability enriches the SF mega-text, providing both a new way of seeing to people without disabilities, and an entry point for the lived experiences of people with disabilities and their families, who are all in search of possibility beyond the limits of a diagnosis.”

Each of these tenure lectures works towards redefining or even creating new fields of study even as they mark a point of entry into a longstanding academic

tradition. These essays are joined by others representing more established voices in the field of literature and literary study. But even these already established scholars are represented here by their less than conventional, even surprising, work. Tim Marr's essay on Herman Melville tantalizingly begins with the promise of explaining how Melville's "planetary imagination" led to a visiting professorship at the DECL. Cyril Wong's queer poetry should by now no longer merit the labels "bold" or "unconventional" were it not for the fact that he is a Singaporean writer. The esteemed literary critic, Rajeev Patke, perhaps pulls this volume's biggest surprise with his intellectual, if wry, poetry.

The history of academic tenure tells us that the practice evolved as a guarantee of academic freedom. The job security that comes with tenure (a privilege accorded only to teachers, professors and judges) allows those who have it a level of fearlessness and creativity valued in the academe as nowhere else. In a sense, the concept of academic tenure or its promise, fuels the selections in this volume.

The tenure lectures, and by extension their publication in an academic journal, signal the entrance into a community where one is expected to be a lively and significant presence. This entails not only a comprehensive knowledge of one's academic field but also, and more importantly, original and important contributions to that field. Academic tenure ensures one a voice and tenure lectures stage that granting of voice. Albeit difficult situations where one must render often highly specialized research to the scrutiny of peers whose own assumptions and training may vary widely from one's own, tenure lectures exemplify the process of finding voice, of making sure one is understood and appreciated by a wider but

highly discerning community. It is not about making one's voice popular but of earning the respect of a like-minded, if diversely thinking, institution.

In the end, the tenure lecture is ultimately a test of character. And of character, Heraclitus had also this to say: *Ethos antropoi daimon*, "character is fate."