



Shattered and Patched: Life in a Regional Comprehensive University

Description

Shattered and Patched: Life in a Regional Comprehensive University

Memo

Working in higher education is challenging these days. Regardless of individual initiatives, the broad ethos of university systems, especially Regional Comprehensives, is shattered and patched. I'm an associate professor at a Midwestern Regional Comprehensive State University. I've worked here full-time since 2015. Regional Comprehensive Universities are public institutions created to prepare a regional workforce. Unlike the research focused (R1) state universities where I trained, or the small liberal arts university of my first teaching gig, this place, like most Regional Comprehensives, has minimal budget and maximal expectations for faculty and staff. We're scrappy and student-focused, growing leaders of students from historically excluded groups. I love the influence we faculty can have on students' lives, literally helping them chart a path never previously considered.

'The work climate was initially stressful, but manageable.'

I was hired on a tenure track appointment at the early part of a multi-year budget decline. Each year there have been more cuts. Hiring is delayed. We're to do the same work with less funding. The work climate was initially stressful, but manageable. Post Covid, my institution has shifted from financially strapped to a state of extreme budget crisis. The organizational system is a web of layers that seem in constant battle – fossilized against change. In recent years, many tenured faculty have been retrenched (i.e. laid off). Faculty union and administrative leaders spar contentiously. I've been using

Pantoum and Sijo poetic forms to exploring the autoethnographic question, “What is it like to live and work in a regional comprehensive university during a time of major organizational change and intense conflict?”

Pantoum poetry originated in Malaysia in the 15th century. A Pantoum can be any length, but the basic structure is repeated 4-line stanzas in which the 2nd and 4th lines of one stanza become the 1st and 3rd lines of the next stanza. It’s common for the first and last lines of the poem to be the same. A sijo is a Korean poetic form that consists of 44 to 46 syllables. Traditionally, it is written in three lines, with each line containing 14 to 16 syllables. My writing adheres to the basic elements of these structures with a leaning towards westernized forms.

The AutoEthnographer

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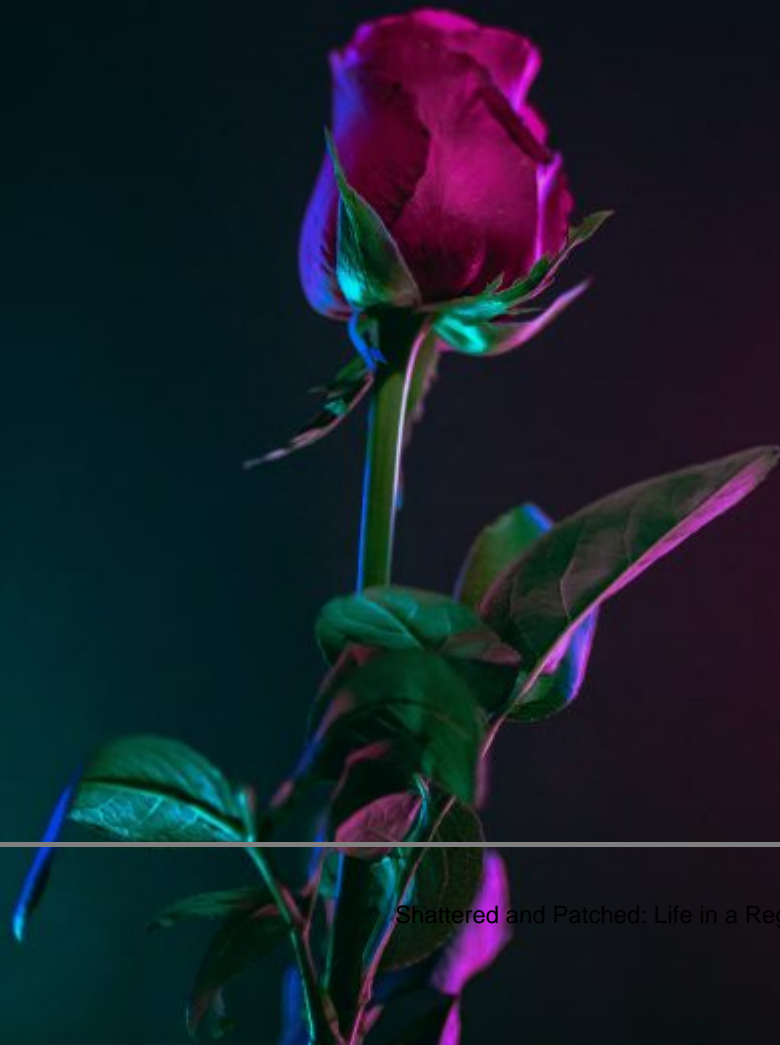


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Pantom for a Regional Comprehensive

The system is shattered and patched.
Why don't they participate and engage?
Perhaps the disengaged are the survivors.
Biding time until a life raft floats by.

Why don't they participate and engage?
If only, if only...
Biding time until a life raft floats by.
Should I hang on, keep treading water?

If only, if only...
The students, they've changed.
Should I hang on, keep treading water?
The faculty overloaded or checked out.

The students, they've changed.
Asynchronous communication flattens nuance.
The faculty, overloaded or checked out.
Suppressed hostility approaches boiling.

Asynchronous communication flattens nuance.
Keep it nice yet assume diabolical intent.
Suppressed hostility approaches boiling.
Teacher evaluations. Meet and confer. The pressure cooker explodes.

Keep it nice yet assume diabolical intent.
Perhaps the disengaged are the survivors.
Teacher evaluations. Meet and confer. The pressure cooker explodes.
The system is shattered and patched.

Pantom: Union and Administration Faceoff

Our administrators are villains, says the union
Fifteen minutes ago, they too were faculty

They've become evil incarnate
Union leaders fight for autonomy while the budget circles the drain

Fifteen minutes ago, they too were faculty
Committing blood and sweat for student success
Union leaders fight for faculty autonomy while the budget circles the drain
Any new revenue-creating initiative, questioned and suspect

Committing blood and sweat for student success
We speak about academic equity, the power of education to change lives
Any new revenue-creating initiative, questioned and suspect
We will die for faculty rights, sacrificing student opportunity on the cross of academic freedom

We speak of academic equity, the power of education to change lives
Yet, we disembowel programs that allow degree completion for single, working parents
We will die for faculty rights, sacrificing student opportunity on the cross of academic freedom
White privilege, gender privilege, faculty privilege –top of the food chain

Yet we disembowel programs that allow degree completion for single, working parents
The very students we claim to serve.
White privilege, gender privilege, faculty privilege – top of the food chain
What's best for me overrides what's best for all.

The very students we claim to serve
They've become evil incarnate
What's best for me overrides what's best for all.
Our administrators are villains, says the union

Sijo Poem for Regional Comprehensives

The system is shattered and patched; submerged, gasping, barely buoyant.
They don't participate and engage. The Titanic passages forward.
Inching towards the iceberg. Are the disengaged the survivors?

Credits

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The AutoEthnographer