

Meeting Place

In the sixth line of *Macbeth*, the first Witch asks her sisters: ‘Where the place?’ (1.1.6). While the time and location ‘to meet with Macbeth’ (1.1.7) are prioritised by the Witches, questions of place are not ones we frequently ask of ourselves or our students. This is a question which place-based learning (PBL) asks educators and learners to be cognisant of: ‘where are we?’ (Shannon & Galle, 2017: 5). Where is our place of learning and what meaning does it generate for the teaching and learning of Shakespeare?

For the Witches, place is inseparable from their characterisation – they are living proof that ‘places make us’ (Gruenewald, 2003b: 621). They are partly given form by the stormy weather and elemental disturbance of their meeting in ‘thunder, lightning and in rain’ (1.1.2). Their connection to the ‘the heath’ (1.1.6) is axiomatic to readers and spectators. Banquo’s astonished reaction to the sight of the Witches instinctively reads them in relation to their place: in fact, his talk is all of place when he and Macbeth stumble upon the Witches, as he wonders ‘How far is’t called to Forres?’ (1.3.39). Upon encountering the Witches, they appear as ‘wild’ as the weather they describe and ‘look not like th’inhabitants o’th’ earth, / And yet are on’t’ (1.3.40–2). Upon vanishing, they are interpreted by Banquo as ‘bubbles’ of the earth and by Macbeth ‘as breath into the wind’ (1.3.79, 82). In this way, the Witches embody the basic premise of place studies, which ‘begins to unpick the separation implicit in the preposition *in* – and finds rather that we are *of* the landscape, indeed that we *are* the landscape’ (Somerville et al., 2011: 1, emphasis in original). If the Witches teach Macbeth and Banquo anything beyond the duplicitous prophecies they convey, it is the potency of place and its centrality to their characterisation.

To a twenty-first-century educator, though, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* may appear quite distinct from the place in which it is taught and learned. This is in part because, as the place philosopher Edward S. Casey observes, ‘we rarely accord to place any such importance’ (2009: xiii). ‘Other than as a collection of buildings where learning is supposed to occur,’ observes David Orr, ‘place has no particular standing in contemporary education’ (1992: 126). This disjunction between play and place became clearer to me when I taught *Macbeth* in Far North Queensland, where students envisage the

Scottish heath of *Macbeth* in the Australian tropics. The contrast between literary setting and lived place emphasised a dissociation between the study of literature (like Shakespeare's plays and poetry) and the immediate physical environment in which that teaching and learning takes place. In *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning*, I respond to this tension and document my pedagogical journey towards PBL.

For Alexander C. Y. Huang, the concept of locality is 'under-theorised' in Shakespeare studies, and 'it is important to consider, in dramaturgical terms, the dynamics between Shakespearean localities, the localities of the critics, and the localities where Shakespeare's works are (re)presented' (2007: 193). To this we could add the localities of educators and students. My emplacement, or in Casey's words, 'implacement' (2009: xiii) in Far North Queensland has brought to the fore questions of the relationship between the localities of lived place and literary text. Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton ask: 'What does the study of literature have to do with the environment? Can reading, writing about, and teaching Shakespeare contribute to the health of the planet? What is the connection between the literary and the real when it comes to ecological conduct, both in Shakespeare's era and now?' (2011: 2).¹

These questions are generated by an ecocritical imperative which seeks to investigate how literary studies and education can play a role in moving towards a sustainable future. Using place within humanities pedagogy may assist with this goal, according to Margaret Somerville and colleagues, who advocate for using place as 'an important framework for an integrated educational curriculum' (2009: 6) which addresses environmental issues from a range of perspectives and across traditional subject boundaries, from science to English. Such an approach recognises that 'all education is environmental education' (Orr, 1992: 12). In explicitly invoking place to teach Shakespeare, we acknowledge that '*place matters*, both in the world and in the text' (Wyse, 2021: 19, emphasis in original). This incorporation of place into Shakespeare pedagogy can not only invigorate a learner's engagement with the text but deepen their understanding of place.

¹ Randall Martin and Evelyn O'Malley point out that this 'leaves performance out of the enquiry' (2018: 377), something this Element attempts to address through its integration of pedagogy with performance.

Place has been ‘a constant theme in the history of Western thought since at least the first century AD’ (Cresswell, 2015: 23). However, conventional epistemology in humanities disciplines has ‘largely disregarded landscape as a platform for learning’ and understood space and place as ‘a passive stage or a backdrop’, disconnected from social life and action (Mayne, 2009: 175). In the context of higher education, PBL is ‘often underemphasized’ (Shannon & Galle, 2017: 5) and its omission across disciplines teaches students that ‘ecology is unimportant for history, politics, economics, society, and so forth’ (Orr, 1992: 85). Even outdoor education has overlooked ‘place’ (Wattchow & Brown, 2011: 120). While we may recognise implicitly the importance of place, it is not until relatively recently that ‘spatial studies’ has blossomed (Casey, 2009: xxi). Place has attracted considerable attention in recent decades (Mayne, 2009: 175; Wattchow & Brown, 2011: 82) and has ‘become a powerful theoretical construct in many disciplines’ including literature (Gruenewald, 2014: 142). A subset of cultural studies, place studies focusses on new understandings of place and the relationship between cultures and environments (Somerville et al., 2009: 6). Spatial studies, according to Casey, ‘are now a whole industry’ in the humanities. ‘A spatial turn has been taken, with dramatic and far-reaching consequences. At the heart of this turn has been a recognition of the formative presence of place in people’s lives and thoughts. Place is now a prominent theme in literary theory, cultural geography, psychoanalysis, and architectural theory’ (2009: xxi–xxii). Despite these developments, the spatial turn is yet to find a firm hold in many fields. In most cultural and educational theory, David A. Gruenewald argues that the environment ‘continues to be neglected’ (2014: 144) and Urszula Pawlicka-Deger observes that the intertwining of ‘place and humanities knowledge has been largely unexplored’ (2021: 321). In *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning*, I connect this spatial turn to the teaching and learning of Shakespeare, building on ecocritical developments in this field through my focus on place.

However, we cannot begin to engage with place without respect for Indigenous peoples, without acknowledgement of systemic, pervasive racism in our constructions of place and without awareness of ‘the profound race-work that happens through race-attentive pedagogy’ (Dadabhoy & Mehdizadeh, 2023: 1). Culture, ethnicity, gender and class are ‘part of the event of place’

(Casey, 2009: xxv). Place and identity are inseparable. ‘Who we are affects what we study, and how’, and just as ‘social locations inform our scholarship and teaching’ (Dadabhoj & Mehdizadeh, 2023: 14–15), *where* we are informs our identity and affects our learning. We cannot separate the ‘who’ and ‘where’ of our identities as learners and educators. As such, place-based Shakespeare must listen to and learn from urgent work in critical race studies and ‘premodern critical race studies’ (Hendricks, 2019), including the vital work supported by the #ShakeRace and #RaceB4Race movements in Shakespeare scholarship and in anti-racist pedagogy (Akhimie, 2021; Dadabhoj, 2020; Dadabhoj & Mehdizadeh, 2020, 2023; De Barros, 2019; Eklund & Hyman, 2019; Erickson & Hall, 2016; Hall, 1996; hooks, 1994; Joubin & Starks, 2021; Karim-Cooper, 2020, 2021; Sterling Brown, 2020; Thompson, 2021; Thompson & Turchi, 2021).² This is crucial in any place-based work because Australian researchers ‘cannot begin to articulate a position about place without confronting the complex political realities of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in place’ (Somerville, 2010: 330). There is much to learn from Indigenous knowledges of place: ‘Place has long been noted as an organising principle in Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies’ (Somerville, 2010: 330). This recognises the multiplicity of place, as it is perceived differently ‘by different cultural groups who hold different ways of being and knowing’ (Greenwood, 2013: 98–9).³ When working with place as a pedagogical framework, we must acknowledge that places are sites of trauma, dispossession, erasure, loss and exile, as well as loci for the violence of colonialism. An ‘important collective act’ of PBL is ‘the process of recovering and retelling those stories of country, of restoring the land’ (Cameron, 2014: 300), reconstructing ‘previously invisible place

² See also the Anti-Racist Shakespeare webinar series (2021–2): www.shakespeareglobe.com/seasons/anti-racist-shakespeare.

³ While Gruenewald (now Greenwood) is a pivotal scholar in the field of PBL, some scholars have critiqued his work for its ‘inherently colonizing framework’, as he himself discusses (Greenwood 2019: 366). He espouses that PBL should work towards decolonisation: ‘writings on place that fail to engage significantly with the difficult issues of colonization, indigeneity, and race can be viewed as reproducing and reinforcing the erasures and silences that surround white, settler cultures’ (2019: 366–7).

stories' and generating 'new stories about place' (Somerville et al., 2009: 8–9). To enrich Shakespeare education through place, we must begin by acknowledging that place is not inherently a pedagogical force for good, and neither is it a neutral blank canvas upon which we can write our Shakespeare lessons. It is a palimpsestic, complex and dynamic agent that encompasses the traumas of our histories of racial conflict, of ecological crisis and of individual encounter. It is neither a simple nor a risk-free addition to the classroom, but that does not make it any less valuable as a means of deepening our understanding of Shakespeare.

What constitutes a 'place' for Shakespeare education? A reader might think immediately of a classroom, a theatre or the outdoors, from 'the micro-geographies of the classroom' to neighbourhoods and cities, schools and states (Angulo & Schneider, 2021: 389). The meaning of place will be wildly different from one learner to another. Place is also more than a passive tool to be added to our pedagogical toolbox, ready for deployment. Thinking of place as a 'vehicle' may be anthropocentric rather than ecocentric and overlooks the voice of place itself (Cameron, 2014: 297; Greenwood, 2013: 98). Although scholars like Pam Bartholomaeus describe place 'as a key resource and catalyst for learning activities' (2013: 18), I give to place an agential role. Place-based Shakespeare engages place as an active partner in learning with its own stories (Demarest, 2015: 6) that we must learn to listen to. This partnership should be mutually beneficial: learners should consider whether their learnings are 'in the service of place, or whether the place is only in the service of the story they are constructing' (Cameron, 2014: 299).

Drawing on theories of place, ecocriticism and complexity theory, as well as the voices of Shakespeare students in northern Australia, I will embrace multiple interpretations of place, from the material to the imagined. *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning* is not an evaluation of the 'best' places for learning Shakespeare but rather investigates how place is constituted through complex social, environmental and cultural interactions, and how this interplay can be engaged to enrich the teaching of Shakespeare – wherever we are. Section 1 tracks the development of PBL from its interdisciplinary origins into contemporary literary studies, considers PBL's intersections with anti-racist Shakespeare pedagogy and offers a seven-part conceptual framework for teaching place-based Shakespeare. Section 2 examines theoretical and learner understandings of place as a

REFLECTION IN PLACE

Throughout *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning*, ‘Reflection in Place’ prompts at the end of each section will support you to progress your own place-based journey. These reflections, inspired by Ambereen Dadabhoy and Nedda Mehdizadeh’s vignettes and reflections in *Anti-racist Shakespeare*, are designed to meet you where you are in your engagement with place and to facilitate critical reflection to foster your sense of place and place-based pedagogy. This acknowledges that sense of place is subjective and that PBL requires ongoing learning.

For this first ‘Reflection in Place’, I invite you to consider:

- Where are you?
- What stories of your place do you know?
- How might the ‘where’ of your pedagogical context inform your practice?
- How might place influence your pedagogy in ways that may not be immediately visible to educators or students?
- How might you already be doing place-based learning?

These questions are designed to stimulate preliminary reflection on an educator’s sense of place. This works against a tendency for place to operate as a ‘mere backdrop’ (Casey, 2009: xiii) in our teaching and learning contexts by simply making place visible in our work as Shakespeare educators.

critical precursor to implementing place-based Shakespeare. From this data emerges a multipart definition of place designed for use in Shakespeare PBL. Section 3 documents my early experience with outdoor place-based Shakespeare and examines the challenges, limitations and learnings of these explorations. This section features reflections from ‘Shakespeare on Site’, a series of outdoor theatre workshops for high school students.⁴ Finally, in

⁴ All research was conducted with approval from James Cook University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, ethics application IDs H7660 (2019–22), H7771 (2019–20) and H8409 (2021–2).

Section 4, I offer a model and practical examples of learning activities and assessment for place-based Shakespeare classrooms. These activities include site reading, outdoor education, community engagement and creative and virtual place-based activities. Throughout, PBL is considered as a means not only of enriching Shakespeare pedagogy but of improving our understanding of ourselves, our relations with human and more-than-human others and our ability to engage responsibly with the environment to support our learning and our world.⁵

The explicit integration of place as an agent in the learning process can enrich our understanding of Shakespeare in many ways and across scales: fostering a deeper critical engagement with the settings of his playworlds (textual analysis); developing our knowledge of early modern environments (new historicism); incorporating a learner's environment to connect to Shakespeare's works (presentism); using Shakespeare's plays as a lens by which to examine our own engagement with place (ecocriticism). My use of the concept is capacious but also critical. Place-based learning is by no means a silver bullet nor an entirely novel approach to Shakespeare: it is in some ways already embedded in our pedagogical practice, in our scholarly research and in our students' engagement with the text (in productive and problematic ways). This approach has challenges and limitations and is not 'a panacea for the economic, environmental, political, and social dilemmas that confront modernity' (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014a: 357). It offers an additional pedagogical practice to promote civic engagement and care for others and the environment (McInerney et al., 2011: 13) and to develop critical thinking and authentic engagement in Shakespeare studies. In an era when the human relationship to place has reached a crisis level, PBL aligns with ecocritical aims to illuminate the study of Shakespeare through place and to enrich our sense of place through teaching and learning Shakespeare.

⁵ I choose the term 'more-than-human' because it is 'used critically to remind human geographers that the non-human world not only exists but has causal powers and capacities of its own' (Rogers et al., 2013).

1 Developing Place-Based Shakespeare Pedagogy

Place is always a fundamental part of our experiences. It shapes our lives – pedagogically and otherwise – in urgent ways. In the face of the ecological disasters wrought by climate change, ‘place emerges as ever more important’ (Casey, 2009: xxviii).

Daily we are presented with news about global warming, climate change, rapid loss of endangered species, and devastating catastrophes of weather. In Australia the local and the global have powerfully intersected in ways that make attention to global/local issues of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, drought, increasing problems of water scarcity and local negotiations about water use, an imperative. (Somerville, 2010: 327)

But place is not always, or even often, a feature of our teaching. Literary studies and the teaching of English have a role to play in the ‘newly emerging field of place studies’ as we seek to ‘know place differently’ (Somerville et al., 2009: 3) and to communicate the urgency of revisiting our relationship to it. By incorporating place into education, we recognise that as ecological crisis changes the world, so must we transform education (Gruenewald, 2003a: 312; Wattchow & Brown, 2011: 14).

This transformative aim stems from PBL’s resistance to educational scholarship’s neglect of the person–place relationship (Greenwood, 2013: 97). Place-based learning does not seek to focus on place *instead* of ‘content and skills’ but rather posits that places can improve engagement and understanding (Gruenewald, 2003a: 315). It enhances the relevance of pedagogy to our lived experience by asking learners and educators to pay attention to their ‘braided cultural, ecological and ideological landscapes’ (Greenwood, 2019: 363). On a superficial level, we can therefore define PBL with relative simplicity: ‘The key concept of cutting-edge, place-based pedagogy is that student learning is enhanced when course content is grounded in a particular place of meaning’ (Hagood & Price, 2016: 603). Despite this seemingly simple formulation, there is no one

way to implement PBL. This is in large part because PBL builds on shifting ground: every educator and classroom will have a different sense of place, so there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. Place-based learning ‘can take a wide range of forms’ while also being simultaneously ‘specific to particular locales’, making generic models and prescriptive advice inappropriate (Smith, 2002: 593, 587; Wattoo & Brown, 2011: 28).

In their survey of PBL literature, Janice L. Woodhouse and Clifford E. Knapp identify five useful characteristics: ‘it emerges from the particular attributes of place’; it is inherently ‘multidisciplinary’; it is ‘experiential’; it reflects ‘an educational philosophy that is broader than “learn to earn”’; and ‘it connects place with self and community’ (2000: 4). More recently, Simon Beames identified six key ‘assumptions’ of PBL: it is about education; it involves all kinds of place (local, distant, urban, rural); it considers past, present and future; it can be used across the curriculum; it encompasses interactions between place, humans and ecosystems; and it requires ‘dwelling’ and ‘responding’ (2015: 28). These core components expand the kinds of place included in PBL, enable historicist and presentist approaches, welcome consideration of complex interactions between the human and more-than-human and prioritise a focus on embodied experience and reflection.

The Development of Place-Based Learning

This understanding of PBL has developed over decades, because as Gregory A. Smith reminds us, ‘[p]lace-based education is not a new phenomenon’ (2002: 587; 2017). It emerged in the latter third of the twentieth century as a concept and practice apart from environmental education (Ball & Lai, 2006; Smith, 2017: 17). Its philosophical roots are much older, dating back to the US philosopher and educationalist John Dewey, nature studies and experiential learning (Azano, 2011: 2; McInerney et al., 2011: 5; Wallis et al., 2021: 154). Place-based learning tends to straddle disciplinary divides, emerging not from education but from human geography, eco-psychology, deep ecology and philosophy (Beames, 2015: 27). These interdisciplinary origins are evident in its implementation. Educators will quickly identify that many of its methodologies

are not unique to PBL. Peter McInerney and colleagues note its ‘eclectic nature’, with exponents adopting ideas and approaches from other education traditions including situated pedagogy and critical pedagogy (2011: 5). Place-based learning has similarities or links with an extensive range of pedagogies, including phenomenology (Gruenewald, 2014: 143), ‘experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, indigenous education, environmental and ecological education, bioregional education, democratic education, multicultural education, community-based education, [and] critical pedagogy itself’ (Gruenewald, 2003a: 309). It is aligned with project- and problem-based learning, civic education and education for sustainability (Demarest, 2015: 1; Smith & Stevenson, 2017). For Smith, unlike most educational reform movements, it has ‘functioned more like a vision of educational possibilities around which people already attracted to teaching in this way have rallied’ (2017: 12). As such, PBL is a broad church – multidisciplinary, nebulous and emergent.

One point of difference is important for understanding the development of PBL: ‘its explicit focus on both human and natural environments and its concern about equity and social justice issues as well as environmental’ (Smith, 2017: 1). This focus on environmental justice is apparent in Orr’s ‘ecological literacy’, a key concept in developing place-centric education that responds ‘to a moral ecological imperative’ (Wattchow & Brown, 2011: 121). Orr identifies six core foundations for sustainable education and ecological literacy, the first and most famous of which is his recognition that ‘*all education is environmental education*’ (1992: 90, emphasis in original). A central facet of PBL is thus its investment in environmental sustainability; from a PBL perspective, education of all kinds should develop environmentally responsible learners.

However, this may conflict with our educational systems. We teach Shakespeare within a complex system of standardisation, testing and accountability. In the current climate, teaching with place might seem like an indulgent novelty, and educators might reasonably ask: how can place help our students write their Shakespeare essays or pass their exams? Liam E. Semler refers to the behaviour of educational systems as ‘SysEd’, ‘the increasingly systematised nature of the education sector and professional