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‘Tongues in trees’: Reimagining the regions through pastoral place-based pedagogy

Abstract:

This essay uses the pastoral conjured in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* to reflect on the experience of teaching Shakespeare in regional far north Queensland. By aligning the pastoral with the concept of the ‘region’, the essay negotiates the complex relationship between a sense of lived place and the literary places imagined and constructed in the texts we encounter in our teaching, writing, and research. The explicit connection of these two places – regional and pastoral – will prove mutually enlightening as the discussion works towards a framework for enabling students to incorporate a sense of place in literary studies through the concept of ardenspace. This discussion will draw on place-based learning in order to examine the way our senses of literary and regional place are imaginatively constructed and how this affects – and can be utilised in – research, writing, and teaching.

Biographical Note:

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William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* famously constructs – and immediately problematises – the boundary between court and country. Duke Senior tells his followers:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
 Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
 Sermons in stones, and good in everything
 (Shakespeare 2.1.15-17)

The exiled Duke is hyperaware of his emplacement in a world outside the court. Freed from the public gaze – described as a haunting which paradoxically compounds the sense of isolation – the Duke and his ‘merry men’ (1.1.121) (and all that term invokes in its allusion to the escapist fantasy of Robin Hood) seek to find replacements for their city pleasures and pastimes in the forest. Specifically, it is the tangible materialisation of literary culture – tongues, books, and sermons – which is sought. For Kate Flaherty, this process amounts to the Duke’s rhetorical ‘settlement’ of Arden (2009: 319). Importantly, it is in the pastoral landscape that many of the characters find their unorthodox educations. Orlando, the heroic but unfortunately younger son, complains that despite being at court, he is kept ‘rustically at home’ (1.1.7) and denied the ‘good education’ (1.1.63-4) that he feels is owed a ‘gentleman of my birth’ (1.1.9). It is in Orlando’s escape from the court that he finds an education of another kind, and in this way, rurality becomes – as Michael Corbett describes it – ‘education’s other, a kind of antithesis of the institutional learning process’ (Corbett 2013: 2). The othered pastoral world of the Forest of Arden becomes a site for unexpected and unusual transformative educational experiences.

The pastoral world of Arden in *As You Like It* can serve as an analogy for teaching English literature in the regions. Far from the imagined public court of the urban cities, regional students and educators could be conceptualised as finding their ‘books in brooks’ and ‘tongues in trees’, seeking an education that is different from – but with anxieties about being equivalent to – the imagined court, always ‘haunting’ the regions. This simplistic analogy, however, deliberately highlights the ease with which one can slip into a ‘metrocentric’ view of education (Corbett 2013: 2) and ‘a deficit or generalised model’ to understand the regional and the rural (Walker-Gibbs 2013: 128-9) as uncritically ‘othered’ against court or city.

In this essay, I will utilise the pastoral conjured in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* to reflect on my experiences of teaching Shakespeare in place; specifically, in regional far north Queensland. By aligning the literary mode of the pastoral with a discussion of literary regionalism and ‘rural literacies’ (Corbett 2017), this essay will seek to explore the conceptual gap between the inhabited lived place of educators and students, and the imagined pastoral place of Shakespeare’s play. In doing so, I will suggest that a movement towards ‘ardenspace’ (Semler 2013) may enable students to connect their sense of lived place to the literary places imagined in the play. This discussion will draw on place-based learning in order to examine the way our senses of literary and regional place are constructed and how this affects – or can be utilised in – research, writing, and teaching.

Shakespeare in place

Since moving to regional far north Queensland in early 2018, I have become noticeably more aware of my teaching and research as occurring within a specific

place. From envisaging the Scottish heath of *Macbeth* in the midst of a tropical summer, to discussing *Romeo and Juliet's* representation of fate with students in a regional nineteenth-century gold rush town, I am repeatedly made conscious of the geographical context in which I teach and the correlations or disjunctions between play and place. Yet, this heightened awareness of the emplacement of Shakespeare education in specific places reinforces a conceptual distance between the place-making occurring within the text, and our own processes of place-making as scholars and students in literary studies. There are three main factors that serve to reinforce this distance. First, for a scholar like myself who has moved from an urban to a regional context, there is a tendency towards self-categorisation of being 'in the regions'; a conceptual label that appears to work in complex ways both in terms of self-definition, and in terms of the ways in which 'the regions' are defined and othered against the urban or metropolis. Second, and perhaps generated from the first, is a greater awareness of the immediacy of place and the environment. My newfound proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, and my local community's perceived reliance on potential investments from companies like Adani, bring into sharp relief environmental crises that, while important, were previously physically distant to my personal and professional life. This reinforces the fact that the essence of rurality is 'the way it represents the intersection of people and place' (Corbett 2013: 3). Third, this hyperawareness of my sense of place is also in part due to my own interests in ecocriticism, a burgeoning trend as 'ecological interpretations have become increasingly central to twenty-first-century literary studies' (Mentz 2013: 66).

However, far from reinforcing my faith in ecocritical approaches to Shakespeare pedagogy, my emplacement in far north Queensland has generated a raft of questions. In the words of Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton:

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? (2003: 2)

In my 'regional' context, I have found that these questions intensify. Rather paradoxically, close proximity to a site like the Great Barrier Reef – which has come to represent (both nationally and globally) the collision of climate change discourse, innovative science, political rhetoric from both the left and right, economic value, job security, activism, and our own emotive engagement with our environments – seems to have deepened the conceptual space between fictional literary places and the regional places in which literary texts are taught.

Problematising place

In his overview of theories and philosophies of place, Edward S. Casey comments that 'something is astir that calls for a return to reflective thought about place' (1997: 13). There are many possible causes of this 'spatial turn'; Casey cites 'the prospect of nuclear annihilation' in the twentieth century as responsible for providing a stark reminder of the 'unreplaceability of these places' (1997: 14). To this ecocritics would

add the anxieties around climate change. For a term which, on one level, attempts to identify solid ground – something foundational, tangible, unmoving – place is paradoxically nebulous. It is also ubiquitous:

Whatever is true for space and time, this much is true for place: we are immersed in it and could not do without it. To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact? (Casey 1997: 9)

Just as we are always emplaced, so is place always in flux: ‘place is not entitative – as a foundation has to be – but eventmental, something in process, something unconfined to a thing’ (Casey 1997: 337). More locally and more recently, we can see similarly complex conceptualisations of place emerging in Australian literary scholarship. In a 2018 issue of *JASAL*, Emily Potter and Brigid Magner conceptualise

the understanding of place as an unbounded, non-geographically determined, and relationally constituted, real-world context for practices of living and meaning-making; and the recognition of complex, more than material, and more than human forces, in the ongoing constitution of place. (2018: 1)

Place is thus more than our immediate physical locations. As Eric Prieto writes, it ‘extends beyond the restrictive definitions’ used in cartography or geometry; it goes beyond points on a map or lines defining a point in space (2011: 15).

Reading the regions

If place is mutable, multiple, and relationally constituted, how then do we understand the concept of regionality? For Casey, the more the world is globalised and made the same, the more we long for the specific. The ‘sameness-of-place’ found on a global scale generates a desire for ‘the particularity of place – for what is truly “local” or “regional”’ (1997: 14).

In defining the rural, Corbett writes that

We desperately attempt to finally know the physical reality of the rural by measuring distances (usually from urban areas), population densities and by alluding to productive activities and landscapes. (2013: 2)

This quantitative comparative approach seeks to define the rural against what it is not: the urban, the court, the city, the metropolis, the centre. But, like any sense of place, the rural is an unknowable entity; ‘a boundless complexity whose shape shifts with our attempts to describe it’ (Corbett 2013: 2). The concept itself is entirely ‘imaginary’ (Corbett 2013: 2), and as Corbett reminds us, ‘there are as many imaginaries as there are people with imagination’ (2013: 2). The rural is ‘both real

and imagined – a complex, sometimes contradictory, and always political overlap of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the material’ (Corbett 2017: 9).

The utilisation of categorisations like ‘rural’ and ‘regions’ is understood by Doreen Massey as a reaction to the openness and protean quality of place. The label of ‘region’ is an attempt to ‘institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places’ in order to stabilise meaning and come to terms with space-time’s ‘unutterable mobility’ (Massey 1994: 5). Massey advocates a different approach, however; not to impose boundaries but to seek connections. In this way, place is not defined by othering but by its interactions.

The identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple. And the particularity of any place is, in these terms, constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counterposition to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that “beyond”. Places viewed this way are open and porous. (Massey 1994: 5)

Place, for Massey, is constructed through networks of social relations, and through interactions with other places – rather than ‘by counterposition to them’ (1994: 121). In this definition, a place will have multiple identities (Massey 1994: 121). For real and imagined places understood as rural, regional, remote, or even pastoral, it is powerful to reconceptualise place as not bounded and defined by its counterpositioning to places imagined in the concepts of metropolis, the urban, the city, and the court. This rewrites the regional as generated through networks, not binaries. This is an implicitly complexivist reading of place (Hansen 2017).

This understanding of place as constructed through networks is shared by Corbett, who argues that

As much as we are remiss to define rurality, I want to suggest that we might understand the rural as a space of intersections and tensions, of people and place, of people and people, of place and space, and so forth. Rurality, as I understand it, is about connections and stewardship. (2013: 2)

Both Massey and Corbett understand place-based categorisations like ‘region’ and ‘rural’ as a network of connections. As such, I seek to cross many spatio-temporal boundaries and *connect* the ‘far north’ ‘region’ of Queensland in which I teach Shakespeare to the ‘pastoral’ place within Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

Placing the pastoral

While writing this article I visited one of Townsville’s main attractions: Magnetic Island, a popular tourist destination situated just twenty minutes away by ferry. While taking a hilly and hot spring walk from the ferry terminal in Nelly Bay across to neighbouring Geoffrey Bay, I realised I was in Arcadia: a suburb of Townsville proper, located on the island. Not quite the Arcadia of Virgil, reimagined as the English pastoral ideal by the early modernists, but perhaps not quite so far off. This

strange synchronicity between my research of the pastoral in my regional place, and the discovery of the idyllic pastoral world brought to life in that place, collided the two core concepts of this reflection: ‘real’ or ‘lived’ regional place and ‘imagined’ literary place.

The pastoral is, at its heart, the tension between city and country, urban and rural. Like the terms that flower around notions of regional place – rural, remote, far north, outback – it is defined by its peripheral position to a perceived city centre. It is marked by one core difference, according to Terry Gifford’s work on the concept: unlike regional or rural place, the pastoral needs to remain as allegory, with Arcadia as metaphor and the notion of pastoral operating as playful ‘carnavalesque’: ‘When pastoral loses that sense of itself as carnivalesque ... it becomes dangerously open to exploitation by a culture that might prefer to hide reality in the myth of Arcadia’ (Gifford 1999: 23). But there are also important resonances between these conceptualisations of the regional and the pastoral. For Lawrence Buell, this is in the identification of nationhood with countryside. He writes that modern incarnations of the pastoral have been enlisted in the ‘service of local, regional, and national particularism’ (1995: 32). Pastoralism, he suggests, is ‘an article of cultural nationalism’ (Buell 1995: 32). The pastoral (and regional) thus helps to characterise national identity.

The literary concept of the pastoral has roots stretching back to Theocritus and Virgil. As Buell explains, ‘pastoralism is a species of cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without’ (1995: 32). An exile or escape from the city or court, it is also traditionally understood as a ‘disguise’ (Dusinberre 2006: 101) and a safe space for socio-political critique. The early modern period of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw an ‘explosion of pastoral possibilities’ during which time ‘pastoral pervades the forms and performances of Elizabethan culture’, uniting texts through a ‘nexus’ of people, objects and relations (Montrose 1983: 420). Louis Montrose here identifies not only the pastoral’s centrality to early modern literary culture, but its *networked* nature. Like Massey and Corbett, Montrose’s focus is not on a comparative or dichotomous definition of place (even allegorical place), but rather understands the pastoral as a series of connections.

Questions have been raised as to the ongoing relevance or usefulness of the term ‘pastoral’ (Nardizzi 2016: 565). Buell addresses this concern:

But how pressing an issue will pastoral continue to be? Given our present degree of industrialisation, isn’t it likely to become increasingly obsolete? Surely not. Environmental holocaust now seems not only a potential by-product of nuclear attack but also an imminent peril in its own right. (1995: 50-1)

Like Buell, Juliet Dusinberre is quick to defend the relevance of the pastoral, aligning the early modern pastoral with our own twenty-first century ideals of rural place:

As You Like It goes to the heart of the dream of simple country life, which still remains potent in Western industrialised society of the twenty-first

century. Our contemporary vision of rustic retreat is part of Shakespeare's play. (Dusinberre 2006: 97)

As an enduring and 'potent' concept in our culture, the pastoral – as it manifests in *As You Like It* – can help us to play with the constructs of regionality and rurality, particularly around the nexus of place and pedagogy.

The pastoral as pedagogical

In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, place is explicitly tied to pedagogy. The play embodies David Gruenewald's argument that

places are profoundly pedagogical. That is, as centers [*sic*] of experience, places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us: as occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped. (Gruenewald 2003b: 621)

In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare is interested in the educative potential of a particular *kind* of place: the pastoral, brought to life through the Forest of Arden.

Many people across the world who have neither seen nor read *As You Like It* possess a pool of associations into which the words 'Forest of Arden' drop like a pebble, creating concentric ripples ... Rooted in Elizabethan culture – books, topology, economics, social customs, natural phenomena – the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It* has grown, like the biblical mustard-seed, into a vast tree which casts shadows over other cultures and other times. The setting of a play, it transcends the theatre. All the world is its stage. (Dusinberre 2006: 50)

Before their arrival to Arden, both Orlando and Rosalind are explicitly aware of various kinds of education. Orlando, as we have seen above, bemoans the formal, courtly education which has been denied him: he has been kept 'rustically' at home (1.1.7), the implication being that despite residing at court he has been marginalised with a rural level of education. Immediately this raises clear connotations about the kinds of education afforded those based on their place; here, it is both physical (urban, country) and social (noble, working class) place. Rosalind, too, seeks or requires a different kind of education. She tells her cousin Celia, whose father Duke Frederick has banished Rosalind's own father, 'Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure' (1.2.5-7). Unlike Orlando, the cousins are aware of the potential for emotional education well before they reach Arden. Indeed, Celia understands love as something to be taught: had their situations been reversed, she says, 'I could have taught my love to take thy father for mine' (1.2.11-12). For Celia, who accompanies Rosalind into the Forest of Arden to seek Rosalind's banished father, the journey is also a means to teach Rosalind this lesson: 'Rosalind lacks the love / Which teacheth thee that thou and I am one' (1.3.93-4). Her loyalty, shown through her voluntary exile to Arden, aims to provide that educative experience to Rosalind.

Upon arriving in Arden, Orlando's education is deliberately ironic: expecting to find 'savage' behaviour in the 'desert' (2.7.7, 17), he preemptively behaves savagely. When he demands that Duke Senior and his party touch none of their food until Orlando has stolen what he needs, the Duke enquires whether it is his situation or his nature that explains his bad manners:

Art thou thus boldened, man, by thy distress?
Or else a rude despiser of good manners,
That in civility thou seem'st so empty?
(2.7.92-94)

Orlando has lost 'the show / Of smooth civility' (2.7.96-7) but assures the Duke that he is 'inland bred / And know[s] some nurture' (2.7.97-8). The civil 'inland' (read: urban, court) behaviour, which Orlando has learned and practised, is abandoned swiftly when he finds himself in need (an indication that either his 'rustic' upbringing has indeed been unrefined or that the influence of the wild forest is strong and swift). The savage behaviour he exhibits before the Duke's pastoral court is quickly identified as misplaced, as Orlando is taught that his assumptions about the pastoral world of Arden are incorrect: in the forest, 'Your gentleness shall force / More than your force move us to gentleness' (2.7.103-4). Orlando's arrival into the pastoral collides expectations and reality, and emphasises the paradox inherent in any simplistic dichotomising of court and pastoral, urban and rural. Variants of 'gentleness' are repeated five times within twenty-five lines (2.7.100-125) in an explicit illustration of the pastoral paradox. This is Orlando's first pastoral lesson, and one in which the regional and urban are understood through their connectivity rather than through their disparities. The Forest of Arden differs from court only in Orlando's imagination; he, in fact, finds multiple points of connection, which underlines Massey and Corbett's definition of the regional as constructed through interaction and connectivity rather than by counter-positioning. This connectivity goes far beyond a shared sense of civility and 'gentleness'; we quickly discover multiple lines of connection, including the love that the exiled Duke Senior bore for Orlando's own father (2.7.199-200), and Orlando's love for the Duke's daughter. Linguistically, Orlando highlights the shared experiences of the pastoral court with his own past through anaphora:

If ever you have looked on better days,
If ever been where bells have knolled to church,
If ever set at any good man's feast,
If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear
(2.7.114-117)

Duke Senior's subsequent repetition of these phrases (2.7.121-124) reinforces the commonality of their experiences and generates a link across the court-pastoral divide. It is precisely the articulation of this shared experience that enables the dialogue to proceed to Jaques's 'seven ages of man' speech (2.7.140-67), as Duke Senior takes Orlando's circumstances as exemplifying that

This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene

Wherein we play in
(2.7.137-40)

The *theatrum mundi* metaphor highlights that ‘woeful’ scenes are common universally, and not isolated to the court or the pastoral ‘scene’ in which Duke Senior and his fellow players act. Further, Jaques’s seven stages is a claim for the sameness of the human experience; spoken in the context of the pastoral Forest of Arden and within the broader context of how one’s place (court, forest) prefigures one’s behavioural choices (gentle, savage), Jaques’s speech is a claim for commonality beyond spatial boundaries, thus overriding the preconceptualisations of how human behaviour is circumscribed by the places in which we are embedded.

These are not the only educative experiences proffered by the pastoral world of *As You Like It*. In ‘The Education of Orlando’, Marjorie Garber identifies two distinct types of education at work in the Forest of Arden: first, Rosalind’s ‘gradualist mode of education’ by which

Under the guise of Ganymede, Rosalind teaches Orlando not only the rules of love and its nature, but the uses of language – and even, to her everlasting credit, the gentle arts of irony and self-deprecation. (2003: n.p.)

It is well-acknowledged that Rosalind educates Orlando in the ways and language of love during their playful wooing scenes in the forest. As Garber argues, ‘from their first encounter in the forest she becomes his teacher’, and her lessons are ‘not so much about technique as substance’: Rosalind teaches Orlando ‘about himself, about her, and about the nature of love’ (2003: n.p.).

The second type of education – what Garber calls ‘the alternative path’ to Rosalind’s pedagogy – is embodied in the sudden transformation of Orlando’s brother, Oliver (2003: n.p.). Saved from the dangers of Arden by Orlando, Oliver undergoes an instantaneous ‘conversion’ (4.3.135), moving from ‘what I was’ to ‘the thing I am’ (4.3.135-6), his discourse suggesting a complete renewal of the self. Oliver’s language emphasises his emplacement in the pastoral world. Upon his entry in Act Four, scene three, he asks: ‘where in the purlieu of this forest stands / A sheepcote fenced about with olive-trees?’¹ (4.3.73-76) The correlation between his arrival at Arden and his alternative educational transformation is reinforced by this explicit invocation of idyllic, peaceful pastoral imagery. Importantly, he is not just in the forest but in the ‘purlieu’; an area whose inhabitants were ‘exempt from its jurisdictions’ (4.3.75n).

Oliver’s is not the only instantaneous conversion generated by entry into the Forest of Arden: Duke Frederick’s journey into Arden provides a similarly transformative educative experience, as in ‘the skirts of this wild wood’ the Duke met ‘with an old religious man’ and ‘[a]fter some question with him, was converted / Both from his enterprise and from the world’ (5.4.156-60). Both Oliver and Duke Frederick are ‘converted’ (4.3.135, 5.4.159) not solely by a momentous or religious encounter but by the spatial context in which that encounter takes place.

The Forest of Arden is key to both kinds of educational strategies – Rosalind’s ‘gradualist’ mode and Oliver and Duke Frederick’s ‘alternative’ path. The forest itself is a risky space because it unleashes the potential for otherness: for Rosalind to transform into Ganymede, for Orlando to turn from uneducated ‘rustic’ wrestler to a well-schooled lover, for Oliver’s transformative near-death experience, and for Duke Frederick to realise the possibility of an entirely different life. Pastoral place is a catalyst for educational experiences in *As You Like It*. Once one crosses the margins of the forest ‘skirts’ or ‘petticoats’, the pedagogical opportunities increase exponentially. Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* thus proffers an early example of place-based learning.

The pastoral in practice

As regions and ruralities are constructed by interconnectivity rather than solely by counterpositioning or othering, so this essay connects Shakespeare’s pastoral forest of Arden with my own regional teaching place in order to consider the function of place in pedagogical practice. This manoeuvre utilises a place-based learning (PBL) framework; a formal variation of the informal PBL strategies adopted in *As You Like It*. PBL is a practice that seeks to educate through the use of students’ experience of place. PBL (sometimes also known as place-based education) requires that we make space for ‘the cultural, political, economic, and ecological dynamics of places whenever we talk about the purpose and practice of learning’ (Gruenewald 2003a: 320). It is worth noting a distinction between PBL in environmental and sustainability education and recognising the role of place in *any* teaching subject or discipline – as all teaching takes place *in place* and is therefore critically influenced by its relationship to place.

A critical pedagogy of place aims to contribute to the production of educational discourses and practices that explicitly examine the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education. (Gruenewald 2003a: 320)

It is this nexus between environment, culture, and education which is illuminated in *As You Like It*’s pastoral world of Arden, and which merits further investigation in our own pedagogical contexts.

Gruenewald’s model of critical place-based education has been adapted by Margaret Somerville, who formulates her own feminist and postcolonial pedagogy of place. The key elements of her conceptual framework include: recognition that ‘our relationship to place is constituted in stories (and other representations)’; that the body is ‘at the centre of our experience of place’; and that ‘place is a contact zone of cultural contact’ (Somerville 2010: 335).

In PBL practice, the teaching method most conventionally described is that of ‘taking students outdoors’ with, as Gregory Garrard dryly describes, some kind of vague ‘romantic educational theory’ inspiring the move from classroom to nature (2010: 236). But as he astutely argues, it is not as straightforward as simply emphasising the places of the literary texts we teach and using their ‘imagined’ environments to

change our ‘real’ equivalents (or at least our attitudes towards them). Nor is it, he argues, a matter of using our ‘real’ environments, through place-based learning, to drive deeper understandings of the texts we teach.

To put it in the terms of environmental education, there remains a widespread, but largely untested and untheorised assumption that education *about* the environment (nature writing, ecopoetry and environmental literature) delivered *through* the environment (place-based education) will automatically be education *for* the environment. (Garrard 2010: 241)

With less skepticism, Gruenewald further articulates outdoor PBL practice:

In order to develop an intense consciousness of places that can lead to ecological understanding and informed political action, place-based educators insist that teachers and children must regularly spend time out-of-doors building long-term relationships with familiar, everyday places. The kinds of educative experiences students and teachers pursue depends on the distinctive characteristics of the places they inhabit, as well as on what learning objectives and strategies they employ. (Gruenewald 2003a: 316)

The outdoor activities designed would be dependent not only on learning objectives and strategies but also, of course, on subject, discipline, and, more pragmatically, on the specific educational spaces occupied and the rules and regulations of those spaces. Garrard is rightly sceptical of the potential of vaguely-defined outdoor place-based learning, arguing that ‘the value and impact of “the outdoor classroom” remains unexamined’ and requires further ‘comparative research’ (2010: 237). He observes that perhaps the ‘sedentary, solitary and wholly textual traditions of literary study’ make the simple act of taking students outside appear as ‘the most radical and unusual thing we do’ (Garrard 2010: 237).

To document my initial experience, I’m drawing on what Garrard calls (somewhat cynically) ‘narrative scholarship’ - ‘critical, reflective storytelling’ (2010: 236). In the second semester of 2018 and my first year of teaching in the regional area of Townsville, Queensland, I set *As You Like It* as one text in an introductory first-year subject. During one tutorial in week four of semester, I took my students outside for a close reading on their feet. Despite the fortune of a leafy tropical campus with weeping fig trees to shelter us from the sun (strong and hot even in winter), and despite the relative tranquillity of a regional campus that does not have the pedestrian or vehicular traffic one might experience in metropolitan centres, I did not (nor, I would venture, did my students) feel the sublime epiphany of bringing the text to life *en plein air*. My first-year class of seventeen students ventured out one August morning to enact a passage from Act Four, scene three of *As You Like It*: exploring the transformation of Oliver, Orlando’s brother, from villain to redeemed. We focused on the strange exoticism of the imagery of this moment: the serpent and the lioness appearing suddenly in an anecdote conveyed by Oliver regarding his salvation.

Under an oak, whose boughs were mossed with age
And high top bald with dry antiquity,

A wretched ragged man, o'ergrown with hair,
 Lay sleeping on his back; about his neck
 A green and gilded snake had wreathed itself,
 Who with her head, nimble in threats, approached
 The opening of his mouth. But suddenly
 Seeing Orlando, it unlinked itself
 And with indented glides did slip away
 Into a bush; under which bush's shade
 A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
 Lay couching, head on ground, with catlike watch
 When that the sleeping man should stir
 (4.3.103-115)

My first-year students quickly identified the way in which the descriptions of the aged oak and the ragged man bleed into each other; the one mossed with age, the other 'o'ergrown with hair'. They noted the allusions to Eden, the exoticism of the animals present in Oliver's description, and queried the veracity of Oliver's tale of conversion.

But just as the foreign otherness of the fauna described in this scene seems out of place in the realm of Arden, so – it seems – did their immediate environment appear to the students in their examination of the play's language. From my position as a participant observer, I detected no difference in class outside – beyond useful practicalities like increased room for a makeshift stage – to the experience of enacting the passage within four walls. No linkages were made between their immediate outdoor place and the pastoral Arden in which Oliver finds himself.²

As Garrard notes, we cannot support a 'romantic' pedagogical view that students will innately connect text and place. This is especially so if their educational institutions routinely de-emphasise place. The curriculum is largely 'placeless' and educational reforms, which 'emphasise national, state and local standards aligned with high-stakes testing and national economic objectives' are increasingly disconnected from our places (Gruenewald 2003b: 640). In fact, the 'deeply rooted accountability movement ... neglects and thwarts place-consciousness among teachers, students and citizens' (Gruenewald 2003b: 642). Gruenewald writes that PBL is most revolutionary in its emergence from 'the particular attributes of place':

This idea is radical because current educational discourses seek to standardize the experience of students from diverse geographical and cultural places so that they may compete in the global economy. Such a goal essentially dismisses the idea of place as a primary experiential or educational context, displaces it with traditional disciplinary content and technological skills, and abandons places to the workings of the global market. (Gruenewald 2003a: 314)

This is not the only limitation faced by educators and students who seek to find connections between literary texts and place. Local places do not necessarily equate to relevant or interesting places for students. Eric L. Ball and Alice Lai tell us: 'Just because something is "local" (in the sense of being physically proximate) does not necessarily mean that it will always be particularly familiar or meaningful to students'

(2006: 268). If we are seeking to connect with students through place, then the concept of 'place' that we have in mind must be relevant for students. Ursula K. Heise similarly notes that 'the local itself is thoroughly unfamiliar to many individuals and may be epistemologically as unfathomable in its entirety as larger entities such as the nation or the globe' (cited in Garrard 2010: 239). Furthermore, students may feel excluded or oppressed by their perceived sense of 'place'. In light of these challenges, how can we enrich students' grasp of the pastoral place of Shakespeare's Forest of Arden by connecting it to their own lived regional place? While transplanting the class outdoors may not be a guaranteed means of activating student engagement with place, a movement towards the conceptual place of ardenspace might offer an alternative mode of enacting PBL in regional education and exploring lived and literary place through story.

Towards ardenspace

Arden, like the concept of regional or rural space, is largely imagined. As Flaherty argues in her assessment of representations of Arden in Australian productions of *As You Like It*, 'Arden is first and foremost a landscape of the imagination conceived and constructed through verbal accounts' (2009: 319). Similarly, Corbett tells us that 'rural is what we think it is in our various imaginary constructions' (2013: 2). When we attempt to connect texts to our students' lived sense of place, then, we are not connecting the literary and the real; we are connecting the literary and the constructed. For place – and, I would argue, especially regional place – is always constructed. To use Gruenewald's words: 'places are social constructions filled with ideologies, and the experience of places, such as the Black inner city or the White suburbs, shapes cultural identities' (2003a: 311). Preempting criticism of this conceptualisation of place, Gruenewald argues:

Not only is our experience of places mediated by culture, education, and personal experience, but places themselves are products of culture. The assertion that places are social constructions may seem heretical to some thinkers who maintain an ecocentric view of reality. One could argue that to designate an ecosystem or an oak tree a social construction is the ultimate expression of anthropocentric hubris. However, it is people and cultures that invest places – ecosystems, oak trees, nature itself – with meaning. (Gruenewald 2003b: 626)

Regional places, like literary places, are thus imaginative constructions. Conceptualisations of the region, the rural and the far north are no less constructed than the pastoral places of Arden and Arcadia. Instead of a PBL approach that attempts to view *As You Like It*'s pastoral world through what is perceived as students' *real* regional environment, we need a place-based strategy that recognises the dynamic, networked and imagined construction of *both* lived place and literary place.

In a curriculum and educational environment in which we tend to ignore our environment – looking anywhere but directly at it, rarely interrogating how we teach

and learn *in place*, one reaction against the systems which support such placelessness is the creation of what Liam Semler has termed ‘ardenspace’.

Ardenspace is a type of dreaming. It is a space of creative interactivity for temporary exiles of educational courts. It is creativity provoked by system. It is not, *per se*, a revolution, or an all-out assault on system by its malcontents. It is participatory storytelling in response to, about, from and against system. It is transgressive in respect to systems, categories and habits, but more importantly, it is free, generative and metamorphic. (Semler 2013: 38)

Ardenspace is a fertile exile space – like Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden – in which educators and students can play outside systemic restrictions of placelessness. It is the pastoral escape from *As You Like It*’s oppressive court. It is a space designed to enable us to ask ‘what if?’ (Semler 2013: 41).

But how might ardenspace be realised in a PBL framework? Semler’s ardenspace is a form of participatory storytelling; it is a space generated by stories. And the method by which we invest places with meaning is storytelling. Semler’s ardenspace thus aligns with Somerville’s critical pedagogy of place, which recognises that our relationship to place is ‘constituted in stories’ (2010: 326). This relationship between storytelling and place is well-established: ‘Places and stories are innately entwined. The roots of this connection run deep: every story takes place somewhere – and every place is constituted, at least in part, by stories’ (Mundell 2018: 1). Gruenewald writes that ‘all genres of creative literature clearly evoke the person-place relationship: Character, mood, theme, and whatever happens all depend largely on setting’ (Gruenewald 2003b: 625). A further similarity between Somerville’s pedagogy of place and Semler’s ardenspace is evident in Somerville’s conceptualisation of place as ‘offer[ing] a way of entering an in-between space where it is possible to hold different, and sometimes contradictory, ideas in productive tension’ (Somerville 2010: 330). This productive tension is precisely what Semler describes as ‘system stress’: critical turbulence that suggests ‘systems and internalised system habits are bending - or trying to’ (2013: 44).

Storytelling is key to the construction of place, and it is also a method of PBL. Rather than instructing students to generate connections between a text and our (educators’) understanding of their (students’) place, we can encourage students to imaginatively construct a sense of their lived place in response to pastoral literary places like the Arden of *As You Like It*. In this way, how place functions is entirely up to the student and does not depend on external categorisations or expectations of ‘regionality’. Meg Mundell furthers this in her discussion of creative writing as place-making (2018: 10-11). Mundell is interested in how creative writers make literary places, but her modelling of this creative place-making process applies not just to the writing stage but also to the reading stage: she identifies that a literary sense of place has three components – the generative act (making the literary text), the text itself, and the interpretive act conducted by the reader (2018: 3). Place-making is a multi-staged creative process that operates during the reader’s interpretive act. Thus, even in literary studies subjects that are not driven by creative writing learning outcomes or

assessments, PBL practices which focus on students' imaginative generation of their sense of place as a creative response to literary places can be implemented to help students better understand and reflect on their own lived place and the fictional literary places in the texts they study. Mundell's place-oriented experimental techniques (the 'POET model') for the creation of literary place could be utilised as part of a PBL strategy to help students to engage with both literary place and their own sense of place (2018: 9-10). There are five POET modes, according to Mundell: retrospective techniques (remembering place, using autobiographical memories); immersive techniques (site visits and direct encounters with place); collaborative techniques (utilising shared or cultural knowledge of place, from texts to maps to rumours); vicarious techniques (imaginatively inhabiting a character to empathise place); and nebulous techniques (imagination, intuition, dreams) (Mundell 2018: 9-10). Although designed for creative writers' construction of place, these techniques could be incorporated in the reader's interpretive act.

The implementation of activities like the POET techniques in ardenspace could generate reflective learning not only of the object of study (here, *As You Like It*) and the students' sense of lived and literary places, but also of their own learning processes. There are multiple ways such techniques might be adapted for my regional classroom's exploration of *As You Like It* in order to foster the imaginative construction of a student's sense of lived place in response to the play's pastoral literary place. A retrospective technique might involve asking students to write a short story or creative reflection of a time in their past when they have either left a familiar place or arrived at an unknown place; encouraging them to generate an authentic sense of place through both memory and creative writing that aligns with the experiences of literary place in *As You Like It*. It is well-established that place is integral to the construction of memories (and thus learning): 'it is, after all, impossible to create memories without tying them to a place' (Edward Moser qtd in Østby & Østby 2018: 34). This retrospective technique explicitly connects the memory of lived place with the construction of literary place. Alternatively, a vicarious technique could ask students to imagine a character fleeing not to Arden but to the student's lived place, and consider the potential learning experiences of that character in place. This imagined intersection between fictional character and lived place may provoke unexpected reflections on the student's sense of place. Nebulous techniques could focus on students' imagining their own version of the 'pastoral'. If the pastoral functions as an othered, idyllic space for exile, alternative education, and social critique, where might an equivalent space be found or imagined in the students' own experience of lived place? What criteria must be present for a place to be 'pastoral'? Students could also be asked to produce their own version of Arden – drawing inspiration from places they have been, imagined, seen, or read about; this could be a collage, a poem, a story, or a personal essay. These activities prioritise the generating of connections between literary place and a student's idiosyncratic sense of lived place. The activities are also designed to reinforce the role of networking in the definition of regionality, as Massey and Corbett describe it above.

Repositioning students as storytelling creators of place may foster an ardenspace in which students can engage with the literary places constructed in the texts they study,

as well as the sense of place derived from their own localities – outside of and beyond systemic limitations. The PBL opportunities within ardenspace allow students to depart the restrictions of the ‘court’ with its presuppositions about what place – especially regional place – really is, and how those within it are affected by their regionality. In building PBL storytelling practices that encourage students to create their own Arden or pastoral space – their own escape from both the system’s ignorance of place and its restrictive spatial expectations – we are not reifying urban/rural binaries nor participating in idyllic escapism, but rather recognising the generation of alternative senses of place through the participatory storytelling of ardenspace. By invoking the pastoral mode demonstrated in *As You Like It* to reflect upon the construction of regional Australian place, we can interrogate important preconceptions about our sense of place – problematising court/country binaries, fostering social critique, shifting the focus away from limited pre-existing categorisations of place, and realising sense of place as something always in the process of being imaginatively constructed through networks, connections, and storytelling. In fostering an imaginative engagement with both fictional place in literary texts and our own sense of lived place, scholars and students studying and writing in locations like Townsville – characterised as ‘regional’ place – can creatively generate their own senses of place and build novel connections between literary place and what is categorised as ‘regional’ place.

Endnotes

1. This is also a pragmatic theatrical strategy: as Martha Clare Ronk notes, while the play ‘suggests a pastoral world’ Shakespeare’s stage was ‘minimally dressed and outfitted’, and thus ‘the Forest of Arden is “seen” through the emblematic as given in words’ (2001: 269).
2. It is worth noting that I could do no equivalent activity with my online cohort, who in this subject almost equalled the number of internal or on-campus students. The relationship between PBL and technology is beyond the scope of this article but an awareness of digital or virtual places is critical, as students ‘come to us from “screenland”, a place of *iClouds* rather than real clouds, where most of their information, recreation and even socialisation happens through the medium of a screen’ (Venn and Lazaredes 2017: 123). For more on PBL and technology see Hagood and Price (2016).

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