

You Are “Here”: The Rhetoric of Place  
Eng 461: Senior Seminar, Fall 2010, Dr. Steve Ferruci

“We seem divided,” claims Philosopher Alain de Botton, “between an urge to override our senses and numb ourselves to our setting and a contradictory impulse to acknowledge the extent to which our identities are indelibly connected to, and will shift along with, our locations.” He is not the first to raise questions about the importance of place in forming not only our identities (cultural, social, individual) but also the way we see the world and our, well, place in it:

*Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world. – Archimedes*

*We would like only, for once, to get to where we are already. – Martin Heidegger*

*It is not down in any map; true places never are. – Herman Melville*

*These changes in latitudes, changes in attitudes/Nothing remains quite the same. – J. Buffett*

In this seminar, we will explore these concepts of place and the modern ennui of dislocation in works of literature, philosophy, and theory (including human geography). That place has an effect on us – the way you feel in a church, on an empty beach, in your grandmother’s kitchen – is not in question. Yet rarely do we pause to consider what that experiences means, how it means, or what, if anything, we should do with it.

We will examine the rhetoric of the places where we think and work and live, asking ourselves, for example, what it means to be here: **41.72 N 72.21 W**,  
as opposed to here:                      Or here:                      Or:



Drawing on our own experiences, the works of poets, essayists and philosophers, we will consider the following questions: What does it mean to be in a place? What does “place” mean? How are our experiences / ways of being mapped by those places we inhabit? And when we move to a new place how (and perhaps why) do we transform it? What are the consequences of “placelessness” or displacement?

The issues we explore will inform your own projects: an examination / exploration of (a) place. Former students of place have written about the Dunkin’ Donuts arena in Providence, the light and dark peripatetic of downtown Willimantic, and the inauthenticity of Lebanon, CT. We’ll read some of their work.

Possible authors and texts include selected works by Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, Edward Casey’s *Getting Back Into Place*, Tim Cresswell, *Place, A Short Introduction*, and others.