OUT OF HERE: EXPLORING LOCALLY REGULATED DIFFERENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NOVELS OF ADOLESCENCE

by

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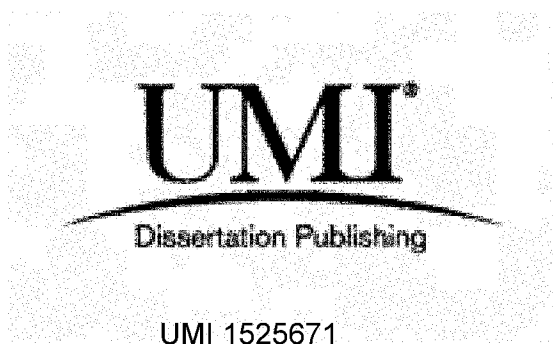UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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ABSTRACT

The role of the adolescent protagonist, as a critical medium through which to view society, is well established in the scholarly field of developmental fiction; however, the concept of place—as it relates to societal norms, values, and expectations—remains relatively unexamined. "Out of Here: Exploring Locally Regulated Difference" discusses ways in which contemporary novels of female adolescence appropriate developmental genre conventions and themes to explore the place-based definition and regulation of difference. Each of the novels suggests that conflict and transgression facilitate a critique of the social boundaries of place. Three contemporary Canadian novels that engage with local and systemic constructs of place frame this thesis: *Kalyna's Song* by Lisa Grekul (2003), *The Sudden Weight of Snow* by Laisha Rosnau (2002), and *A Complicated Kindness* by Miriam Toews (2004). My theoretical approach focusses on contemporary place theory as it relates to the critical function of conflict, a characteristic theme in developmental novels.

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Introduction

Adolescent protagonists have long been portrayed in conflict with their

hometowns. In what follows, it is my aim to focus specifically on the ways in which

adolescent conflict comes to bear on constructs of local place in three contemporary

Canadian novels set in small towns: *Kalyna's Song* by Lisa Grekul (2003), *The Sudden*

Weight of Snow by Laisha Rosnau (2002), and *A Complicated Kindness* by Miriam

Toews (2004). Sharing a common interest in female adolescence (though not necessarily

written for adolescent readers), each of these texts portrays a young female protagonist

coming of age in a town where dominant norms, values, and expectations conflict with

her sense of identity. My understanding of developmental fiction is informed by Adena

Rosmarin's notion of genre as "a kind of schema, a way of discussing literary text in

terms that link it with other texts and, finally, phrase it in terms of those texts" (Rosmarin

22). In taking a flexible approach to genre I aim to focus on its usefulness as an analytical

tool. Genre-driven criticism assumes that there is meaning both in the repetition of and

divergence from themes and conventions in literature (Seitel 276). My thesis therefore

charts both continuities and divergences within my chosen novels and, in doing so,

expands the conversation about conflict in novels of adolescence, namely by introducing

contemporary place theory into the discussion of individual protagonist's relationships to

society. Specifically, I am interested in the ways that conflict, a prominent theme in

novels of adolescence, performs a critical function by highlighting local constructs of

place and corresponding expectations (both explicit and assumed) for individual

behaviour and identity.

Conflict between adolescent protagonists and their hometowns can be traced back to the traditional *bildungsroman,* a genre in which a protagonist—usually male—is propelled by the social and intellectual constraints of his rural or "provincial" town into the wider world, where he undertakes a process of self-development (Buckley 17). The protagonist is often portrayed "in conflict with generations and with educators in the pedagogic community" (Labovitz 3). In the traditional *bildungsroman,* the protagonist generally moves from a rural to urban setting where "the most significant educational experiences of his life" occur (Rishoi 59). These experiences are crucial to the protagonist's journey of self-development, and while they might produce insecurity at first, they eventually lead to his maturity and "reconciliation with the world" (Rishoi 59). Often, the end of the self-development process culminates in the protagonist's return home, where he demonstrates "the degree of his success and the wisdom of his choice" (Buckley 18). In this formulation, the protagonist/place relationship is treated as a catalyst for individual development, which often corresponds with a resolution to the conflict between the individual protagonist and society. More often than not, the traditional *bildungsroman* assumes and affirms a social context that ultimately will "facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities, leading the young person from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 6).

Scholars have noted, however, that traditional *bildungsroman* resolutions—where the protagonist is integrated into society—are relatively uncommon. According to Bernard Selinger, from as early as the late eighteenth-century and onward "the male bildungsroman has gone from charting the integration of an individual into society to an (alienated) individual forever separate from society" (41). Some scholars—notably

Jeffrey Sammons, Fritz Martini, and James Harden—insist that the term *bildungsroman* ought to be used sparingly and only applied to novels in which humanist ideals are upheld and the full formation of an inherent self is the primary theme. Furthermore, Harden insists that "most traditional definitions of the Bildungsroman consider an accommodation between the individual and society an essential characteristic of the genre," something that is uncommon in modern novels, which are characteristically "open-ended, noncommittal, [and] relativistic" (xxi).

Despite attempts to narrow the term, however, '*bildungsroman*' is still used to facilitate discussions of contemporary developmental novels, even those in which protagonists find themselves irreconcilably at odds with society. Writing extensively on the debate about terminology, Ellen McWilliams posits that "the most useful, inclusive definition of *bildung* can be taken as a physical, intellectual, or indeed spiritual process of cultivation and transformation" (8). Scholars who continue to use the term have produced engaging analyses of novels that appropriate conventions associated with the *bildungsroman*. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, for example, discusses twentieth-century novels portraying protagonists that tend to seek escape rather than integration into a society with which they find themselves in conflict (162). Similarly, Richard A. Barney insists that diverging forms of the *bildungsroman*, in which individual development does not coincide with social integration, have become a useful medium for marginalized writers resisting socio-political hegemony (361).

Scholars have noted that the tendency to alienate rather than integrate is particularly common in developmental novels with female protagonists. Many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female protagonists, "excluded from active

participation in culture" turn inward to "explore and develop spiritually, emotionally, and

morally" (Hirsch 23). Despite the positive aspects of personal inward development,

"Confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss of public activity; it

enforces an isolation that may culminate in death" (Abel et al. 8). More often than not,

for eighteenth-century protagonists, the novel's resolution involved a choice between two

undesirable options. Many female protagonists were faced with choosing between

"succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive 'normality'" (Abel et al.12-13).

Where novels ended with protagonists' suicides, their deaths were less representative of

"developmental failures" than they were of "refusals to accept an adulthood that denies

profound convictions and desires" (Abel et al.11). Among Victorian and early twentieth-

century female protagonists, development inward "leads in turn to a revelation of the

disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world" (Rosowski 49).

Generally, then, societal expectations are markedly different for women than for men,

and this is reflected in the relationship between the individual and society in female

developmental fiction (Abel et al. 5). Esther Kleinboard Labovitz articulates the double

bind that is encountered by many female protagonists whose desires defy social

expectations:

> A major aspect of the female heroine's *Bildung* will center on the conflict that
>
> arises over independence and freedom. Conditioned to be *dependent,* the
>
> *Bildungsromane* heroines reflect the dichotomy of the social conflict, the desire
>
> for independence and the fear of being cast out. These heroines, however, seem to
>
> be created by their authors to take risks and even hazard being cast out of

respectable society and the family circle—leading the life on an exile. (15; emphasis in original)

Incongruities between the female protagonist's desires and societal expectations have thus been a common theme in discussions of the female *bildungsroman*.

While inward development and alienation have been prominent themes in novels of female development, Rita Felski identifies a subset of developmental fiction about women in the late twentieth-century, the "novels of awakening" that portray alienation and disengagement as necessary, but temporary parts of women's development. Initially, she contends, "separation from male society" is a crucial factor in the realization of female identity (Felski 132). The consciousness of (an often inherent) female identity that women discover in this process provides a "potentially oppositional force to existing social and cultural values" (Felski 132). Transformation does not necessarily culminate with an end to conflict; rather, it shifts the conflict from within to "outside of the self, in the struggle between individual and social, female and male demands" (Felski 133).

As with novels of development that feature female protagonists, contemporary novels of adolescence are marked by protagonists' defiance of societal norms and expectations. Barbara White contends that clashes with adult society have been a prominent theme in novels of adolescence from the early twentieth-century onward, where conflict is stressed above resolution (12-14). While discussions of developmental fiction have tended to overlook novels in which the protagonist escapes or rejects societal limitations, Caren J. Town asserts that many contemporary novels of adolescence feature girls who actively engage with the world and defy societal conventions (12-15). This phenomenon is especially evident in novels in which young female protagonists on the

verge of developing into women resist the gendered expectations that associated with that development (White 20). Christy Roshoi contends that twentieth-century women's coming of age narratives "often reflect the widening horizons for women in American culture and a strong resistance to normative femininity; female quest takes many forms, and successful resistance to gender norms becomes possible and even acceptable, if still sometimes unconscious or covert" (11).

The sense of conflict that characterises contemporary novels of adolescence has been read in terms of the inherent social critiques that are generated by juxtaposing adolescent rebel-heroes against dominant social norms, values, and expectations. In *The Adolescent Idea,* Patricia Meyer Spacks insists that "novels take the young seriously" in their portrayal of "adolescents who oppose the existent social order" (Spacks 15). Adolescents function as "social outsiders" who have yet to be "accepted into the established order" (Spacks 10), and from this vantage point, they have "the capacity either to deny or confirm their societies by choosing or not choosing to enter the inside" (294). As dominant social organization is increasingly viewed with suspicion, people have begun to associate with and/or valorize adolescent outsiders, so that adolescent protagonists "can appear heroic in not belonging" (Spacks 294), and "their separation from the realm of social power now constitutes their virtue" (Spacks 10). Thus, the adolescent perspective can provide a critical medium through which to view society.

When discussing the relationship between adolescent girls and dominant social orders in literature, the role of place in determining a particular social order is often either assumed or ignored. While there are exceptions to this (the work of Karen J. Town in particular) there is ample room in the discourse of female novels of adolescence to

explore the difference that place makes in terms of framing conflict between the protagonist and society. "Every story," writes Michel de Certeau, "Is a travel story—a spatial practice" (115). Just as stories are intrinsic to the construction of space and place, they are also constructed by and through our everyday understandings of space and place (De Certeau 115-116). The concept of place, however, often remains unexamined in discussions of developmental fiction. National and regional demarcations are often treated in a similar manner to genres and used to discuss the meanings of recurring characteristics and departures in literature. This approach is paralleled in discussions of Canadian literature, where an emphasis is often placed on the ways in which literary texts illustrate either the material regional characteristics of place or the subjective re-presentation of place (Chalykoff, "Overcoming" 161). My selection of texts, in the initial stages of writing this thesis, is highly reflective of this approach. Each of the novels included is written and set in Western Canada, a fact that I initially assumed would be of critical importance to the constructs of place represented in the novels. A recent turn in Canadian literary criticism, exemplified by scholars such as Frank Davey and Lisa Chalykoff, has led to the re-examination of regionalisms as constructs that, in an effort to emphasize community, often obscure difference and diversity. Chalykoff's "No Place for a Girl: Place and Gender-Identity in the Channel Shore" led me to the discipline of human geography, where contemporary definitions of place provide "a useful means of examining social difference" (149). According to Chalykoff, the study of place among human geographers such as Doreen Massey and Tim Cresswell "begins from the premise that places are conflictual, hierarchical sites constituted through processes of social exclusion" (149).

'Place' itself is a fairly abstract term, certainly no less abstract than 'society,' and it has been defined in various ways across multiple fields of inquiry. Though the terminology and the foci differ between scholars and disciplines, contemporary scholars such as Edward Soja, John Agnew, Edward Relph, and Tim Cresswell agree that place is not a singular thing. It cannot be reduced to a coordinate on a map or described by geographic boundaries alone. Places, according to Relph, "are the complex, obvious contexts of daily life, filled with buildings, cars, relatives, plants, smells, sounds, friends, strangers, obligations and possibilities" (par. 4). In his book, *Place and Politics,* Agnew identifies and expands three aspects of place: "*locale,* the settings in which social relations are constituted (these can be informal or institutional); *location,* the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction as defined by social and economic processes operating at a wider scale; and *sense of place,* the local 'structure of feeling' (28). This last aspect of place—also described by Agnew as "the social-spatial definition of place from *inside*" (28)—is particularly relevant to my thesis because the protagonists in each of my novels find themselves restricted by locally constructed and regulated senses of place.

Working from Agnew's definition (among others), one of the most comprehensive and articulate summaries of place that I have encountered comes from Tim Cresswell's *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*:

Place always exists in a state between objective fact and subjective feeling. Because we live in place, as part of place, and yet simultaneously view place as something external, place can be thought of as a centre of meaning and an external context for action—as ideal and material. Place combines realms that

theory has sought to hold apart. Place, as a phenomenological-experiential entity

combines elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender,

and so on), and meaning (the mind, ideas, symbols). Experience of place, from a

phenomenological perspective, is always an experience of all three realms, each

of which affects our actions is place. (157)

Cresswell examines "the way in which space and place are used to structure a normative

landscape—the way in which ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are

transmitted through space and place" (8). Notions about what is good or desirable vary

from place to place and usually do not need to be articulated outright; rather, they

function through common-sense. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Cresswell

explores the role that transgression plays in exposing that normative landscape, asserting

that "transgressive acts prompt reactions that reveal that which was previously considered

natural and commonsense" (10).

Cresswell's notions of normative landscape and transgression are particularly

relevant to my thesis, insofar as the relationship between normative landscape and

transgression is exemplified by frictions between the adolescent protagonists and their

respective hometowns in each of the novels I discuss. That is to say, normative

landscapes are portrayed in conflict with the desires and values of the protagonists. One

of the primary assumptions underlying this approach is that the outsider perspective is

both unique and powerful; bell hooks writes that being on the margin allows for a person

to look "both from the outside in and from the inside out," allowing for a more complete

perspective (ix). The expectations and limitations associated with a sense of place are, in

a sense, the antagonists in the novels that I examine. The protagonists' failures to "fit in,"

either wilfully or haplessly, highlight expectations and limitations that would otherwise be overlooked as common-sense, allowing the reader to see the workings of place.

While contemporary theories of place have become increasingly complex, representations of place are often regarded merely as backgrounds for action and meaning in the discourse of developmental fiction. Close readings of place in fiction can provide further understanding of the norms, values, and expectations expressed in contemporary novels of adolescence. Furthermore, examining norms, values, and expectations through the lens of place has the advantage of allowing scholars to engage more articulately with differences in scale. As Yi-Fu Tuan notes, "place exists at different scales. At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth" (149). Although adolescent conflicts have offered broad-scale critiques of social norms and values, the protagonist/place dynamics in the novels that I have chosen beg readings that account for (but are not limited to) relationships between localized small town constructs of place and corresponding place-based social norms, values, and expectations.

While the relationship between the adolescent individual and society at large has been (and continues to be) a relevant topic for literary analysis, it is becoming ever more important to assess and expand upon the ways in which we engage with the importance of localized place. Increasing interconnectivity and interdependency are changing the "structures and organizations of societies and places" (Davies 189). We are experiencing "time-space compression," a term that is introduced by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* to refer to the acceleration of experiences of space, generally as a result of advancements in transportation and communication. The telephone, the internet, and the jumbo jet have

changed the ways in which we experience space by decreasing the time required to

communicate or travel across vast portions of space. While the assumption is often that

globalization results in "a decline in the significance of the 'local,'" Linda McDowell

notes that "for many people in the world, everyday life continues to take place within a

restricted locale" (2-3). Rather than becoming homogenous, however, a "sense of

locality" has increased (McDowell 3). Doreen Massey observes that in some instances

this has led to the revival of more problematic expressions of place, "from reactionary

nationalisms, to competitive localisms, to introverted obsessions with 'heritage'" (5). I

have specifically chosen to work with novels that reflect contemporary struggles to

determine the value of local small towns in the context of increasing globalization and

urbanization, because a reactionary sense of place has a critical impact on the

protagonist/place relationships that result. While I will not be dealing with globalization

or urbanization directly in chapters of my thesis, it will be evident that the novels I am

engaging with all portray the defense of local norms, values, and expectations in tandem

with the articulation of "competitive localisms" and "introverted obsessions with

'heritage'" (Massey 5).

Contemporary novels of adolescence are well-suited to highlighting a reactionary

sense of place insofar as adolescent protagonists' identities are often constructed in

conflict with normative place in their small town. In *The Sudden Weight of Snow* by

Laisha Rosnau, the central character's relationship to her hometown, Sawmill Creek, is

established early on in the novel. Before the setting of the novel is described, or even

introduced, Rosnau makes it clear that one of the things her protagonist, Harper, wants

more than anything is "a way out" of her small town (Rosnau 2). Likewise, Colleen, the

protagonist of Lisa Grekul's *Kalyna's Song,* yearns to leave her hometown, St. Paul. At

the age of thirteen, she surveys the town from her parents' car window, wishing to be

"somewhere else. Anywhere else" (52). Her dislike for her hometown remains

throughout her high-school years, and by midway through the novel, as she prepares to

graduate, she has been "waiting a long time to leave St. Paul" (230). In *A Complicated

Kindness*, Miriam Toews portrays a similar relationship between protagonist and place.

Situated in the fictional Mennonite community of East Village, Toews's central

character, Nomi Nickel, asserts, "If I could live anywhere else in the world, anywhere, I

would" (53). Each protagonist expresses the belief that things must be different

elsewhere. Thus, while the norms, values, and expectations that they baulk against may

be common to an entire region, nation, or continent, their conflicts are imagined locally

and situated primarily within the local politics of place.

The first chapter of my thesis will be focussed on the use of spatial boundaries to

segregate cultural practices and regulate cultural identities in Lisa Grekul's novel,

Kalyna`s Song. I will use theory by Tim Cresswell to discuss commonsense place-based

expectations for appropriate behaviour supplemented by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of

doxa—or the experience of supposedly self-evident or commonsense limits in our day to

day lives—to examine the relationships between cultural identity and place in *Kalyna's

Song*. The most closely related to the conventions of the *bildungsroman,* Grekul's novel

portrays the protagonist's development from early adolescence through her first year of

college. Throughout the narrative, the most prominent conflict occurs between Colleen's

developing sense of cultural identity and the unspoken rules that govern significant places

in her life. I will use Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson's "Beyond 'Culture': Space,

Identity, and the Politics of Difference" to examine the role of imagined homelands in the territorialization and authentication of culture in the novel and to discuss Colleen's recognition of the place-based regulation of cultural identity. Finally, I will introduce Doreen Massey's concept of a "meeting place"—a notion of place that focusses on intersections and interconnectedness over boundaries and separation—to discuss the alternative way of imagining relationships between culture and place that Colleen eventually formulates.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I will be focussing primarily on the ways in which a sense of place, particularly in conjunction with notions of work and family, is used to define insider and outsider status in Laisha Rosnau's *The Sudden Weight of Snow.* I will be using Tim Cresswell's work on the role of transgression in exposing a dominant sense of place. In addition, I will be applying Cresswell's notion of differentiation, supplemented by Goran Therborn's notion of positional ideologies, to examine the ways in which a dominant sense of place is constructed relationally, in opposition to notions of the 'outside.' Rosnau's novel is told from the perspective of an adolescent girl, Harper, who relates her coming of age in a fictional resource community called Sawmill Creek. Harper is keenly aware of how the dominant sense of place is collectively defined, what the dominant norms and values are, and who does not belong in the corresponding social structure. For Harper, whose sense of self is in conflict with the norms and values of her hometown, a sense of belonging is neither possible nor desirable. As she journeys away from her hometown and back again, she continues to be an outsider, and her narrative illustrates the positive value of persistent transgression as a means to challenging place-based hegemony.

In the third chapter, I will examine the ways in which notions of separation and the protection of difference can be used to limit access to competing ideologies, thereby regulating contestation of the established order and the self-determination of individuals in *A Complicated Kindness*. In the first portion of the chapter, I will be introducing Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia—defined as a place that is "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (24)—to discuss the social order of place that is presented within the novel. Foucault's concept of heterotopia will be supplemented by Edward Soja and Robert Sack's explanations of territoriality as a strategy to influence or maintain power relations through geographic boundaries. Finally, I will be engaging with Bourdieu's concept of orthodoxy to analyse the rules of place in Toews's novel and compare them to the doxic or commonsense rules of place in *Kalyna's Song* and *The Sudden Weight of Snow*. Miriam Toews's novel centers on her adolescent protagonist, Nomi Nickel, and the eventual disappearance of all of her family members from East Village, Nomi's hometown. Foucault's concept of heterotopia is particularly useful for examining place in this novel because East Village is constructed as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia" (24); strict rules are constructed and structured primarily around the idealization of a place that is separate from the rest of the world and its values. For Nomi, whose most ardent desire is to be 'normal,' the rules of East Village present a fundamental discord. Furthermore, as Nomi begins to develop her own world-view, she finds herself questioning—and ultimately rejecting—the religious ideologies that serve as a foundation for the rules of East Village. The apparent critique of the rules of East Village occurs in parallel with a more subtle critique of the narrative and genre

expectations, and in the end, the challenge that Nomi poses to her hometown is matched by Toews's challenge to the generic conventions that she both appropriates and modifies.

The expectations and limitations of place vary between the novels that I have chosen. What is normal or valuable in Miriam Toews's East Village would be strange and undesirable in Lisa Grekul's St. Paul. The protagonists vary greatly too. They do not transgress the boundaries of place in the same ways or to the same degrees. What is shared between all three is that notions of place and space are used to regulate the behaviour and construct notions of what is desirable, admirable, and even acceptable. In addition, all of the protagonists are characterized by an awareness that the boundaries exist and the willingness to question and even transgress them. The conflict between the adolescent protagonists and their hometowns is far more than a reflection of the indiscriminate rebelliousness that has come to be associated with adolescence. As a literary convention, it facilitates critiques not only of the places represented in the novels, but also of the ways in which places at large can be constructed to regulate difference and maintain the status quo.

Chapter 1

Disclosing and Contesting the Spatial Regulation of Cultural Difference in Lisa Grekul's *Kalyna's Song*

Adolescent protagonists are often portrayed as "rebels with a cause" (White 14), generally transgressing rules and norms as a protest against "a long interval of dependence between childhood and adulthood" (14). Lisa Grekul's protagonist Colleen does not rebel in the ways that are often associated with a defiant teenager; she does not run away and she does not experiment with sex, drugs, or alcohol. Her rebellion generally takes the form of questioning authority, both inwardly and outwardly by 'speaking her mind' and verbally challenging authority figures. Often, her conflict is with authority figures hold to views that are implicit in the regulation of cultural difference; for example, challenging a high school teacher that presents a Eurocentric view of Canadian history, refusing to teach the history of Canada before European settlement because it is not "written down" (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 121).

Compared to Rosnau and Toews, Grekul incorporates a fairly traditional "apprenticeship" plotline, which, according to Able, Hirsch, and Langland, shows an essentially chronological and "continuous development from childhood to maturity" (Able, Hirsch, and Langland 11). Although Colleen's narrative does not begin until she is fourteen, it does cover a significantly larger span than *The Sudden Weight of Snow* or *A Complicated Kindness,* and it unfolds more or less chronologically. Like many traditional *Bildungsromane* protagonists, Colleen leaves her small town home and then returns, having matured significantly. Throughout the novel, one of the most crucial issues is Colleen's developing sense of cultural identity. Part of her journey involves navigating

the complex intersections between cultural identity and the unspoken rules that govern place and space. As she matures, Colleen undergoes a process of development that involves recognizing the unspoken rules that govern the spatial distribution of cultural difference within place. Ultimately, she is able to question the legitimacy of those rules, and conceptualize an alternative relationship between culture and place.

Even at a young age Colleen struggles with the ways in which cultural practices and identities are locally segregated and regulated, and as she matures, Colleen connects local everyday rules with broader and more systemic ways of conceptualizing relationships between culture and territory. Colleen's struggle to articulate her identity as a third generation Ukrainian-Canadian is often made difficult because of the tendency to validate cultural practices in conjunction with a notion of 'where you come from.' While Colleen initially sees the spatialization and authentication of cultural identities and practices as something that she can get away from if she leaves St. Paul, as she travels to Swaziland and back again, she learns that these problems are not limited to her hometown.

Throughout *Kalyna's Song* Grekul uses her protagonist to call attention to the ways in which expectations change from place to place and to the way that people alter their behaviour to meet those expectations. In the course of an average day, people unconsciously shift their behaviour according to place specific expectations, but from the perspective of Colleen, an adolescent who is constantly and deliberately making an effort to fit in, shifts that would not ordinarily be noteworthy become apparent. At school, Colleen notes that "you act like everyone else" (59). When she goes through airport security in Edmonton, getting ready to board a plane for the first time in her life she has

no idea what to do, so she observes the behaviour of the people around her: "while I stand in line waiting for my turn to go through the metal detector, I watch the people around me, to see what they do" (281). When it is her turn, she simply tries "to act like everyone else, like going through airport security is routine, so that no one will stare at [her]" (281). When she arrives in Swaziland, Siya, a Swazi friend that she meets on the plane, teaches her "how to act" and what to say in Mbabane (297). Moving from place to place, whether it is from one country to another or just from the playground to the library, requires an adjustment in behaviour according to unspoken rules or norms. The rules are rarely explained, so fitting in often requires behaviour that is based on the observation and imitation of those who already know the rules.

"Expectations about behaviour in place," Tim Cresswell argues, "are important components in the construction, maintenance, and evolution of ideological values" (Cresswell, *In Place* 4). In our everyday lives, spaces and places are used in ways that construct and reinforce categories of sameness and difference all the time, often in ways that are so familiar that we take them for granted as commonsense. According to Pierre Bourdieu, an "established order tends to produce (to very different degrees with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness" (164). Where the relationship between "objective classes" (sex, age, ethnic ancestry) appear to correspond naturally with "social classes" (gender, age limits, cultural identity), the prevailing social order often seems to be "self-evident" (164). Bourdieu refers to this experience as *doxa*, which is differentiated "from an orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness and recognition of different or antagonistic beliefs" (164). While the rules of cultural practice in St. Paul are not strictly doxic—they are explicitly linked to the more formal rules

experienced by Colleen's parents' generation and contradicted by attempts to create and foreground 'multicultural' experiences both inside and out schools—they are comparable in the sense that in Colleen's everyday experiences they are generally unspoken and, as a result, unquestioned. According to Cresswell, where place-based expectations, an important component of any social order, appear natural without being articulated as natural, they are more likely to remain uncontested: "The most powerful expectations remain unnoticed and assumed. The supposed naturalness of ideas remains implicit in behaviour. . . . The natural way is not the 'best' way; it is the only way" (*In Place* 159).

Many of the commonsense notions that Colleen calls attention to throughout the novel are intrinsic to the spatial regulation of difference. Within St. Paul, difference is segregated into different places, with varying degrees of formality. Kalyna, Colleen's aunt, "goes to a special kind of daycare" that is explicitly defined as a place "for mentally handicapped people" (100). The two bars in town, The Donald and The Lavoie are not formally segregated; however one is predominantly patronized by Aboriginals and the other by rig workers. Within the Orthodox Church that most of Colleen's extended family attends, women sit on one side of the church, while men sit on the other (64). At the Rodeo Beerfest, a part of the annual Rodeo Weekend celebration in St. Paul, the hockey players sit at one table that is "covered with empty beer bottles; some of them are drinking straight rye. All of them are smoking Colts" (179). At another table, the "bona fide cowboys" from out of town sit quietly, "chewing snuff and spitting yellowish-brown saliva into plastic cups" (179). The schools in St. Paul are all either Catholic or Protestant. Glen Avon, the only protestant school, is located on the west side of St. Paul, while St. Paul and Racette, the Catholic elementary school and junior high school, are

located in the centre of town, within blocks of the Cathedral and convent. The high school, also Catholic, is located on the east side of town.

While difference is segregated in many different ways, the segregation of cultural difference is particularly evident in *Kalyna's Song*. Colleen identifies herself as a Ukrainian Canadian, an identity that she associates with Ukrainian folk song and dance. She is part of a dance club that competes in dance competitions at Ukrainian folk festivals. The summer before she begins grade eight, Colleen and the rest of her dance club attend a competition in Dauphin, where they lose every single competition that they enter. Everyone in the club is embarrassed about the losses, and for the first time, Colleen is not excited to return to school in the fall. She wonders what she and the other Ukrainian kids will talk about, since they most likely will not want to talk about their loss (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 51). Partway through the first day of school, however, it dawns on Colleen that they have never talked about Ukrainian dance competitions at school: "even when we competed and *won* at festivals in Vegreville and Hafford, we never talked about it at school—not to each other, and definitely not to the other kids who don't Ukrainian dance" (54). Colleen realizes that "Dancing is like some kind of secret we all keep" and that, in fact, her and her Ukrainian peers "don't talk about *anything* Ukrainian" (54).

The silence surrounding cultural practice in the predominantly English Canadian space of the school is, as Colleen notes, governed by a set of unspoken rules:

> Although Mom and Dad have never said so, there are rules. Rules that can't be broken. I get it now. I see it so clearly. We never talk about the rules, but we all know them—everyone in our family, everyone in [the Ukrainian dance group],

everyone who takes Ukrainian. It's okay to be Ukrainian at home but not at

school. . . . That's just the way it goes. (59)

While the rules are not explicitly articulated, they are widely understood. Place, in this

sense, is intrinsic to the notion of cultural difference: different cultural practices belong in

different places. In addition, the rules governing the spatialization of difference can be

compared to Bourdieu's notion of doxa as they operate primarily in the realm of

commonsense, where "that's just the way it goes" (Grekul 59). The Ukrainian students

are not the only ones that do not vocalize anything that belies their otherness. The Cree

students at Colleen's school are also silent about cultural practices, and Colleen notes,

"I've never heard them talk about what it's like to be Native, what it's like living on the

reserve" (55). Again, cultural identity and practice is linked and, and ultimately relegated

to "Other" places.

According to Bourdieu, doxic notions of appropriate behaviour and social order

within place become visible when they are challenged. He writes that the "adherence

expressed in the doxic relation to the social world is the absolute form of recognition of

legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness, since it is unaware of the very

question of legitimacy, which arises from competition for legitimacy" (168). Obedience

to commonsense expectations for behaviour reinforces the validity of those expectations.

In order to de-naturalize those expectations, alternative ways of behaving must be

presented, but where adherence is so entrenched as to appear natural or commonsense,

the probability of recognizing the arbitrariness of the existing order is somewhat limited.

However, when other ways of being or behaving are presented, the supposed naturalness

of the rules is revealed to be arbitrary (168). Revealing the social and historical aspects of

place can be a powerful tool for dismantling the established order:

> The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into
>
> formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in
>
> breaking the immediate fit between the subjective and the objective structures,
>
> destroys self-evidence practically. It is when the social world loses its character as
>
> natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character . . .
>
> of social facts can be raised. (Bourdieu 169)

In *Kalyna's Song,* Grekul's adolescent protagonist is a critical medium for formulating a

critique and bringing "the undiscussed into discussion" (Bourdieu 169). Essentially, once

Colleen realizes that the unspoken rules exist, she begins to question them, and her

process of questioning is used to uncover the social and historical construction of the

unspoken rules, thereby de-naturalizing the 'natural' spatialization of difference. She

traces the unspoken "rules about not being Ukrainian in some places, and being

Ukrainian in others" (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 61) to the experiences of her parents'

generation, before the rules about the spatialization of cultural difference were

internalized as commonsense expectations.

The rules about Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian places, in this case, are traced back

to the early childhood education of Colleen's parents. While the existence of policies

designed to assimilate aboriginal peoples have become relatively well known, especially

pertaining to residential schools, less severe measures were also taken to assimilate other

non-English speaking populations. Policies to make public education compulsory in

Canada were, in some instances, a direct response to English Canadian anxiety about the

growth of immigrant communities (Gauthier, Kach, and Mazurek 201-202). When, in the early 1900's bilingual schools were no longer allowed in Manitoba, where a large portion of Ukrainian immigrants had settled, students were no longer allowed to be taught in their first language, and English became the primary language of education (Gauthier, Kach, and Mazurek 206). Although Ukrainian-as-second-language courses were introduced into schools in the 1950's, it was not until the 1960's and 1970's that "a more flexible attitude to instruction in other languages grew up" (Gauthier, Kach, and Mazurek 210). While making children ashamed of their language and culture may not have been the primary aim of assimilationist policies, it is an understandable outcome. Colleen's parents would rather their children not "be too Ukrainian," because they were made to feel embarrassed about their own Ukrainian cultural practices and identities when they were children. When they were children in school, Colleen's parents "couldn't speak English properly" and "ate different foods" (57). "Normal" behaviour was reinforced by teachers who used informal methods of shunning and formal methods of corporal punishment, "strapping them when they spoke Ukrainian with other Ukrainian kids" (57), essentially teaching the children that school was not the right place for their cultural practices.

The spatial structure of place not only governs appropriate behaviour, but also informs the way that people think about their own identity and "who they are in society" (Cresswell, *In Place* 8). This is particularly clear in *Kalyna's Song* when Colleen is asked to define and give an example of genocide. In her interview for United World Colleges, Colleen starts with the most widely used understanding of the term: "the wholesale annihilation of a group of people for religious or political reasons," and uses the example of physical extermination, like "the Jews in World War II" and "the Beothuck people

of . . . eastern Canada" (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 198). She then turns her attention to what

she sees as more "subtle" and local forms of genocide, forms of *"cultural* genocide":

> When my parents and my aunts and my uncles were young, in the thirties and
>
> forties, they weren't permitted to speak Ukrainian at school. The teacher expected
>
> them to speak English but most of them didn't know *how*. They spoke Ukrainian
>
> at home. The teacher strapped them at school when they spoke Ukrainian; the
>
> other kids called them names. My parents and their generation, they grew up
>
> ashamed of who they were, and of who their parents were. Ashamed of their food,
>
> their religion—everything. Their whole way of life. So they raised us to be
>
> English, thinking we wouldn't have to be ashamed, then. (199-200)

In the spatial structure of St. Paul, the segregation of cultural difference creates a sense

of otherness for those whose cultural identities and practices do not match the

expectations of 'normal,' predominantly English Canadian spaces. Cultural practice and

identity become, within these spaces and places, sources of shame and markers of

outsider status. As a result, they modify their behaviour to fit in, and when they have

children of their own they give them "English names" and they rarely take their children

to the Orthodox Church that they attended themselves as children (57). The shame that

her parents felt as school children is by no means absent from Colleen's generation,

evidenced by the fact that they never speak about anything Ukrainian at school. But they

know the rules, and they know how to perform in order to avoid embarrassment.

The segregation of cultural difference is not just manifest in schools. The

difficulty of mixing cultural difference within one place becomes especially apparent

when Colleen attends her cousin's wedding. When Colleen's cousin Dean marries an

Angliik (60), they have the ceremony in the Greek Orthodox Church, but break with all the Ukrainian traditions for the reception. When they arrive at the reception hall, Colleen thinks that it is "all wrong for a Ukrainian wedding," that it is "not the right place for a reception" (68). She does not like the rules that segregate cultural practices and does not see the "sense" in them, but feels that since they can only be themselves in Ukrainian places and with other Ukrainian people, they ought to stand up for that (61). At the reception, instead of everyone seating themselves where they please (as they normally would at a Ukrainian wedding), there are place-cards to tell everyone where to sit. The place-cards are essentially used to group and to separate people—to spatialize cultural marginalization in much the same way that it is spatialized in Colleen's school. The Ukrainian guests are all seated together, in a part of the room where they are out of sight: "Nobody in the hall can see us because we're behind the pillars" (71). All of the Ukrainian guests are nervous in this setting, in part because the rules have suddenly changed and now they do not know how to behave: "Are we allowed to leave our seats once we sit down?" (68). When Colleen and her sister Sophie do leave their seats to get a better view of the podium where people are giving toasts and speeches, they are almost immediately recognized and made aware that they are out of place. The groom's mother says something that causes them to giggle and, "All the heads at the tables closest to us turn and stare" (72). Their aunt, the groom's mother, is horrified and embarrassed at their seemingly innocent behaviour, and Colleen knows immediately that she and her sister "are out of place, out of our assigned spots, on the wrong side of the pillars" (73). Here, the rules of place are clearly not static; the rented room could have been constructed as a

place of cultural interconnectedness, but instead it is constructed in terms of the familiar

unspoken rules that separate and regulate cultural practices and identities.

The spatialization of cultural difference within a given place can be seen as a

symptom of a broader systemic way of thinking about the relationships between culture,

place, and distinctiveness. In "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of

Difference," Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson address the ways in which cultural identity

is often linked to specific territories. They argue that "space itself becomes a kind of

neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are

inscribed," and that "space functions as a central organizing principle in the social

sciences at the same time that it disappears from analytical purview" (7). While Gupta

and Ferguson are directly addressing the field of social sciences, particularly

anthropology, their insights are applicable to the ways in which the relationships between

cultural identities and places are conceptualized, and ultimately problematized, in

Kalyna's Song.

The spatialization of cultural difference in St. Paul reinforces a broader systemic

way of thinking about culture in relation to place or territory. While attempts to

conceptualize the world in terms of cultural regions, nations, and homelands are

becoming increasingly difficult in today's "world of diaspora, trans-national culture

flows, and mass movements of populations," notions of "culturally and ethnically distinct

places" have become increasingly resonant (Gupta and Ferguson 10). For immigrant

communities, imagined homelands often become "symbolic anchors of community" (11).

In *Kalyna's Song*, Grekul uses Colleen's perspective to highlight the ways in which the

reinforcement of the relationship between cultural identity and place not only perpetuates

cultural separateness, but can also reinforce notions of culture that rely on imagined

homelands as points of reference by which cultural practices and identities can be

authenticated. Although Colleen resents the peripheralization of Ukrainian culture in St.

Paul, she is also faced with trying to negotiate her own sense of cultural identity within a

cultural community where notions of authentic culture are constructed in relation to a

folkloric version of "the Old Country" (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 88).

The phrase "where you come from" is often used to articulate a connection

between a sense of identity and a sense of place. Frequently, when someone talks about

where they come from or refers to where someone else comes from, it denotes much

more than a geographic location. People associate particular characteristics with

particular places, and often if you say that you are from a place, you are associating

yourself with those characteristics. While the sentiment underlying the phrase "where you

come from" often provides unity and a sense of community for people who are from the

same place, it can also be a limiting mentality through which to view individual practices

and identities. In *Kalyna's Song,* Colleen's struggle to articulate her sense of Ukrainian

Canadian identity is often impeded by systemic ways of authenticating Ukrainian culture

in relation to territory.

Throughout the narrative, this struggle is only exacerbated by the discourse of

multiculturalism, a concept that Grekul herself argues is fundamentally flawed. The

discourse of multiculturalism, in effect, promotes "celebratory 'song and dance' models

of ethnicity" that fail to acknowledge or engage with the everyday lived experiences of

ethnic minorities (Grekul, *Leaving* xv). The Multiculturalism Act calls for the

"preservation" of culture (Kamboureli 104), but "the 'preservation' of ethnicity lodges

the ethnic subject within a museum case because of a 'heritage'—another touchstone in

the Act—that is presumed to be stable and unambiguous, and therefore easily

reproducible" (106). In *Kalyna's Song*, the celebrated "song and dance" aspects of

culture are often meant to harken back to a homeland or point of origin, providing a

symbolic link between person and homeland and ultimately reinforcing the tendency to

think of cultural identity in terms of locations on a map. The final project for Colleen's

eighth grade French assignment revolves around just such a celebratory model. The

theme for the assignment is *"Canada, Le Pays Multiculturel"* (Grekul, *Kalyna's* 108),

and the students must pick a 'hyphenated' identity to represent in a final presentation

before the entire school. The students presenting on Mexican- Canadians intend to make

papier mâché piñatas to symbolically represent Mexican culture. Colleen sees the project

as a chance to foreground her own sense of Ukrainian cultural identity, and the project

that she undertakes is in many ways reflective of the tendency to construct cultural

identity in relation to territory. In addition to displaying a collection of *pysanky*

(Ukrainian Easter eggs), a translation of a Ukrainian poem, and wearing her Ukrainian

dance costume, Colleen constructs a series of maps that show the demographic

distribution of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. She "of course" includes a map of

Ukraine "which shows the cities and the villages from which most of the Ukrainian

settlers originally came" (109). Using "the classic 'ethnographic maps' that purported to

display the spatial distribution of peoples, tribes, and cultures" (Gupta and Ferguson 6-7),

Colleen's project illustrates the way in which aspects of culture are symbolically

connected to a point of origin, or a homeland. For Colleen, cultural identity and practice

are by no means limited to a "song and dance" model, but when she tries to articulate

what it means to be Ukrainian Canadian, she has trouble moving beyond representations that are symbolic of territorial links.

While Colleen's parents alter their cultural practices to ensure that their children will fit into dominant English Canadian settings, they still "can't forget where they came from," nor do they really want to (Grekul, *Kalyna's* 58). Cultural identity and geography are inextricable in this oft-repeated phrase, but physically, neither Colleen nor her parents have ever been to Ukraine. Colleen's grandparents immigrated to Canada when they were too young to retain any remembrance of their homeland (88). Having never physically been to Ukraine herself, Colleen has difficulty convincing others that she really is Ukrainian. When her piano instructor, Sister Maria, says, "Tell me about being Ukrainian" (87), Colleen does not know "how to explain it" or "where to begin" (88). She begins by tracing a physical connection to homeland, explaining that while she has "never actually been to the Ukraine," her *Baba* and *Gido* [sic] emigrated from there (88). After that, the conversation falls apart, and though Colleen insists, (despite having never been to Ukraine and not knowing how to speak the language) "we're Ukrainian in other ways" (89), she has trouble articulating her own cultural identity.

Folk culture, particularly the performance of folk songs, is intrinsic to Colleen's sense of cultural identity as well as her identity as an artist and performer. However, the performance of folk culture within her community is often judged according to notions of authenticity that are constructed in relation to homeland. Notions of authenticity, even those that are, as Smaro Kamboureli suggests in *Scandalous Bodies,* "self-fashioned" can be used to define and limit cultural practices and identities and "become a straitjacket that is not that different, either ideologically or structurally, from the social attitudes that

make diasporic subjects Other to their host societies" (4). At the dance competition in

Dauphin, one of St. Paul's dance numbers is disqualified before it is even performed,

because the "costumes are inauthentic" (Grekul, *Kalyna's Song* 13). The parents of the

St. Paul dancers are outraged, one noting that the costumes cannot be anything less than

authentic because the dance instructor "'did six months of research in Ukraine. In

Ukraine!" (13-14). Here, it is not the demand for authenticity itself that the parents find

offensive, but the supposed misinterpretation of authenticity. Ukraine is the measure of

authentic cultural performance, and the St. Paul dancers have been taught by someone

who has physically been there. Not only does this way of thinking assume a

homogeneous and essentialized version of Ukrainian culture, it also imposes a standard

by which Ukrainian-ness can be measured.

Initially, Colleen internalizes this demand, and when she falls in love for the first

time, at the Dauphin festival, it is with someone who she sees as an "authentic"

Ukrainian. To Colleen, "Corey is really Ukrainian": he attends a bilingual school and

"talks a lot about famous Ukrainian authors, Ukrainian art, [and] Ukrainian music" (32).

Colleen is determined to win the singing competition, not just to impress Corey, but also

to "prove" to everyone that she and the people from St. Paul "are good, authentic

Ukrainians after all" (17). Colleen loses the competition, because, according to the

adjudicators, she sings "with a Canadian accent" (39). Here, the place-based

measurement of cultural authenticity puts Colleen, in a 'no win' situation.

Leaving St. Paul is a crucial aspect of Colleen's development, particularly with

regards to her growing awareness of the ways in which space and place can be used to

regulate and authenticate cultural difference. The 'journey' is a recurring theme in the

bildungsroman and continues to be an important motif in novels of adolescence. While it

was rarely incorporated into novels with female protagonists (due to a lack of geographic

mobility), it is now a more accessible convention to women writers writing about women

(Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 13). As mentioned in my introduction, the trajectory of the

journey in a traditional *bildungsroman* usually is from the "repressive atmosphere" of a

rural home to the city, where the protagonist's "real 'education' begins" (Buckley 18).

But the journey does not end in the city, and the protagonist, having reached maturity,

returns home to harmoniously integrate into society (Buckley 19).While Grekul follows

this model quite closely in terms of narrative progression, she does so in a subversive

manner. As Colleen moves to Edmonton and eventually to Swaziland then back to St.

Paul again, she learns that every place has its own rules, that every place has its own way

of using space and place to define and regulate difference.

When Colleen is in the eleventh grade her history teacher presents her with the

option of applying to United World Colleges, an organization that has several

international colleges and is founded on the goal of uniting young people from around the

globe (140). Colleen chooses to apply to the college in Mbabane, Swaziland to get "as far

away as possible," to a place that is "completely different from St. Paul" (159). At the

opening assembly, on the first day of her classes at the United World College in

Swaziland, the headmaster quotes King Sobhuza, asserting that "*We are all of the earth

which does not see difference of colour, religion, or race*" (310); however, as Colleen

looks around her, she notices that all of the students "sit in clusters—white students

separate from black students separate from Indian students. Boys sit with boys, girls with

girls. Boarding students apart from day students" (310). While the college's goal is to

bring people together from around the world, the students use place and space in the same manner that the students in Colleen's school in St. Paul do, grouping and separating themselves according to categories of sameness and difference.

The territorialization of cultural identity is especially apparent at the college, and Colleen is both implicated in and troubled by it. When she introduces herself to the girls in the room next to hers, she introduces herself as "Colleen Lutzak, from Canada," and gives them each one of the Canada flag pins that her mother bought for her to pass around (307-308). On the first day of classes, everyone in Colleen's history class introduces themselves by name and nationality. Although the goal is to bring people together from nations all over the world, nationality is used as a distinguishing characteristic that sets individuals apart. This becomes especially apparent in the conflict that develops between Colleen and one of her classmates, Katja. Colleen tries to explain to Katja how she can be both Ukrainian and Canadian, since "grandparents immigrated to Canada from Ukraine" (321); however, her schoolmate insists, "you're not Ukrainian, then. . . . Your *grandparents* are Ukrainian. *You* are Canadian" (321). Once again, faced with the insistence on a link between culture and territory, Colleen finds her cultural identity "hard to explain" (321).

Colleen's notions of authentic Ukrainian culture and identity, notions that are inextricable from folk song and dance, follow her to the college in Swaziland. At the end of the term, her music teacher, Mrs. McBain asks her to "represent the Ukraine" at a luncheon for the Rotarians, a group that donates a significant amount of money to the school. She explains that "the gentlemen would like to believe that their donation is bringing music to the . . . underprivileged" (Grekul, *Kalyna's* 399). Colleen is the most

talented performer at the school, but "there is nothing exceptional about a Canadian student playing a classical piano piece" (400). So Mrs. McBain asks her to sing a traditional Ukrainian folk song. Since Colleen does not have any "genuine Ukrainian attire" with her, she will have to perform in Katja's Polish folk costume (401). In addition to her qualms about pretending to be from Ukraine in order to appear "underprivileged," Colleen is uncomfortable with performing in an inauthentic costume. Not only is she afraid that she will be exposed as a fraud, but she still clings to an idea of authentic Ukrainian-ness, where costumes, songs, and dance routines reference a homeland. Despite her qualms, Colleen follows through with the performance (under threat of expulsion). Although she sings spectacularly, her fears come true when one of the Rotarians approaches her after the performance to tell her that although he enjoyed her performance, he noticed that she "didn't pronounce the words correctly" (412). Once again, Colleen's Canadian accent confounds her performance as a "real" Ukrainian. The Rotarian declares that while she is a "fine singer," she is "not much of a Ukrainian" (414).

This incident, rather than confirming Colleen's inherited notions of authentic place-based culture, acts as a catalyst for her to find a way to articulate her own sense of place and cultural identity. When the Rotarian deems Colleen an inauthentic Ukrainian, she finally rejects the imposition of authentic cultural place-based identity: "I'm tired of people telling me what I am. . . . . So what if I've never been to Ukraine?" (414). In terms of Colleen's individual development, recognizing the ways in which difference is spatialized and cultural identities are authenticated in relation to place are intrinsic to the development of her own personal identity and worldview. While novels of adolescence

emphasize conflict over resolution, tending to be less developmental than

bildungsromane and novels of female development (White 13-14), Grekul incorporates

development as a significant theme in her novel. In *Kalyna's Song*, Colleen's critical

perspective does not come ready-formed. While her critical stance towards place is

established early on in the novel, it develops as she encounters new people and places, re-

conceptualizing her own identity in terms of intersections and interconnections rather

than authenticity and distinctiveness.

Interconnected place is a concept that Colleen encounters nearly a third of the

way into the novel. When Colleen is transferred into Mr. Kaushal's eleventh grade

history class, she immediately connects with his worldview:

> I like Mr. Kaushal because he has all kinds of ideas about the world—like how, if
>
> a butterfly flaps it wings in South America, the weather changes in North
>
> America. Or how, if you work it out, every person on earth is connected to every
>
> other person. Six degrees of separation, he calls it. Mr. Kaushal has lived all over
>
> the world. . . . He says we're not really as different as we all think. (143)

Mr. Kaushal's sense of interconnectedness has a crucial impact on Colleen's developing

perspective of place, but it is not until she leaves St. Paul and returns that she finds a way

to integrate this perspective into her own worldview.

In Mbabane, all of the senior students at Waterford have to complete an extensive

research project for the term's end. Once again, Colleen chooses a Ukrainian-themed

project, only this time with very different results. Initially, Colleen decides that she will

do her project on Ukrainian folk songs, "to understand how the old music has changed in

the new world. In Canada, I mean. Under the influence—the *oppressive* influence—of

dominant, Anglo-Canadian culture" (321). By the end of the term, Colleen's perspective

on her project has changed. Having become uncomfortable with demands for

authenticity, Colleen comes to recognize that "folk songs do change. That's the whole

point of my essay" (438). The oldest recordings that she has are from the nineteen-fifties.

Prior to that, she does not know what they would have sounded like. She does not even

know how her own grandparents would have sung them. When Ukrainians immigrated to

Canada, the instruments changed. Over the years, the words changed, and musicians

added new rhythms and styles: "I've heard folk songs played to samba beat, with Spanish

guitar in the background. I've heard them played with saxophones and trumpets. I've

heard them rapped" (438). Colleen does her research, and by the end of the term, she can

"make a clear case for the ways in which new instruments were introduced, and lyrics

altered" (438). When the time comes to write the conclusion, however, what she cannot

explain is "why the changes took place" and whether or not she believes that "it's a good

or bad thing that the songs are never the same" (438). At this point, Colleen is resolved:

"I have to make a decision. It's time for me to take a stand" (438).

Her stand does not come in the form of an essay conclusion. She cannot say all

that she wants to say in such a short and constricted format. Instead, she writes "Kalyna's

Song," and in this original composition she finally finds the medium through which she

can articulate her own worldview. The song is partly a tribute to three significant women

in Colleen's life who pass away during the course of the novel. But the song is also

symbolic of the way that Colleen comes to conceptualize the interconnections and

intersections between places and cultures. As Colleen is preparing to go home for her

cousin Kalyna's funeral, she sits down in the music room in the college and starts playing

some of the traditional Ukrainian folk songs that she knows by heart. While she plays, the Swazi women who clean the practice rooms come in to begin their work, and while they work, they sing (439-440). As she listens to the women sing, the idea for her song starts to form. She transcribes the melody from the women's song, and incorporates portions of traditional Ukrainian folk songs, then composes the lyrics out of Ukrainian, English and Swazi words (440-41). She writes the song on paper that is pasted over top of her journal entries, musing that "That's how the song works, after all. In layers. One voice on top of another voice on top of another. If you dig deep enough, there's an embryo of a melody at the centre of it all that ties the song together. In a way, the embryo is me" (6).

The song that Colleen composes resembles Doreen Massey's notion of a "meeting place." Now, more than ever in history, relations (be they social, economic, or political) are "increasingly stretched out over space" (154). Massey notes that while increasing globalization has often led to reactionary senses of place—essentialized, internalized, and geographically bounded—"it is possible to envisage an alternative interpretation of place" (154). If we examine geography, particularly the geography of social relations today, we can, if we choose, see that what gives a place its specificity is "the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (154). Colleen's song, like the novel itself, represents the weaving together of multiple places and cultures, a notion of interconnectedness that can still accommodate the uniqueness of the different aspects that it contains. In *Kalyna's Song,* text becomes a place where differences come together.

The world is already interconnected, but in many ways we lack the discourse, and even the rhetoric with which to articulate alternative perspectives of the relationship

between place and culture. For Colleen, song provides a medium through which she can communicate meaningful points of intersection. For the reader, the novel, the character "Colleen," and the song that she writes all act as "meeting places" where cultural identities and practices intersect and connect. Colleen's development is a process of negotiating the complex relationships between place and difference, and as she develops and adopts an alternative worldview, Grekul presents the possibility of a radical refiguring of the relationship between cultural identity and place.

Chapter 2

Place and the Boundaries of Belonging in Laisha Rosnau's
The Sudden Weight of Snow

Midway through Laisha Rosnau's *The Sudden Weight of Snow,* we find the

protagonist, Harper, and her mother in a heated argument. As the argument escalates,

Harper reduces her mother to tears, and although she feels badly, Harper rationalizes that

she "simply wanted to expose things, bring them to the surface" (174). Throughout the

novel, this is precisely what she does: she brings things to the surface. Not just in her

relationship with her mother, but also in her relationship with her hometown. Through

Harper's critical perspective, Rosnau highlights the way that places are ideologically

constructed and reveals the implications that these constructs have for social relations and

the development of gender roles. While I will be focussing on Sawmill Creek, the small

(imagined) town where most of Harper's narrative is situated, there are other significant

places represented in the novel. Part way through the novel, Harper runs away from home

to live with her boyfriend at Pilgrims Art Farm, an arts collective located near Sawmill

Creek. The story of Harper's individual development is more than a critique of one

imagined place; rather, it is a critique of the ways in which places reinforce specific

behaviours, exclude those who fail or refuse to conform to their expected roles, and value

particular individuals over others according to their role in place-based social relations.

As Rosnau illustrates, a sense of place in Sawmill Creek is constructed in relation

to the sustainability of mill-work and the nuclear family. Based on this particular

construct of place, the gendered division of labour and the enforcement of traditional

gender roles are critical to the maintenance of Sawmill Creek's collective identity. The

church plays a particularly crucial role in the preservation of the existing social structure by reinforcing adult women's roles as wives and mothers. From Harper's perspective, place-based expectations for appropriate behaviour are neither commonsense, nor natural. Her awareness of transgression, or behaviours that are "out of place" highlights the ways in which Sawmill Creek's collective identity is reliant on the construction of the other, and the maintenance of that identity is reliant on the differentiation, or the association of transgressive behaviours with other places. Defining particular behaviours as transgressive not only highlights the dominant sense of place, it also impacts the ways in which people behave in Sawmill Creek. For Harper, the dominant sense of place and the associated expectations for behaviour are in conflict with her own self-perception and her desire for self-definition. Harper's journey to Pilgrims Art Farm plays a crucial role in her continuing engagement with place as well as in the legitimization of her difference by exposing her to other ways of being. The ending of the story does not posit a resolution to the conflict between a dominant sense of place and individual difference; however, the overall story does posit the persistence of transgression as a means of challenging the hegemony of a dominant sense of place.

Harper's relationship to Sawmill Creek is established early in the novel. Before the setting is introduced and described, she makes it clear that one of the things she wants the most is "a way out" (Rosnau 2), indicating a dissatisfaction with where she is. Later on in the novel, when Harper meets Gabe, the young man that she will later move in with, she expands on her relationship with Sawmill Creek. Gabe asks her whether she is "from Sawmill," her verbal response is a nonchalant "yeah," but her internal response is more telling:

I was most definitely from here. At one time, I tried to convince myself that,

because I hadn't moved to the town until I was six, I was from somewhere else. I

had eventually resigned myself to being from here, the creek running in my veins,

thick as the clogged water that flowed out of the booming ground at the far end of

the lake. (101)

Harper clearly does not want to be a part of Sawmill Creek, but she resigns herself to a

kind of physical inclusion and a reluctant sense of belonging. Throughout the novel,

however, it is clear that she does not feel like she 'fits in.' Like the water "at the far end

of the lake," Harper occupies a marginal position on the edge. From this position, she

can, and does, take a critical stance towards the norms, values, and expectations that

govern her hometown.

Through Harper, Rosnau shows a keen awareness for the ways in which a sense

of place is constructed. Economically, most residents of Sawmill Creek are directly or

indirectly linked to forestry work, and are dependent on the mill for sustainability. Harper

describes Sawmill Creek's reliance on "a mill that goes through cycles of lay-offs like

seasons and is always threatening closure" (3). Her best friend's parents, the Delaneys,

"moved to Sawmill Creek for the reason most people had at one point or another—Harley

had gotten work at the mill" (150). While Harley Delaney likes to remind his wife and

daughter of "how much money he once made—how much everyone in forestry was

making—in their first few years here," the forestry boom that attracted families like theirs

eventually waned. Nonetheless, mill-work remains integral to both the town's economy

and to the sustainability of their sense of place.

A dominant sense of place in Sawmill Creek is partially constructed in relation to forestry, and members of the small town are "taught early that the forest was something to extol, something that sustained us all in different ways" (28). The community's sense of Sawmill Creek as a forestry community, or mill-town, is partly reinforced through activities such as "Sawmill Days." According to Harper, the annual celebration of "Sawmill Days" illustrates how "The notion of celebration was irrevocably linked to the forest" (28). The activities that are organized as part of this celebration feature various competitions involving current and traditional skills that are directly and indirectly related to participation in the forest industry: Men have to climb tree trunks, balance on wet logs in moving water, and exhibit a competency in handing chainsaws. Harper further notes that "the word *lumberjack* was still used and the images of fairy-tale woodcutters and the beer-bellied, chainsaw-wielding mill boys were somehow wed" (28). These activities not only showcase skills related to male-dominated forestry work, they also illustrate the community's construction of an *ideal* concept of work. What Harper sees (beer bellies and chainsaws) is juxtaposed with the ideologically constructed and ideally perceived version of masculine labour (via the traditional figure of the lumberjack). In addition, Sawmill Creek has a monument, "a huge carving of a lumberjack wielding a chainsaw to welcome people to town," projecting their self-defined image to visiting outsiders (35).

Family structure also plays an important role in shaping people's sense of place. While the activities that take place during Sawmill Days reinforce a sense of the importance of the forest industry and mill workers, other activities and organizations enforce the gendered division of labour and the importance of masculine authority in

traditionally organized families. The informal barbecues organized by "the boys" from the mill illustrate how men's roles in the economy converge with their roles in the family. Through Harper's eyes, mill work is about more than wages; it is about maintaining an ideal and the achievement of "success" that is evidenced by families:

> In the summer, [Mr. Delaney] and other boys from the mill organized a series of backyard barbecues . . . The one thing Mr. Delaney insisted on was that Krista and her mother attend these barbecues. So, it seemed, did the other old boys: they brought wives and children ranging from toddlers to teenagers. These families were statements. Look how good we're doing. We have good, solid work, families, [and] barbecues in the backyard of what, everyone assured themselves after a couple of beers, could only be called paradise. (81)

Here, nuclear families exist as evidence of the success of the male members of the community. While the importance of the wage in a capitalist economy obviously has material significance, it is also invested with ideological implications. A man with a family is conceivably motivated not solely by his own needs, but also by his role as a provider; his family members are his success and his success is their sustenance. Essentially, men's roles as workers are given dual significance: their participation in the resource economy is critical for the sustenance of the community as a whole, as well as the subsistence of their families.

The gendered division of labour reinforces the value of masculine labour and masculine authority, both in the community and in the home. Women work in the service sector and men work at the mill. The women of Sawmill Creek are not excluded from wage labour as a whole; however, those who participate in the paid labour force are

employed in the service industry, as clerks or secretaries, and one of the women owns her own record store in the mall. Notably, their participation in the wage-labour economy is secondary to men's, and dependent on the existence of the mill. Thus, ideals of feminine and masculine work weaken women's position in the existing set of place-based social relations. Because the female characters in this novel are excluded from the traditionally masculine work that sustains the community, their value is perceived to be secondary to that of men.

One of the most explicit ways in which traditional gendered relations are constructed and reinforced is through the Friends of Christ Free Church. Organized activities, such as potlucks, reinforce women's domestic roles. The women are responsible both for the preparation of food, and for washing the dishes while the children play and the men visit (89). Women's domestic roles are seen in relation to their roles as mothers, and the importance of motherhood is reinforced through the church's teaching that "Eve's original transgression had stained women. Childbirth could save [them], bleach [them] clean with pain" (60). Women's roles are extended, of course, beyond having babies to raising children, and the concept of motherhood is intrinsically linked to their acceptance the church and their role in Sawmill Creek as a whole. At one point, Harper states that "If you believed Pastor John, the whole damn world would cease to be if the sixty members of the Friends of Christ Free Church in Sawmill Creek, British Columbia, stopped singing the Lord's praises, talking in tongues, and having babies" (19). Here, women's participation in the town's 'economy' is linked to their biological role in reproduction.

During the "Week of the Word," five days set apart at the beginning of the year, men "discuss doctrine, politics, and the finances of the Free Church," while "the women gathered together in prayer groups and healing circles to pray the cysts, lumps and viruses out of each other" (130). In other words, men are in charge of decision-making, while women are in charge of care-related roles. Gendered roles within the church are expressly linked to a heteronormative nuclear family structure, and the pastor quotes Ephesians 5, a passage Harper has memorized because he quotes it "again and again to explain the hierarchy of the Free Church. Wives submitting themselves to the will of their husbands, husbands loving their wives like their own bodies, like temples. All of us . . . submitting ourselves to Christ" (56). In this hierarchy, a woman's submission to her husband's authority is seen as an extension of their submission to God himself.

Theoretically women's roles in reproduction and motherhood are just as important to the community as men's roles in material production; however, the community's anxiety about economic sustainability places the role of mill work over motherhood. The Friends of Christ Free Church see their role in the community as being explicitly linked to anxieties around economic sustainability: "The valley was run on mill money and people thanked God that there were trees to cut down, that there would always be trees to cut down. The Friends of Christ Free Church was right there in the middle of the valley, holding it all in place" (22). As a place-based social group, the Free Church is not only constructed by a broader sense of Place, but is involved in the reproduction of that sense of place and the associated social relations and expectations.

The same ideas about Sawmill Creek that provide a sense of unity among many of the residents are used to define and limit appropriate behaviour and ways of being.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of Harper's perspective is her awareness of the expectations that govern which behaviours are acceptable and which are "out of place." "Transgression," Foucault writes, "is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage" ("A Preface to Transgression" 33). A sense of place can be used to construct the limit. The power relations of place define the rules and the boundaries—both social and spatial—that determine belonging and exclusion (McDowell 5; Cresswell 2). When someone transgresses the expectations regarding normative behaviour in a particular place, those expectations and the ideological values that they construct and maintain become more apparent: "transgression . . . serves to foreground the mapping of ideology onto space and place, and . . . the margins can tell us something about 'normality'" (Creswell 9). In *The Sudden Weight of Snow,* the ideological construction of Sawmill Creek as a mill-town and "a good place to raise a family" (Rosnau 4) is inextricable from the norms, values, and expectations that govern appropriate behaviour. As Cresswell states, "the socially constructed meaning of places directly [affects] judgements of the events in them" (150).

Three pages into the novel, Rosnau gives us a two paragraph long description of Sawmill Creek from Harper's perspective. One and a half of those two paragraphs are dedicated to a list of behaviours to which "people in Sawmill" are opposed and a list of people who do not follow the "moral code" (3-4):

> People in Sawmill, as we called our town, had distinct values, a moral code that informed the whole community. Some of the things that people objected to were child abuse, homosexuality, vandalism, laziness, single moms, welfare moms, public nudity, lying, cheating, stealing, the decline of family values, zealous

feminists, and most prominently, anyone who protested man's God-given right to
make a living and support his family. (3-4)

The moral code is essentially a list of possible transgressions, and as such, speaks to the
normative geography of place, the notions of appropriate behaviour, and the boundaries
of inclusion. Many of the things that members of Sawmill Creek "morally" oppose are
include perceptions of work, the nuclear family, and the value of the individual according
to participation in the existing place-based social relations. Single moms, homosexuals,
and zealous feminists might all be perceived as a threat to the traditional hetero-
normative family structure. Vandalism, laziness, welfare moms, lying, cheating, and
stealing, can all be viewed as potential economic strains on the community. These
perceived threats are summarized succinctly and connected to the forestry industry in the
statement that the most predominant objection is against "anyone who protested man's
God-given right to make a living and support his family. The last mentioned were mainly
the environmentalists from the city who knew nothing about the land or how to live off it
honestly" (4). Here, the idea of the hard-working man in the forestry industry is linked to
the idea of family, reinforcing the inextricable connection between the concept of work
and the concept of the nuclear family in the normative construction of Sawmill Creek.

While Sawmill Creek is presented as a fairly cohesive place with a strict moral
code, there are those who do not fit in to the dominant version of place because "not
everyone followed the code" (4). In a passage describing these people, Harper switches
between aligning herself with the dominant sense of place and positioning herself as an
outsider:

There were the old draft dodgers living in the hills with ham radios and Marxist

manifestos, though the war they were running from had ended thirteen years

before. There were those who stitched marijuana crops into the fabric of the forest

and clerks at the health food store who claimed we could cure every ailment with

the right herbs and tinctures. (4)

Here, draft dodgers, marijuana growers, and health food store clerks are constructed as

other, and Harper includes herself in the "we" that are sceptical about the efficacy of

herbal medicine. The "we" in the rest of the passage switches though, as she later aligns

herself with adolescent peers that are dissatisfied with their small town and the moral

code that governs it:

Somehow, we even had teachers infiltrate our secondary school who taught us

about passive aggression, relaxation techniques, and conservationist forestry

practices. These teachers were from other, bigger places—Vancouver, Calgary—

and came to Sawmill Creek as student teachers, were lured to stay by the fruit-

filled valley, the ski hill half an hour from town. We knew better than to tell our

parents about what they taught us. We hung on to these glimpses of a larger

world. Dreamed of ways to get there. People told us we'd want to return--*This is*

such a good place to raise a family—but we'd been raised here and we knew it

wasn't true. (4)

Harper aligns herself with her peers, revealing a portrait of place that is perhaps not as

cohesive as it seems. The practices listed in this passage exist within Sawmill Creek, but

are not incorporated into its normative geography. Nonetheless, they are crucial to the

way that Sawmill Creek is defined as a place, and the way that place-based ideology is

constructed through differentiation.

Cresswell's explanation of place and differentiation, the construction of "us" in

reference to "them," draws specifically on Goran Therborn's argument that ideologies are

set up in opposition to other "alter ideologies," against which they are defined (Therborn

27-28). Through inclusive ideologies individuals define themselves according to their

membership in a social world, while through positional ideologies they define themselves

according to their differences from others (Therborn 23-25). Cresswell applies this theory

specifically to place, asserting that "People . . . create themselves as subjects in relation to

opposites and differences," and "places are fundamental creators of difference" (153-

154).

The 'people of Sawmill' define themselves both by their membership in the social

world of a particular place and by their differences from other people in other places. In

Sawmill Creek, the primary focus of differentiation is the city. As mentioned previously,

the most prominent thing that people in Sawmill Creek object to is "anyone who

protested a man's God-given right to make a living and support his family" (4). This

objection is primarily directed to "environmentalists from the city" (4). While

environmentalism is certainly not an ideology that is exclusive to "the city," in Sawmill

Creek ideologies that do not belong here, that do not characterise "us," belong

somewhere else and characterise "them." That somewhere else is most often the city. The

"others" who protest the forestry practices that are so intrinsic to a sense of place in

Sawmill Creek are associated with impractical knowledge, with not knowing how to live

off of the land, and with ideologies that characterise other places. Environmentalism is

not the only ideology/practice that is associated with the city. When Psychology is introduced into the school curriculum, it "caused concern in a town that thought psychology was for shrinks and shrinks were softies from the city" (63). The notion that the city is soft and impractical is critical to the oppositional definition of Sawmill Creek as tough and practical, both characteristics that are associated with the ideal of mill work that brings together the "fairy-tale woodcutter" and the "beer-bellied, chainsaw-wielding mill boys" (28).

In addition to constructing a sense of place in opposition to the city, a sense of place in Sawmill Creek is also constructed in opposition to the Pilgrim's Art Farm (82). The Pilgrim's Art Farm plays a critical role in the novel, not only in Harper's development, but also as a place that is perceived as transgressive by the people of Sawmill Creek. Harper asserts that "The farm informed our own perception of Sawmill Creek but most people tried not to acknowledge it" (82). The farm is a place where most resources are collectivised. There is a communal "cookshack," where people come together to cook meals, play music, and visit. Children "lived with two parents, or one parent, or a parent and a friend, or the person who was most like a parent to them" (195).

In Sawmill Creek, the farms' practices are primarily constructed as transgressive in opposition to Sawmill Creek's identity as a hardworking family town. Pilgrims Art Farm, defined in opposition to Sawmill Creek, is a fusion of laziness, collectivisation, and hyper-sexuality, all things that are particularly transgressive of Sawmill Creek's ideals of work and the nuclear family. When Mike, an adolescent boy from Sawmill Creek, crashes the New Year's celebration at the farm, he ends up confronting Thomas, one of the men at the farm who is trying to get him to leave. Mike tells Thomas, "You

think you've got it made out here, eh? While the rest of us are out working, busting our asses, you can just sit back, watch your weed grow, living off pogey. And now you've got these sweet teenage girls [Harper and Krista] to pass around. Share and share alike, right?" (270-71). Here, the "rest of us," or Sawmill Creek, is presented as a hardworking place, where people are "busting their asses" in direct contrast to Pilgrims Art Farm, where people are sitting on theirs, growing marijuana, and seducing teenage girls. The concept of collectivisation is overtly sexualized, and the sharing of partners contrasts with the traditional nuclear family structure that is so important to a dominant sense of place in Sawmill Creek.

Ironically the farm, a small rural place, is also associated with city ideologies and practices. It is Krista, Harper's best friend, who decides that they will pay a visit to Pilgrims Art Farm. Bored with Sawmill's "hockey games and lame parties," Krista tries to convince Harper to go with her to the Solstice celebration at Pilgrims Art Farm. When Harper asks her who will be there, Krista says "No one we know . . . growers, people who hang out at the health food store. I think people from Kelowna and shit. Maybe even Vancouver. They're into this kind of artsy stuff down there" (88). Here, the people within Sawmill Creek (the growers and herbalists who have already been featured in Harper's list of people who do not follow the moral code) are associated with the Arts Farm, which is associated with the "artsy" interests of people from the city.

While the construction of Sawmill Creek in opposition to the city and the farm secures a dominant sense of place, it also has an impact on the way that the boundaries of inclusion and acceptable behaviour are defined. The construction of a place-based ideology in opposition to practices that are associated with the city essentially relegates

those practices—and those who practice them—to the outside. The outside though, is not

necessarily physical, as Cresswell points out:

> It is possible to be inside a place or outside a place. Outsiders are not to be
>
> trusted; insiders know the rules and obey them. The definition of *insider* or
>
> *outsider* is more than a locational marker. Just as place has objective and
>
> subjective facets, the designations of difference through place mean two
>
> connected things. An outsider is not just someone literally from another location
>
> but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of 'our' place—
>
> someone who doesn't know the rules. (154)

Belonging requires a certain way of being, and Harper is a good example of this. It is not

that she does not know the rules, but rather that following them negates her desire for

self-definition. One of the primary conflicts for Harper, as an outsider in relation to the

dominant sense of place in Sawmill Creek, is the conflict between place-based

expectations for behaviour and her own self-perception. After leaving home and moving

temporarily to the farm, Harper explains, "I didn't know what I was looking for, but there

was one thing I was certain about: the farm would be different than the place I was

coming from. I wasn't seeking a place I could belong. If anything, I was seeking a place

where I could feel comfortable not belonging" (Rosnau 194). For Harper, expectations

about behaviour, social structure, and the reinforcement of gendered roles are too strict to

allow her to be "different."

In part, Harper's individual development involves a negotiation between the

strictly divided gender roles that sustain the identity of the community. Breaking with

these gender roles means breaking with place-based expectations for behaviour.

According to Barbara White, gender conflict is "the major theme" in female novels of adolescence. Referring to Morton Hunt's *Her Infinite Variety,* White asserts that "girls learn to prefer male roles which they are often then taught are inappropriate for themselves" (White 19). In Sawmill Creek the devaluation of women's roles sustains Sawmill Creek's dominant sense of place, but depreciates their value as individuals. However, the depreciation of women's value does not mean that expectations for their behaviour are less strict, or that their gender roles are not strictly enforced. White argues that in a social structure where adult women's roles are conceived primarily in terms of marriage and reproduction, there is a strong demand for the adolescent girl's normative social integration:

> The adolescent girl, yet to fulfill her function, is crucial to the replication of the
> social system. Whatever her present goal, whether it be 'social integration' or not,
> her society will insist on integrating *her* . . . So long as women's main function is
> conceived to be marriage and childbearing, and so long as wifehood and
> motherhood carry lower status than male pursuits, the adolescent girl will be in
> conflict with society. (197)

While Harper incorporates some aspects of femininity into her identity and behaviour, she does not fully embrace a normative feminine ideal. From early childhood on, Harper resents gender segregation, and the behavioural expectations that are associated with girlhood. She describes herself as being "uncomfortable in groups of girls and women," and resents the institutional practices of gender segregation and socialization, commenting that after her family moved to Sawmill Creek, "both elementary school and church seemed to conspire to keep me in the Holly Hobby-themed bedrooms of

classmates after school or in the middle of women's circles whenever they felt I needed

support and healing" (Rosnau 61).

In the sixth grade, Harper's body begins to betray her, and she develops breasts.

Puberty and the physical changes that accompany it are decidedly unwelcome: "I felt that

this would only seal my fate, take me farther away from reaching the tops of trees,

balancing on the thin edges of fences" (61). In response to this change, she has her

mother take her and her brother to the hairdresser. When the hairdresser finishes Nick's

"standard cut," Harper takes her place in the chair and asks for the same one (61). The

hairdresser tries to at least give the short haircut a more feminine style, but Harper refuses

it: "No, I had insisted, I wanted the same cut, a boy's cut, no curls, no cute flips" (61).

After that, she dresses in "baggy jeans and T-shirts," making "one last attempt to join the

boys" (62). When that fails, she begins to spend most of her time alone, preferring it to

pretending to be interested in "Barbie's dramas" (62). At a very early age, the standards

of femininity in Sawmill Creek are in direct conflict with Harper's self-perception. Her

relationship to Sawmill Creek illustrates the way in which a dominant sense of place

requires the reinforcement of particular, in this case gendered, roles within the existing

social structure.

The conflict over gender identity in novels of female development is connected to

another recurring theme: the lack of adult women role models. According to White,

"Adolescent heroines would no doubt find it easier to grow up female if they could

admire and identify with adult women. However, the girls seldom want to pattern

themselves after any of the women they know" (White 141). While Harper resists

modelling her life after her mother and the other women that subscribe to place-based

expectations in Sawmill Creek, she does find a role model in one of her babysitters.

When Harper is in the second grade, Melody, "who smelled like the colour pink—sweet

and slightly spicy at once," appears to be "the perfect woman," someone who Harper, "a

girl who aspired to be a boy" (218), does not think she can ever emulate. However,

Melody makes it easier for her to straddle the worlds of girlhood and boyhood: "She

would attempt to curl my lank hair, dab purple eyeshadow on my lids and pink gloss on

my lips, then announce to Nick and me that we were going to war" (Rosnau 218). Here,

Melody provides the possibility of being both feminine and masculine, undermining the

notion that one cannot "be both" (218).

As an adolescent, Harper puts on make-up to go to parties, but scoffs at the tight

jeans that are in style (32) and refuses to be called a "princess" by Gabe (161). When

Thomas, one of the men from the farm serves her coffee with cream and sugar, assuming

that "Young women . . . usually like cream and sugar," she tells him that she takes hers

"black" (250). Once again, Harper has her hair cut short, like a boy. The haircut scene

happens after Harper comes out of a lengthy fever, and Gabe helps her into the shower

and washes her (183-85). Afterwards, she asks him to cut her hair off completely,

insisting once again that she does not want "any style to it" (186). The decisions that

Harper makes as an adolescent, including her decision to run away to the farm, are not

only attempts to assert a measure of adolescent independence, but also attempts at self-

definition. Her journey to the farm is not, as I suggested earlier, an attempt to find a place

where she can "belong," but rather to find a place where she can "feel comfortable not

belonging," a place where the collective sense of place will allow for the existence of

difference (194).

Harper learns that while the farm is a very different place from her hometown, it is not void of its own social structure or expectations for appropriate behaviour. Harper can be different at the Pilgrims Art Farm, but there is still an existing social structure and behavioural expectations. Furthermore, even though Harper does not go there seeking belonging, the farm demands belonging from its permanent residents. Gabe's mother explains the expectations to Harper, at first making them seem very loose and unregulated: "We don't expect much here at the farm. Everyone does what they can— that's about all you can expect form anyone, really . . . Just pitch in where you can" (180). However, she then addresses Harper's past church attendance, and outlines the expectations a little further: "Now, I don't know much about your church but I know they have some pretty strong beliefs and we don't want anyone butting in here, Harper. We don't want this to become an issue" (180). The speech that Gabe's mother gives to Harper reveals that while the expectations appear to be quite unstructured, the farm is still a place, where expectations for appropriate behaviour determine outsider and insider status.

The status of insider/outsider is partially determined in relation to questions of permanence and transience. Transient members of the farm, those who come "in vans or station wagons stickered with slogans, wanting to get out of cities or take a break from cross-continent road trips" (196) come with an idea of what Pilgrims Art Farm will be, but they do not know the specific rules of place. They stay for "a month or two, seeking unconventional romance and clean air, collecting welfare cheques so they could pursue these through volunteer work and shared meals" (196). When their idealization of the farm bumps up against the reality of everyday conflict and boredom, they leave (196).

These transient members, with their idealization of Pilgrims Art Farm essentially remain

outsiders because they are "existentially removed from the milieu of 'our' place"

(Cresswell 154).

As her stay at the farm lengthens, people start to question whether or not Harper

belongs there. After asking Harper whether or not she is going to stay, Thomas tries to

tell her that "no one really stays here for good," adding that "a person couldn't always

stay here" because "it'd drive you mad" (Rosnau 199). When Harper says that it "Seems

pretty relaxed here to me," he explains that "Every group has its own politics" (199).

While he insists he is not trying to dissuade her from staying, Thomas essentially gives

the impression that the farm might not be the place for her. Later on, he is somewhat

more direct with Harper about whether or not she should stay on at the farm. While he

initially says that she is welcome to stay, he questions whether or not it is "the right place

for [her]," insisting that "It's just not the right place for everyone" (211). At one point,

Harper overhears Gabe's mother, Susan, talking to Gabe about whether or not Harper

should remain at the farm. She tells him, "not everyone belongs on the farm . . . not

everyone chooses to live like us and we don't choose to live with just anyone" (285).

While Harper does not find what she is looking for on the farm, her time there is crucial

to her understanding of the place-based relativity of social structures and expectations for

behaviour.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 'the journey' is a prominent theme in

developmental fiction. Protagonists in traditional *bildungsromane* often complete their

journeys by returning home and integrating into society (Buckley 18). In *The Sudden*

Weight of Snow, Rosnau appropriates this convention, but like many other authors writing

about women's development, rejects both the idea of the coherent self and of integration.

Harper's journey to the farm is intrinsic to her development, and the farm is presented as

an alternative to the social structure and expectations of Sawmill Creek. During her stay

there, she encounters new ideologies that are related to other ways of being. Through the

conversations that she listens to, Harper learns about "the things that [are] respected and

revered" on the farm

> I learned about arts festivals up and down the coast, protests in various
>
> endangered areas, alternative theatre companies that performed in fields or on
>
> beaches, artists who lived and created in every conceivable small space—tree
>
> houses, boats, geodesic domes built into the ground. I learned that people made
>
> houses out of used tires, pop cans, and bales of hay. That there was an entire
>
> informal network across North America of people who inhabited the periphery.
>
> The things I had learned about the world so far—that the church and family were
>
> the most important things, and after these a good education and a job—no longer
>
> seemed to apply. (Rosnau 209-10)

Prior to her stay at the farm, Harper is aware that the norms and values of Sawmill Creek

are not the only possible norms and values. Her awareness is prompted by the existence

of the people who do not follow the code: draft dodgers, marijuana growers, herbalists,

and teachers from "other, bigger places" (4). Going to the farm, however, solidifies the

fact that there are other ways of being and belonging.

In keeping with the thematic tradition of conflict over resolution that is dominant

in novels of adolescence, *The Sudden Weight of Snow* does not present a resolved ending.

Harper is neither integrated nor completely alienated from Sawmill Creek. However, as

in *Kalyna's Song*, the theme of development is crucial throughout the novel. Expectations for women's behaviour are directly related to the expectations for their integration into the roles of wife and mother. These expectations are in conflict with Harper's self-perception and, in this sense, the novel presents a critique of place-based expectations. But the novel also frames an alternative way to imagine development. Throughout the story, there is an emphasis on the importance of the relationship between behaviour and knowing what you want. When Harper first sneaks out to the farm and comes back late, her mother, Vera, says that she hopes she knows what it is she is doing and what she thinks she is "looking for" (172).

Vera's own life is in many ways the result of not knowing what she wanted as a young woman and of looking to different sets of expectations to determine that for her. When she marries Jim, Harper's father, she longs for "something—stability, sex, something—and hopes that marriage might be that unknown" (201). Not actually knowing what she wants, Vera does what is expected of her and searches for what she is expected to search for. As she searches Las Vegas for a place to get married, she comes to the realization that she is looking "for a chapel that resembles her Ukrainian Catholic Church in Northern Alberta" (201). After a few months of road-tripping with her new husband, Vera decides that they should move back to Northern Alberta, "return to find out what they really want" (289). Soon she is pregnant, and filling the roles of wife and mother. When she leaves Jim, she is almost immediately drawn to the church, which saddles her with a new set of expectations that she, as a divorcee, can never quite fulfill. Her hope that Harper knows what she is "looking for" is critical, in view of her own development.

In addition to Vera, other women characters make decisions without really knowing what they want, decisions that have huge repercussions. Gabe's parents get married at time in their lives when they are young. Susan, Gabe's mother, tells Harper, "we didn't know yet what we wanted, what we were looking for," and it "turned out we wanted different things" (329). For Susan marrying without knowing what she wanted led to a miserable marriage and eventual divorce. Being able to recognize the importance of knowing what you want is something that Vera and Susan can pass on to Harper in order to help her in her own development by directing her attention to her own self-awareness over the expectations that she is presented with.

In the end, there is a place that can accommodate difference, and that place is narrative. The closing sentence, "I follow the fingers of several valleys, but all of them round in on themselves again, seeking some kind of centre, the lowest point, a place where things gather" (341), mirrors a passage from the page just before it, where Harper is trying to sort out the connections between herself and those closest to her: "I tried to retrace my mother's past as a way to connect her to my own. I tried to remember [Gabe's] story, to frame it in a way that would bring part of [him] back, but it kept slipping back into me" (340). Here, something akin to what Harper is looking for when she goes to the farm begins to take shape. Her mother's story, Gabe's story, and her own merge, and narrative is presented as a "place where things gather" (341). Differences exist together within the fragmented self and within the stories that Harper constructs, stories that weave her own life with the lives of other people and places.

In *Kalyna's Song*, Grekul highlights unspoken rules that govern what is appropriate in place, particularly in relation to cultural practices and identities. Rosnau

delves just a little further in *The Sudden Weight of Snow* illustrating how a dominant

sense of place secures the unspoken rules or expectations that govern behaviour and

structure being. Sawmill Creek's anxieties about economic sustainability—manifest in

the gendered division of labour and traditionally gendered roles—reinforce expectations

about how people should behave. Harper's awareness of those expectations and her

refusal to capitulate to them both highlights the boundaries of inclusion and represents

the potential for social change. Transgression, as Cresswell argues, "is also important in

itself as an example of possible tactics for resistance to the established norms" (21). If

transgression brings the legitimacy of the established order into question by illustrating

that there are other ways of being and behaving, then the persistence of transgression in

place is critical in challenging place-based hegemony. By rejecting the traditional

integration or alienation resolution in novels of female development, Rosnau constructs a

narrative that makes it possible to imagine a continuing engagement between collective

place-based identity and individual self-perception, where difference does not succumb to

erasure.

Chapter 3

**Limiting Contestation and Self-Determination through the Boundaries of Place in
Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness***

A Complicated Kindness ends in the midst of what would be the most significant

decision of its protagonist, Nomi's, adolescent development. An aversion to closure is

presented early on in the novel, in fact on the very first page, where Nomi states in no

uncertain terms, "I've got a problem with endings" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 1).

When the story opens, Nomi is 16, and about to graduate early from high school. Her

mother and sister both disappeared and have been absent for three years, and now she

lives with her father, Ray, in the town of East Village. The narrative takes place over the

course of less than a year, but includes many of Nomi's recollections of her childhood, in

which her mother and sister feature prominently. She is the rebel teenager par excellence.

Her aversion to her hometown could not be more apparent, and with good reason. The

disappearance of her mother, sister, and eventually her father are directly related to the

way in which place is defined and good and bad behaviour is regulated within East

Village.

Through her rebellious adolescent protagonist, Toews constructs a narrative that

culminates in a complex critique of the ways in which the regulation of difference

through the mental and physical boundaries of space and place can be used to limit access

to competing ideologies, and thus to maintain existing systems of authority and order and

to regulate contestation and self-determination. By paying attention to transgression and

the ways in which transgression is punished, Nomi shows that rules about coming and

going are not only the rules in and of themselves, but they are the means of maintaining

the established order. Transgressors are cut off through a formal separation from the community (when their transgressions are detected) and their behaviour is relegated to the realm of the undiscussed.

Nomi's development involves a questioning of the dominant norms and values that are espoused, or rather, enforced in her hometown. Nomi's rejection of the orthodox rules that inform and maintain a sense of place in the narrative exists in tandem with Toews's critique of the expectations that inform the genre in which she is writing. Just as Nomi's transgressions serve to highlight the expectations of place, Toews's deviations from genre conventions serve to highlight readerly expectations. Considered within a discussion of changing genre conventions, Toews's novel serves to challenge the issue of alienation vs. accommodation, an issue that has become a defining one in developmental genres.

East Village, the setting for Nomi's development, is essentially constructed as what Foucault refers to in "Of Other Spaces" a heterotopia, or a "counter-site" that is "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about" (24). "Utopias," according to Foucault, "are sites with no real place" (24). "They present society itself in a perfected form," but they remain in the realm of ideas, never fully formulated in the physical realm (24). Unlike the "unreal" space of utopia, where society is imagined "in a perfected form," a heterotopia is "a kind of effectively enacted utopia" with an actual physical geographic position (24). Heterotopias, Foucault insists, "do exist" as physical "counter-sites" that exist "outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (24). Foucault's concept of heterotopia is described and outlined according to five basic principles—several of which I will refer to with more depth

throughout this chapter—but definition is flexible, and he asserts that "heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms, and perhaps no one absolutely universal form can be found" (24). Whatever form they take, Foucault insists that every human group, every culture constructs heterotopic spaces, and that the function of those spaces change with society (24-25).

What is most critical, in terms of discussing the construction of East Village, is the notion of heterotopia as a place that exists "outside of all places" (Foucault 24). East Village exits as a space that is defined by its otherness and its self-imposed physical and ideological separation from (its concept of) the rest of the world. In his examination of historic heterotopic sites, Kevin Hetherington defines heterotopia as "spaces of alternate ordering" or as sites in which the social world is deliberately organized differently from the dominant social world surrounding it (viii). A heterotopic site can only exist in relation to other sites; defined as 'absolutely other' it must be constructed in relation to that which it is not (Hetherington 8-9).

Although the construction of a heterotopic site contains the potential for meaningful and liberating collective resistance to dominant norms and values, it can just as easily become a site of "reactionary politics" (Hook and Vrdoljak 209). Generally, 'heterotopia' is "invoked as a substitute term for a marginal, liminal or hybrid space" and the positive aspects (such as resistance to hegemonic norms and expectations) of heterotopic sites are the most common focus in academic discourse (Hetherington 7-8). As a site that is defined by its otherness, Toews's East Village *is* a marginal space; however, as Nomi navigates the complex social and geographic boundaries of place, it is evident that the politics of margin and centre are highly complex—irreducible to dualistic

notions of inside/outside. Toews complicates the issues of marginalization and transgression in a critical way by adopting (and adapting) the traditional coming of age story and setting it within a heterotopic space, then narrating it from the point of view of a protagonist that is resistant to the form of otherness that has become established to the point of being dominant, even mandatory, within that space.

With the exception of a few individuals, all of the residents of Toews's East Village are Mennonites, and are expected to adhere to the rules of the fundamentalist Mennonite church. The maintenance of religious beliefs and values are inseparable from the way that East Village is imagined, and being an insider means being one of the "followers of Menno Simons," separate from and "misunderstood by outsiders" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 134). Notions of ideological separation and isolation are central to those religious beliefs and values, and East Village is variously described as "a town not of this world" (2), "a town that exists in the world based on the idea of it not existing in the world" (48), and "a town that's not supposed to exist in the world" (200).

The ideological construction of East Village as a place of separation and isolation is partly reinforced through versions of the cultural/historical narrative of Mennonite martyrdom and migration—a narrative that is historically grounded in the mass persecution of Mennonites in Russia and the Soviet Union and their subsequent emigration to various parts of North and South America between 1847 to 1960 (Epp 108). One of Nomi's memories involves her mother telling her "about the Mennonites in Russia fleeing in the middle of the night, scrambling madly to find a place, any place, where they'd be free. All they needed . . . was for a people to tolerate their unique *apartness*" (148; emphasis in original). Thus begins the story that is, in part, a story of the

origins of the Mennonite establishment of East Village. The re-telling of the mass

migration of Mennonites to East Village (and various other places) reinforces a sense of

collective identity that is contingent on a sense of shared otherness. In a sense, it is a

story of origins, where the very purpose of East Village is the accommodation and

maintenance of collective distinctiveness that is to be protected and maintained through

isolation from the rest of the world.

Because of the way in which a sense of place is constructed in Toews's East

Village, the place-based articulation and regulation of difference in *A Complicated*

Kindness are dissimilar to the relationships between place and difference in Rosnau's and

Grekul's novels. In Sawmill Creek and St. Paul, notions of what is appropriate and

inappropriate in place are used to mark difference as transgression and keep it out of

"normal" or mainstream spaces. East Village is imagined as a place that is absolutely

other, and notions of right and wrong are used to contain and maintain difference while

keeping dominant or mainstream ideologies and behaviours out. Of course, one could

argue that if East Village is the centre of the way in which its residents imagine their

relationship with the world, then "normal" or mainstream ideologies are different or other

to East Villagers, and, in a sense, they are. However, East Village as a site of otherness or

difference is fundamental to the way that a sense of place is constructed. That is not to

say that it is imagined as a site for *all* forms of difference, where any deviation from

dominant versions of normality is acceptable. The otherness of East Village is a very

particular form of difference, and within the town's physical boundaries, that form of

difference is dominant, though not "normal" or mainstream. Those who live within the

boundaries of East Village are different, and everyone else is normal, or "English," which

is the term that people in East Village use to designate "anybody who wasn't Mennonite" (134).

Nomi's desires and self-perception conflict with the dominant norms, values, expectations of place: "she's still young, and things are up in the air, but she understands that she can't necessarily be herself in her community but that the community has shaped her and will continue to" (Toews, "It Gets Under" 110). Nomi's foremost desire as an adolescent is to be and behave in a way that she perceives as 'normal,' like everybody in the world outside of her strictly regulated hometown. East Village, according to Nomi, is "kind of a cult with pretend connections to some normal earthly conventions like getting dressed in the morning . . . and going to work and school, but that's where it ends" (*A Complicated Kindness* 49). She dreams "of escaping into the *real* world" (6). East Village, as a place outside of all other places, presents a fundamental discord with Nomi's own self-perception and with her desire for self-determination. The doctrine of separation and isolation is especially apparent through Nomi's point of view because it is the primary obstacle between her and her desire to experience the 'real' world.

In East Village, the doctrine of separation and isolation not only informs a sense of place, but also acts as an organizing principle within a system of explicit rules that determine right and wrong behaviour. The importance of physical separation and isolation from the rest of the world is conceived in tandem with the separation between good and evil, God and Satan, and (perhaps most importantly) Heaven and Hell. The relationship between an individual's place in East Village and his or her place in the afterlife is an important factor in the way that East Village is imagined and in the way that order and authority are maintained. Eternal salvation is associated with the tenets of

the fundamentalist Mennonite religion that are practiced within the boundaries of East

Village, tenets that posit isolation as a necessity for compliance with the more

fundamental issue of denying oneself of 'worldly' pleasures (48). Compliance with the

moral code is a precondition for admission into heaven, where earthly self-denial will be

compensated with heavenly rewards: "The idea is that if we can successfully deny

ourselves the pleasures of this world, we'll be first in line to enjoy the pleasures of the

next world, forever" (48). From the time that she is a child, Nomi associates living in

East Village and following its rule with having a secure place in heaven:

> The only thing I needed to know was that we were all going to live forever,
>
> together, happily, in heaven with God, and without pain and sadness and sin. And
>
> in my town that is the *deal*. It's taken for granted. We've been hand-picked.
>
> We're on a fast track, singled out, and saved. (17)

Leaving East Village and transgressing the rules have ramifications far beyond

community belonging: "Like my uncle, The Mouth of Darkness, said, there were eternal

issues at stake" (45). Those who choose to transgress the moral code risk being

excommunicated from their family and friends in East Village for the duration of their

lives on earth (more on this later) and then finally being cut off from them for eternity.

One of the defining features of Foucault's concept of heterotopia involves the

regulation of coming and going: "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening

and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable (26). According to Soja, it

is this aspect of heterotopic spaces that causes them to take on the characteristics of

territoriality:

Through such forms of spatial regulation the heterotopia takes on the qualities of

human territoriality, with its conscious and subconscious surveillance of presence

and absence, entry and exit; its demarcation of behaviours and boundaries; its

protective yet selectively enabling definition of what is the inside and the outside

and who may partake of the inherent pleasures. Although not mentioned explicitly

in "Of Other Spaces," implicit in this heterotopian regulation of the opening and

closing are the workings of power, of what Foucault would later describe as

"disciplinary technologies" that operate through the social control of space, time,

and otherness to produce a certain kind of 'normalization.' (161)

Thus, regulating incoming and outgoing traffic and communication supports a

relationship of power. 'Territoriality,' according to Robert Sack, "is a powerful

geographic strategy to control people and things by controlling an area" (5), and a place

becomes a territory "when its boundaries are used to affect behaviour by controlling

access" (19).

Very little information is given about what East Village was like before Nomi's

lifetime, but there is an indication that in East Village—unlike in Sawmill Creek and St.

Paul—the social order does not function on the presupposition that 'that's just the way

things are' or the notion that 'it's always been this way.' What everybody knows (and

nobody discusses) is that the heightened importance of isolation coincides with the return

of Nomi's uncle Hans return to East Village after his own coming of age journey into the

city. The very brief outline of Hans's life that is provided within the broader narrative

reads like a *bildungsroman*-gone-wrong. As a young man, Hans leaves East Village to

live in the city, where he never really finds his place. According to Nomi, "eventually he

gave up and came back here full of renunciations and ideas of purging every last bastion

of so-called fun in this place and a greatly renewed interest in death and a fresh loathing

for the world" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 50).

The way in which behaviour is regulated in Toews's East Village is significantly

different from the way that it is regulated in Rosnau's Sawmill Creek and Grekul's St.

Paul, the critical distinction being the fact that East Village is primarily governed through

orthodox rules. While doxic beliefs and values remain unarticulated and unperceived in

their naturalness, orthodox beliefs and values exist in the *"field of opinion,* the locus of

the confrontation of competing discourses" (Bourdieu 168; emphasis in original). Within

this field, also referred to as the "universe of discourse (or argument)," the existence of

alternative beliefs and values is explicitly evident. In fact, orthodoxy is only evident in its

relationship to heterodoxy, or the realm of competing possibilities (Bourdieu 169). Rather

than operating as commonsense or natural, orthodoxy is articulated in terms of

"acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects

heretical remarks as blasphemies" (Bourdieu 169).

While Rosnau and Grekul's protagonists call attention to the rules of place that

operate under the guise of their own common sense or naturalness, many of the rules in

Toews's novel are already operating in the realm of discourse, and notions regarding

appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in East Village are often explicitly stated and are

articulated in terms of right and wrong. Morality in East Village, as Nomi explains, is

conceptualized in terms of extremes: "You're in or you're out. You're good or you're

bad. Actually, very good or very bad" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 10). The

physical construction of East Village reflects the ideological extremes that it is built

upon. On one end of Main Street there is a giant billboard Jesus "in a pale blue robe with

his arms out, palms up," and on the other end there is "another giant billboard that says

SATAN IS REAL. CHOOSE NOW" (47). The rules in East Village include "a ban on

the media, dancing, smoking, temperate climates, movies, drinking, rock 'n' roll, having

sex for fun, swimming, makeup, jewellery, playing pool, going to cities, or staying up

past nine o'clock" (5).

While the rules are seemingly random, many of them are specifically related to

the maintenance of notions of separation, isolation, and containment—keeping the

outside world and its values out and keeping East Villagers in. An order that is governed

by orthodox rules, according to Bourdieu, often attempts to conceal the existence of

competing ideologies and to function in the same manner as common sense (169). In East

Village, knowledge of competing ideologies is regulated through rules and ideals that, by

designating 'the world' as bad/evil, directly affect the comings and goings of people and

information. Those rules are articulated within the rhetoric of 'worldliness,' and their

advent in East Village coincides with Hans's return to East Village.

Upon returning to his hometown, Hans enforces strict isolation. The 'purging'

that Nomi refers to is predominantly related to the coming and going of people and

information. Hans shuts down public means of transportation in and out of the town, such

as the bus and the train. Nomi asks her dad, "why aren't trains allowed here again?" and

he tells her that "the elders thought it would bring with it worldly influences" and that "It

would make it easier to come and go. Especially go" (167). The regulation of coming and

going is not merely a matter of regulating access to transportation, however. There are

ways to enter and leave East Village. After all, as Nomi puts it, her mother and sister

"easily made tracks when it was time to split" (53-54). Nomi and her father live just off

of highway number twelve, and her father likes to drive across the border to the states for

coffee once in awhile (88, 184). Nomi and her boyfriend Travis drive to other towns to

buy alcohol (69). The association of East Village with good, God, and heaven, in contrast

to the rest of the world with sin, Satan, and damnation is far more convincing than the

lack of transportation. So while East Villagers can find the physical means to leave, the

ideological boundaries are enough to keep most people within the physical boundaries of

East Village or at least ensure their quick return. As Nomi explains to a visiting tourist,

"There are no bars or visible exits" (53). Here, the "bars" most immediately refers to

drinking establishments, as she is describing the economy and amenities of East Village,

but the play on words is hard to ignore, with its invocation of a sense of boundary. While

there are no physical restraints keeping people in East Village, the ideological restraints

are very 'real'.

Heterotopic boundaries are not just meant to regulate outgoing traffic. In fact,

Foucault calls more attention to the regulation of incoming traffic in "Of Other Places,"

asserting that "to get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures"

(26). Soja explains that "entry and exit are regulated in many different ways," which

range from ritual or hygienic purification to "more subtle enactments, such as the

illusions of freedom and openness that hide closure and isolation" (161). In East Village,

the maintenance of separation and isolation is dependent on the regulation of incoming

traffic; however, the boundaries keeping 'the world' outside take an unexpected form.

The economy of East Village is dependent to a large degree on the tourist

industry. Marketing a town as a tourist attraction whilst keeping it separate from the

world seems counterintuitive; nonetheless, during the summer, tourists come "from all over the world" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 11) to see the historical village, where townspeople dress up in period costumes and demonstrate how Mennonites used to live:

> Americans come here to observe our simple ways. Here, life is so refreshingly uncomplicated. The tourists are encourage to buy a bag of unbleached flour at the windmill and to wander the dirt lanes of the museum village that is set up on the edge of town depicting the ways in which we used to live. (47)

Rather than attracting people into East Village, the museum village seems to function as a buffer zone to keep the tourists from interacting with the residents in any meaningful way. There are, according to Foucault, instances of heterotopias that "seem to be pure and simple openings, but that hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact, that is only an illusion: we think we enter where we are, but the very fact that we enter, excluded" (26). The example Foucault uses to clarify this point is of "the famous bedrooms that existed on the great farms of Brazil and elsewhere in South America" (26). The entrance to the bedroom was open to any traveler to enter and stay for the night, but the bedrooms did not open up into the rest of the family's house, and "the visitor was absolutely the guest in transit, was not really the invited guest" (26).

Like a jewellery box with a false bottom, East Village's museum acts as a destination that stops people from further investigation. It provides what appears to be an opening while it acts as a means of loosely regulating the influx of outsiders into East Village. The museum village is located immediately next to the rest of East Village, but visiting outsiders, who come to see "how simple life can really be" (183), generally do

not venture beyond the historic attractions that are provided specifically for them. When they do, they are "either surprised or disappointed" to see the contemporary Mennonite residents who do not appear to be that different from the rest of the world: "they pay good money to see bonnets and aprons and horse-drawn wagons" (53). The village attraction provides a very specific expectation, which it then fulfills, and in doing so, deters outsiders from entering and interacting with contemporary East Villagers' realities.

The notion of ideological separation from the world that forms the basis for East Village's physical isolation also requires a regulation of incoming information. Most popular culture texts are deemed wrong or sinful within the broader community. Although forms of media are not strictly regulated in Nomi's family, it is implied that many of the television shows, radio programs, and records that are allowed in their home are only allowed to exist secretly. Nomi's mother, Trudie, hides all of her old records in the basement of their home, and is reprimanded and reminded of the eternal consequences when she is found out (12). Members of the town who are diligent in their obedience are extremely isolated from what is going on in North American popular culture, and Ray Nickel, Nomi's father, does not even know who John Lennon is (17). As part of his 'purges' Nomi's uncle Hans has the teachers implement and follow "an oddball curriculum that had nothing to do with the standard provincial guidelines" (13). Thus, while the 'right' values and beliefs of East Village are often articulated in opposition to the 'wrong'/worldly values and beliefs of outsiders, the rules regarding what information is allowed into East Village prevent any real understanding of what those opposing values and beliefs consist of. The doctrine of separation, which is intrinsic to the way in which East Village is imagined, becomes the rule and—by curbing the

influx of competing ideologies—functions as one of the means by which the existing order is maintained.

While coming and going are strictly regulated in East Village, *belonging* is an even more complicated endeavor. Like Colleen and Harper, Nomi reveals that localized belonging requires certain behaviour. As discussed in chapters one and two, belonging in any place requires that one knows and behaves according to the unspoken rules of place. In Rosnau's Sawmill Creek and Grekul's St. Paul, the expectations of place are often unspoken, and function as 'commonsense.' Those who transgress those commonsense expectations are often treated as outsiders through informal exclusion. In Toews's novel, not only are the expectations of place explicit, but belonging is formally regulated. East Village is characterised as a town in which "there's no room for in between. You're in or you're out. You're good or you're bad." (10). Being "in" is directly related to being "good," and those who are bad—or rather, who are caught being bad—risk being excommunicated from the church and from the community.

Excommunication, or "shunning," as Nomi refers to it, is a formal method of discipline that involves cutting transgressors off from the church and by extension, the rest of the community. When a member of the community breaks the rules (in most cases repeatedly) the elders of the church convene to vote on whether or not the individual can continue to be a member of the congregation. After the vote, "everyone had to stand up in church and publicly denounce them" (44). Having a sense of belonging in the community is directly tied to membership in the church, and this is most apparent in instances where transgression is punished with excommunication. Members of the community are expected to break all ties with excommunicated individuals, inside and outside of the

church. Even family members are not permitted to speak to them (44). When Nomi's mother is excommunicated, "the townspeople were expected to rally around the church and cut her off in their own special way" (189). People who have been excommunicated may physically remain in the town, but they do so as "ghosts" (45) who are essentially cut off—through various methods including silence—from any communication with other East Villagers (189). When an individual is excommunicated, the members of the community are not even allowed to eat at the same table as them (45). Excommunication can be seen both as a formal way of regulating belonging and as a way of creating boundaries to separate the members of the community from any transgressive ideologies and/or behaviours that manage to make their way within the borders of East Village.

The cultural/historical narrative of Mennonite martyrdom and migration that Nomi is so familiar with sustains a notion of East Village as a haven from religious persecution and intolerance: "Five hundred years ago in Europe a man named Menno Simons set off to do his own peculiar religious thing and he and his followers were beaten up and killed and forced to conform all over Holland, Poland, and Russia until they, at least some of them landed right where I sit" (5). When Nomi's sister, Tash, complains about boredom and isolation in East Village, Trudie reminds her that "we could have stayed in Russia and had our barns set on fire and our stomachs torn out" (91). The historic narratives of flight from Russia that are told and re-told amongst East Villagers are crucial to the way in which a heterotopic sense of place is constructed and maintained, yet within the frame narrative of Tash, Trudy, and Ray's flights from East Village, they present a sad irony. By framing the story this way, Toews reveals the cyclical tendency of resistance and the rule—of transgression and the limit. It would

seem that "transgression," as Foucault writes, "is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" ("A Preface to Transgression" 35). In East Village the resistance has become the rule; the initial otherness that characterised East Village has been transformed into an other expression of dominance. According to Nomi, contemporary East Village exists as "the tail end of a five-hundred-year experiment that has failed" (94).

Within the novel, the story of Mrs. Klippenstein (one of the elder women in the community) and her family is an especially good example of East Village's movement from a site of refuge to a site of persecution. Mrs. Klippenstein was born in Russia and spent her childhood there, where her family was relatively prosperous until they were forced to flee persecution in Russia for religious freedom and physical security in East Village. By the time Mrs. Klippenstein reaches old age, a system of order has developed in East Village to determine the rules and methods of inclusion and exclusion. Mrs. Klippenstein's spouse is excommunicated from the church, "and afterwards, like a lot of the ghost people, had lived in a little shack next to the main house while Mrs. Klippenstein took care of the children and the farm" (164). Her husband eventually becomes "The Swearing Man," who dresses in a suit and tie and rides a bicycle around town and swears. What begins, in Mrs. Klippenstein's lifetime, as a place where Mennonites are free to practice their religious convictions eventually becomes a place in which residents are all *required* to espouse and practice those same religious convictions. The particular form of otherness that East Village is meant to accommodate has

essentially become a requirement for belonging, and like the Russian Mennonites, East

Villagers (such as Nomi's mother and sister) have begun to flee.

The existing notion of East Village as a sort of 'stopover' on the way to heaven

discourages expressions of dissatisfaction with 'the way things are.' As Nomi says, "It's

hard to grieve in a town where everything that happens is God's will" (173). The

coupling of the orthodox rules with notions of good, God, and heaven creates a moral

imperative for silence in instances where an individual might feel compelled to speak out

or instigate change: "I once suggested that it was a really risky gamble to bet everything

we had in this world on the possibility of another world, and in five seconds [the teacher]

was leading the entire class in prayer" (49). When Trudie is excommunicated from the

church, Nomi's family—particularly her father, Ray—is faced with a fundamental

discord between what they believe to be right and good here and now and what they

believe to be right and good in heaven for eternity: "How could [Ray] stand up and

publicly denounce a woman he loved more than anything in the world. And how could he

turn away from the church that could, someday, forgive his wife and secure their future

together in paradise, for all time" (194).

As a child, Nomi clings to the idea that as long as she and her family behave

according to the rules, they will all be together in heaven when they die. In East Village,

"that is the *deal*. It's taken for granted" and in her childhood, "it was the one thing

[Nomi] counted on . . ." (17); however, the dominant ideology that informs a sense of

place in East Village begins to unravel for her as she approaches adolescence. Nomi's

ideas about heaven (and hell) are critical to her rejection of the orthodox rules of East

Village. Although orthodox rules exist within the "universe of discourse (or argument)"

where alternative beliefs and values are apparent (Bourdieu 168), the maintenance of those orthodox rules rests on a more fundamental silence. The existence of overt censorship, of an "official way of speaking and thinking the world" hides another more fundamental censorship. That there are opposing right and wrong opinions within the field of orthodox discourse is obvious, but "the overt opposition between 'right' opinion and 'left' or 'wrong' opinion, which delimits *the universe of possible discourse*, be it legitimate or illegitimate, euphemistic or blasphemous, masks in its turn the fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be stated, and hence thought, and the universe of that which is taken for granted" (Bourdieu 169-170). In East Village, heaven (and hell) exist in that other universe, the one that is "taken for granted." Nomi's perspective looks beyond the articulated realm of right and wrong, to the realm of the undiscussed (the things that people just do not talk about because they might open up a more fundamentally critical conversation) and to the unquestioned (flight of her people and the postponement of pleasure for the promise of heaven).

It is common sense in East Village that earthly suffering is supposed to be rewarded with heavenly pleasure, but Nomi asserts, "I've never really understood what those pleasures will be. Nobody's ever come right out and told me" (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 48). Nomi's willingness to critique the doctrine of separation is prefigured by her ability to question the underlying promise of heaven/threat of hell. Even before she is faced with the excommunications of her mother and sister, Nomi begins to resent the heavenly promises as much as the earthly rules associated with her small hometown.

At the age of nine, Nomi has an experience that figures prominently into her development. She describes waking up, getting dressed, and simply feeling "so good," "happier than I had ever felt in my entire life, perfectly content and absolutely carefree" (209). She feels so great that she shares it with her teacher: "When I got to school I told my teacher I was on cloud nine. I told her I was so happy I thought I could fly. I told her I felt so great I wanted to dance like Fred Astaire" (209). Her teacher scoffs and rebukes her: "She said life was not a dream. And dancing was a sin" (209). The experience, or her recollection of it, is a launching point for Nomi's self-awareness and for the development of her critical perspective of place:

> It was the first time in my life that I had been aware of my own existence. It was the first time in my life I had realized that I was alive. And if I was alive, then I could die, and I mean forever. Forever dead. Not heaven, not eternal life on some other plane . . . just darkness, curtain, scene. Permanently. And that was the key to my new religion, I figured. That's why life was so fucking great. (209)

Once Nomi rejects the dominant ideology of her hometown, and with it the promise of heaven/threat of hell, it becomes worthwhile for her to challenge the existing order. When she thinks back to that day when she was nine years old and felt exuberant happiness alongside the realization that she could die, she wants to go back, to have that day again, and for somebody to tell her, "someday you'll be gone, you'll be dust, and even less than dust. Nothing. There's no other place to be. This world is good enough for you because it has to be. Go ahead and love it. (Menno was wrong)" (209). The imperative to obey the orthodox rules of East Village rests, for the most part, on the unquestioned assumption that one's eternal destination is determined by his or her

obedience. By excavating and questioning the foundation for the rules, Nomi destabilizes the imperative for obedience.

Nomi's decision to reject the religious ideology of her hometown, and the promise of heaven that goes along with it, exists alongside her unwillingness to accept "preordained endings" in general:

> I've got a problem with endings. Mr. Quiring has told me that essays and stories generally come, organically, to a preordained ending that is quite out of the writer's control. He says we will know it when it happens, the ending. I don't know about that. I feel that there are so many to choose from. (1)

Here, Mr. Quiring's advice about narrative trajectory parallels East Village's belief about the course of one's life. An eternity in heaven (or hell) is an ending that residents accept as commonsense, and Nomi is taught by Mr. Quiring that narrative functions in a similar manner. Life on earth seems to be rife with preordained endings as well, and Nomi understands that once she graduates from high school, the normal course of life will take her to the local chicken farm, where she will take her place in "the assembly line of death" (2). Thus, life, fiction, and even the afterlife all seem to take a somewhat organic course. Contrary to Mr. Quiring, Nomi suspects that there are "so many [endings] to choose from" (1); however, throughout the novel, Toews reveals that the existence of expectations and conventions complicates any straightforward opposition between preordained endings (or fate) and choice. Or rather, what may seem 'preordained' might actually just be an ending that has been repeated so often that it is difficult to imagine an alternative.

The function of 'story' is one of the recurring themes throughout the novel, and in fact, the insight that Nomi is left with at the end of the novel—the thing that growing up in East Village has taught her—is that "stories are what matter" (245). In fact, story and reality are not presented as being altogether distinct. The story of Mennonite migration, retold again and again becomes a part of the structure of everyday life, providing a foundation for 'the way things are.' The "shunning" stories that Nomi craves as a child reinforce her early belief in the importance of obedience, and thus, reinforce the importance of being separate from the rest of the world (or face the consequence of being separated from your family and your God for eternity). The novel is, in many ways, about the social expectations/rules of place, but the critique of expectations is paralleled by a similar exploration of narrative and genre conventions.

Nomi's transgressions (and those that she points out throughout the novel) are critical for highlighting the rules of East Village, but perhaps one of the most important transgressions in *A Complicated Kindness* is Toews's decision not to have Nomi leave East Village, either in the usual journey motif or as an ending. Near the end of the novel it is made apparent that the narrative being framed as Nomi's response to the assignment referred to on the first page when Nomi says that she has "assignments to complete" (1). The assignment, written in response to the topic "The Flight of Our People" is assumedly meant to reinforce the historical narrative of mass Mennonite emigration; however, Nomi appropriates the theme of mass migration and uses it to highlight the harshness of the current order by centering her response to the assignment around the disappearances of her family members from East Village. In the final chapter, Nomi has just been excommunicated for various transgressions including a lack of church attendance (235),

and her father is once again put in the impossible situation of choosing between someone

he loves and "the faith that keeps his motor running" (26). Ray chooses to leave, and that,

according to Nomi, is "what people around here are forced to do if they aren't strong

enough to live without some kind of faith or strong enough to make a stand and change

an entire system or overthrow a church" (241). Nomi begins to address her teacher, Mr.

Quiring, whom she assumes will mark her assignment "INCOMPLETE" (242). She

imagines the possible endings to her parents' portion of the story, where they might have

gone, what their motives might have been, and whether or not they lived (246). Then

comes the ending: "I lit a Cap, pulled the seat up a little closer to the wheel, found a half-

decent song on the radio, and drove" (246). Only that isn't the final paragraph; it goes on:

"That sounds good, right? . . . Truthfully, this story ends with me still sitting on the floor

of my room wondering who I'll become if I leave this town . . ." (246).

That Nomi does not leave her hometown is an important deviation from narrative

conventions in the developmental genres. It highlights the fact that leaving is such a

prominent convention/expectation: "Toews subverts the familiar version of the story as

we expect it to unfold, refusing the narrative of the adolescent girl leaving the small

town, proposing instead that the town, in a bewildering fashion, vanishes from the young

girl" (Steffler 126). Toews's deviation from genre conventions, in keeping her

protagonist in her hometown, serves to highlight 'normality' in the contemporary

developmental fiction in the same manner that the protagonists' transgressions in *The*

Sudden Weight of Snow, Kalyna's Song, and *A Complicated Kindness* highlight the place-

based norms and values that are represented in the novels. Leaving (whether permanently

or temporarily) is a relatively common convention in developmental fiction, and Nomi

has very few reasons left to stay in East Village. The choice that Nomi and her family members are faced with resembles the one that prefaces the Mennonite migration story that is repeated in *A Complicated Kindness*. In both cases, separation from an oppressive context becomes the only option for protagonists/peoples who seek to maintain their differences from mainstream society/place. While the Mennonite migration narrative that Nomi is told as a child ends with the happy creation of a separate Mennonite community, Nomi's story reveals the next chapter, in which the place that is established to accommodate Mennonite difference becomes a place in which that very difference is mandatory and highly regulated. Nomi's family, like their ancestors before them, choose to leave. That Nomi chooses to stay suggests the desire—if not the possibility—to change the course of the 'flight' narrative by refusing to choose between leaving or capitulating to the prevailing place-based system of authority.

Toews, like many contemporary novelists writing about adolescence, opts for an open ending, refusing the finality of conventional endings that her protagonist is so suspicious of. While the open ending is common in contemporary novels of adolescence (Spacks 295), Nomi is situated in a unique position at the close of the novel. She has not left, mentally or physically, but she has been shunned; she is a ghost in her own town. Integration is no longer an option for Nomi, but as everyone close to Nomi disappears, alienation is shown to be an entirely undesirable alternative. Considered within the context of genre conventions, the ending of the novel begs the question of how to continue imagining resolutions outside of the dichotomous alienation vs. accommodation paradigm that has come to define developmental genres.

Both Rosnau and Grekul end their novels with images that strongly suggest the possibility of imagining the inclusion of difference without its annihilation, and Toews seems to suggest a similar possibility. In *The Sudden Weight of Snow,* it is narrative that allows for the coexistence of difference, and in *Kalyna's Song* it is the song that the protagonist writes that represents the interconnectedness of differences. At the end of *A Complicated Kindness,* Nomi momentarily glimpses it in her perception of her own hometown:

> I closed my eyes and that's when the odd thing happened. I started to see things in my town clearly, the pits, the fire on the water, Travis's green hands playing his guitar, him whispering in my ear move with me, and the trampoline, and the old fairgrounds and the stuff written on the rodeo announcers' booth and the lagoon and the cemetery, and the toboggan hut and the RK Ranch and the giant horses and my windowless school and my desk and American tourists and The Mouth and Main Street and the picnic table at the Sunset Diner and Sheridan Klippenstein and everything, everything in town, the whole of East Village, and it didn't seem so awful to me any more in that instant that I knew I'd probably never see it again except for every time I closed my eyes . . . (Toews, *A Complicated Kindness* 245-246)

I have included the quote at length because of the way in which the sentence structure parallels the content. As aspects of place accumulate in Nomi's mind, so does the coordinating conjunction 'and,' until she sees the "whole of East Village" at once. Everything is a part of the whole, and yet each element maintains its separateness. The

aspects of East Village that Nomi calls to mind are both the dominant (The Mouth) and the transgressive (the local party spot, graffiti, and Nomi's first sexual experience).

Toews's narrative provides an intricate critique of the ways in which difference is regulated through place-based notions of physical and mental separation. Separation, when it is used to define a sense of place can be used as a means to restrict knowledge of alternative ways of thinking and being, thereby limiting challenges to the existing order. In Toews's East Village, the coupling of orthodox rules with notions of good and evil further compromises individual's ability or desire to instigate change within place. While Nomi rejects the rules and dominant religious ideology that defines her hometown, enabling her to transgress the rules of place, she does not reject East Village outright.

Nomi's brief insight into her hometown, when she suddenly sees things in her town clearly, represents a new and complicated way of conceptualizing place and the individual's relationship with it. Place, in this instance, cannot be reduced into an either/or duality. The separation of East Village from the world is more complex than its doctrine would admit, and the separation of good from bad within East Village is even more complex. In an interview about *A Complicated Kindness*, Toews states that "The people of the community, the individuals, are like individuals everywhere: there are good ones and bad ones, but most of them are in between, like all of us. It's the culture of control that complicates their decency" (Toews, "Miriam Toews Breaks Out"). There is, despite its harsh doctrine and even harsher punishments, "a complicated kindness" that Nomi identifies in East Village. Staying or leaving cannot be reduced to a simple either/or scenario any more than a place can be reduced to good or bad. Neither integrated nor fully alienated from the town, it would seem that the town is a part of

Nomi that will stay with her whether she stays or leaves. While Nomi's sister, Tash,

"manages to rebel decisively against the town," Nomi "is highly sensitive to the

complications of the town's interconnected fundamentalism and nurturing. Her response

to this codependence of East Village's oppression and compassion prevents a decisive

and straightforward rebellion or rejection" (Toews, "It Gets Under" 135).

Conclusion

If the regulation of difference through space and place is ever to change, it needs first to be challenged. Recognizing the often unspoken rules that regulate acceptable behaviour and identity is a pivotal first step towards change. Narrative provides an important platform for revealing the subtle ways rules shape our lives and, as I hope I have amply established, the conflicts between adolescent protagonists and their hometowns in developmental novels present an opportunity for undertaking critical readings of the way in which place is constructed at a local level to regulate difference and maintain dominant norms, values, and expectations. In *Kalyna's Song*, the separation of cultural practices and identities from mainstream ones becomes evident through Colleen's struggle to articulate her cultural identity, just as the place-based enforcement of appropriate behaviours and identities becomes apparent through Harper's resistance towards a dominant sense of place in *The Sudden Weight of Snow*. In *A Complicated Kindness* the regulation of competing ideologies is made apparent through Nomi's rebellion against the strict rules of her hometown. Transgression and conflict, as Cresswell asserts, serve as productive platforms for revealing and resisting normative landscapes.

Each of the novels examined here suggests that transgression can help change the ways we think about place by making visible the commonsense place-based rules that maintain established social orders and the boundaries of belonging. Collectively, the novels I have analyzed suggest that there is power in transgression and conflict. When someone acts 'out of place' it reveals the possibility of alternative ways of being and behaving in place. If enough others follow, then that which was initially out of place can

in fact become the new 'normal' (Cresswell 165). Cresswell insists, as do the novels that

I have chosen, that "within transgression lie the seeds of new spatial orderings" (166). In

order for these seeds to sprout, however, transgression needs to be persistent. If

transgression is to incite meaningful change, staying home and refusing to capitulate to

the polarities of alienation or accommodation are meaningful departures from what we

have come to expect in novels about adolescence. And in that sense, *Kalyna's Song*, *The

Sudden Weight of Snow*, and *A Complicated Kindness* represent what may continue to be

an important trend in developmental literature.

Though none of the novels represent changes in the places central to their

narratives—the old orders remain—they do point towards what positive change might

look like. Colleen leaves her hometown, looking for a different kind of place, and what

she discovers is that it is not just the particular place that is a problem, it is the way in

which place—any place—can be mobilized to regulate difference and maintain dominant

norms, values, and expectations. Using music and lyrics, the mediums that she is most

comfortable with and inspired by, Colleen writes a song that harmoniously incorporates

representations of multiple cultures without assimilating them.

Harper leaves Sawmill Creek seeking a place where she can be "comfortable not

belonging" (Rosnau 194). In other words, she is looking for place where difference is

neither rejected nor assimilated. Like Colleen, she does not find that place, but she does

find that narrative provides a "place where things gather" (341). For a brief moment,

Nomi glimpses something similar in her own hometown, where the separation of East

Village from the influences of the world beyond is not as straightforward as it seems.

The world that we live in is already highly interconnected, becoming more and more so with developments in communication and travel. Partially in response to this, beginning in the 1980's, "the world has seen the recrudescence of exclusivist claims to places—nationalist, regionalist and localist" (Massey 5), and the novels that I have chosen reflect this by portraying places in which difference is something to be kept out or contained. Reactionary senses of place are, in a sense, "attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities and to claim them for one's own" (Massey 5). But the impetus to keep difference out and maintain a homogenized sense of place is not only problematic, it is becoming increasingly impossible. If the authors I have examined here offer any indication of how perspectives of place are changing, then perhaps the impetus to construct exclusivist senses of place is waning. But in order for perceptions of place to change, we must first recognize those perceptions in the first place, and writers like Grekul, Rosnau, and Toews are utilizing the conventions of genre as a platform for revealing perceptions of place.

As much as they employ the conventions of developmental genres, the authors of all three novels also break with them. Genre, like place, is not fixed or static. Old conventions are broken with, written against, and replaced by new ones. None of the texts that I have chosen could be said to fully belong to any one genre. Instead, they appropriate conventions from multiple genres, including the *bildungsroman,* the novel of female development, and the novel of female adolescence. The appropriation of narrative conventions can be used to serve different purposes. In this instance, it provides a significant platform for critique. The portrayal of conflict between the protagonist and

place (or society) is already a well-established convention in literature, and it will continue to provide a means for writers to voice social critique.

The novels that I have chosen represent a small sampling of a much larger field. Engaging with place in novels of adolescence has the potential to go in many different directions, and I believe that it will produce fascinating results. Claudia Dey's *Stunt* and Heather O'Neill's *Lullabies for Little Criminals* provide complex portrayals of adolescent girls' relationships to the city. Examining the place-based regulation of masculinity in a novel like Gail Anderson Dargatz's *A Rhinestone Button* would be another exciting avenue to pursue. Beyond Canadian literature, some of the most widely read series with adolescent protagonists engage with constructs of place in meaningful and exciting ways—such as J.K. Rowlings's *Harry Potter* series and Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* Trilogy. As scholars continue to engage with contemporary fiction, in all its forms, developmental genres will be difficult to ignore, and with the more recent prominence of place theory in academia, I hope to see increasing scholarly engagement with the intersection between development and place in narrative.

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