

rather like Toews herself.

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Rita Dirks, *Silence and Rage in Miriam Toews's Mennonite Novels*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2024.

Rita Dirks's book, as the title asserts, centers on what she labels as Miriam Toews's Mennonite novels, namely *Swing Low*, *A Complicated Kindness*, *Irma Voth*, *All My Puny Sorrows*, *Women Talking*, and *Fight Night*. The titular silence references the long-term silencing of Mennonite women, and the rage that marks many of the characters in these novels refers to the response to that silencing. This specific expression of rage is characterized by Dirks as a potentially constructive force which serves an essential role within the Mennonite world and beyond.

Dirks's introduction provides important contextual material in terms of placing Mennonites in historical context, describing the development of North American Mennonite writing, and then situating Miriam Toews's body of work within this literary context. Dirks pays attention to Toews's Mennonite novels, arguing that, taken collectively, these six novels form a stepping stone chronicle of the journeys of the Toews family (13). Dirks makes a convincing case for the strongly autobiographical dimensions of these novels, describing the writing as "autobiographically infused fiction (14)." This "autofiction (16)" provides an expression and release of rage at the powerful structures that embody patriarchy, and thus rage allows the enforced and damaging silences to be broken.

Each of Dirks's six chapters deals with one Mennonite novel, following the chronology of the dates of publication. The chapters offer keen insights based on close readings of the texts, supplemented by drawing on secondary sources and occasionally including personal commentary. Dirks keeps the dimensions of silence and rage ever present without reducing all six novels only to those emphases. For example, Dirks brings to view the restor-

ative work that writing performs in *Swing Low*; she includes a fascinating discussion of the dual purpose of Plautdietsch in *A Complicated Kindness*. Dirks also (importantly) makes clear that Toews is decidedly not anti-Menonite. Rather, Toews's deep concern centers on problems within militant fundamentalism and patriarchal structures (98). Other examples of keen interpretive insights could be multiplied here. Overall, the strength of the book is showing the connections between these novels, along with mapping the progression on display in various characters as they find voice in the face of continued attempts at silencing, tied closely to the development seen in the expression of righteous rage that seeks to find the way to being constructive and life-giving as opposed to destructive and stultifying.

Dirks's good work could be strengthened in several ways. First, her inclusion of numerous direct quotations makes for some choppiness in the book, especially in the case of her drawing on secondary sources, which could be integrated more seamlessly into the narrative. Further, and more substantively, Dirks at times brings material into the discussion without enough development. For example, her foray into a description of Menno Simons's theology of shunning is too cryptic, especially given the weight of the role of shunning in Dirks's reading of these novels. Similarly, her abrupt leap from a torn curtain scene in *Fight Night* to the tearing of the veil of the temple in Matthew 27 deserves much closer attention (111). The interpretive impulse here is provocative, but the potential richness of that connection remains largely untapped. A similar observation could be made in the case of Dirks's connection of 'honour killings' to domestic violence in *Irma Voth*, which raises fascinating possibilities that are only hinted at here (58). Further, the assertion that Plautdietsch "has no words for affection, such as love and kindness" causes Dirks to wonder about the psyche of such a linguistic group (62). Here Dirks's brief linguistic analysis stops short of being convincing—further analysis of sources such as *Plautdietsch Wiedabuak* (Low German Dictionary) would show that there are several possibilities for describing and expressing love and kindness in Plautdietsch.

The conclusion of this book deserves specific mention here. Drawing on her analysis of Toews's Mennonite novels, Dirks writes a gripping conclusion in which her own voice calls the reader to recognize the kinds of problems that are brought to view in these novels, and the constructive possibilities

that must be recognized and acted upon. Toews's novels have addressed violent silencing by inscribing "silenced rage into the printed word" (117). Dirks presses the reader to use these kinds of insights to address violence against women, without which "we will have no currency as peacemakers in the world" (118). She expresses her own rage at readings of the Bible that serve to subjugate women under the guise of following the teachings of Scripture. But Dirks is not content to embrace rage; rather she hopes for this rage to turn into work, "much like all the protagonists in Toews's novels have learned to fight and write and live" (122). This deeply personal conclusion, along with the hard-earned insights from Toews's Mennonite novels, present to the reader the crucial importance of confronting the truth revealed to us in fiction.

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Marlene Epp. *Eating like a Mennonite: Food and Community across Borders*.  
Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023.

What does it mean to "eat like a Mennonite"? This deceptively simple question guides Marlene Epp's recent work of scholarship. It leads her through a discussion of the Mennonite history of migrations and missions, gender dynamics among twentieth and twenty-first century Mennonites (mostly in North America), a plethora of Mennonite cookbooks, the impact of histories of food scarcity, and the interplay of religion and food in Mennonite culture. This engaging book is a work of "cross-over" scholarship; it is sourced like an academic work, but it avoids jargon and clearly explains bits of theory so that readers without prior knowledge of food studies or Mennonite history can easily read and understand the research and analysis.

Epp does not provide a definitive answer to her question, arguing that Mennonites are too diverse for there to be only one food culture or food practice. Instead, she finds themes that sometimes reflect commonalities among Mennonites of different ethnicities and sometimes illuminate different historical trajectories. The chapter on the impact of hunger and