tiple forms of power, both in the foreground and background. As an example, she identifies that the open application process for committee positions initially appears to create equal access to positions of power, yet it inherently privileges those who see a hymnal as relevant, which ends up being white "ethnic Mennonites" with classical music training. Ultimately, Johnson suggests that "without clear-eyed attention to the multidimensional nature of power, Free Church worship risks reproducing relationships of domination present in our broader social context that are in violation of our ecclesiological commitments and eschatological vision" (93).

In her foreward, Lisa M. Weaver observes that the *free* in Free Church is not just an adjective describing a historical reality, it also expresses the way that communities can live and participate in worship. As the editors observe, the nature of power is that it ebbs and flows depending on who has it and how it operates. In our changing political, social, and religious climate, Free Church worship—and the power embedded in it—will continue to evolve. Weaver suggests that Free Church worshippers can "revisit, reconsider, and reimagine liturgical power and authority in ways that enable all who participate in worship to do so fully and *freely*" (xiv). With thought-provoking ideas for practitioners and scholars at a range of stages, this edited collection acts as an invitation to continue the work that the contributors have begun, consistently re-evaluating power as liturgical structures develop.

Anneli Loepp Thiessen, PhD candidate in Interdisciplinary Music Research, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario.

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Sabrina Reed. *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Landscapes of Resilience in the Works of Miriam Toews*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2022.

Sabrina Reed's clearly written, accessible study of Miriam Toews's novels is the first such book and rather overdue, considering how important Toews has become on the Canadian literary scene since *A Complicated Kindness* nearly twenty years ago. This is, in many respects, a good first book in the field

as it offers a reasonable, steady-eyed view of an author whose work has been the site of polarized debate, especially in the Mennonite community.

Reed, not a Mennonite, has researched carefully and offers helpful (if backward-looking) context about Mennonite communities which are the setting of some of Toews's best-known works. Not all of Toews's novels are explicitly grounded in Mennonite experience; the most recent, *Fight Night*, does not use the term and neither does *The Flying Troutmans,* one of Toews's funniest books. Reed emphasizes the repressive aspects of Mennonitism, and I was grateful whenever she substituted the term fundamentalism. She argues correctly that Toews "postulates a feminist vision of what being a Mennonite should (and can) be," (119) but too often Reed allows the suggestion to exist that Toews's progressive ideas are remarkable. (There are thousands of Canadian Mennonites involved in this quest for liberation.)

Reed organizes her analysis in chapters which pair Toews's first eight books in thematic units (*Fight Night* is the ninth and receives its own short chapter). Reed's themes involve home, road trips, Mennonite experience, and the way Toews has used autobiographical fiction to work through the tangled stories of grief in her family, particularly the grief following the suicides of Toews's father and sister. It will not surprise anyone who knows these actual people that Miriam's mother, Elvira Toews, arises as the hero of Reed's book and, indeed, several of her daughter's novels. Her mother's remarkable courage, humour, and generosity are the basis of the resilience which this study promotes as the key to Miriam Toews's work.

I cannot disagree with the resilience thesis, although for me it was restated too often, just as I became uneasy about the lengthy treatment of suicide. The discussion of mental illness and suicide is, of course, essential in a study of Miriam Toews—she has transformed stories of her father and sister in several novels. But while reading the novels, I was never uneasy about Toews's own handling of suicide. In *All My Puny Sorrows*, the circumstances are tragic, but the honouring of Miriam's sister Marj is deeply affectionate and frequently joyous. The strange hilarity of that book creates not tragicomedy (too simple a term), but something fiercely complex, resonating with profound and unsayable qualities of love.

In a book like *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined*, subjects like suicide and fundamentalism necessarily become intellectual themes, and a schol-

ar is obliged to present themes cogently and rationally. But Toews's great strength as a writer of fiction is her wildness. Her boisterous, life-affirming voice is, I would argue, the major reason readers have embraced her novels—and it would be lovely to investigate more fully this outrageous comedy.

The term autofiction is employed by Reed here, and I'm not sure how helpful the label is. Toews has certainly made use of her turbulent life—and the deaths she has mourned—but not in the self-absorbed way of a Karl Ove Knausgård. Her writing has more in common with the outward-looking, generative use of memory of a Dickens or a Margaret Laurence. Reed accedes too easily to the notion that Toews's protagonists are her stand-ins: contrarily, I see the riot of weird names for these women (Knute, Nomi, Hattie, Yoli, Mooshie) as a persuasive feat of exaggeration and distance.

Throughout Reed's book I noted flashes of insight that could be jumping-off places for a livelier discussion. Toews's insistence on the significant phrase "act of female imagination" in *Women Talking* is one such point; the imaginations on display in that novel are capacious and extremely eccentric. Then there are the unusual survival strategies. Young Irma Voth (in the novel by the same name), for example, takes comfort in believing she is dead; nearly everything Nomi does in *A Complicated Kindness* is a bizarre stratagem for underscoring the meaning of her messed-up existence, and Reed delineates Nomi's character well. The fearlessness of Toews's characters is astonishing: Irma dangerously mistranslates the orders of the dogmatic film director in Irma Voth into utterances such as "he wants us all to have fun, relax, and be brave" (quoted in Reed, 143). Reed's discussion of Irma's character is particularly effective. And Reed does good work on the motif of creating art out of chaos and pain.

But comedy could move firmly to the front of the stage. Many critics mention how funny Toews is, and Reed is no exception. But how daring this comedy is! Reed astutely quotes Magdalene Redekop, for whom Toews has a "comic vision" and "an inner clown whose movements are guided by this vision and who is brave enough to keep going no matter what" (quoted in Reed, 206-07). The vitality within Miriam Toews does come across in Reed's study because Reed quotes generously from Toews; nearly every quotation is a little explosion of vivacity and affirmation.

This is a capable first look at Miriam Toews's art, and hopefully there are many more studies to come. This one would benefit from taking more risks,

rather like Toews herself.

Sue Sorensen, Associate Professor of English, Canadian Mennonite University.

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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-