



Women Talking

Written by Miriam Toews

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Table of Contents

Women Talking Miriam Toews	1
Women Talking Review	2
Women Talking Novel	3
Women Talking About Cars	4
1	5

Women Talking

By Miriam Toews

Women Talking Miriam Toews

One evening, eight Mennonite women climb into a hay loft to conduct a secret meeting. For the past two years, each of these women, and more than a hundred other girls in their colony, has been repeatedly violated in the night by demons coming to punish them for their sins. Now that the women have learned they were in fact drugged and attacked by a group of men from their own community, they are determined to protect themselves and their daughters from future harm.

Women Talking Review

While the men of the colony are off in the city, attempting to raise enough money to bail out the rapists and bring them home, these women—“all illiterate, without any knowledge of the world outside their community and unable even to speak the language of the country they live in”—have very little time to make a choice: Should they stay in the only world they’ve ever known or should they dare to escape?

Women Talking Novel

Based on real events and told through the "minutes" of the women's all-female symposium, Toews's masterful novel uses wry, politically engaged humor to relate this tale of women claiming their own power to decide.

I have done what the verse from Philippians instructed, which is to think about what is good, what is just, what is pure, and what is excellent. And I have arrived at an answer: pacifism.

I don't understand all the starred reviews for this book.

Perhaps Women Talking works better if you go into it expecting a religiophilosophical analysis, instead of a feminist novelization of a true story. There are some echoes of Plato in here, to be sure. Readers familiar with Socratic discussions will recognize I have done what the verse from Philippians instructed, which is to think about what is good, what is just, what is pure, and what is excellent. And I have arrived at an answer: pacifism.

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Pretty much everything that happens can be gathered from the title and description. I was intrigued and horrified to hear that this is based on a true story of a Mennonite colony in Bolivia. Over several years, hundreds of women and girls were drugged and raped in their beds by "ghosts" or "demons". These supernatural creatures were eventually discovered to be men of the colony. Bringing attention to this horrendous crime is arguably the book's strongest point.

In this book, women talk. Yes, I'm being a little facetious, but it's an accurate description of almost the entire book. This isn't a problem in itself. It's just that these discussions among the Mennonite women about whether they should leave the colony or "stay and fight" are bloodless, unbelievably rational given the circumstances, and concerned almost solely with religion and analyzing what their religion wants them to do.

They sit around, sharing cigarettes and drinking instant coffee, and weigh the pros and cons of leaving and argue about various interpretations of what their religion would ask of them. I've never heard sexual abuse approached in such a cold and emotionless way.

I also don't understand why this supposedly feminist story was given to a male narrator. I've seen some others argue that it is because the book is framed as meeting minutes, which must be kept by August Epp because the women are illiterate. This might make sense in theory, but I have no idea why the

Women Talking

author decided to use meeting minutes at all, when this book is written in a style unlike any meeting minutes I have ever seen in my life. It doesn't read like meeting minutes; it reads like a regular first-person narration from a man's point-of-view. An odd choice.

I think this might be a book for readers who enjoy lengthy discussions about how to correctly apply religious doctrine.

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Women Talking About Cars

This is, without a single doubt, the most important book I have read all year.

The women have three options they can choose from, but they can choose only one.

1. Do nothing.
2. Stay and fight.
3. Leave.

But perhaps one is enough. Perhaps that one option can open multiple other possibilities. If the women arrive to a conclusion, that is.

Already from the straight-forward title, you know 90% of what is happening in this book. Women are talking about their situations and trying to imagine a safer future. This is, without a single doubt, the most important book I have read all year.

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This is a work of fiction, and yet Miriam Toews wrote this book as a reaction to real life events that have happened in a Mennonite colony in Bolivia. In this colony, women were raped in the night by "unwelcome visitors," believed to be demons sent by the devil himself to punish the women for their sins.

But the truth came out. It was the men who committed these acts. Men who raped women, teenage girls and even young children. The accused men were incarcerated, but in this version of the story, the Priest and the majority of the other men plan to bail them out without consideration for the women.

And, in a patriarchal society, what can women "who have been oppressed all their lives by their fathers, their husbands and even their sons and whose thoughts don't matter" do to stop these violent acts against them and start leading peaceful lives?

That is what Greta, Agata, Mariche, Ona, Mejal, Salome, Autje and Neitje "the youngest in the group" are pondering. August Epp, the man who records these conversations also participates in the discussions at times. He is someone the women can trust. Everyone has a role to play and

everyone's voice is heard for once. Even the youngest ones, Autje and Neitje, gain confidence and become involved in their own ways, despite being reluctant to participate in the beginning.

I cannot imagine discouraging anyone from reading this incredible story. The format is original, yes, and the themes salient, of course, but it's also utterly captivating. If you know me even a little, you know that I don't give high ratings to ~ important books whose important ideas were poorly developed. Otherwise I would have definitely given *The Kiss Quotient* five stars. But this, this is everything.

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I had to stop And think for a little more than a day on what my rating of this would be, had to separate my feelings so I could judge what Toews has accomplished by writing this book. Quite frankly, this book made me so angry for the women in this Mennonite enclosed colony in Bolivia. Between 2005 and 2009, over 100 women and children were drugged and raped by male members of their sect. The youngest was three, a great part of what made me so angry. These women were expected to forgive their rapists and just carry on as if nothing had occurred. There is more to this, but that is all I'm saying about the men.

Toews, from a Mennonite background, much like these women, decided to give them the voice they probably did not actually have. Or maybe they did, I don't know that. So a group of women get together, to decide whether they are going to leave the colony or stay. The only man present, August, trusted, has his own back story, a very interesting one. It is while they talk that we learn of their lives in the colony, where they are so little valued that they are not taught to read or write, not allowed to express their likes or dislikes, completely powerless. Another huge source of my anger. In a short amount of pages, Toews accomplishes much, provides insights, and shows the remarkable courage of these women. Quite a revelation and accomplishment both.

Not a thrill a minute, there is some repetition as the women talk through their beliefs, their options and how their decisions will be accomplished. Yet, much is said, much is learned. Toews is an excellent author and one of my goals this year is to read the books by her that I have not yet read.

This was Angela, Esils and mine monthly read. We all agreed on this one.

This is a link to an article I found on why Toews wrote this book. Quite informative.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/201...>

Women Talking

ARC from Netgalley. [...more](#)

1

In the loft of a barn, the women of a Mennonite community in Bolivia meet to talk about what they should do, how they could move forward to protect themselves and their daughters from more of the vicious rapes they have endured as they were drugged in the middle of the night. I would have found this hard to imagine if not for this opening sentence of a note by the author before the book begins:

“Between 2005 and 2009, in a remote Mennonite colony in Bolivia (named the Manitoba Colony, after the

In the loft of a barn, the women of a Mennonite community in Bolivia meet to talk about what they should do, how they could move forward to protect themselves and their daughters from more of the vicious rapes they have endured as they were drugged in the middle of the night. I would have found this hard to imagine if not for this opening sentence of a note by the author before the book begins:

“Between 2005 and 2009, in a remote Mennonite colony in Bolivia (named the Manitoba Colony, after the province in Canada from which the colonists had emigrated in the mid-1900s), hundreds of girls and women would wake up in the morning feeling drowsy and in pain, their bodies bruised and bleeding, having been attacked in the night. The attacks were attributed to ghosts and demons. Some members of the community felt the women were being made to suffer by God or Satan as punishment for their sins; many accused the women of lying for attention or to cover up adultery; still others believed everything was the result of wild, female imagination.” (See the links to some news stories I have posted at the end.)

That this novel is based on a true story makes this such a horrific and powerful story, as we listen to the women talk to each other about their options and to the only man left at the colony, August, a teacher who takes minutes for them since these women have never been allowed to read or write. The rest of the men have gone to bail out the rapists who were taken into police custody for their safety, the safety of the men not the women. Meanwhile these women struggle with what to do to keep their daughters safe. The discussions are difficult, philosophical, religious, practical and heartbreaking as they recount their experiences. Should they do nothing? Should they stay and fight? Should they leave? The middle of the book felt a little slow, but then I thought that these discussions seemed realistic; it was not an easy decision to make. While this was their story, I was moved by August’s connection to them. This is one of those books that was so impactful and definitely a powerful telling of the awful things that happened to many of the women in the real sect. I woke up thinking about these women, wanting to know what happened after the ending. Kudos to Miriam Toews for not forgetting these women.

Thanks as always to Esil and Diane for our monthly read together. A terrific discussion!

I received an advanced copy of this book from Bloomsbury through NetGalley.

Women Talking

Articles on the events this was based on:

<http://content.time.com/time/world/ar...>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-...>

<https://nationalpost.com/entertainmen...> ...more

The women in this book have been dealt a hand of crappy cards.

AND I MEAN *CRAPPY*!!!!

The women need to talk.

With only 2 days free until the men in their community return - (its their intension to bring back the lovely rapists who have been in jail to give them back their RAPING-LEADERSHIP... cuz they are such nice wholesome decent men)...

Ha!!!!

So.....while the men are away..., the women will play (with one man allowed to play too).....

Eight women meet secretly- - ~barn-style~™ group-emerge The women in this book have been dealt a hand of crappy cards.

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Eight women meet secretly- - ~barn-style~™ group-emergency-chat gathering.

What the f#~k solution can they agree upon that will protect them in the future?

A couple of the women are pregnant already - (greetings, daddy?), and several daughters were also RAPED!!!!

The word *violated* is just not BIG ENOUGH!!!

The year was 2011 when the two-day ~talk-a-thon~™ took place. The RAPES took place in the years 2005-2006. Over 100 women were RAPED!!!!

I wonder how many times I need to write the word RAPE - before the devastating REALITY syncs into every cell of our HEARING THIS? And what~s the plan to STOP IT?/!!!!!!

NOTE... (this might sound trite), when talking about RAPE...(not intended), but ...

Geeeee- we each know how hard it is to make changes in our OWN LIVES...

We are FAMILIAR with our crappy problems - to change them FOR THE BETTER - is one of the hardest things a human being does FOR THEIR OWN BENEFIT.

Women Talking

People resist change. Change creates upset.... it's frightening. THINKING about change - talking about it - is a start - but even for THE MOST INDEPENDENT POWERHOUSE women today - who believes in civil rights - justice - their life working - has STRUGGLES CHANGING.....their environment- diet- and habits... etc.

Yet - these 8 women - whom have ONLY KNOWN this lifestyle - are expected to clap their hands over a solid solution???

Good luck!

These are RELIGIOUS women!!! Their thought reasoning is specific.

God - (their faith) - is a strong force. They haven't been raised to think freely.

The women couldn't read or write. (of course). Welcome to their "religious" community!!! (Wow- even in the year 2011)

That type of "organized-religion" is one I wouldn't wish for my worse enemy.

THIS IS NOT the 1600's.

Who knew that in the years 2000+, illiterate was desired.... in ANY community -religious or otherwise!!!!!!

It's Religious brainwash if the women felt "not reading" was being faithful to their God.

August Ebb - was the only man - also a part of the 2-day "talk-a-thon".

He was the "minutes-note-taking"-guy. The women trusted August to have their best interest at heart.

However.....

God- forbid - the eight women could trust their own voices "together" without the need of a MAN for help.

Yep... fitting!!! It's the community the Mennonite women knew!

Men were always granted more power than women...

So why would this "women's talking" gathering be any different.

See the problem about solution solving?

"What if the rapists are released on bail and return to the colony and find that there are no girls and women here, and begin to use these boys, the 13 and 14-year-olds, as targets for their attack?"

One of the females (Mejal) chimes in.

"Surely we can't be afraid of boys this age? Why couldn't they join us?"

Ona (another woman speaks):

"August, you're the boys teacher. What is your feeling about this? Do your boys at this age pose a threat to our girls and women?"

August must stop his transcribing in order to properly answer her question.

"I'm simply not capable of containing my happiness and surprise at being asked a question by Ona, formulating my answer, communicating it in Low German, and translating it instantly in my mind to English"while almost simultaneously writing in English translation on paper".

Women Talking

August's answer: Ha... teasing... don't expect me to give you spoilers!

However - his answer is in two-parts.

Yet...NO ANSWER is clear- cut- and dry when it comes to looking at religious beliefs - forgiveness - repenting - education -sinners - heaven - and hell.

The women in the community talked & talked... discussing/arguing/laughing at times/ debated... ultimately about how to take their lives back after these horrific RAPES!!!

Based on a real-life event....

Dystopian Fiction written in a unique format...(very visual to imagine)

Miriam Toews took a god-awful terrifying- subject -made it personal -offering readers the possibility for our own added interactive discussions.

Perfect book club pick!

Thank You Bloomsbury Publishing, Netgalley, and Miriam Toews ...more