



# Women Talking

Written by Miriam Toews

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# Women Talking

By Miriam Toews

## Women Talking By 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 About Cars

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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