Heeding the Wounded Storyteller: Toews' *A Complicated Kindness*

Grace Kehler, *McMaster University*

if
i showed the stigmata on my hands
& feet . . .
if i told even a sliver of what i know
haltingly who would listen

(Di Brandt, *Agnes in the Sky*)

Miriam Toews repeatedly composes texts that make room for the uncomfortable. They bear witness to society's wounded and melancholic people who struggle to make themselves heard and seen as human, precisely in their pain.[1] Challengingly, her texts blur the boundaries between nonfiction and fiction, suggesting that a hybrid literature, dually attentive to the visible and the invisible, has much to teach us about learning to dwell with and to become responsive to the pain of others. A literature of witness, her texts, in turn, seek to create other witnesses in the very social and cultural sites that previously remained closed to difficult conversations and discomforting affects. Notably in three hybrid texts that I have come to think of as her Manitoba Mennonite trilo-

gy—*Swing Low* (2000), *A Complicated Kindness* (2004), and *All My Puny Sorrows* (2014)—Toews gives voice to socially created ghosts and martyrs. She focuses on those who get effaced from the public sphere because their trauma and mourning jar the dominant narratives of social health and harmony, while inviting readers both to respond compassionately to hurts that are not their own and to reconceive of *their* subjectivity as vulnerably dependent on the responses of others. *Swing Low* and *All My Puny Sorrows* imaginatively explore the real-world suffering and suicides of Mel and Marjorie, Toews' father and only sibling, in part to call attention to the social and ethical imperative of providing caring witness to those whose despair may not permit of a cure. *A Complicated Kindness*, the focus of this essay, similarly belongs to this hybrid genre. Though it does not suggest a correspondence between its melancholic sixteen-year-old narrator and any one historical figure, it begs to be read as a literature of witness that calls for ongoing engagements with traumatized persons. Furthermore, the story Nomi Nickel tells of her personal desolation also takes "a stance … *beyond* [the *self*]," another crucial function of witness literature (Felman and Laub, 3): her melancholy, her mourning without end, simultaneously functions to indicate where the social and spiritual fabric of the community is in need of repair.

I shall argue for the importance of reading *A Complicated Kindness* as a creative text that seeks to direct readers' imaginations and affects to unfinished historical hurts. Nomi's first-person account of her town of East Village as a religio-political monoculture, presided over by "The Mouth of Darkness," emphasizes its ever multiplying bans against physical, worldly pleasures and its ritual shunning of church members who fail to meet its impossible standards of purity (45). As Nomi reveals, in a community that nurtures neither body nor spirit, all members languish in a suspended state between life and death. If The Mouth and other church officials presume that clear lines can be drawn between the spiritually elect and the fallen, Nomi offers a counter-narrative in which her physical wounds and melancholia manifest the pain of living in a world bereft of the sacred (45). Whether one adheres to church prescriptions and feigns "cheerfully yearning for death" (5) or one gets shunned, living within community as an unheeded martyr or social ghost, one exists in the stranglehold of death narratives that fracture the community and individual psyches alike. Critics of the novel astutely draw attention to Nomi's restorying of the Mennonite master narrative of martyrology, an idealized narrative of a pacifist people that follows a perfect arc through earthly suffering and renunciations to the foregone conclusion of a glori-

fied afterlife.[2] Scholars including Noon Park, Margaret Steffler, and Ella Soper note that Nomi, in contrast, refuses the singular truth narratives and teleological certainties promoted by her community.[3] Yet if, as these scholars rightly contend, Nomi advocates an embrace of life with its messiness and contradictions, how do we as readers address the eerie replication of East Village's systemic evacuations in her person and narrative? Might not her isolated state at the conclusion of her memoir point less to a revitalizing ambiguity than to a haunting emptiness that signals that the restoration of social and spiritual bonds has yet to occur?

Nomi tells an unheard tale. Abandoned by her family and shunned by the religious community, she addresses her memoir to a high school teacher who has rejected all of her previous writing. This imposed voicelessness in Toews' literary representation, as in trauma theory, constitutes one of the most devastating forms of violence one might inflict on another, for to stigmatize an individual and her story as unspeakable, unreceivable, constitutes a fundamental rejection of her humanity.[4] Such is the final textual state of Nomi, who resides alone in her family home, unrecognized by the Mennonite community at large that has shunned her. She has become one of "the ghosts" (45), her ironic term for physically present and highly visible community members who are erased as interlocutors, neither addressed nor heard. As Nomi underscores, these ghosts bleed and dream, but their stories as well as their persons go unheeded.

Nomi, too, can only dream of reciprocal speech and of a present, touchable community. In the final pages of her memoir, she comments, "The stories that I *have told myself* are *bleeding into a dream*, finally, that is slowly *coming true*" (245; italics added). A ghost telling stories of the disappeared, Nomi struggles to tell herself a narrative of survival, but its tone is melancholic. It functions, to borrow Sigmund Freud's well-known and evocative description of the melancholic complex, like "an open wound" (252). For all the verve and searing wit Nomi exhibits, her traumatized utterances indicate "a history which is essentially *not over*" and that, perhaps, cannot be fully grasped by the one who speaks from within the wound (Felman and Laub, xiv, 67).[5] Nomi rails against a town and a people who prefer the unreal and unseen to the pleasures of the now, but remains immobilized in an empty house where she conjures idylls of a beautiful past and of a future, physical family reunion. Left behind with no farewell words from her mother and a baffling note from her father, she converts her loss of family into unverifiable stories of sacrificial love, whereby her parents choose to vanish rather than inflict on other family members the

annihilating silences that accompany shunning.[6] Her inadvertent repetition of East Village's practices of self-denial and deferral indicates that her unresolved trauma cannot be separated from the larger communal crisis—that is, its lost sense of the incarnational as the source of spiritual vitality.

While Toews eschews a Christological point of view, her aesthetic hones in on the spiritual hollowness of the Mennonite community and the punitive impulse of church authorities from Menno Simons to The Mouth. Her point, however, is not simply to denounce the interrelational failures of an insular Mennonite community. Though assigning to Nomi a recursive tale of wounding that reaches back to the sixteenth century, Toews suggests that a life of renunciation is by no means inevitable. Nomi's unfinished tale of mourning cries out for a fully incarnational practice of addressable community and haptic connection. When Nomi imagines entitling her memoir "*for the way things could have been*" (242), she implicitly calls for a reversal of fragmentation and absence. What's at stake in Nomi's unresolved narrative is nothing less than a plea for confirmation that (to borrow the words of William Blake) "every thing that lives is Holy" (102).

Melancholics, Ghosts and Martyrs

> The sore that opened when I saw you wear
> Misfortune like a flower—may it smart
> Anew each changeful weather of my soul
> To hurt me in my querulous ease and tear
> The scabs from memory, from mind and heart,
> Because I need such wounds to keep me whole.
>
> ("The Grace of Remembrance," Vassar Miller)

The melancholic who remains openly wounded bodes uncomfortable encounters that "smart" and "tear" at one, and as *A Complicated Kindness* repeatedly illustrates, such lesions meet with skepticism and outright denial from East Villagers. A visible sufferer like Nomi's friend Lydia, whose hyper-sensitized body keeps breaking down, gets hospitalized—and eventually sent to an asylum for shock treatment—even though her family and the biomedical practitioners insist there's nothing physically wrong with her. Meanwhile, those who publicly self-medicate (alcoholics and potheads) get labeled as community members who refuse to embrace spiritual health and who consequently risk excommunication. The problematic logic of East Village, as Ralph Friesen

explains in his review of *All My Puny Sorrows*, is as follows: "If you were a Christian in good standing with God, then why would you be depressed?" This Christian pathologizing of naked suffering without an end date also coincides with psychoanalytic accounts. As Freud points out in "Mourning and Melancholia," mourning, which terminates in an acceptance of loss, tends to be regarded as productive of and oriented towards health, regardless of its excesses. On the other hand, melancholia, an open-ended grief, immediately raises suspicions of an individual pathology (242). Bereft of a loved person, object, or even ideal, the melancholic experiences trauma and loss as constitutive and as resistant to closure. Perceiving the world from inside the wound, the sufferer grieves all that the present does not contain, each act of looking thus a potential exacerbation of pain, another wounding. To engage the world in terms of lack entails profound vulnerability, possibly leading to the extreme of a psychotic break or even death (243, 251). But the impetus to tarry with the negative, Freud elucidates, is charged with ambivalence. The melancholic subject, fixated on what is not, ostensibly seeks to preserve the love that binds her to an object by endowing it with an exemplary status that takes precedence in her psychic life. Such ardent desire for what is missing thus functions paradoxically insofar as her life becomes an endless mourning, but the mourning itself indicates her longing for wholeness, for reconnection with the lost person or object that gave her life purpose in the first place. Cleaving to loss, she simultaneously cleaves to love of the dead and to a hope, however implausible, for future restorations (256).[7]

Recent affect and trauma theorists continue Freud's investigations into the multiple valences of purportedly negative feelings like melancholia. Jonathan Flatley, for example, postulates that one's affective state is never a purely individual matter.[8] Whereas "*emotion* suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative," something interstitial that arises between and among beings as well as their environments (Flatley, 12). Thus, importunate affects may—and do—give rise to revisionary considerations of the location of hurt and of the accuracy of diagnostic indices. The melancholic, who makes visible the absences that inform the individual as well as the collective, can be seen as opening up a countercultural space for addressing the brokenness of the world. Her symptomatic and metonymic disclosure of communal failures and refusals invite others to take risks that rend the misleading cicatrices of a culture that would rather place the onus of woundedness and redress onto the individual. When the witness

responds to the melancholic with such willful, self-estranging vulnerability and opts "to / Tear the scabs from memory," from blinkered perceptual apparatus, and from blunted affect (as Vassar Miller's poem "The Grace of Remembrance" discerns), hurt then registers as a shared responsibility for working towards "whole[ness]."

The writing of Miriam Toews repeatedly performs countercultural revisions by highlighting the connections between the melancholic and her particular community. The site to which she returns in her Manitoba Mennonite trilogy is the historic town of Steinbach (also represented as East Village), the town of her birth and raising.[9] All three texts defy easy generic classification. *Swing Low*, though it uses actual names of places and persons, takes form as the first-person reflections of Mel Toews, Miriam's deceased father to whom she gives retrospective voice, while the two later and ostensibly fictional texts reference Miriam's life experiences, historic Mennonite migrations and persecutions, and identifiable Manitoba landmarks—while also drawing liberally on fantasy and hyperbole (Tiessen, 144). Deliberately blurring the boundaries between self and other, fact and fiction, figure and ground, Toews hints that realism or empiricism might prove inadequate as a mode of representation, especially when it comes to communicating unresolved historical traumas. To that end, she uses excommunication, an actual but relatively rare church practice, as one of her prime symbols—or symptoms—of a Mennonite culture that undoes creation and perverts incarnation. If readers are not to take literally the sheer number of references to shunning—for it is no embellishment to state that the East Village of *A Complicated Kindness* in particular is (de) populated with ghosts—nonetheless the various spectral and denied presences register an unexorcised history of spiritual violence also attested by other Mennonite authors.[10]

Nomi repeatedly underscores the fact that those who furtively contravene church rules pass as moral exemplars, so long as they keep quiet about their personal pain. Her grandmother (a near replica of Mel Toews' mother in *Swing Low*) disguises her alcoholism through excessive but private consumption of vanilla, remaining a respected member of the community, whereas a man of the same generation (identified only as "Bert's grandfather") lives "in a little garden shed in the backyard and had his food brought to him in a margarine container" after being "thrown out of the church" for overt alcoholism—which the elders "don't recognize as a disease" (79).[11] Such bizarre and perverse misrecognitions also attach to physical bodies. Take, for example,

the case of a shunned woman prone to fainting spells. Like the other town "ghosts," she receives no consolatory words or touch (unless we count the time when another woman makes a concession to modesty and pulls down the fainted woman's skirt), though community members leave sausages or cheese beside her when she passes out in the street. Acknowledging her physical frailty, they simultaneously refuse to attend to her still more pressing psychic needs of address and response. No doubt this is a hyperbolic and historically inaccurate representation of Mennonite shunning, but Toews resorts to fiction in order to forge a narrative that reveals the worldly urgency of attending to persons who are not invisible but deliberately effaced.

The conjunction of fiction and nonfiction offers a unique opportunity for writers to inquire into what kinds of truth a hybrid narrative can substantiate. At least as far back as the late-eighteenth century, writers constructed texts—Tilottama Rajan names them "autonarrations"—that self-consciously "transposed" elements of (auto)biography into fictional form (Rajan, 150, 161).[12] I cannot do justice here to Rajan's intricate theorizing, though I do wish to highlight a few ways in which Toews' text benefits from being read in terms of this genre that knots together the "two different media of 'life' and 'text,' as if each requires the supplement of the other" (161). In autonarration, the writer is impelled to return to the past—and more specifically to the narratives recorded by the authorities—looking into the powerful but by no means inevitable socio-spiritual hierarchies that have shaped and continue to haunt individuals and communities.[13] Such investigation unsettles and dialogizes the categories of the historical and the literary, both by calling into question the hegemonic accounts of prior events that shore up current power dynamics and by positioning the plots and tropes of literature as forces to wrestle with lingering, operative injustices. For Nomi, who muses that she will entitle her assignment "*for the way things could have been*" (242) and recasts the Mennonite story as a familial tragedy, and for Toews, who writes about and dedicates her books to Mel and Marj, the hurts of Anabaptism clearly include a pacifism gone awry and the sting of the privileged narratives that misleadingly locate violence outside of community. In *A Complicated Kindness*, to borrow the words of Nomi's sister Tash, Mennoism as practiced in East Village represents "the tail end of a five-hundred-year experiment that has failed" (94).

The way things could have been is vexed both within *A Complicated Kindness* and Anabaptist-Mennonite history. Originally one of the radical reform groups of the sixteenth century, Anabaptists

(and their Mennonite descendants) sought release from the hegemonic socio-religious structures that positioned the clergy as the authoritative interpreters of the divine and as mediators between it and a lay population. Anabaptists advocated "that power and authority were not vested in traditional and inherited political power or in the ritually sanctioned office of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but rather only in the individual will and the community of the faithful" (Redekop and Redekop, xi). Seeking a vital rather than a prescribed spirituality based on ritual observances and (what they understood as) an idolatry of ecclesiastical objects, reformers undertook an exegetical and practical return to the Scriptures: notably in a revolutionary practice of volitional community that embraced an incarnational mandate of honouring the holy in all aspects of embodied living. Even as the enfleshment of Christ modelled the divine enactment of compassionate relationality, individual converts committed to integrating their spiritual beliefs with their words and actions as well as to peaceably drawing together in non-hierarchical fashion. As John D. Roth elucidates, since the Anabaptist tradition understood the church as "a *visible witness* to the world," its adherents "insisted on the importance of holy living and unity within the body—hence [they placed] an emphasis on the disciplined community" and accountability to one another (12). The redemptive ideal thus underscored the insufficiency of the self and the necessity of an orientation towards others. Yet the ideal of congregational unity proved as elusive in practice as a consensus on what holiness entailed in the practice of the everyday. Inadvertently and ironically, the ideal of yieldedness to the scriptures and to one another produced all manner of internal competitions to get it right, ethically speaking. Seeking to preserve the purity of the family of believers, groups continued to divide into new congregations, some of which also endorsed shunning within their select community as a form of sanction and discipline against those who got it wrong, ethically speaking. At its worst, Roth argues, this "propensity of groups to divide is an expression of human sin that makes an idol out of the particular enculturated form that has been given to the body of Christ" (13). A perversion of the incarnational aesthetic, this form of self-worship replicates past power structures and persecutions, a martyrological (re)turn that misses in equal measure the model of Jesus in his redemptive suffering and in the creative beauty of his life.[14]

Yet Anabaptism also included consequential instances of incarnational and counter-cultural practices. Most of the communities "deliberately cut themselves off from the coercive structures of

society, refusing to bear arms, serve in the military, swear an oath, or hold any magisterial office" (George, 352). Marked as seditious and heretical for their pacifist stance, Anabaptists endured widespread persecution and martyrdom. What gave these bodily sacrifices gravity was their communal context. Religious martyrdom, Elizabeth Castelli avers, constitutes "one form of refusing the *meaninglessness* of death itself, of insisting that suffering and death do not signify emptiness and nothingness, which they might otherwise seem to imply" (34; original italics). The Anabaptist martyrs understood their deaths as meaningful both as rejoinders to the endemic corruption and lovelessness of the dominant society and as examples of the potential for a non-violent existence. Despite the fractures among their church communities, Anabaptist groups commonly held the martyrs in high regard, perceiving them as imitators of Christ whose radical, inclusive practice of compassion led to his crucifixion (Gregory, 197). The deaths of the martyrs, then, signified the sacred because they advocated a life of embodied relationality that eschewed the hierarchies and vindictiveness of the dominant social order.

By contrast, *A Complicated Kindness* dispiritingly registers intra-communal, church-driven persecutions that create unheeded martyrs and melancholic ghosts. Noon Park offers a compelling argument regarding the repeated martyrological motifs in Nomi's tale, demonstrating that its wounds and self-sacrifice not only link the Nickel family with the historical, faith-based Anabaptist martyrs but also that *A Complicated Kindness* seeks to recognize and redeem ordinary everyday suffering (60). I am less easy, however, about his proposal that the text—whether we think of it as Nomi's memoir or as a Toews' autonarration—initiates a rapprochement between the heterodox and the orthodox, the profane and the sacred. The text achingly accumulates stories of divisions and speaks out of the wound for a redress of fractured relations that has not yet occurred.[15] The profane world Nomi describes, as much as the church's domain, bears the marks of the deathly. The example of the local drug dealer is a case in point. She identifies The Golden Comb as "a rare example of a person who lived freely in our town completely outside the structure of the church and who didn't care and who didn't leave," and expresses admiration for his ability to distance himself from "responsibility or guilt" (78). Yet this freedom, such as it is, derives from his prior training in the church-sanctioned factory farm of East Village. One of the town's only sources of revenue, the abattoir (as Nomi calls it) is a death industry that promotes a practiced callousness towards the land and animals only to beget indifference to *all* embodied life and to the

needful affective, inter-corporeal connections among beings.[16] The Comb, ostensibly an outsider, comprises yet another of the church's ghosted doubles. Affectively deformed by its evacuations, he, in turn, makes his livelihood from a type of depletion. Nomi ironically notes that "Menno Simons himself" would have to admire that "The Comb had managed first to identity an overwhelming need [for numbness] in this community and then, secondly to single-handedly go about filling it" (78). "Filling" the hollowness of the town youth by providing them with the means to anaesthetize themselves, The Comb, like the Mennonite church of Nomi's experience, evacuates the sensual and preys upon the suffering.

Nowhere is this traumatic replication more clear than when Nomi in her "overwhelming need" comes to The Comb with her head shaven like a penitent, broke and crying, and he "fills" her need by giving her drugs in exchange for sex. Afterwards, he tells her that she "gave it up real sweet" (232).[17] When she returns the next day to the home her father has been steadily divesting of the most fundamental means and symbols of nurture and togetherness—the freezer filled with food, the dining room table, and the couch—The Mouth comes to inform her of her excommunication from the church, her desolation met yet again with further divestment. In a further compounding of the traumatic, The Comb has participated in the emptying of the Nickels' home, purchasing the couch from Ray who sits outside on it in the middle of the night, while The Mouth responds censoriously to the lack of furnishings in and overall decrepitude of the house.[18] The point I am making here, however, is not simply that the minister and the dealer both trade in suffering, but rather that their inability to feel for and with others functions as yet another sign of a transgenerational and collective trauma that requires a community to "create the conditions by which the very possibility of ... social witness and response may finally take place" (Caruth, *Listening*, xvi). The Comb, seemingly maintaining a defiant separation from community, still bears the marks of the failed spiritual-affective structures of East Village. Arguably, even The Mouth, whom Nomi figures as a punitive disciplinarian, acts out of damage, for his prohibitions and bannings replicate already familiar practices.[19] As far back as Nomi's tale reaches, it detects splinters that are both external and internal, indicating the need for inter-redemptive relationality that reconnects bodies and affects, for an incarnational, everyday practice of care.

Given the ready transmissibility of trauma and desolation, the accounts Nomi provides of her vanished parents as loving, martyrological self-sacrifices and of a physical family reunion to occur at

some unspecified date and time contain several troubling notes. The family cannot be neatly psychically extracted from the community that forms them, and the fantasy of a reconfigured small unit apart from the imperfections of the whole recalls the Anabaptist-Mennonite purity narratives that fuelled splinters in the first place. Nomi's narrative, in other words, might traumatically repeat what it also critiques.[20] Repetition is a common phenomenon in the severely traumatized, who have not assimilated the overwhelming aspects of their experience and who have not, as trauma theorists Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub write, broken free of the mastery of the death drive (33). In Nomi's fantasies lurk such elements of the fatal, for they not only entail the recognizable East Village tactic of deferral, substituting an ideal life-to-come for embodied relationality, but they also suggest a form of self-harm (C. Wiebe). Nomi has taken into herself the hurt and pain of a family and a village, a doubled introjection of the deathly that threatens to undo her. Her predicament is one in which the threat of losing the world she knows seems unbearable, even though her attachment to it is costly and possibly untenable.[21]

Nomi at the end of her memoir retreats into what Lauren Berlant (in another context) describes as a fantasy of "a life where love circulates and extends its sympathies, rather than the life she actually lives" (47). Embracing the lesson of her town "that stories are what matter," Nomi places her faith "in a beautiful lie" designed to get her through life, the lie that family can be free of psychic scars simply by relocating to a different place (245-46).[22] Her memoir, however, is replete with tales of those who did not or might not have made it through life, including references to the possibility of the deaths of both of her parents, whom she alternately imagines as living out individual, adventurous lives or as separate suicides not yet discovered in the local Rat River (245). As to her own ability to sustain life, it is by no means assured. She may not be "cheerfully yearning for death" (5), which she posits as a Mennonite ideal, but she hears in the sound of her own attempt at cheer "the kind of laugh a person laughs before consuming two or three bottles of aspirin" (111).

More pointedly still, when she realizes that she has begun to bite herself in her sleep, she wonders, "Would I be able to kill myself eventually without realizing it?" (127) As her memoir disconcertingly reveals, individuals, families, and communities can and do undergo excruciating blows to the spirit and body that might be separate from conscious permission or even recognition.[23] Nomi and her family discern the gap between Anabaptist ideals and everyday life and seek to promote in their home the compas-

sionate relations their community fails to provide. Still they remain caught in a trauma without ending. The Nickel family fractures under the pressures from the church and, as they disappear one by one, Nomi multiplies descriptors of her physical and psychic brokenness: these include inarticulateness, self-biting, vomiting, bleeding, numbness, enervation, depression, and suicidal fantasies. She who embodies the pathology of her community in turn requires a witness to her precarious physical and psychic state. Yet who is listening to her melancholic words that testify to her open wounds?

Open Wounds

there is blood on the horns
of the altar
blood on the bottom
the altar dripping down the scarred rock
& filling its dark
pocked surface
... .
there is no forgiveness

(Audrey Poetker-Thiessen, "standing all the night through")

"Carnage," Nomi asserts near the start of her memoir, "has a way of creeping up on you" (2). This carnage attaches dually to East Village's abattoir, a primary source of town revenue, and to a scene of childhood in which eight-year-old Nomi and her mother Trudie watch a man force his young, very reluctant son to slaughter a chicken. Failing to awaken the "killer instinct" in the boy, who deliberately bungles the chopping, the father efficiently severs the head of the chicken, splattering the snow-covered ground with blood (2). For Nomi such scenes distill the ethos of the entire town as a macabre training ground for dying. Trudie, in sharp contrast, compares the blood pattern to the aesthetic of Jackson Pollock and enigmatically quips, "Who knew it could be so easy" (3). Reflecting on these words as a teenager, Nomi remains bewildered:

> I don't know if she meant it's so easy to make art or it's so easy to kill a chicken or it's so easy to die. Every single one of those things strikes me as being difficult to do. I imagine that if she were here right now and I was asking her what she meant, she'd say what are you talking about and I'd say nothing and that would be the end of it (3).

What begins as an exposure of the habitual violence within East Village secondarily discloses a scene of failed communication between mother and daughter. Trudie does not detect that Nomi is disconcerted by the bloodshed and the boy's unheeded distress as well as by her mother's aestheticization of death. Moreover, when Nomi retrospectively attempts to imagine a conversation about the event, she stages it as a disconnection in which her questions come across as incomprehensible and she ends up defeated, retreating into silence. Thus, from the beginning of the memoir, the creep of carnage attaches to uneasy deaths that might take form as blood loss or as missed communication, as physical or affective wounding. At times, Nomi conflates altogether the distinctions between words (said or unsaid) and wounds, highlighting that traumatic hurt, even if invisible, routes its way through corporeal experience and gut feeling. In her description of East Village that follows the chicken slaughter, she compares the town to a "force that exerts a steady pressure on our words like a hand to an open, spurting wound" (4). A spurting wound, it stands to reason, needs the work of hands to staunch the flow of blood, though she indicts the touch of the town as one that becomes lethal precisely—and ironically—as it mimes the act of attending to a hemorrhage. The town, she charges, attends to words of individual suffering with an injunction to silence. Equally troubling, however, are the instances in which she struggles to articulate her woundedness but remains ghostly to those she wishes to address. This is Nomi at her most vulnerable: a ghost person whose stories are bleeding into dreams, into a fantasy of a life that she cannot realize (245). Blood and stories, which are essential to survival, also menace the self. Untended bleeding threatens life as surely as unheeded words, and this is Nomi's precarious state inside both her family and her community.

The frequency with which blood loss takes literal form in *A Complicated Kindness* emphasizes the combined threats to psyche and soma Nomi experiences. As physical injuries go, hers would appear mere scrapes, incurred by everyday mishaps and resulting in a modicum of blood loss, except for the fact that the novel's scenes of accidents typically resist containment. From her face wound after a bicycle fall, Nomi picks out "bits of gravel and congealed blood" and smears them onto her bedroom wall "in a way that resemble[s] the Mandarin language" (88). This proves yet another futile attempt to convert wounds into words intelligible to her family. While the Nickels are still together at the time of her tumble, the family appears to heed neither the blood on her face nor her writing on the wall. Drawing an analogy between her blood marks and an indecipherable Eastern logographic sign system,

Nomi, characteristically, despairs of her ability to engage in meaningful dialogue. As she self-disparagingly remarks elsewhere, "I ... only ever said half of what I meant and only half of that made any sense, which is, I admit, a generous appraisal of my communication skills" (98). But as Nomi moves between the past and present tense, her memoir suggests that what's at stake is not her success or failure with words. Rather, it is the damage done by East Village's acts of silencing and shunning that tear at the fabric of family and community. In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver writes that subjectivity "requires the possibility of a witness. ... Subjectivity ... is [dependent on] the ability to respond and be responded to" (91). Since the very condition of being a subject depends on a relay of address and response, when persons are silenced or rendered ghostly, what gets annihilated is both the individual subject and the intra-communal bonds.

In the latter portions of her memoir, Nomi reveals that her halting endeavours to convey her pain to community members merely exacerbates her isolation. Local figures like a local nurse respond to Nomi dismissively when she tries to communicate her affective state by saying that she thinks she is dying. Told that she is as "healthy as an ox" and that sixteen is "a wonderful time in a girl's life," she stutters into broken, incoherent sentences, followed by a rote expression of gratitude for being prescribed the bromides of tea and relaxation (229). Her ready facility with representation in her memoir seems promising if not for the fact that there is no one to respond to the ghosted teenager's words of woundedness as they seep from images of internal and external hurt into fantasy, an escape from the real as potentially hollow as the "museum village ... right next to the real town, this one, which is not really real," and not particularly interested in the "present tense" (47-49). If stories are what matter, the ontological lessons to be gleaned from *A Complicated Kindness* are those of the spirit's necessary in-dwelling of and co-constituency with the present, corporeal body and of the body's fundamental inter-subjective, inter-corporeal relation with the world. To cite Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "whether we are considering my relations with things or my relations with the other (the two problems are but one) … every relation between me and Being, even vision, even speech is ... a carnal relation, with the flesh of the world" (83).

For the Way Things Could Have Been

> If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness (10) And if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday. (11) And the Lord will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire in scorched places, And give strength to your bones, And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58: 9-11)

Anabaptism, at its best, highlights the paradox of being in which the individual bears a responsibility towards the world and to others yet has her life only in and through incarnational encounters with others. Our flesh, the medium of our being, extends us into and partakes of the world and its formative elements, an enfleshment that makes possible an ethical practice of care. Yet in East Village, community members have lost the ability to respond to sufferers with a healing touch. Nomi writes as a deeply injured individual who awaits an affectively and physically responsive witness to her pain. More, her tale attests to "unresolved social [and spiritual] violence" and calls for a redress of wounds (Gordon, vi). The ghosts who haunt the town must be seen and heard, translated back into a lived reality, but in order to do so East Village, the unreal, ghost-making town, must cease its self-harming practices. That is, Anabaptist descendants must learn to apprehend when their manifest drive towards moral transparency and accountability actually constitutes a form of spiritual blindness to the ghosts who melancholize, bleed, and dream of intersubjective touch.[24] Nomi, the final ghost of the text, crystalizes the problem and of disjunction between ideals and a sustainable practice that recurs even in sites of care. Her family's fractures, disappearances, and potential suicides bespeak the "insidious" spread of collective trauma in which the "basic tissues of social life" become rent, damaging "the bonds attaching people together and impair[ing] the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, 460). Nomi may dream of an escape from East Village and of the redemption of her family elsewhere, but her embodied pain and open wounds bleed into the larger creep of carnage that permits no easy or singular resolution. The pain of the one, however distinctly manifest, also reflects the shared conditions of living and a need for concrete repairs to common structures of relationality.[25]

As in *Swing Low* and *All My Puny Sorrows*, the wounds delineated in *A Complicated Kindness* call to be understood as actual threats to the well-being of historical individuals and communities when divisions become the norm: words from embodied relations,

the spirit from the senses, the invisible from the visible, the individual experience from the communal, the fictional from the factual. All three texts, while not conventionally Christological, bear witness to the acute wounds of atomism and gesture towards an incarnational model that restoratively, transformatively, reconfigures shared embodiment as the medium of engagement with the spiritual. To borrow the words of theologian Karl Barth, the messianic redemptive functions not as a one-time event of incarnation, death and resurrection, but as an "*eternal continuation* of the reconciliation and revelation accomplished in time" (157; italics added). Even as the incarnate Christ reveals the sacred through his material being and lived intimacies—particularly his close attendance on the suffering and the socially shunned—each generation bears the responsibility of making daily, enfleshed movements towards reparative, reconciliatory ends, ends which should not be confused with teleological endings. An incarnational ethos involves duration and advent; it involves repeated acts of reaching out to the wounded, not so as to pronounce on their pain or to judge its legitimacy, but to dwell with sufferers. This is not the case in *A Complicated Kindness*, but in its suspended state of unrepaired rifts and ongoing crises of body and spirit, the text still permits of address and response.

Following *A Complicated Kindness*' own mixed metaphors of profane ghosts and religious practices that dis-incarnate, I wish to emphasize that the missed potential of the past to enflesh a compassionate inter-redemptive practice haunts the present of Toews' text. Such hauntings come with potential, since ghosts are not absent. As Avery Gordon contends in *Ghostly Matters*, "The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure" (8) that calls attention to those whom society has tried to efface and to treat as if they were bloodless. The troublesome presence of ghosts, then, indicates the "somethings to be done" which "are always discovered in material practices" (Gordon, 202). Echoing Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, Gordon insists that the time of reparation—what Benjamin terms the "messianic"—is always Now, but that the required change is "extremely difficult" because it "must become incarnate":

> The kind of transformation evoked and called for by [writers and seers of ghosts] is about going beyond what you already know just so. It involves being taken ... into the passion of what is at stake. It is not individualistic, but it does acknowledge, indeed it demands, that change cannot occur without the encounter, without the *something you have to try for yourself*. There are no guaranteed outcomes for an encounter. (203)

Toews' tale of suffering also begs for incarnate, material change, change that begins with the affective transformation of the witness who must become willing to encounter the uncomfortable. *A Complicated Kindness* implicitly asks for its historical readers to become ghost seers, to respond to what is being effaced in our place and time. In profound ways, it calls for spirits and the spiritual to be incorporated into the everyday.

The redemptive in human life entails acknowledging spirit and flesh as inseparable from one another, and the embodied encounter as the site of the inter-transformational. As Trudie attempts to impress upon Nomi when, as a girl, she delights in the putative moral clarity of stories of shunning and ghost-making, "there was always the possibility of forgiveness" (44). This missed potential of the past comes to haunt the present as the teenaged Nomi herself yearns to "know what it's like to be forgiven by another human being" (48). Such evident need of the practice and spirit of reconciliation manifests throughout *A Complicated Kindness*, and, in one of the novel's exquisite scenes of suffering, Nomi invokes the language of the prophet Isaiah to model the potential for a relational, lived spirituality. In response to one of the condemnatory messages The Mouth places on the church signage, Nomi experiences a visceral, bodily reaction and imagines what could be: "I stood there with my mouth open and my hand on my heart ... I started to cry and couldn't stop. Why couldn't the sign say: And you shall be like a spring whose waters fail not. Why not offer some goddamn encouragement?" (175)

The Mouth has departed from his usual practice of culling the scriptures for threats to frighten or subdue the townspeople into conformist behaviour and, on this occasion, arrogated to himself the authority to speak as God, a God obsessed with hell and damnation. His message, delivered at the height of a parched summer, reads: "YOU THINK IT'S HOT HERE ... GOD" (174). This sign Nomi rightly interprets as a goddamn act of violence that makes life into a scorched earth, and her turn to Isaiah's image of unfailing springs of water to counter such devastation enacts a recuperative approach to the Biblical and communal. The larger context of Isaiah 58 (see the epigraph above) delineates a movement from blaming and judgment to acts of nurture, an attendance to the body and spirit of the sufferers. The movement, however, is dependent on the affective transformation of those who previously set themselves up as judges. Therefore, Isaiah uses the subjunctive, the if-then structure. "*If* you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness. And *if* you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the af-

flicted, *Then*" the living spirit, the unfailing waters, will be present, tangible. A grammatical structure of hope routed through an ontological emphasis on embodiment, the subjunctive here underscores the fundamental intertwining of temporality, matter, and spirit. Spiritual fullness comes from ongoing enactments of caring physical relations: the time of incarnating the spirit is always now. For Toews, I suggest, a spiritual and necessary practice depends in part on inviting social ghosts—melancholics, potheads, alcoholics, the lonely, the ill—into full presence in homes and communities once again. The failed social experiment of Anabaptism in East Village as illustrated in *A Complicated Kindness* still has something to tell us about the way things could be if we honoured the spiritual aspects of embodiment.

Notes

[1] My title derives in part from Arthur W. Frank and his important book on narrating illness: *The Wounded Storyteller*. Frank's focus on bodily suffering offers a welcome complement to the psychoanalytic accounts of psychic and spiritual suffering on which I draw.

[2] On Mennonite master narratives of suffering and "divine election," see Magdalene Redekop (12), Paul Tiessen (146), and Robert Zacharias (30).

[3] Noon Park, Margaret Steffler, Natasha Wiebe, Ella Soper, and Paul Tiessen explore the complexities of *A Complicated Kindness*. These scholars respond to Nomi's distressed narrative with tremendous sensitivity, yet they generally concur that the narrative functions as a testament to Nomi as a survivor and even as a potential reviver of a death-driven culture. Steffler, like me, sees that Nomi remains in a "void" in which she might be permanently silenced (132); Steffler emphasizes, however, that Nomi toys with the very concepts of truth—imbuing her narrative with comic inversions, hyperbole, and figuratively saturated writing (133-36). Her memoir remains open-ended both in terms of her own fate and in its restive reimaginings ("restorying") of the possible locations of her family members (see N. Wiebe). As Soper incisively notes, Nomi's story refuses the teleology of predetermined endings, ironizing the coming-of-age memoir by "ending" in a suspended state (98). For Park, Nomi's memoir rebuts the religious idealization of life as a renunciatory waiting-for-death and, as such, a guarantee of eternal bliss in part by insistently materializing what a protracted death looks and feels like and by dignifying such "profane suffering" (60). James Neufeld, by contrast, finds troubling the fact that Toews' narrative, while amusing, simplifies and caricatures matters of faith. I concur with him that Toews offers little in the way of representing Mennonite Christianity as a rich and contested practice, but I remain moved by her representation of the imbrication of spiritual and psychic trouble. Christoph Wiebe begins this discussion, which I continue here, in "'The tail end of a five-hundred-year experiment that has failed': Love, Truth and the Power of Stories."

[4] In the words of trauma theorists Felman and Laub, "The absence of an emphatic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an

other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story. And it is, precisely, this ultimate annihilation of a narrative that, fundamentally, *cannot be heard* and of a story that *cannot be witnessed*" that constitutes the annihilation of subjectivity itself (68).

[5] Caruth makes the widely accepted argument that trauma and mourning occur at the intersection of knowing and not knowing: both are experienced as "delayed and belated." The wounded psyche always tells the same story, she avers: "the story of a wound that cries out, that *addresses us* in an attempt to tell of us a reality that is not otherwise available" (4; italics added). Similarly, Felman and Laub figure truth not as possessable, but as an advent, an occurrence that takes place through encounter and in dialogue. Kelly Oliver's monograph builds explicitly on Laub's therapeutic model of witnessing, stressing the need for a relay of witnessing to woundedness, particularly a witnessing "beyond recognition" in which the addressee goes beyond knowledge paradigms to attend viscerally and imaginatively to the words and the silences of the distressed testifier.

[6] Trudie, Nomi asserts, leaves town after being shunned because it would "kill" her husband Ray to have to choose between his faith and a "woman he loved more than anything in the world" (194). After Nomi also has been excommunicated, she rationalizes that Ray disappears so as to escape living alongside a "kid he loved but couldn't acknowledge" (240).

[7] As Agamben explains in *Stanzas,* acedia or spiritual melancholy can be conceptualized as a "concavity" that paradoxically attests to the enduring desire of the melancholic for the "fullness from which [he appears to have] turned away" (7).

[8] On depression as a public project, see Cvetkovich's monograph. Other insightful commentators on affective atmospheres as shared include Sara Ahmed (37), Jill Bennett (12), Gregg and Seigworth (1), and Kelly Oliver (the introductory and concluding chapters of *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*).

[9] *Irma Voth* (2011) also mines the Mennonite and autobiographical veins, though it is connected with the filming of Carlos Reygadas' 2007 *Stellet Licht* (*Silent Light*), in which Toews performed a major role. Toews' other fiction also resembles the "trilogy" insofar as it explores sibling relations.

[10] Other Manitoba, Mennonite-born authors who write about endogamous spiritual violence include, but are not limited to, the following: Patrick Friesen (*The Shunning*); Di Brandt (much of her early poetry, especially *Agnes in the Sky*, and her essay "This land that I love"); and Audrey Poetker-Thiessen (*standing all the night through*). Beachy's 2010 collection *Tongue Screws and Testimonies* offers many examples of Mennonite writers from the U.S. and Canada who testify to ongoing, intra-communal forms of violence.

[11] Bert's parents also suffer excommunication. After they are "shot out of town in a cannon," as Nomi colourfully puts it, he is raised by grandparents—at least until his grandfather also gets shunned (79). The ghosts in the text are too many to list.

[12] Also relevant is *The Limits of Autobiography* by Leigh Gilmore. Focusing on a selection of texts that traverse the conventional boundaries of autobiography and fiction, she explores the productive affective work performed by texts that do not confine themselves to the literal truth. Her particular interest involves the far-reaching effects of trauma and the experimental forms of self-representation required to express an experience of violence.

[13] History, as Walter Benjamin asserts, tends to be recorded by the "victors" (391). While this may seem an odd term to apply to members of a persecuted minority, it is decidedly apt. On the re-erection of spiritual and power hierarchies within Anabaptism, see Roth, Redekop and Redekop, Stayer, and Brandt ("This land that I love").

[14] Roth's explication of such self-worship is illuminating (14).

[15] Steffler rightly calls *A Complicated Kindness* an anti-Bildungsroman, a text that inverts the usual trajectory of a young person who finds her place in society and instead shows society as forsaking Nomi (132).

[16] Soper identifies both of the town's two main sources of revenue as death industries (91). The factory farm, a literal death industry, symbolically marks the unviability of the family farm and the erosion of intimate human ties to animals and the land. The tourism attached to the museum village figuratively conjures a death industry insofar as it enables East Village to traffic in ideals of an agrarian past precisely while evading engagement with its suffering, present community members, such as Nomi.

[17] I can only touch on the implied sexual trauma of Nomi, whose only sexual experience prior to The Comb involves drunkenness, depression, and tears (216). Thereafter, her boyfriend disappears from her life.

[18] In yet another conflation of Christianity and its discontents, Nomi quips that The Mouth is in "love with the notion of shame and he traffics the shit like a schoolground pusher, spreading it around but never personally using" (49).

[19] Berlant has argued that apparent detachment might also indicate affective implication in the "social modalities that can no longer be said to be doing their work" of life-building (97). Nomi offers a rare, compassionate portrait of The Mouth when, from outside of his house late one night, she watches him mechanically eat ice cream for about twenty minutes to half an hour. Afterwards, he leans against the stove in a way that reminds Nomi of her mother: he looks "like a guy completely defeated by life, with holes he could never fill with ice cream no matter how much he ate" (51). This is but one of the text's many figures that merges physical and spiritual emptiness.

[20] Laub discusses the "inadvertent repetition or transmission" of trauma (67). This is also an iterated theme in Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*.

[21] Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* provides an illuminating discussion of attachments that both sustain us and threaten our well-being.

[22] Even her fantasies of an escape to New York—and specifically to another East Village—bear traces of psychic conflict, for Nomi also fears that world has already co-opted her "yearning" and turned it "into a comedy. It's a funny premise for a movie, that's all. Mennonite girl in New York City. Amish family goes to Soho" (135).

[23] Julia Kristeva writes: "If temporary sadness ... and melancholy stupor [sic] ... are clinically and nosologically different," they are both predicated on an extreme "intolerance for object loss ... in which the subject takes refuge [in withdrawal] to the point of inaction (pretending to be dead) or even suicide" (10). Nomi, trying to figure out a way of surviving, at one point gives herself the following advice: "Pretend you've already died and things will matter less" (210).

[24] I adapt here Gordon's psychoanalytic term of "hysterical blindness" as "spiritual blindness" (15).

[25] Avery Gordon demonstrates that hauntings and ghosts demand mediations between institutions and individuals, social structures and subjects, history and biography (19).

Works Cited

Agamben, Giorgio. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.

Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." Gregg and Seigworth 29-51. Print.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics II: The Doctrine of God*. 1957. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000. Print.

Beachy, Kirsten, ed. *Tongue Screws and Testimonies: Poems, Stories, and Essays Inspired by the Martyrs Mirror*. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2010. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "On the Concept of History." *Selected Writings Vol. 4, 1938-1940*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap P of Harvard University Press, 2003. 389-400. Print.

Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Blake, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell." *Blake's Poetry and Designs: Authoritative Texts, Illuminations in Color and Monochrome, Related Prose, Criticism*. Norton Critical Edition. Eds. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979. 81-102. Print.

Brandt, Di. *Agnes in the Sky*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1990. Print.

---. "This land that I love, this wide, wide prairie." *So this is the world & here I am in it*. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2007. 1-10. Print.

Caruth, Cathy, ed. and interviewer. *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Print.

---. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print.

Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Print.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012. Print.

Eng, David L. and David Kazanjian. "Introduction: Mourning Remains." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning.* Ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkley: University of California Press, 2003. 1-28. Print.

Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." *American Imago* 48.4 (1991): 455-72. Print.

Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Flatley, Jonathan. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. Print.

Frank, Arthur W. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Print.

Friesen, Patrick.*The Shunning*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1980. Print.

Friesen, Ralph. Review of *All My Puny Sorrows*. *Preservings.* Web. 31 March 2016. http:// www.plettfoundation.org/articles/all-my-puny-sorrows

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* (1914-1916) Vol. 14. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953. 243-58. Print.

George, Timothy. "The Spirituality of the Radical Reformation." *Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*. Ed. Jill Raitt. New York: Crossroad, 1989. 334-71. Print.

Gilmore, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001. Print.

Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth. "An Inventory of Shimmers." Gregg and Seigworth 1-25. Print.

Gregory, Brad S. *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. Print.

Miller, Vassar. "The Grace of Remembrance." *Collected Poems of Vassar Miller*. Intro. George Garrett. Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1991. 31. Print.

Neufeld, James. "A complicated contract: Young rebels of literature and dance." *Queen's Quarterly* 112.1 (2005): 99-106. Print.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed By Working Notes*. Trans. Claude Lefort. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968. Print.

Noon, Park. "Rebirth through Derision: Satire and the Anabaptist Discourse of Martyrdom in Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness.*" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28 (2010): 55-68. Print.

Oliver, Kelly. "Ecological Subjectivity: Merleau-Ponty and a Vision of Ethics." *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 4.1 (2004): 102-25. Print.

---. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.

Poetker-Thiessen, Audrey. *standing all the night through*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1992. Print.

Rajan, Tilottama. "Autonarration and Genotext in Mary Hays' Memoirs of Emma Courtney." *Studies in Romanticism* 32: 2 (1993): 149-76. Print.

Redekop, Magdalene. "Escape from the Bloody Theatre: The Making of Mennonite Stories." *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993): 9-22. Print.

Redekop, Benjamin W., and Calvin Wall Redekop, eds and Intro. *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Print.

Reygadas, Carlos, dir. *Stellet Licht*. Perf. Miriam Toews. Bac Films, 2007.

Roth, John D. "'Blest be the Ties that Bind': In Search of the Global Anabaptist Church." Lecture One. "The Challenge of Church Unity in the Anabaptist Tradition." *Conrad Grebel Review* 31.3 (2013): 5-23. Print.

Soper, Ella. "'Hello, abattoir!': Becoming Through Slaughter in Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness*." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature Canadienne* 36.1 (2011): 86-99.

Stayer, James M. *Anabaptists and the Sword*. Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1972. Print.

Steffler, Margaret. "Fragments and Absences: Language and Loss in Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness*." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43.3 (2009): 124-45. Print.

Tiessen, Paul. "Revisiting Home: Reading Miriam Toews's *A Complicated Kindness* and Sandra Birdsell's *Children of the Day* Through the Lens of Ontario-Mennonite Literature." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82 (2008): 127-46. Print.

Toews, Miriam. *A Complicated Kindness.* Toronto: Vintage, 2004. Print.

---. *All My Puny Sorrows*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014. Print.

---. *Imra Voth*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. Print.

---. *Swing Low: A Life*. Toronto: Vintage, 2005. Print.

Wiebe, Christoph. "'The tail end of a five-hundred-year experiment that has failed': Love, Truth and the Power of Stories." Trans. Gerhard Reimer. *Journal of the Center for Mennonite Writing* 3.2 (2011).

Wiebe, Natasha. "Miriam Toews' *A Complicated Kindness:* Restorying the Russian Mennonite Diaspora." *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. 28 (2010): 33-54. Print.

Zacharias, Robert. *Rewriting the Break Event: Mennonites & Migration in Canadian Literature*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013. Print.