

hasn't fully shifted, scholars who prioritize women's history as part of the main thread of history rather than a specialized subfield, and who apply an intersectional lens to the overlapping power structures of race, gender, class, and geography, offer new and critical modes of understanding our Mormon past, present, and future.

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Fourteen Respite

Ashley Mae Hoiland. *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2017. 212 pp. Paperback: \$12.95. ISBN: 978-0842529921.

Reviewed by Meg Conley

One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly is the kind of work that becomes more radical with time. When I first read it years ago, I appreciated it. I liked its looseness and its light. I felt a kinship with the woman who wrote and the children she mothered and the world they tramped through with wet shoes and too few snacks. I felt like I was that woman and the children were my children and the cold feet and hungry stomachs were mine to warm and mine to feed.

When I returned to *One Hundred Birds*, I expected to gather up enough sustaining sisterhood to get through another wondrous, hard year of long walks trailed by little feet. Instead, by the time I was done reading (in one sitting while the littlest feet napped), my hands were stuffed full of the filaments of faith.

Written by Ashley Mae Hoiland, writer, artist, and founder of the creative writing website *Mine to Tell*, *One Hundred Birds* is fourteen, well, fourteen what? Not chapters, they're more and less than chapters. Better to call them respites, really. *One Hundred Birds* is fourteen respites of sketches, poems, questions, and lists. The lists! Lists of prayers and people and moments and wonderings and wanderings. They are the kind of lists I imagine dotting the corkboards of Creation.

One Hundred Birds isn't a story, not really. It is a book full of the moments that make people want to tell stories. As the reader moves from sketch to prayer to anecdote on a Swedish wayside, you get the sense that Hoiland is a woman more interested in the fullness of a moment than the fulfillment of a narrative arc. It is this freedom from the constraint of conclusion that gives *One Hundred Birds* its wings. (Conclusion has little place in an ever-progressing eternity anyway.)

One Hundred Birds is about the art of seeking God. It's a bold framing in a faith tradition increasingly reliant on formal formulas for spiritual enlightenment. Where do you seek God outside of the handbook?

God is found in community building, and Hoiland knows this. She gently tells us about her efforts. About a homemade banner that said "Be Brave" strewn across a busy path, or a late-night installation of wildflower seed packets on a neighborhood fence. Another time she leads a project that puts local poetry on billboards that are usually plastered with plastic surgery ads. Her outreach reaches back. The banner is kept up and embellished by grateful, tired college students. The seeds are planted and wildflowers bloom. A man with little to hold in his hands looks up and sees his poetry against the sky.

God is found in isolation, and Hoiland knows this. She gently invites us into her quietude. By her side, we partake of the often anchoritic experience of being a mother anywhere and a woman in Mormonism. It is a generous offering. One of the most profound moments in the book happens as she contemplates her children playing on the floor:

“Play for my children consists of hours submerged in countless possibilities. Could we not do the same with our own spiritual lives?”

It’s not all play. There is boredom and pain for any woman in a cell. But as Saint Julian has shown us, Christ can be found there too. Sometimes, right next to the crayons.

Sometimes God isn’t found at all. Hoiland knows this. But there is a grace given in the seeking. She knows this too.

There are no answers in *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly*. There is no grandstanding over doctrinal divides or exhibition via erudite ruminations. Because of this, it’s been called—by men, mostly—simple and sweet. A wisp of a book by a whirl of a girl. A truly good effort. It can be difficult to hear the faint praise over the heavy pats on Hoiland’s head. I suppose after decades of finding safe crossing with cross-references, Hoiland’s pietism amid playdough might feel a bit messy.

While there is no doubt of Hoiland’s own learnedness—her literacy is embedded in every expressive line—this book is a meditation on seeking God outside of the stacks, outside the quotations of men. *One Hundred Birds* teaches us to look around where we stand, in the kitchen, in the office, on your front step, waiting outside our children’s school and ask, “Is God here?”

It’s the question that founded Mormonism asked in a way that will help revitalize Mormonism. The right questions cast light. “Is God here?” This quest as question illuminates and reveals a Mormonism that is more than follow and footnote. With *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly*, Hoiland brushes the chalk off her hands, reaches out, and offers us Mormonism as a language of seeking, a halting tongue making holy sounds.

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