

*Mormonism for Beginners* is marked by its humor, transparency, and balance. Throughout its survey of Mormon history, scripture, Mormon life, and challenging topics, the author and illustrator accomplish the monumental task of covering a wide range of material in a way that is both compelling and engaging. Truly, the text accomplishes the arduous task given to introductory books of providing a rich and detailed portrayal of a complex topic. This text would serve as an important addition to both introductory courses on Mormonism and a starting point for anyone interested in learning more about American religious traditions.



## [Invisible Men / Invincible Women](#)

Eric Freeze. *Invisible Men: Stories*. San Francisco: Outpost 19, 2016. 150 pp. Paperback: \$16.00. ISBN: 9781944853020.

*Reviewed by Lisa Rumsey Harris*

The gaze of the girl on the cover of Eric Freeze's short story collection arrested me—stopped me. Her eyes, full of hostility, told me that if I opened the book, I would be intruding. Her bright knee-length plaid skirt, reminiscent of schoolgirl uniforms, belied the knowledge behind her glare. If it wasn't for her posture, her arms embracing something, I wouldn't have noticed the titular Invisible Man next to her on the cover.

Her warning wasn't wrong. I felt like an intruder as I began to read. I could only take it in small doses—read, then turn the ideas over and over in my mind, like rubbing a smooth stone between my fingers.

I entered the book through the first story, "Duplex," a fragmented narrative that unfolds in disinterested third-person (focused around a man named Garvey) as well as the up-close "I" of a little girl at the beginning of the narrative. The narratives merge, and the effect of piecing

together details gave me the sense of prickling nervousness. I knew what was coming because it had already come, the end at the beginning, and I was afraid. I didn't want to keep reading, but I had to, like an onlooker at an accident scene: driving by, hands over my eyes, but fingers spread so I could peek at the carnage. I didn't want to see it, but I couldn't look away. That's the way I felt while reading most of the stories.

It was only in the aftermath of reading that I could focus on the artistry, the realistic details, sharp and crisp: "Mom was a realtor who permed her hair and frizzed up the front into a ten-inch-high claw" ("The Chameleon") and "He carried his books in a green Jansport from the nineties that he'd picked up for three bucks, second hand at Deseret Industries ("Tabernacle of Flesh"). These characters, wearers of clothes and stylers of hair, emerge vivid and breathing on the page, wandering around familiar places I've been, like the landscape of the point of the mountain, and places so foreign that I would never venture there voluntarily, like the wilderness of a mountain cave. Immersed in the familiar and fantastic, I was a hesitant traveler, waiting for the darkness to fall on the characters. And it did. Sometimes it hurt, but other times I cheered. Heartbreak can be a five word question ("The Bigamist"), a profanity-littered dismissal ("Our Shared History"), or it can be a landslide ("Sasquatch"), heart failure ("Mr. America"), or a body that caves in on itself ("The Chameleon").

Imbued with resignation and the unflinching ability to look at the ambiguities in life, Freeze guides the reader on a gender journey fraught with pain and haunted by the absent presence of invisible men. Is the invisible man the predator? Or the prey? "Lone Wolf" asks this question, as does "Sasquatch," and the answer to both questions is yes. Freeze warns us that invisibility doesn't offer protection. Indeed, invisibility always predicts pain—pain for the men themselves, and pain for those around them. In "Mr. America," Freeze tells us "men hold their arms, trying to massage out all the hurt" (160), and that emerges as the central idea around which all these stories gather. "They are all under

a tremendous amount of pressure. They try to hide it with prepared statements, with dazzling outfits, with full-Nelsons and banter and worn boots and t-shirts and opinions. But these men can crack. You've seen it happen. It will break your heart" (154).

The women who populate Freeze's stories are often heroic, concerned far more about the survival of their children than for any man struggling along in their wake. They cannot carry the baggage for the men in their landscape, so sometimes the men fall behind—abandoned, alone, invisible, an absent presence that haunts the women's lives (literally, in "The Bigamist"). Women in this world can be so other, so unknowable that they are literally monsters, like the Ice Woman and Sasquatch, or they can be as familiar as the widow you think you know in your ward ("The Bigamist").

By the end of the last story, the women have evolved, from the high-pitched sing-song voice of the little girl in "Duplex" to the invincible Ice Woman who moans and demands while giving birth. In this instance, the invisible man stands to the side, irrelevant, hurt, and full of mistrust in her moment of triumph (177).

And yet the men's invisibility shapes the women's lives, their choices, their pain. The men may feel irrelevant, but their absence impacts the women's lives, causing them to change course and adapt while leaving holes and pockmarks in their souls.

There is enough pain to go around. But the women seem to deal with it a bit better, or maybe it's just that Freeze gives us the inside of the men's emotions, a part that most fiction leaves off the page. Frankly, for me, as a woman with no brothers and a mother of four daughters, I've never pondered the vulnerability of men: the side effects, the risks, and the dangers when confronted with women. Seeing inside was an uncomfortable revelation.

By the end, my hands were no longer over my eyes, and I was appreciative of the nuance in the journey through both Mormon and secular territory. Anyone who ventures into this countryside with Freeze as a

guide should know that they will not emerge with sure answers and easy denouements. Instead, you will walk into dark places that are safe (a Sasquatch's den) and familiar places (BYU campus, I-15) that will haunt you long after you've put down the book. When the penetrating gaze of the cover model is hidden from your view, obscured and pressed against other books on the shelf, you will no longer be an intruder. Instead, you might become the girl, glaring with dismay at the implications of interactions between genders. Or maybe you'll be the invisible man, wondering why camouflage doesn't offer safety. In the moments between your everyday life and to-do list, your mind may catch on a detail, a sentence, a phrase, and you'll reconsider what nuances you may have missed the first time.



## Speaking for Herself

Ashley Mae Hoiland. *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2016. 212 pp. Paperback: \$11.92. ISBN: 9780842529921.

*Reviewed by Glen Nelson*

*One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God* is a collection of short missives—poems, essays, and autobiographical sketches—grouped loosely and thematically into thirteen sections and an epilogue. Ashley Mae Hoiland is the author/illustrator of three self-published children's books, a contributor to a collection of essays, *Fresh Courage Take: New Directions by Mormon Women* (Signature Books, 2015), a blogger (under the name ashmae) for *By Common Consent*, and the creator of a collection of sixty (trading or flash) cards of notable women in history, *We Brave Women* (Kickstarter, 2015).