

“Joseph Smith, founding prophet and fallen martyr, as a camp celebrity figure” (194). This brief section is the moment from Weber’s text that lodges itself most firmly in my mind and speaks to the thought-provoking nuggets of insight that are scattered throughout the text.

Weber’s text is a fascinating exploration of a wide range of Mormonisms and how they are mediated through all sorts of media, essentially working with Mormonism as it is replicated throughout the broader popular culture and not overly, or at all, concerned with how it exists as a practice, people, or history. This move leads to some deeply insightful analyses and also some blind spots.

CONOR BRUCE HILTON {conor-hilton@uiowa.edu} is a PhD student at the University of Iowa, specializing in nineteenth-century British literature and the postsecular, with additional interests in film, media studies, and adaptation theory. He blogs about Mormonism, film, literature, and occasionally politics at conorhilton.com and arch-hive.net (as “The One Who Hies”).



## Beauty in the Irreversible

Lisa Van Orman Hadley. *Irreversible Things*. Minneapolis: Howling Bird Press, 2019. 153 pp. Paper: \$18.00. ISBN: 978-0-9961952-5-6.

*Reviewed by Sarah Nickel Moore*

Judging by its length, *Irreversible Things* is the kind of book that I should have been able to finish in a couple hours. Perhaps one evening, after the kids had gone to bed, I could curl up on the couch for a quick, light read with some hot chocolate. It is small enough to easily fit in my purse to read in snatches while commuting or waiting in the doctor’s office. Like its narrator, however, *Irreversible Things* demands to be read

slowly. No, perhaps “demands” is the wrong word—rather, this book sits down next to you, softly puts its hands on your knee and says, in a gentle Floridian accent, “Wait honey, I don’t think you heard me right. Try reading that bit again.” It took me weeks to finish this book because I kept pausing to catch my breath, rereading and rediscovering passages and savoring a language that is heartbreakingly simple and poetic.

Shortly into the book, styled as a collection of autobiographical short vignettes narrated by the author’s younger self, the titular chapter “Irreversible Things” opens with the sound of cicadas. As a born-and-raised southerner myself, I remember being a child and listening to the rhythmic wailing of thousands of bugs as my father explained to me that I wouldn’t hear this again for seventeen years. I remember, in that moment, feeling a terrible sadness as I tried to listen to every song, to hear each insect, and with each buzzing decrescendo I wondered, “Is this the last? Is it over?” Lisa Van Orman Hadley beautifully recreates that desire to hold onto something even as it disappears with simple, everyday childhood stories that are infused with urgency—she compels us to notice the texture of thermals, sweatpants, and jeans all layered to keep out the cold (82), the chill as the night air switches “from summer to autumn overnight” (62), and the familiarity of your very own chair (114). Van Orman Hadley invites you into her home without tidying up first, allowing you to see that the messes are the most beautiful part. Each family member and friend is portrayed with a perfect mix of childhood innocence and honesty; when her mother complains that in every story she is a “complete idiot,” Van Orman Hadley fittingly responds, “But the mother is my favorite character!” (135).

Just like her characters, Van Orman Hadley allows her narrator to be flawed. She deftly maneuvers the difficulties of the memoir genre by creating a narrator whose tone matures as the book progresses but who never loses her identity. This can be frustrating as a reader, especially when, for example, the childhood narrator recalls the tragic murder of their neighbor but does so in the context of missing cats, cicadas, and first crushes. I wanted to know more about her neighbor, I wanted to

make sure the kids were safe, I wanted, in short, a news article. This was the first moment when Van Orman Hadley asked me, gently, to read it again. As I went back and reread the passages, paying attention to the inverted timeline and the sounds and smells and images that infused her writing, I realized that this is not a book about her life events but rather a book about her life. Van Orman Hadley is refreshingly frank about the unreliability of her narrator—in one memorable section she admits that she does not recall the events surrounding the discovery that her grandmother wore a wig. She then invites the reader to explore this memory in a chose-your-own-adventure fashion, allowing you to build your own chain of memories and choose which story you like best. While at first glance this may seem playful or even kitschy, it does the important critical work of reminding the reader that every story in this memoir is chosen and crafted, and even that we ourselves choose our own memories and build the narratives that surround our lives.

As I sit in the middle of my life, I think about the narratives I've built, the messes I've made, and the distorted timelines that run backward and forward in my mind. *Irreversible Things* reminds me that life is not an irreversible series of events that stack from birth to death but rather an existence that is constantly redefined by overlapping experiences. Lisa Van Orman Hadley has created here a kaleidoscope of memories that come together to form a new and ever-changing picture of her life. This was an absolutely delightful read, and I sincerely hope to see more from her.

SARAH NICKEL MOORE {srmoore2@uw.edu} is currently a doctoral student at the University of Washington, where she studies late medieval romance and early modern drama. She has an interest in the environmental humanities and the materiality of textual manuscripts, and as such several of her past projects have focused on the connections between animal, women, and text. Sarah continuously seeks to improve her pedagogy and to help students find their critical voices.

