

*Strange Children*, by Sadie Hoagland  
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rev. by Sara Winsky

Sadie Hoagland is the author of the novel, *Strange Children*. Hoagland is a fiction writer from Louisiana with a PhD from the University of Utah in fiction, as well as an MA in Creative Writing from University of California, Davis. Hoagland currently teaches as a professor of creative writing at University of Louisiana in Lafayette. Hoagland's novel follows a group of eight adolescents in their journeys of finding themselves inside and out of their polygamist commune. Battling against the norms of a home where religion is used as a weapon, these strange children have to find their own way in the harsh world.

The confusion of growing up is laced with abuse, entrapment, and sexuality. The home these children grow in is anything, but healthy. With religion held like a weapon in their community, they grow to misunderstand their desires for sin and their place in the realm of marriage. Eight young narrators lead the reader through each of their stories, teaching them not only the ways of their mind, but the ways of their hearts.

Hoagland's writing style naturally adheres to all eight adolescents, writing in a simple, yet specific way that gives them plenty of space to let their own voices shine. Every chapter is told from a different narrator's perspective allowing the structure to work well for the reader and give more of a personal connection to each child. The written style features a dichotomy between basic language and eloquent phrases picked apart from the Bible- further emphasizing the theme of their torment from their religious community.

“After the black government car came belly-crawling through slow like a snake, there came the first fire. The men were all at the gathering House and we smelt town smoke, not fields burning but things built and made, Cadence running down the road and yelling for Josiah, yelling for everybody to come quick, and then we heard the bell and saw the house of the Prophet's wives was afire and exploding with children and the boys who are assigned to townfire, only three of them left it turned out, came with their hose to attach to the pump and the children were screaming and the whole town gathered as the back porch and one up- stairs corner of the house burned, then smoldered, then sat like a black shell still smoked with fire's hunger but no flame as night began to come.” (130)

As we see in this paragraph, Hoagland has reflected the hysteria of a scared teenager watching a fire burn the most important part of their town through extended sentences and aggressive language. The author has utilized biblical allusions in this scene comparing the “black government car” to a “belly-crawling” snake, giving the audience a reference to Genesis and the Garden of Eden and burning a religious symbol as if referencing the burning bush. These allusions are scattered throughout the novel, almost giving the audience a puzzle to solve whilst reading.

“I dumped the rest of the lemonade into a planter box made to look like an oversized boot, watched it become colorless in the pitched soil, and felt an emptiness. I didn’t understand how it was possible that Jeremiah had been in that road, picking up a stone, but also in that article, doing what he done. I wanted to know if it had all happened because of the loneliness I saw that day in him: quiet, folded, waiting for the opportunity to hold something more than a small, misshaped thing from the road.” (257)

Many aspects of the novel are written eloquently in an almost prose-like manner, leaving many paragraphs lined carefully with symbolism and deeply felt emotions. This scene describes the feeling of confusion and despair, putting the reader in a position of empathy for so multiple of these adolescents. The planter box and the lemonade are written to describe the narrator’s understanding of how life is fleeting and loneliness is an emotion too well known to the masses.

The end of Hoagland’s masterpiece *Strange Children* will leave the reader deeply affected by every twist and turn; all eight of these young narrators learn a lesson about youth, dignity, and arrogance. The tone of this novel is influenced by each of the unique perspectives, leading the reader on an emotional rollercoaster through the painful and beautiful events in *Strange Children*.