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Abstract: *Grant Hardy has shown that Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni have distinctive personalities, rhetorical strategies, implied readers, and thematic concerns. Mormon lived within history and wrote as a historian. He focused on the particulars of time and place and person, on political and military matters. But, Hardy says, Mormon lacked audience awareness. I argue Mormon's historiography was well adapted to the needs of his initial envisioned audience, the Alma family. Moroni, who lived most of his life outside of history, wrote intertextually, in dialog with voices speaking from the dust. And he wrote as a theologian especially attuned to the tragedy of human existence without God. Unlike his father, Moroni was a reluctant and, initially, untrained writer. His initial lack of confidence and competence and his growth as a writer and as a person are apparent in the five different endings for the Book of Mormon that he successively inscribed over the course of his life. Moroni's ultimate model as he so effectively closed the large-plates record was Amaleki, last author of the small plates. This article critiques Hardy's assessment of Mormon's and extends his account of Moroni's rhetorical effectiveness.*

Human beings choose the world they live in. The choice is not wholly unconditioned, unconstrained. Many features of the chosen world — for example, many connections between acts and consequences — exist as brute facts. But the overarching mental map of the world is always chosen. It is an interpretation. One can choose to live in a world created by God and full of miracles. One can choose

to live in a godless world in which everything is reduceable to inert matter in motion. And while these two worlds each have numerous inhabitants, there are many other worlds in which human beings may and do choose to live, many of them being subsets of these two overarching worlds. While all get to choose their world, none has a choice about choosing. God or the universe confronts all of us with a choice and respects our agency. For now, we live in whatever world we and our culture have co-created through interpretation.

The world we choose to live in determines, among many other things, how we read scripture. Those who have chosen to live in God's world read a different Bible and Book of Mormon than those who have chosen to live in a godless world. Dan Vogel and Dan Peterson do not read the same Book of Mormon. For Vogel, the Book of Mormon is a purely naturalistic product of Joseph Smith's nineteenth century. For Peterson, the text has both ancient and nineteenth-century provenance, being composed anciently and translated in the nineteenth century. For Vogel, Joseph Smith was the sole, purely naturalistic, human author of the book. For Peterson, the book has multiple authors and, since most of those authors are prophets, God strongly influenced the book's construction and content. While those living in these alternative worlds may sometimes agree, e.g., about the Mosiah-first composition/translation of the text we now have, for the most part, their interpretations are not just incompatible but incommensurable. It is, thus, noteworthy when a scholar identifies a way of reading the Book of Mormon that is equally valid for those who live in these incompatible and incommensurable worlds. In *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, Grant Hardy has accomplished that difficult and noteworthy task.[1]

Understanding the Book of Mormon was published by Oxford University Press and is meant to address readers in both worlds, both faithful Latter-day-Saint and secular non-LDS readers. Hardy makes the book relevant to both groups by bracketing the main issue that divides them, the question of the book's historicity. Hardy is able to bracket this contentious issue because his approach to the text is primarily literary. Regardless of where people stand on the issue of historicity, no one can credibly deny that the Book of Mormon has the attributes of a literary text. Conveniently, scholarly readings of ancient texts like the Bible (and the Book of Mormon if it is ancient) are,

1. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

perforce, primarily literary readings.[2] This is true because the text itself is, by far, the fullest, most important artifact we now have that speaks to the circumstances of its composition. While archeological and historical remnants may and do affect interpretations of ancient texts on the margins, the vast preponderance of interpretation is grounded in close, literary reading of the text itself. As for modern texts, while abundant historical resources increase the potential contribution of material outside the text to our understanding of the text's meaning, close, literary readings nonetheless remain an essential element of any adequate reading of modern literary texts. So literary readings largely tread upon common ground.

What Hardy demonstrates in *Understanding the Book of Mormon* is that the putative main authors of the book—Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—each has a distinctive personality, characteristic rhetorical strategies, alternative implied readers, and author-specific thematic concerns. And these writerly attributes reflect the putative historical circumstances and life experiences of the purported author. For Latter-day Saints who inhabit the world God created, these features of the text are evidence of the book's historicity because they are properties one expects to find in authentic histories. For secularists who inhabit a godless world, these features of the text must be evidence of Joseph Smith's extraordinary literary genius. As literary readings demonstrate ever greater intrinsic coherence and depth in the Book of Mormon, secular inhabitants of the godless world must attribute to Joseph Smith ever greater degrees of literary genius.[3]

The purpose of this article is to summarize some of Hardy's key findings in *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, then to critique and extend them. While Hardy says many insightful things about Nephi and other authors in the small plates, I will focus exclusively on what he says about the redactors of the large plates and plates of Ether, the father and son contemporaries Mormon and Moroni, with particular emphasis on the writings of Moroni. Hardy's analysis of the Book of

2. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 16.

3. But as Brian C. Hales has shown, Joseph's literary achievement, if it is his, cannot be attributed to his formal education, which was meager. Nor did he manifest extraordinary intellect in early texts he produced, apart from the Book of Mormon. Brian C. Hales, "Joseph Smith's Education and Intellect as Described in Documentary Sources," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 1–32, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smiths-education-and-intellect-as-described-in-documentary-sources/.

Mormon is so well done and so compelling that this article is more an extension than a critique of his work. The critique mostly focuses on his reading of Mormon's implied audience and on how well Mormon's rhetoric is adapted to the needs of that audience. The extension focuses mostly on Moroni's rhetoric, his literary influences, and his growth as a person and as a writer, interpretations that Hardy does not offer but that are mostly consistent with how he frames Moroni.

The Distinctive Voices of Mormon and Moroni

In *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, Hardy highlights many differences in the authorial voices of Mormon and Moroni. He suggests that Mormon is the more confident and polished writer, that Mormon has a clearer vision of what his project should be and is both more empirical (in his meticulous use of names and dates) and more literary (in his use of parallel narratives) than Moroni. In the books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, Third Nephi, and Mormon, Mormon, a talented historian, weaves together political, military, social, and religious strands of his story to create a comparatively full, rounded account of the society he describes. In the book of Ether, "Moroni does just the opposite," providing only "a lightly edited chronicle, checking off the generations one by one . . . with the sort of dry synopsis that might characterize a middle-school book report." "His editing of Ether's record, and the dates and circumstances of the letters and sermons he includes [in the book of Moroni] is a chronological blur with virtually no narrative context."[4]

Hardy tells us that Moroni is self-conscious about these differences between him and his father. Unlike Mormon, he is not intrinsically motivated to write. Moroni repeatedly tells us that he writes his portion of the book because his father commanded him to do so (Mormon 8:1, 3). He procrastinates the fulfillment of that command, Hardy says, not taking up the writing task until 16 years after his father's death (Mormon 8:1, 6). Then he writes only two chapters and seems to feel he has fulfilled the charge his father gave him.[5] He openly worries about his weakness in writing and fears that his lack of polish may cause future readers to reject his work (Mormon 8:12, 17–21; 9:31–33).[6] And, getting to one of the main points of this article, he repeatedly offloads the

4. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 222, 225.
5. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 218.
6. For an insightful discussion of Moroni's insecurities and anxieties, see David F. Holland, *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell

writing task, composing his text by quoting others rather than by writing it himself. Thus, he writes only the first and last of the ten chapters in the book of Moroni. Of the twenty-seven chapters we have received from him, "twenty-one are either copied directly or only lightly edited, and even in the six chapters where he is expressing his own ideas . . . he does so with an unusually high proportion of phrases borrowed from previous Book of Mormon authors."[7]

A Talent for Theology, Allusion, and Audience Awareness

His real and self-perceived weaknesses as a writer notwithstanding, Moroni produced some of the most memorable and powerful passages in the scriptural canon. While as Hardy indicates, Moroni lacks Mormon's talent for managing historical narrative, he has a gift for allusion and for organizing material theologically.[8] Reflecting on his use of allusions, Hardy says "the inventiveness that seems apparent in Moroni's use of allusion borders on the miraculous."[9] As another insightful reader, David F. Holland demonstrates in *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction*, the book of Moroni highlights humanity's most important existential paradoxes, then fulgently illustrates how they are resolved through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Moroni achieves these effects not by writing most of the words himself but by organizing materials he has inherited from others in such a way that they reveal, then through the Atonement, resolve fundamental tensions. The spectrum of theological issues Moroni raises and resolves is impressive.[10] And though the book of Moroni is mostly a collection of writings others have produced, Newell Wright and I demonstrate that the book has a connecting thread that runs through

Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University [BYU], 2020), 17–18.

7. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 248–49.
8. For a brief overview of the theological organization of the book of Moroni, see Holland, *Moroni*, 14–15.
9. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 247.
10. In Holland, *Moroni*, Holland discusses how Moroni addresses theological and societal tensions between the following concepts: *ecclesiastical structure/authority* and *personal spirituality/conscience* (21–22); between *formalism/ordinances/social order* and *antinomianism/higher meaning/social collapse* (24–25); between *overly literal high church transubstantiation* and *empty low church sacramental symbolism* (42–45); between *mercy for sinners* and *community boundary maintenance* (53–54); between *ritual* and *charisma* (57–58); between *works* and *grace* (61–66); between *determinism/predestination* and *randomness/agency* (62–71).

the materials Moroni assembled in the book: the Holy Ghost and the conditions under which one can claim its companionship and through it be incorporated into the divine community. Moroni ends with the contrasting fates of those who reject and those who accept the gospel of Christ.[11]

Although critical of Moroni's inept handling of narrative, Hardy suggests that, ironically, Moroni's more abstract, less polished and less factual prose may speak to modern readers more effectively than Mormon's writing does. Mormon "sees himself as a historian, with a responsibility to tell the story of his civilization comprehensively and accurately."[12] He is engaged in a "project of persuading future readers through the marshaling of historical evidence."[13] He "cannot distort the history too much since the cogency of his argument depends on the accuracy of his facts; we should believe certain things because they are demonstrated by actual events of the past."[14] But Moroni, Hardy argues, has a better understanding than Mormon has of their modern audience. Thus, "Moroni shifts the balance between faith and reason substantially away from what Mormon had established in his own narrative. One might imagine Moroni saying to his father, "What you have been doing is not going to work. Why should we bother to try to convince the Gentiles with evidence and arguments when they won't even believe that we existed?"[15]

11. Newell D. Wright and Val Larsen, "The Holy Ghost in the Book of Moroni: Possessed of Charity," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 57 (2023): 53–76, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-holy-ghost-in-the-book-of-moroni-possessed-of-charity/.
12. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 91.
13. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 153.
14. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 119.
15. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 221, 224–25. According to Hardy, Moroni relies upon the testimony of the Spirit rather than the force of empirical, historical fact to persuade his readers (Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 244–45):

    > Modern readers . . . are promised another spiritual mechanism by which to ascertain the truth of the Book of Mormon (again in Moroni's quotation of the Lord): 'He that believeth these things which I have spoken, him will I visit with the manifestations of my Spirit, and he shall know and bear record . . .' (Ether 4:11–13). This, of course, is a very different mode of reading from that envisioned by his father. Mormon had assumed that he could persuade his audience through the careful marshaling of historical evidence—that prophecy and its fulfillment, combined with primary documents and a few brief editorial asides, would carry the day. Moroni, knowing more about his audience and facing data

Hardy's observations on Mormon and Moroni's differences in authorial stance and use of evidence are very astute. Mormon, the man who lived within history, who was himself a major historical player, wrote as a historian, historically. He focused on the particulars of time and place and person, on the kind of political and military matters that so engaged him in his professional life. Moroni, who lived most of his life outside of history, as a man for whom history had ended, whose only companions were those who spoke to him from the dust in the records he laboriously carried with him, wrote intertextually, in dialog with other voices in the records he carried. And he wrote as a theologian who was especially attuned to the tragedy of human existence without God and to the utter necessity of redemptive grace that can be activated only through faith in Christ. If these differences in the characterization of Mormon and Moroni do not reflect very real differences in their actual lives, they are a manifestation of exceptionally great literary genius. It is no easy thing to so fully make who people are a clear function of the purported circumstances in which they lived their lives.

Mormon's Rhetoric: An Alma-Family Handbook/Training Manual

In this trenchant analysis Hardy misses the mark in just one important respect: his suggestion that Mormon naively misunderstood the character of his intended audience. While I cannot fully develop the argument here, much evidence suggests that, on the contrary, Mormon knew his intended audience well and skillfully managed his materials and calibrated his rhetoric to speak to it with great power. Given the magnitude of Mormon's oeuvre, his body of work, I cannot now discuss his writings in detail. My focus in this article will mostly be on the more limited oeuvre of Moroni and, in particular, on the five endings Moroni composed for the Book of Mormon. But we can better understand the distinctiveness of Moroni as a writer if we have at least a basic understanding of how different he was from his father and of

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that were much less obviously in line with his themes, gives up on strict chronology and the straightforward presentation of historical information, preferring instead to rely on intrusive comment sections and the power of the Spirit to convince his readers. It is an intriguing situation, in which Moroni has to gently subvert the assumptions behind his father's record in order to bring it to a proper conclusion.

how thoroughly the differences in their rhetoric reflect the differences in their training and especially in their life experiences.

Judging from his brief account of his own early life (Mormon 1:2–6), Mormon appears to have been trained as a historian in Bountiful, the capital city of the Nephite nation. His teacher was Ammoron, a lineal descendant of Alma and the inheritor of the Alma-family historical records previously kept by his brother $Amos_2$. Mormon's brief account implies that while instructing him in the scribal language, Reformed Egyptian, in family history and the family business of governing and defending the Nephites, Ammoron recognized Mormon's special interest in, understanding of, and aptitude for writing history. He also knew him to be proximate to power, well positioned to observe and record major events in the history of the Alma family in his time.

These facts and others suggest that, like $Amos_2$ and Ammoron, Mormon was a member of the Alma family, a direct descendant of $Alma_1$ and $Alma_2$.[16] Mormon's membership in the family is apparent in multiple lines of evidence, only a couple of which I can discuss here. The strongest evidence is the fact that the records were passed to him. The records had been handed down in the Alma family from father to son for eight generations, from $Alma_1$ to $Alma_2$, from $Helaman_2$ to $Helaman_3$, from $Nephi_2$ to $Nephi_3$, from $Amos_1$ to $Amos_2$. At the end of that long history of transmission within the Alma family, it was perfectly predictable that $Amos_2$ would keep the records in the family by passing them laterally to his brother when he had no son who could/would receive them from him. It is equally predictable that Ammoron would again pass them laterally to another Alma family member if he had no son suitable to the task of receiving and keeping the record.

Mormon's name is another indication that he was a member of the family. It is derived from the headwaters of Alma-family prominence, the waters of Mormon (Mosiah 18:16 and 3 Nephi 5:12), where $Alma_1$ founded the church subsequently presided over by his descendants, including Mormon. Mormon's pure descent from Lehi (3 Nephi 5:20) may be explained, in part, by the fact that his family were in the Zeniff and $Alma_1$ groups and, thus, were separated for three generations

16. For an extended discussion of evidence that Mormon was a member of the Alma family, see Nathan J. Arp, "Count Your Many Mormons: Mormon's Personalized and Personal Messages in Mosiah 18 and 3 Nephi 5," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 75–86, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/count-your-many-mormons-mormons-personalized-and-personal-messages-in-mosiah-18-and-3-nephi-5/.

from the intermarrying Nephites and Mulekites. Though we can't be sure because we don't know his grandfather's name, judging from the information we have, Mormon's name reflects the Alma-family tradition of having father/son dyads who share the same name. His father was named Mormon (Mormon 1:5), creating a dyad. When Mormon himself had a son, he may have chosen a new name to maintain the Alma-family tradition of having only two successive generations share the same name. Since he shared the name of his father, he gave his son the name of his greatest historical hero, Captain Moroni.

Hardy assumes that Mormon wrote the Book of Mormon for us, a modern audience. But the content of the book he wrote indicates that Mormon wrote within a historiographical tradition designed to educate young men in the Alma family. Authors in that tradition wrote history calibrated to legitimize the Alma family's right to rule, history written to train young men in the family to take up and perform their duties as political, military, and religious leaders in a manner consistent with the family's values. Those values and traditions centered above all on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If this thesis be granted, it becomes quite obvious why we find what we find in the Book of Mormon and why we don't find some things modern readers would like to find there. Let's start with what we don't find.

Chief among the things we lamentably do not find is an account of domestic life—apart from fathers instructing their sons—and a description of what women felt and how they lived. In a text written for young men living in ancient times, this deficit is unsurprising. In ancient Israel and other ancient civilizations, women were not taught to read and write. Authors writing in those times did not, therefore, have women in mind as the readers of their writings. The Book of Mormon has spiritual power that has touched the hearts of millions of women. And sophisticated readers like Kim Matheson and Joseph Spencer detect subthemes pertinent to the proper status and role of women.[17] But even so, for modern readers, the lack of attention to the concerns and lives of individual women is an obvious and unfortunate gap in the text. Were the text originally drafted specifically to meet the needs

17. Kimberly Matheson Berkey and Joseph M. Spencer, "'Great Cause to Mourn': The Complexity of The Book of Mormon's Presentation of Gender and Race," in *Americanist Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 298–320. Also see Joseph M. Spencer, *1st Nephi: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, BYU, 2020), 100–18.

and expectations of modern readers, it would have said more about women. Were it originally drafted, as I hypothesize, to train ancient men, it would not have addressed the needs and duties of women. Those would have been addressed in a parallel oral tradition similar to the one attributed to the Lamanite mothers of the stripling warriors. And that parallel tradition surely existed. Amid all the temptations of wealth and power, with fathers often away or otherwise preoccupied with political, military, and religious duties, it would have been impossible to maintain in the Alma family ten generations of faith in Christ without the influence and support of deeply spiritual, deeply faithful women. So, the women obviously had their own oral tradition of faith and faithfulness that we, unfortunately, do not explicitly find in the Book of Mormon text.

What we do find as the main connecting thread of the Book of Mormon is the story of the Alma-family men passing the plates from father to oldest son across eight generations of rulers, generals, and record keepers.[18] The main political thrust of the record is regime legitimization. The book consistently affirms the desirability of Alma-family rule and the calamitous consequences that ensue when the Nephites fail to follow their natural leaders, the members of that family. With the exception of the Mosiah family, which voluntarily cedes power to and anoints the Almas as its successor, all other families who govern (e.g., the families of Nephihah and Cezoram) prove disastrous for the Nephites. Alma-family rulers, on the other hand, typically bring success and prosperity unless the people refuse to follow them. Apart from Mormon himself, the only obvious exception is $Nephi_2$, under whose governance the Nephites lost half the lands Captain Moroni had successfully defended. But that exception proves the rule. After hearing the powerful preaching of $Nephi_2$ and his brother $Lehi_3$, the Lamanites voluntarily return the lost lands to the Nephites without any bloodshed.

Structural features of Mormon's Alma-family history—our Book of Mormon—serve to legitimize Alma-family rule. The only real rivals of the Almas for the mantle of legitimate leadership are the Mosiahs. Members of the Mosiah family are the Alma family's peers in the provision of righteous leadership and governance. But while he gives the

18. While $Alma_1$ evidently passed on a record or at least an oral account of his life to $Alma_2$ who included it in his records, $Alma_2$ inherited the large and small plates of Nephi from $Mosiah_2$ (Mosiah 28:20). They were then kept in the family from the time of $Alma_2$ until the time of Moroni, the last Book of Mormon author.

Mosiahs prominent play, Mormon chooses to tell their story in such a way that they become major secondary characters in the Alma-family narrative. So, in the book of Mosiah, Mormon devotes more chapters to recounting the history of the Zeniffites (including $Alma_1$) who return to and live in the land of Nephi than he does to the history of the wiser Mosiahs who remain in the land of Zarahemla. Though the Zeniff/Alma story is technically embedded in the Mosiah story that frames it, the narrative within the frame is more extensive than the frame narrative. And while Mormon structures the narrative as an invidious contrast between the three successive generations of each governing family, $Mosiah_1$/Zeniff, Benjamin/Noah, and $Mosiah_2$/Limhi, a contrast that strongly favors the Mosiahs, his Alma narrative ultimately intrudes upon and begins to supplant the narrative of the Mosiahs by the end of the book of Mosiah.

This displacement is apparent in the way $Mosiah_2$ somewhat fecklessly cedes governing roles—appointing priests (Mosiah 25:21), organizing religious worship (Mosiah 26:5, 20–22), judging crimes and imposing punishments (Mosiah 26:12)—to $Alma_1$, who has no obvious inherent claim to those civil authorities. And it is apparent in the primacy that is given $Alma_2$ in the account of $Alma_2$ and the sons of Mosiah. Since Mosiah's sons are princes in the kingdom in the line of succession, the story could have been narrated as an account of Aaron, Ammon, Omner, Himni, and $Alma_2$. It is instead recounted as the story of $Alma_2$ and the sons of Mosiah. Then $Mosiah_2$ taps $Alma_2$ to be his successor instead of passing the right to rule to one of his sons.[19]

The entire narrative of the sons of Mosiah in the land of Nephi (a narrative that is very on point for training young men to be diplomatically, militarily, and religiously effective) is then embedded as a seam in an inconsequential journey $Alma_2$ takes from the land of Gideon (home of the Zeniffites) to the land of Manti. This frame positions the single most extensive Mosiah family narrative as an incidental aspect of an inconsequential act of $Alma_2$ (Alma 17:1, 27:16). Mormon's handling of this flashback is literarily brilliant per se, but it is all the more

19. Formally, $Alma_2$ was selected as the first Chief Judge by the people. But the people deeply trusted $Mosiah_2$ and $Mosiah_2$ had indicated his belief that $Alma_2$ should be selected as Chief Judge, among other things, by passing on to him the tokens of Nephite kingship: the brass plates, sword of Laban, all the records the kings had kept, including the large and small plates, and the interpreters that marked $Mosiah_2$ and $Alma_2$ as seers (Mosiah 28:20).

brilliant if Mormon has the rhetorical purpose of foregrounding the power claims of the Almas and subordinating any claims the Mosiahs might have to continuing power. In the wake of this narrative seam, the Mosiahs disappear from the text, thus erasing the one worthy rival of the Almas to the right to rule.

So, we have many reasons to believe that Mormon was trained and wrote within a historiographical tradition that envisioned as its audience male members of the first family of Nephite history, the Alma family. We have many reasons to believe that historians in that tradition — all themselves members of the Alma family — addressed their message to the elite male members of their own family who were destined to fill top political, military, and religious positions within Nephite society. All the dates and places, all the careful documentation of historical events that Hardy rightly says are unlikely to be persuasive evidence of historicity for most modern readers, are very much relevant to members of the Alma family who know and live in the places mentioned and whose current life circumstances were very much influenced by what happened on those dates in those places. Nothing Mormon wrote about Alma-family history and the history of the nation they so often led, nothing he wrote about political and military tactics, about church governance, about the destructiveness of fraternal power rivalries, would appear irrelevant if Mormon's original intended audience was elite members of the Alma family. So, if we correctly identify Mormon's intended audience, we will see that his rhetoric, his historical precision, was finely calibrated to meet the needs of his envisioned readers.

Most relevant of all to those readers (and to us) was the emphasis Mormon and every other writer within that tradition placed on making deep faith in and a relationship with Christ the foundation for all other endeavors. $Alma_1$ and $Alma_2$ had directly observed the damage entrenched or charismatic leaders could cause if Christ were not the foundation for and motive force behind their actions. This explains the tradition's special emphasis on the fall and redemption of two high status young men, the family's founders, $Alma_1$ and $Alma_2$. Those stories, and especially the $Alma_2$ story, that is narrated three times, drive home the fact that intelligence and strength and charisma and status and wealth and power mean nothing, indeed, less than nothing, if one is not a devoted and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. And while it may not have been written specifically for us, that message is very relevant for readers in our time, which is, by historical standards, unimaginably prosperous.

The Almas handed down a tradition of scholarship, faith, and action that formed Mormon as a leader and a historian just as it had earlier formed the Helamans, Nephis, Amoses, and one Ammaron, who preceded him, all of whom like Mormon, the last in the line, were prominent public figures and, most importantly, devoted followers of Christ. To have cultivated and preserved faith and decency in so many men enmeshed in all the temptations inherent in wealth and power was an extraordinary achievement and a testament to the power of the texts written in that tradition to speak to their intended audience.

So, Mormon appears to have written most of his history within that Alma-family historiographical tradition. And for most of his life, he remained enmeshed in a living history that had an uncertain end (Mormon 2:12). In preaching that is presumably not kabuki theater, he sought to call his people to repentance (Mormon 3:2). In a letter probably written between 345 and 350 AD, Mormon urged Moroni to pray that the Nephites would repent (Moroni 8:27–28).[20] As late as 375 to 380 AD (when he was between 65 and 70 years old)[21] Mormon seemed to hold out some hope that "God will spare thy [Moroni's] life, to witness the return of his people to him" (Moroni 9:22). Had the people repented and invited Moroni to lead them as his father and other progenitors had earlier done, Mormon's history, written within the Alma-family historiographical tradition, would have been for Moroni a valuable guide to action.

Of course, in the version of Book of Mormon ultimately handed down to us, which is probably a late final draft that modified the more hopeful text written earlier, Mormon has concluded that his people will be (or has observed that they have been) utterly destroyed. He now knows that his work will have a latter-day audience (Mormon 5:1–2, 9–15). If we grant, however, that much of the work was written for an audience of Nephite elites in earlier, more hopeful times, Hardy's critical evaluation of Mormon, his suggestion that the great historian was naive about his audience, becomes invalid, and the vast majority of Mormon's content decisions — e.g., the attention given to politics, war, and military tactics along with church leadership — become readily explicable.

As comments in Words of Mormon and his final message in

20. Joseph M. Spencer, "On the Dating of Moroni 8–9," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016), 131–48, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/on-the-dating-of-moroni-8-9/.

21. See Spencer, "Dating Moroni 8–9," 143.

Mormon 7 make clear, Mormon knew by the end of his life that the history he had spent his life laboriously composing would not be passed on to yet more generations of the Alma family as originally intended. In Mormon 7, a masterful text he apparently wrote after the battle of Cumorah but before he and all his remaining companions except Moroni were hunted down and killed, Mormon, at the height of his literary powers, inscribed a powerful final message addressed to the descendants of those who had defeated him and destroyed Nephite civilization. His audience is a mixture of Nephites and Lamanites and Ishmaelites and Mulekites and Jaredites and the many other indigenous peoples that have merged together, all now called Lamanites. Mormon eloquently rededicates his book to them and reframes his book's purpose as a call for them to come unto Christ as ten generations of Alma family members have done, to be baptized with water and fire that it may be well with them in the day of judgment as it will be with him and the other Alma family members whose lives he has recounted.

So, in the end, Mormon's writing had multiple layers of composition and multiple envisioned audiences. While Mormon wrote most of the text with an Alma-family audience in mind, he modified that original draft near the end of his life when it became clear that Alma-family governance would not continue because there would be no Nephites left to govern. An important task that remains for scholars is to identify what parts of Mormon's writings were drafted before he knew that the Nephites would be destroyed and Alma-family rule would end. Scholars likewise need to identify what parts were added late in his life when he hastily revised the text to speak to a modern audience and, in particular, to any remnant of Lehi's family still living when the text was exhumed and translated.

Moroni's Models and Rhetoric: Breaking Off Is Hard to Do

In the contrast between Mormon's writing style and that of Moroni, we can see the effects of life circumstances and education. Moroni's life circumstances were very different from those of Mormon. Moroni was born into a civilization on the verge of collapse due to internal corruption and overwhelming external pressure. While Moroni learned to read and write, evidence indicates that he was not deeply trained, as Mormon had been, in Alma-family history and historiography. Thus, he lacked both Mormon's confidence and his competence when he first took up the stylus in response to Mormon's command that he finish

the Book of Mormon. But rather than being a liability, Moroni's lack of training is an asset for the Book of Mormon.

As Hardy says, "Uniquely among Book of Mormon narrators, Moroni offers us the opportunity to follow the development of his ideas and writing style over the course of decades."[22] Moroni's four decades of writings crystalize the long life he lived as a solitary reader and writer of scripture. Moroni lets us observe in his writings — his crystalized life — his growth as a writer and as a person. The trauma and desperation he experienced in the immediate aftermath of the Cumorah cataclysm are evident in the facts he initially records and in his initial writing style. The continuing effects of that trauma remain evident sixteen years later when he again begins to write. Also evident at the end of that sixteen-year hiatus are the thousands of hours Moroni has spent reading the sacred texts he carries and now extensively quotes. The influence of that reading compounds as he writes each successive ending. Moroni's gradual transcendence of the early trauma and bleakness of his life is likewise evident as he sequentially composes his five endings. As the decades pass, his confidence, equanimity, and empathy for his audience all grow. By the end of his life, he is demonstrably more reconciled to God and man than he had been when he first began to write.

Hardy provides insight into why Moroni kept writing new endings. He demonstrates that Moroni struggled to find an appropriate ending for the book. And he offers a conjecture on why: "it may have been difficult for him to know what kind of ending would transform 'the sad tale of the destruction of my people' (Mormon 8:3) into a book that would promise hope and salvation."[23] Complicating his rhetorical task, Moroni had no companions who could read and comment on the aptness of his endings. As previously mentioned, his companions were those he carried in his arms, the inscribed men who spoke to him as text from the dust. Under the circumstances, it is unsurprising that, to provide the ending his father had charged him to provide, he repeatedly sought to appropriate the voices of his textual companions, men whose writings he admired. Except in his first, hurried ending for the book, an ending written in the immediate aftermath of the Cumorah battle without the benefit of years spent reading, Moroni relied heavily upon the rhetoric of his inscribed mentors. While he always had a measure of natural writing talent, guided by his mentors, his confidence

22. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 249.
23. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 249.

and competence increased and he gradually became a more capable, polished, and ultimately very powerful writer.

As previously noted, Moroni's growth as a writer and as a person is apparent in the five endings he composed for the Book of Mormon, which we will sequentially review.

1. Mormon 8:1–5
   - Narrative, written soon after the Cumorah battle
   - Reflects Moroni's desperate circumstances at the time
   - No call to action
   - No audience awareness
   - The least rhetorically effective ending
2. Mormon 8:6–9:37
   - Farewell, written 16 years after Cumorah
   - Not well organized
   - Point of view erratic, section transitions rough
   - Assessment of his despicable modern audience tinged by darkness of his life
3. Ether 12:6–41
   - Farewell, well organized
   - Strong audience awareness
   - More positive tone
   - Implies modern readers may be like faithful ancients
   - Insecurities and excuses still present but more relevant to audience
4. Ether 13–15
   - Narrative, most literarily artful ending
   - Shows rather than tells a profound truth — the futility of pursuing worldly wealth or power
   - Last words reflect circumstances of both Ether and Moroni
5. Moroni 10
   - Farewell, written 35 years after Cumorah
   - An expansion of Amaleki's gospel précis
   - Excellent audience awareness
   - Extended call to action
   - By far, the most rhetorically effective farewell

The genre of two of these endings, the first and the fourth, is narrative. In these two instances, Moroni ends the Book of Mormon with

a story. The genre of the other three endings, the second, third, and fifth, is a formal farewell. Moroni's growth is very evident in the evolution of the rhetoric and tone of both his narratives and of his farewells. The later works are both more literarily polished and more spiritually mature than the earlier works.

The first ending

Our discussion of Moroni's first ending for the Book of Mormon is an extension of Hardy's work because Hardy did not note that it was a separate ending. Hardy suggests that Moroni wrote his first ending for the book sixteen years after the final battle at Cumorah. I here suggest that Moroni wrote his first brief ending in the immediate aftermath of that battle. We learn in Mormon 6 that at the conclusion of the Cumorah battle, a small group of 24 Nephites survived, among whom were Mormon and Moroni. Mormon also knew about "a few who had escaped into the south countries" (Mormon 6:15). In the first five verses of Mormon 8, Moroni tells us what happened to Mormon and the few who escaped to the south: "the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed. And my father was also killed" (Mormon 8:2–3). Moroni coupling the death of his father with the hunting down of those Mormon reported as having escaped to the south suggests that Mormon, Moroni, and their group of 24 joined the escapees but that all except Moroni were soon killed.

After Mormon and his other companions were killed, Moroni's life was precarious, his survival very much in doubt. Close reading suggests that, knowing this, harried Moroni hastily composed his first five-verse ending for the Book of Mormon. In this ending, Moroni *twice* states each of the six then most-salient facts about the Nephites, Mormon, and his own life: a) all other Nephites he knows about are now dead, b) Mormon has been killed, c) before he died, Mormon commanded Moroni to provide an ending for Mormon's literary life work, d) Moroni is now utterly alone, e) he may be killed at any moment, and f) there is no place for him to go to seek refuge.

So, here is Moroni's first ending, quoted in full. The dual statements of the five salient facts are italicized:

> Behold I, Moroni, do finish the record of my father, Mormon. Behold, I have but few things to write, *which things I have been commanded by my father*. And now it came to pass that after the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah,

> behold, *the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed.* And *my father also was killed* by them, and *I even remain alone* to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. But *behold, they are gone*, and *I fulfil the commandment of my father.* And *whether they will slay me, I know not*. Therefore I will write and hide up the records in the earth; and *whither I go it mattereth not*.
>
> Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof. And behold, I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for *I am alone*. *My father hath been slain in battle*, and all my kinsfolk, and *I have not friends nor whither to go*; and *how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not*. (Mormon 8:1–5)

Moroni lets us know in the first verse that he won't say much: "I have but few things to write." Having twice told us about the command to add an ending, in v. 4 Moroni says, "Therefore I will write," and here is what Moroni writes to fulfill his father's command: "Behold, my father hath made this record, and he hath written the intent thereof." That is it! Moroni's ending is one sentence that says in effect, "look at what my father said he was doing." Moroni, no doubt, alludes here to Mormon's last recorded words, his beautifully written, just concluded, final statement of the book's purpose in Mormon 7—polished, powerful prose that traumatized, harried, self-doubting Moroni could not hope to match. The remainder of v. 5 is, effectively, an excuse, Moroni explaining why he did not "write *it*," the *it* being his own statement of the book's purpose. Moroni's excuses are, there is no more room on the plates; he has no ore to make additional plates; and he has no one to help him find ore and make plates. The lack-of-space-on-the-plates excuse suggests that Moroni used what space remained to write his five-verse ending. Were there then room to write the rest of chapters 8 and 9, his excuse would have been invalid. He would have had ample room to say something about the purpose of the plates.

Understandably, given his circumstances, Moroni is focused in these five verses on his own desperate situation: the fact that he is alone, surrounded by enemies, may be killed at any time, and has no place to go where he might find companionship and refuge. Unsurprisingly, given these circumstances and the fact that this is his first attempt to fulfill Mormon's command to supply an ending for the

record, this is by far Moroni's weakest ending for the Book of Mormon. He merely says Mormon told us why he wrote the book. Here, Moroni manifests no audience awareness. He provides no call to action. But short though it is — indeed precisely because it is so short and the tone so harried — these verses attest that Moroni was a real person. He wrote as most people would write if they were situated and traumatized as he was, if they were determined to complete a writing task before their temporally uncertain but imminently expected death occurred. Moroni loves and respects his father and writes immediately to ensure that he fulfills Mormon's command, but this is the best he can then do. It will be another 16 years before he can create more plates and find place and time to write more — the remainder of chapter 8 and all of chapter 9, which are his second ending.

The second ending

Moroni's second ending is much lengthier than his first. Indeed, it is by far his longest ending. His relative verbosity is one indication that he is not yet the skilled writer he will become. Compared to that in Mormon 8:1–5, the tone in this ending is less harried, more reflective. But considered whole, the text remains disordered. The point of view is erratic and the transitions from one section to another are not smooth. Moroni needs a friend who can listen to him and help him see how his personal trauma is bleeding into his writing and understanding of the world, but though they are teaching him, his inscribed friends cannot listen and respond. So, he sees and speaks darkly, his words heavily tinged by the darkness of his own time and the bleakness of his own life.

All the darkness he perceives exists. Nothing he says is untrue, but human civilizations and lives are not so overwhelmingly and exclusively dark as his account in this ending might suggest. Yet, it is not so much what he says as how he says it that marks him as a less skillful writer in this ending than he will be when he composes subsequent endings. Much of his specific content is the same (e.g., his focus on the reality and necessity of miracles). His talent for turning a good phrase is evident. But the parts of this farewell simply do not fit together as well as the parts of later endings will. This farewell is a heterogenous collection of loosely-related sections and themes. It has no consistent organizing principle, focus, or audience. It is not as well-crafted as later endings will be, not as carefully designed to engage its future readers and to maximize its rhetorical effect on them.

The first part of this ending, Mormon 8: 6–11 and 13, wraps up the history of the Nephites. Differences in tone and scale distinguish this historical account from that in Moroni's first ending. In Mormon 8:6, Moroni tells us that it is now 400 years since the coming of Christ, or some 16 years since the battle at Cumorah. The harried account of the immediate aftermath of Cumorah in vv. 2–3 gives way in vv. 7–9 to a more staid account of what has happened in the intervening years. Moroni here describes what seems to have been a systematic effort to ferret out any ethnic Nephites still living among the Lamanites.[24] After they completed that bloody, laborious task, the Lamanites were no longer unified against their common Nephite enemy. They turned against each other and, over time, "the whole face of this land [became] one continual round of murder and bloodshed" (Mormon 8:8).

One sufficient but not necessary marker of an ethnic Nephite at that time was belief in Christ.[25] Moroni's seemingly non sequitur mention in vv. 10–11 that the Three Nephites still live, is a qualification of his statement in v. 9 that "there are none save it be the Lamanites and robbers that do exist upon the face of the land." Moroni, himself, is also an exception. In v. 13, Moroni artfully wraps up the history of the Nephites with a *merism*, a Bible and Book of Mormon figure of speech Nephi and Mormon both used[26] in which the whole of something is signified by its parts, especially, the first and last part: "Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, and my father was a descendant of Nephi." The *I* in that sentence, Moroni, is the lonely only remnant of the civilization and history that extended from the first great Nephite, Nephi, to the last great Nephite, Mormon.[27] Moroni's raw writing talent is apparent in his use of that summative merism as he concludes the narrative history.

Verse 13 reflects both Moroni's talent and his present deficiencies

24. It is clear that if there ever had been a racial difference between Nephites and Lamanites, it no longer exists (4 Nephi 1:17). But culture and/or religion could still distinguish Nephites from the Lamanites. The Lamanites have systematically finalized the Nephite genocide in the years since Cumorah.
25. By the end of the Book of Mormon, not all Nephites believed in Christ, but everyone who did believe was counted as a Nephite and was destroyed.
26. Noel B. Reynolds, "Biblical Merismus in Book of Mormon Gospel References," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 26, no. 1 (2017), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1602&context=jbms.
27. Though he reads verse Moroni 8:13 a little differently than I do, Hardy also underscores the artfulness in Moroni's use of that verse. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 254.

as a writer, because the artfulness of his *merism*, its effectiveness as a summation of Nephite history is marred by the insertion (between v. 11, the wrapping up of Nephite history, and v. 13, its eloquent summation) of v. 12, an expression of Moroni's insecurity: "whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it." Since v. 12 flows very naturally into v. 14, this particular imperfection could have been avoided by editing the text slightly to read as follows:

> Behold, I make an end of speaking concerning this people. I am the son of Mormon, and my father was a descendant of Nephi. And whoso receiveth this record, and shall not condemn it because of the imperfections which are in it, the same shall know of greater things than these. Behold, I am Moroni; and were it possible, I would make all things known unto you. And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord.

Moroni is obviously very concerned that his inadequacies as a writer will inhibit the uptake of the vitally important message he feels charged to communicate to his latter-day readers. In this ending, he will twice more comment upon and offer excuses for possible weaknesses in his writing. These manifestations of insecurity will disappear in later writings.

Having concluded his history of the Nephites, Moroni turns to the future coming forth of the record, and his intended audience bifurcates. He directs himself to Joseph Smith and others immediately around Joseph, but with the expectation that a broader audience will be listening in. He stresses that the plates cannot be used for financial gain, that the person who brings the record forth will be blessed, and that he can bring it forth only through God's power and with an eye single to God's glory. He then provides what he did not provide in his first ending, his own brief statement of the book's purpose: the book has been written for "the welfare of the ancient and long dispersed covenant people of the Lord" (Mormon 8:15). Moroni will again briefly state this purpose at the end of this ending.

Perhaps conscious of the inadequacy of this statement of purpose, which his father had charged him to provide, Moroni again, rather aggressively, reveals his insecurity. He says:

> And if there be faults they be the faults of a man. But behold, we know no fault; nevertheless God knoweth all things;

> therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire. (Mormon 8:17)

In this case, the mention of potential faults and the danger of focusing on them fits the surrounding context well. In v. 16, he had written "[this record] shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of darkness, and come unto the knowledge of the people; and it shall be done by the power of God." In the moment when the record comes forth, the question of whether one focuses on its faults or on its virtues is very much germane.

Moroni now shifts to a very narrow audience — perhaps just one person — and topic: the importance of not saying to Joseph Smith, "Show me the plates or I will smite you." Five verses, Mormon 8:18–22, are devoted to this person and topic, though the comment broadens a little at the end and may encompass all who seek to "destroy the work of the Lord." Moroni turns from the wicked to the righteous in the next four verses, Mormon 8:23–26. Here he talks about the people whom he most admires: his dead mentors who speak to him and all of us from the dust. He will end this ending by again focusing on them and crediting the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to them. We will return to them and again allude to these verses, presently.

The next 40 verses and more than half of Moroni's farewell are now devoted to describing and excoriating his future readers. He breaks them down into three classes, those who are members of a church and presumably believe in Christ (Mormon 8:27–41), those who do not believe in Christ (Mormon 9:1–6), and those who believe in God but deny that miracles continue (Mormon 9:7–26). Moroni views all three groups as being despicable. His views are evident in the vocatives he uses for the first, presumably most sympathetic group. In Moroni 8:33, he addresses them as follows: "O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people." Then, in v. 38, he addresses them thus: "O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker." Accurate though it is in describing many aspects of our modern culture, this unrelentingly negative critique of us will not endear Moroni to many modern readers who are not already favorably disposed toward him. His words suggest that he sees us through the lens of his own destroyed Nephite people. Much of what he says about us echoes what had been said of them as their civilization tottered on the brink of destruction. Given what happened to them, these sections may be more likely to inspire despair than hope.

Though his assessment of us is negative throughout, Moroni's tone

lightens a bit in the third section as he mounts an argument on why we should believe that miracles continue. As part of the argument, he describes elements of the gospel, the good news, that necessarily lighten the tone. And at the end of that argument, he transitions into a call to action. But his lack of respect for us moderns is still evident in the negative framing of this call to action. Our wickedness and the darkness that still shades his life lead him to emphasize the negative, what we must not do more than the positive, what we must do. The beginning of each new sentence but one — "Be wise" — has negative framing.[28] Each new sentence begins with a grammatical imperative, and in each but that one, the imperative is a command that we not do some wicked thing or that we eliminate something negative from our lives. All suggestions that we do good are appended with conjunctions as expansions on the initial command that we stop doing evil. Here is the call, with each new sentence designated and with negative framing in italics:

> *O then despise not, and wonder not*, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need.
>
> *Doubt not,* but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him.
>
> Be wise in the days of your probation.
>
> *Strip yourselves of all uncleanness.*
>
> *Ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts,* but ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God.
>
> *See that ye are not baptized unworthily.*
>
> *See that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily,* but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out.
>
> Behold, I speak unto you as though I spake from the dead; for I know ye shall have my words. (Mormon 9:27–30)[29]

28. The command "be wise" diverges only slightly, if at all, from the general negative framing in this section. "Be wise" is the idiomatic equivalent of "Be not unwise." Moroni clearly does not think his future readers will, in the first instance, be wise. In this sentence, too, he is telling them to change.
29. To clarify the structure, punctuation has been changed so that each new sentence begins with a capital letter and so that all sentences end with a

As we shall see in Moroni 10, an important manifestation of Moroni's maturation as a person and as a writer will be changes in tone and framing that make his final farewell predominantly positive. But more important than the changes in tone and rhetoric of that final call to action will be the fact that the call is prominent. It suffuses the entire farewell, from beginning to end. By the time he wrote that last farewell, Moroni understood how to organize his message so as to engage and move his readers. Its negative framing notwithstanding and though it is not as well written as the one that suffuses Moroni 10, this call to action is sufficiently well done that it would have been a suitable place for Moroni to end this first farewell.

But he does not end the farewell here. His insecurities again obtrude. So, in Mormon 9:31–34, now near the end of this ending, he makes a lengthy detour into apologies and excuse making. While this detour is an imperfection, his writing talent is again apparent in his eloquent use of parallelism in the first verse of his apology:

> Condemn me not because of mine imperfection,
> neither my father, because of his imperfection,
> neither them who have written before him;
> but rather give thanks unto God
> that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections,
> that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.
> (Mormon 9:31)

Given its eloquence and its terminal but probably unrealistic call to action — that we be more wise than Mormon and Moroni — this verse could have been part of an effective ending for the Book of Mormon. But again, Moroni does not end here. And the same cannot be said for the discussion in vv. 32–34 about Reformed Egyptian, about Mormon and Moroni's Hebrew being better than their Reformed Egyptian, about Hebrew being intrinsically clearer than Reformed Egyptian, about Nephite Hebrew being changed from the original, about plate size imposing Reformed Egyptian as the scribal language, about interpreters being needed because no other people know the Nephite language, and about the Lord knowing the Nephite language. While this information has value, none of it is appropriate as the final or nearly final message of the Book of Mormon. None of it is likely to inspire Moroni's future readers to pray about the book, repent of their sins,

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period. The structure of the last sentence matches that of earlier sentences if we read death as having negative valence.

come unto Christ and be saved. But it tells us much about Moroni and his, then, state of mind, and the level of his writing skills at that time.

This distracting detour suggests that Moroni is still at a point in his life where trauma makes him anxious and inward looking. That inward orientation is also apparent when, in v. 35, he again states the purpose of the record he will hand down: "And these things are written that we may rid our garments of the blood of our brethren, who have dwindled in unbelief." Like his first ending, this ending is still as much or more about Moroni and his problems as it is about the needs of his future audience. He echoes depressive Jacob who likewise sought to rid his garments of others' blood (2 Nephi 9:24; Jacob 1:19). At this point in his life, Moroni, like Jacob, appears to be a man who is "lonesome" and "solemn," "born in tribulation," "hated of [his] brethren," a man who will "mourn out [his] days" (Jacob 7:26). He mourns because he is still deeply marked by what he experienced as he witnessed his civilization dissolve in the acid of its own unrighteousness and then be completely destroyed.

Given how the bleakness and darkness of his present life have tinged his expectations for the future, it is no surprise that Moroni chooses to end this farewell by again focusing retrospectively on the past, by again focusing on the one clear positive in his life: the righteous men who have been speaking to him from the dust and who have become beloved mentors and friends. Moroni has immersed himself in the records during the years that have intervened since Cumorah, and these figures have become very important to him, personally. Hardy demonstrates these friends' influence. He shows how thoroughly infused this and subsequent endings are with quotations Moroni found in the plates, quotations of Joseph of Egypt, Nephi, King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma, and Mormon, among others.[30] It is to the merits and prayers of these friends that Moroni ascribes the coming forth of the record he is completing (Mormon 8:23–25), not to any merit or worthiness of the record's modern recipients (Mormon 9:36–37). His beloved predecessors are first in his heart and mind. The modern audience is an afterthought. The gratitude and love Moroni feels for his righteous predecessors is exemplary, but it also reveals that he

30. Hardy writes "The next fifteen verses (Morm. 8:26–41) are so dense with connections to 2 Nephi 26–28, chapters in which Nephi prophetically describes the same era, that they read like a paraphrase." Hardy shows that Moroni specifically cites his scriptural heroes. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 252.

remains stuck in his own head, that his writing manifests and is motivated by his own needs, not by the needs of his future audience. That will change in subsequent endings.

Given his comments on the topic of his weakness in writing and his strong warning against criticism — "he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire" (Mormon 8:17) — one naturally hesitates to identify, much less condemn, any imperfection in Moroni's writing. But ironically, these particular imperfections are, from a certain point of view, a perfection. They enhance the realism of the text. They reveal that, like most real people, Moroni had and knew he had weaknesses. Like other real people, he was self-conscious and defensive about his weaknesses. But he didn't settle for being insecure and defensive. He spent many hours closely reading scripture written by those who did not share his personal and artistic weaknesses. He learned from those more mature men and better writers how he could improve, how he could be more spiritually enlightened and make his rhetoric more effective in bringing readers to Christ. He modeled what we need to do to make weak things become strong unto us. By revealing the changes that took place in himself, he better equips us to face and overcome the weaknesses in our lives.

The third ending

Moroni's third ending — in reality, as we shall see, just a farewell, not an ending — is found in Ether 12:6–41. Hardy's excellent, detailed analysis of this farewell demonstrates that Moroni saturates this text with quotations from earlier writers and, in particular, his Book of Mormon mentors. Hardy shows how this intertextuality enriches the farewell, connecting it with the farewell of Nephi in 2 Nephi 33, which had similar themes and which was, in turn, rooted in a prophesy of Joseph of Egypt. This farewell also alludes directly to writings of Mormon. So, as he does with a merism in Mormon 8, Moroni here links this farewell to the first and last great Nephites, the first and last authors of the book and, thereby, artfully enrolls through meristic allusion the entire Book of Mormon in this farewell. Since Hardy so thoroughly discusses the Book of Mormon and Bible intertextuality of this farewell, I will not take up that important topic. I will focus, instead, on the several important ways in which this farewell improves on Moroni's second ending.

A comparison of the two farewells is warranted because their genre is the same. But this farewell is dramatically different from the first one in its organization, its well-defined audience, its much more

positive tone, and in the degree to which it features a call to action. It digresses to the topic of weakness in writing even more than the second ending did, but the digression has a much clearer spiritual import and relevance for the ultimate audience. The first part of this ending, the farewell, is found in Ether 12:6–22, the second part, the expression of insecurity and excuses, which also contains farewell elements, is in vv. 23–41.

In his second ending, his first farewell, Moroni seemed to have had no central theme to develop and no rhetorical scaffold on which he could hang the various things he wanted to say. In this and in his last farewell, he has both. Here, his central theme is the importance of each individual coming to the Father through faith in the Son. The rhetorical scaffold, somewhat problematically as Hardy notes, is the same as that in Hebrews 11. Like Hebrews 11, this farewell begins with a definition of faith as things hoped for but not seen and then illustrates what faith in Christ is with a series of examples that begin with the phrase "by faith" or "it was the faith of." The examples illustrate great works one can do by faith but, especially, how by faith, one can come to know Jesus Christ. The following examples are included:

- Christ showing himself to the Nephites at Bountiful
- The priesthood callings — callings to "the holy order of God" — received by them of old
- Moses receiving the law on Sinai
- Alma and Amulek causing the prison to tumble
- Lehi and Nephi converting Lamanites while in prison
- Ammon and his brothers doing great work among the Lamanites
- The three Nephites obtaining the promise that they would not taste death
- The Brother of Jared penetrating the veil and seeing Christ
- The coming forth of the Book of Mormon because of the faith of those who composed it

The first and next to last examples Moroni gives are direct encounters with Christ, the central theme and call to action of the farewell. Moroni will add another example as he closes when, in v. 39, he tells us "I have seen Jesus, and . . . he hath talked to me face to face."

In that second ending, first farewell, Moroni's disdain for his future audience left little room for hope and an expectation of salvation in the latter days. Moroni implied that we faithless moderns are utterly

unlike the ancient mentors he so admired. In this second farewell, the disdain is gone. Immediately after giving his first example of what faith can do — the appearance of Christ to the faithful people in Bountiful — Moroni says the following:

> Because of the faith of men he has shown himself unto the world, and glorified the name of the Father, and prepared a way that thereby *others might be partakers* of the heavenly gift, that they might hope for those things which they have not seen. Wherefore, *ye* may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if *ye* will but have faith. (Ether 12:8–9)

Here, Moroni frames his latter-day readers as people who might join the ancients as partakers of the heavenly gift. Speaking to us directly, he describes us as people who can have the same kind of miraculous experiences as his beloved righteous predecessors had: "*ye* may also have hope . . . if *ye* will but have faith." The implication of this statement following his first example of faith among the ancients is that all the remaining examples are things we can and should emulate. This statement turns the list of miracles into a call to action. We may have experiences like those of the faithful ancients and, thereby, be incorporated into the divine community as they have been. Moroni ends this section of his second farewell, as he had ended his first farewell, by attributing the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to the faith of the ancients.[31]

Though it is not yet entirely absent as it will be in his final farewell, Moroni's treatment here of his insecurities and weaknesses is fundamentally different, much less self-focused and defensive, much more spiritually mature, than it was in the first farewell. In Mormon 8 and 9, Moroni spoke directly to his modern readers, both admitting (Mormon 8:12) and denying (Mormon 8:17) that the writing had faults or weaknesses. He framed writing problems as being an issue between him and his readers. He sought to deal with his insecurities by cajoling and threatening readers. In this second farewell, he frames writing problems as being an issue between him and God and then, separately, between readers and God. By engaging with God and receiving assurances from God, he mostly transcends his concerns about future readers rejecting his work because of his writing weaknesses.

Indeed, in this farewell, Moroni's weaknesses in writing become an occasion for both him and his readers to grow in faith, hope, and

31. Compare Ether 12:22 with Mormon 9:36–37.

charity. His readers are still threatened — "Fools mock, but they shall mourn" (Ether 12:26) — but the threat is brief and comes from God, not Moroni. By humbly acknowledging his weakness in writing, Moroni provides an example to his readers of what one must do to become strong in the things that were weak. He lays the predicate to himself become "mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared" (Ether 12:24), ultimately capable of inspiring readers through his words to "ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true," and then have Christ "manifest the truth of it unto [them], by the power of the Holy Ghost" (Moroni 10:4). In other words, his confession of weakness here equips Moroni to become a strong writer and, thereby, demonstrate the validity of the promise God makes in this farewell:

> If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. (Ether 12:27)

This promise comforts Moroni, as it should, because it will be fulfilled in Moroni 10. He says to God, "O Lord, thy righteous will be done" (Ether 12:29).

Moroni now accepts that whether future readers read his words charitably or not is a matter between them and God. If they do not, God will "prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly" (Ether 12:35). But Moroni now hopes for better things from the Gentiles. He prays "unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity" (Ether 12:36). He directly addresses and expresses love for his future readers: "And now I, Moroni, bid farewell unto the Gentiles, yea, and also unto my brethren whom I love, until we shall meet before the judgment-seat of Christ where all men shall know that my garments are not spotted with your blood" (Ether 12:38). Self and personal insecurities still obtrude as concern that his garments not be spotted with our blood and in another brief allusion in v. 40 to his weakness in writing: "And only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing." But unlike in his first ending, he here ends by directly addressing his modern readers with a powerful call to action:

> And now, I would commend you to seek this Jesus of whom

> the prophets and apostles have written, that the grace of God the Father, and also the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, which beareth record of them, may be and abide in you forever. Amen. (Ether 12:41)

The fourth ending

As just noted, Hardy reads Ether 12:6–41, the complex interweaving of the words of Nephi and Mormon with structure found in the book of Hebrews, as Moroni's second attempt to end the work. Acknowledging that the book of Ether continues after chapter 12, Hardy says, "It is striking that [Moroni] places his farewell in Ether 12, before he actually recounts the final and brutal annihilation of the Jaredites (Ether 13–15), but this arrangement allows him to avoid the sudden shift in tone or the softening of tragedy that would have resulted from following unmitigated disaster with his personal experience of divine affirmation."[32]

While his interpretation is, as always, insightful, in reading Ether 12 as Moroni's "second conclusion,"[33] Hardy does not adequately credit either Moroni's insecurity (so well documented elsewhere in *Understanding the Book of Mormon* and so clearly evident in Mormon 8 and 9 and still present in Ether 12) or his artfulness. My deviation here from Hardy's reading underscores both of these writerly attributes. Still lacking confidence in the power of his own voice but able to recognize the power and aptness of Ether's concluding narrative and final remarks, Moroni bade his readers farewell in Ether 12, then ended the Book of Mormon with another man's words, Ether's narrative in chapters 13–15. Moroni, thus, makes irrelevant his insecurities about his own ability to write well. Ether's final words address future readers eloquently and are as exactly adapted to the circumstances of Moroni as they are to those of Ether himself.

Moroni makes his original intention clear when he later sets up his fifth ending for the Book of Mormon. He begins the set up for his fifth ending as follows: "after having made an end of abridging the account of the people of Jared, I had supposed not to have written more" (Moroni 1:1). I have elsewhere celebrated the book of Moroni and am grateful Moroni added a fifth ending.[34] But though Ether 13–15 did not ultimately serve its original intended purpose — ending the Book of

32. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 264.
33. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon,* 254.
34. Wright and Larsen, "Holy Ghost."

Mormon — it should be read with that original intent in mind because it is the most literarily artful ending of the book. In this ending, as great literary artists typically do, Moroni reveals a profound truth by *showing* it dramatically rather than by *telling* it discursively.[35]

Reflecting his own now more hopeful outlook, Moroni begins this ending hopefully, anticipating the restoration of the Old and the coming of the New Jerusalem (Ether 13:1–13). Because God is sovereign and good, the history of the world he has created will end well. Remnants of Israel and allied Gentiles will be washed in the blood of the Lamb and will establish the two great capitals of righteousness, the Old and New Jerusalem. All the covenants God made with Abraham will be fulfilled by Abraham's faithful lineal and adopted descendants.

But before that happy day comes, Moroni suggests through his redaction of Ether's observations and prophesies, Satan will polarize humanity, dividing them into warring ideological, political factions who will self-righteously wage wars of annihilation against each other. Hugh Nibley succinctly describes the historical dynamic, that seems ever more pertinent to our own politics:

> Satan's masterpiece of counterfeiting is the doctrine that there are only two choices, and he will show us what they are. . . . [He] convinces us that we are making the vital choice when actually we are choosing between branches in his road. . . . Which one we take makes little difference to him, for both lead to destruction. This is the polarization we find in our world today. Thus we have the choice between Shiz and Coriantumr — which all Jaredites were obliged to make. We have the choice between the wicked Lamanites . . . and the equally wicked Nephites.[36]

Followers of Christ opt for neither axis of this false choice. They refuse to be polarized against fellow human beings for whom Christ died. They continue to see the humanity of fellow children of God and

35. James Tankard and Laura Hendrickson, "Specificity, Imagery in Writing: Testing the Effects of 'Show, Don't Tell,'" *Newspaper Research Journal* 17, no. 1–2 (January 1996), doi.org/10.1177/073953299601700105. For a convenient summary, see Wikipedia.org, s.v. "Show, Don't Tell," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Show,_don%27t_tell.

36. Hugh Nibley, from "Approaching Zion," as cited in Ryan Clark Werner, "What Was Really the Choice in the 2020 Election?" *Public Square Magazine*, 23 November 2020, publicsquaremag.org/politics-law/what-was-really-the-choice-in-the-2020-election/.

seek to establish a peace that balances as much as possible competing interests, achieving to the extent practicable fairness for all, the only kind of political settlement that can be stable in the long run. But we are prone to reject Christ's peaceful path, so using the words of Ether, Moroni artfully demonstrates what happens if we polarize and fanatically embrace one of the mammon-seeking options Satan puts before us.

It is hard to imagine a more powerful illustration of the vanity, the foolishness, the pointlessness of the unbridled pursuit of worldly wealth and power than Moroni's abridged account of the final contest between the Jaredites Shiz and Coriantumr: the image of people drunk with anger, fighting all day, sleeping upon their swords at night, only to rise and renew the slaughter the next day, dwindling from millions to 121, then fifty-nine, then just two, with Coriantumr leaning upon his sword to rest before raising it to smite off the head of Shiz, and finally just one "who fell to the earth, and became as if he had no life" (Ether 15:32). The phrasing, *as if he had no life*, suggests the Jaredites have become not one but none (apart from Ether, the witness of their demise). Once polarization has been taken to the limit, there is nothing left over which to rule.

So here in Ether's writing, Moroni has found a perfect ending for the Book of Mormon, an ending even more profoundly moving and illustrative of the vanity of worldly pursuits than Mormon's final description of the flesh, bones, and blood of his people, lying "upon the face of the earth, being left by the hands of those who slew them to molder upon the land, and to crumble" (Mormon 6:15). Ether's last words in the book of Ether do double duty, being as perfectly adapted to the circumstances of solitary Moroni as they were to Ether himself. "Now the last words which are written by Ether are these: Whether the Lord will that I be translated, or that I suffer the will of the Lord in the flesh, it mattereth not, if it so be that I am saved in the kingdom of God. Amen" (Ether 15:34).[37]

The fifth ending: imitatio Amaleki

Perfect as the Ether ending would have been, both in terms of literary power and in relieving Moroni of the hard task of himself composing a suitably profound conclusion for the text, Moroni did not ultimately

37. The word *amen* is regularly used to mark the ending of a section, which made it apt for ending the work as a whole. When Moroni composed his new ending (the Book of Moroni), he again used it as the last word (Moroni 10:34).

choose to end his book there. Fortunately, he added the first nine chapters of the Book of Moroni, all but the first of which quote others. Then in chapter 10, he took as his final literary model not the person most similarly situated to himself, the Jaredite Ether, but rather the person in his own culture most similarly situated, the Nephite Amaleki, who not coincidentally, was a very fine writer.

Moroni has been diligent in his study of scriptural rhetoric. As a consequence, the writing in his successive endings has consistently improved. His final model, Amaleki, will equip him again to increase the eloquence and spiritual power of this, his final farewell. Personal insecurity and expressions of concern about his weakness in writing will disappear. He will transcend himself and fully focus on us, his future readers and our wellbeing. The entire farewell will be structured as an exhortation, a powerful call to action. Moroni will exhort us to believe in and embrace the same powers of God that his dead mentors embraced. Those powers, he will assure us, are as available today as they ever have been. Totally transformed from what it had been in his dark second ending, Moroni's attitude toward us is now much more positive. As he now enjoins us to have hope and faith, he himself seems to feel hope for us and have faith in us. He now understands that we can aspire to be, and many of us will be, perfected in Christ, even as his dead mentors were perfected.

Among many other features of the final farewell, this change in tone may partly reflect the influence of Moroni's last mentor, Amaleki. Amaleki, like Moroni, lived in a time when the people had rejected Christ and no longer knew about him. And he lived in a time when there was no more revelation or prophecy (Omni 1:11). His only exposure to the gospel was in the record he had inherited and now kept. So Amaleki, like Moroni, had to commune with the dead to learn about and deepen his gospel knowledge. He learned of Christ by reading the four-hundred-year-old words of Nephi and Jacob. Almost everything he says about Christ is a direct quote of either Nephi's or Jacob's words.[38] Just as Amaleki had chronicled the end of Nephite civilization in the land of Nephi, Moroni will chronicle the end for the lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful. Just as Amaleki had passed his records on to King Benjamin, a prophet at the head of a new gospel dispensation,

38. Val Larsen, "Josiah to Zoram to Sherem to Jarom and The Big Little Book of Omni," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 44 (2021): 217–64, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/josiah-to-zoram-to-sherem-to-jarom-and-the-big-little-book-of-omni/.

who would restore the gospel and see many be born again, so Moroni will pass his record on to Joseph Smith, who will likewise restore the gospel and see the beginning of a great gathering of lost souls.

Thus, Moroni had many reasons for taking Amaleki as his model. And in addition to the reasons just mentioned, he had a kind of double warrant from his father for doing so. In Words of Mormon, probably originally an aside in the book of Mosiah, Mormon had celebrated the power and value of the small plates and twice mentioned Amaleki.[39] Then under Mormon's plan for the book as a whole, Amaleki was featured as the last author because when Mormon appended the small plates to his abridgement of the large plates, he made Amaleki, the final author in the small plates into the final author of the book as a whole. Thus, Mormon had given Moroni ample grounds for taking the text's last author, Amaleki, as his model while ending his own section of the Book of Mormon, the section that ultimately became the end of the book as we have it.

So, motivated perhaps by their parallel life circumstance and an implicit suggestion from Mormon, Moroni borrows from his model, Amaleki, rhetorically consequential structural features of his narrative, both macro and micro features, which I will now discuss. Amaleki's influence is especially apparent in Moroni 10, Moroni's concluding farewell, which is basically an expansion of Amaleki's words. But before turning to that, let us focus on a macro feature Moroni borrowed from Amaleki.

39. In suggesting that Amaleki, rather than Mormon, was the last author, I follow Clifford Jones, who persuasively argues that Words of Mormon was originally part of the book of Mosiah, the first part of which was lost with the 116 pages. Jones reads Words of Mormon as an aside Mormon inserted after abridging the large-plate account of Amaleki giving Nephi's small plates to Benjamin. Having written that account, he searched for and found the small plates, then inserted his aside on their value immediately after his account of Amaleki passing them to Benjamin. Jones explains why Joseph retained this portion of the translation (see Doctrine and Covenants 10:41) when the other 116 pages were taken to New York. He does not note—but it is worth mentioning—that the translation and retention of Words of Mormon just prior to the loss of the 116 pages was providential. It provided evidence to all immediately associated with the production of the Book of Mormon that God had anticipated the loss and provided for their replacement. See Clifford P. Jones, "That Which You Have Translated, Which You Have Retained," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 43 (2021): 1–64, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/that-which-you-have-translated-which-you-have-retained/.

Feature 1: Use of the penultimate position to illustrate the consequences of sin

Both *for* and *in* the book of Moroni, the next to last, the penultimate narrative element, focuses on the ultimate decline and/or destruction of a people. Relative to the entire book of Moroni, the penultimate narrative is the account of the Jaredites' decline and destruction in the book of Ether that Moroni used as his fourth ending. Within the book of Moroni, the penultimate narrative is the account of the Nephites' complete moral collapse and subjugation to Satan in Moroni 9. The rhetorical purpose of both accounts is to compellingly demonstrate what becomes of humanity if they utterly reject the gospel and light of Christ. These demonstrations of the downside are then followed by an upside exhortation to receive Christ.

Amaleki had used this penultimate position technique, in part, to resolve a rhetorical problem he faced as he concluded his small-plates history of Nephites in the land of Nephi.[40] His problem was this. While he could reasonably surmise, he did not know the fate of the last Nephite inhabitants of the land of Nephi, an important lacuna in the history he was concluding, the history of the Nephites in that land. Those inhabitants were Zeniff's revanchist returners, a migration that included Amaleki's brother. Given what he did know—the long destructive history of conflict between the Lamanites and Nephites that motivated $Mosiah_1$'s exodus, the continuing enmity and power of the Lamanites reflected in their battle with Benjamin's forces (Words of Mormon 1:12–14), the disastrous first attempt of Zeniff and others to return that resulted in the death of more than half of the returnees before the attempt was abandoned—Amaleki had every reason to believe that Zeniff's return ended with the bones of the returning Nephites scattered upon the land, unburied and unmourned.

But lacking firsthand knowledge of that fact, Amaleki resourcefully used the Jaredites as surrogates for Zeniff's returning Nephites. Communicating both residual Nephite love for their 400-year-old homeland and the futility of Zeniff's attempted return, Amaleki artfully wrote his historical narrative in a backward-looking reverse chronological and moral order. He first narrated the most recent and, from his point of view, entirely warranted and successful migration of $Mosiah_1$. Then going back in time, he narrated the also warranted

40. The analysis in this section summarizes an argument I make more fully in Larsen, "Big Little Book of Omni," 254–62.

but less successful migration of the Mulekites, a migration that had ended poorly but that was about to be redeemed by the restoration of lost language and scripture. He then recounted the also warranted but still less successful migration of the Jaredites, ending that narration as follows: "And the severity of the Lord fell upon them according to his judgments, which are just; and their bones lay scattered in the land Northward" (Omni 1:22). Amaleki used this account of Jaredite destruction as a surrogate for the one unwarranted migration he recounts, Zeniff's return to the land of Nephi, a return that was unwarranted because it, alone, was motivated by the rejection of guidance from God given to a prophet. The pattern in the sequence of narrations—the progressively worse outcomes of each successive migration Amaleki recounts—strongly suggests that the Zeniff migration will end as badly as the Jaredite migration ended, with their bones scattered on the land and no one left to mourn them.

Immediately following his account of the Jaredite's total destruction, Amaleki mentions that he will be giving the small plates to King Benjamin. He then exhorts his readers to come unto Christ and provides the brief summary of the gospel which will be discussed below. He concludes the tragic history of decline in the small plates with a brief account of Zeniff's failed attempt, followed by a second attempt to return to the Land of Nephi. But as noted above, the structure of his retrospective and morally retrogressing narrative suggests that his account of the Jaredites' final destruction implicitly tells us what happened to these unwise Nephites who rejected the guidance of God given to them by a prophet.

The remaining structural features Moroni borrowed replicate and expand on elements Amaleki included in his two-verse gospel précis, which I now quote in full:

> And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed, and knowing king Benjamin to be a just man *before the Lord*, wherefore, I shall deliver up these plates unto him, *exhorting* all men to come unto God, the Holy One of Israel, and believe in *prophesying*, and in *revelations*, and in *the ministering of angels*, and in *the gift of speaking with tongues*, and in *the gift of interpreting languages*, and in all things which are good; for *there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord*: and that which is evil cometh from the devil. And now, *my beloved brethren*, I would that ye should *come unto Christ*, who is the Holy One of Israel,

> and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. *Yea, come unto him*, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved. (Omni 1:25–26)[41]

Feature 2: A just man before the Lord receives the record

Neither Amaleki nor Moroni has a son who can inherit his record. But each knows of "a just man *before the Lord*" to whom he may pass the plates. For Amaleki, that man is King Benjamin. For Moroni it is Joseph Smith. David Bokovoy has noted that "any ritual activity in which a biblical author uses the formula 'before the Lord' can be considered an indication of either a temple experience or site."[42] Amaleki here uses that formula as he mentions Benjamin, who is best known for his great temple sermon. And just before Moroni addresses Joseph Smith directly in the second person as *you* (Ether 5:1), he uses that formula to describe those who will receive his record, a temple people in a temple time: "[the plates] shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean *before the Lord*. And in that day that they shall exercise faith in me, saith the Lord, even as the brother of Jared did, that they may become sanctified in me, then will I manifest unto them the things which the brother of Jared saw" (Ether 4:6–7). In his visions of the Son and his restoration of the Brother of Jared's temple veil experience, Joseph will be, like Benjamin and the Brother of Jared, a temple man, "a just man before the Lord."[43]

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41. One phrase in Amaleki's gospel précis Moroni does not use in chapter 10 is "endure to the end." Like the rest of his précis, Amaleki got that phrase from Nephi (who used it four times) and from Jacob (who used it one time). Its only other appearance is in 3 Nephi 15:9, where Christ used it. But Moroni did use the phrase to end his section of the Book of Mormon, not in the last, chapter 10 ending, but in Mormon 9:29, the second ending he composed. Thus, Moroni seems to have been influenced by Amaleki when composing both the second and fifth endings he composed for the book. In his fourth ending, Ether supplies all the words so there was no opportunity to quote Amaleki.
42. David E. Bokovoy, "Ancient Temple Imagery in the Sermons of Jacob," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021): 35, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/ancient-temple-imagery-in-the-sermons-of-jacob/.
43. D. John Butler, *The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men* (self-published, 2012), 96–99.

Feature 3: Structuring the final presentation of the gospel as an exhortation

Amaleki and Moroni each bring a record keeping tradition to a close. As each notes that his record will now close, he tells us that he will first exhort us to embrace the Gospel of Christ. So as noted above, Amaleki writes: "And it came to pass that I began to be old; and, having no seed . . . I shall deliver up these plates unto [Benjamin], *exhorting* all men" (Omni 1: 25). Moroni, likewise having no seed, writes: "And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of *exhortation* unto you" (Moroni 10:2). I will focus on the specific content of each man's exhortation in a moment because that content strikingly overlaps. But before turning to the overlapping content, it is worth noting that Moroni, like Amaleki, formulates his presentation of the gospel as an exhortation, an explicit call to action. He, thus, borrows from Amaleki the structural scaffold of his final farewell.

Feature 4: Exhortation to believe in and receive a specific set of spiritual gifts

Both Amaleki and Moroni live in a time when spiritual gifts are no longer present among the people. Describing the Land of Nephi in his time, Amaleki's father, Abinadom wrote that revelation and prophecy had ceased: "I know of no revelation save that which has been written, neither prophecy" (Omni 1:11). Describing the state of the people in his time, Moroni's father, Mormon wrote: "the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them. . . . They do not repent, and Satan stirreth them up continually to anger one with another" (Moroni 8:28, 9:4). In these benighted times, both Amaleki and Moroni understand the importance of the missing spiritual gifts and provide a list of spiritual gifts that have disappeared in their time. Moroni provides a longer list, but where the lists overlap, the gifts are mentioned in the same order: prophecy, ministering of angels, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues.[44]

Feature 5: Statement that all good gifts come from Christ

Immediately following his list of gifts of the spirit, Amaleki says the following: "for there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord: and that which is evil cometh from the devil" (Omni 1:25). Immediately

44. This list also overlaps with 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, which suggests parallel revelation or that each author is citing a shared Ur text.

following his list of gifts of the spirit, Moroni echoes Amaleki's gospel précis, saying: "I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ" (Moroni 10:18).

Feature 6: My beloved brethren

Moroni's use of "my beloved brethren" in the phrase just quoted is another token of Amaleki's influence on him. After listing the gifts, Amaleki wrote: "And now, *my beloved brethren*, I would that ye should come unto Christ" (Omni 1:26). Slightly varying Amaleki's words, Moroni combines what were distinct elements of Amaleki's message — the statement that all good gifts come from the Lord and the vocative *my beloved brethren*. He uses Amaleki's vocative *my beloved brethren* twice. Thus, he wrote: "I would exhort you, *my beloved brethren*, that ye remember that *every good gift cometh of Christ*. And I would exhort you, *my beloved brethren*, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Moroni 10:18–19). Moroni does not use the phrase *my beloved brethren* anywhere else in chapter 10. It appears only where it had previously appeared in Amaleki's précis.

Moroni says "I exhort you" or "I would exhort you" eight times. The seventh and eighth exhortations merit special attention. Seven and eight are important numbers in Hebrew scripture — *seven* being related to rest, completion, fullness, endings, *eight* being related to new beginnings[45] — and Moroni seems to understand and use these symbolic meanings. In the book of Moroni, chapter 7 is a seventh-day Sabbath sermon. It begins with a focus on the saints attaining the rest of the Lord:

> Wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the

45. Examples of eight signifying new beginnings include circumcision on the eighth day, baptism at age eight, eight people on Noah's ark, Jaredites crossing the ocean in eight ships, Lehi's eight years in the wilderness followed by a water passage to the Promised Land, and Aeneas being healed by Peter after eight years of sickness. I am indebted to my wife, Allison, for these and other examples. An example that illustrates both the terminus meaning of seven and the new beginning meaning of eight is Nehemiah 8:18, which mentions seven days of feasting, followed by a solemn assembly on the eighth day. For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of these numbers, see Alonzo Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 124, 129–31.

> rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven. (Moroni 7:3)

Like the seventh chapter in the book of Moroni, the seventh exhortation in Moroni 10 brings us to the terminus of our earthly life, in this case to the judgment bar. Moroni's seventh exhortation reads as follows: "I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God" (Moroni 10:27). The content of this seventh exhortation is, thus, consistent with scriptural meanings—terminus, end, completion—typically associated with the number seven. In Moroni 8, Mormon envisions all the saints gathered in heaven with God: "the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God" (Moroni 8:26). They attain this new life, this new beginning by coming unto Christ, which is the focus of the eighth exhortation in Moroni 10.

Features 7 and 8: Two invitations to come unto Christ

At the end of his gospel précis, Amaleki twice urges readers to come unto Christ. He writes, "And now, my beloved brethren, I would that *ye should come unto Christ*, who is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. *Yea, come unto him*" (Omni 1:26). Amaleki took the expression "come unto Christ" from Jacob (Jacob 1:7). The expression occurs in the Book of Mormon only four times, with the last two appearing as part of Moroni's eighth exhortation. In his eighth exhortation, Moroni, like his model, twice urges readers to come unto Christ, with phrasing that is nearly identical to that of Amaleki. Moroni writes, "I would exhort you that *ye would come unto Christ*. . . . *Yea, come unto Christ*" (Moroni 10:30, 32). Given the rarity of this phrase and the many other structural parallels between the rhetoric of Amaleki and that of Moroni, this structural similarity is unlikely to be an accident. It seems clear that in his eighth and final exhortation, Moroni has chosen to echo the final exhortation of his model, Amaleki.

The change in Moroni's outlook on life and especially his view of us is reflected in his exulting valedictory salutation, the last verse of Moroni 10 and of the Book of Mormon:

> And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you

> before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen. (Moroni 10:34)

All the confusion and fear of Moroni's first ending, all the darkness, depression, and self-doubt of his second, are gone. Moroni eagerly awaits his triumph and ours at "the *pleasing* bar of the great Jehovah," a place of judgment that can be pleasing[46] only if we have been transformed by grace, as Moroni has been, and have through that grace been qualified to join him and his mentors in the community of the redeemed that surround the thrones of God and Christ. Moroni now believes that we can be thus transformed. And the catalyst of that transformation for many will be his exhortation that we pray to know the truth of his words and the words of other prophets who speak to us in the pages of the Book of Mormon.

Given that catalyzing effect of his last words on so many of us, his modern readers, we are fortunate that Moroni worked so hard to be a better writer and a better man. We reap the benefit of his long labors as we read his fifth and final farewell in the Book of Mormon, his

46. Royal Skousen argues that *pleasing* should be replaced here and in Jacob 6:13 with *pleading* because *pleasing* does not make sense. For Jacob 6:13, which reads, "I bid you farewell, until I shall meet you before the pleasing bar of God, which bar striketh the wicked with awful dread and fear," the change from *pleasing* to *pleading* does seem to be justified by the context. In Moroni 10:27, where Moroni has just said, "wo unto them who shall do these things away and die, for they die in their sins, and cannot be saved," a pleading bar would have been more apt than a pleasing bar. But here in the context of all the promises that one can be made perfect in Christ (Moroni 10:30–33), *pleasing* seems at least as appropriate as *pleading*. Royal Skousen, "The Pleading Bar of God," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 21–36, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-pleading-bar-of-god/. Even though Skousen recommends *pleading* instead of *pleasing*—and incorporated it into *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022)—not all scholars agree with him. John Welch offers ten reasons why he disagrees with Skousen's interpretation and concludes: "In summary, based on these ten points, I see no viable basis for accepting the proposed conjectural emendation to replace the traditional *pleasing bar* with the problematical phrase *pleading bar*. . . . There is no adequate reason to think that Jacob and Moroni would have engraved the words equivalent to *pleading bar* on the gold plates, that the words *pleading bar* would have been revealed to Joseph Smith in the translation process, that Joseph would have thought of them himself, or that he would have dictated them to Oliver Cowdery. The term *pleasing bar* should be retained in the Book of Mormon, where it has been since 1829." John S. Welch, "Keep the Old Wine in Old Wineskins: The Pleasing (Not Pleading) Bar of God," *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 146–47, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol18/iss1/9/.

ultimate concluding message. The degree to which this fifth conclusion improves on the first three he wrote is apparent in even a cursory comparative reading. And while the fifth conclusion is not more artistically effective than the fourth, it is much more positive and much better calculated to incite us to come unto Christ and be saved. It, thus, more effectively achieves the rhetorical purpose of the Book of Mormon.

If we read closely, we can see not just that Moroni became a better writer and person but also how he accomplished these worthy tasks. He accomplished them by carefully studying the scriptures he carried with him. His study is evident in his many quotations of other writers, quotations that link his messages with theirs and make his summative messages resonate with or echo all that has preceded them. His close reading of his predecessors and use of them as models is especially evident in his use of the rhetorical scaffold of the righteous and skilled writer Amaleki.

Conclusion

In *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, a book published by Oxford University Press and meant to address both Latter-day Saint and non-LDS readers, Hardy brackets the question of historicity. He then demonstrates that the putative main authors of the Book of Mormon—Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—each have a distinctive personality, characteristic rhetorical strategies, alternative implied readers, and author-specific thematic concerns. And each of these writerly attributes seems to reflect the historical circumstances and life experiences of the author.

As befits a man who has no companions to read and respond to his writing, Moroni is the least confident of the three main authors. He is most engaged in a dialogue with the dead and is the most likely to use the words of others to express his message. In this article, I have highlighted indications on which Hardy did not focus, showing that Moroni is the man he purports to be. His use of Ether's words in his most artful attempt to end the Book of Mormon is what we would expect from a man who—wrongly, as it turns out—lacked confidence in his own rhetorical abilities. His reliance in the final chapter of his record on the rhetorical strategies of Amaleki, an author whom his father admired and cited and positioned as the book's last author, is likewise what we might expect from a man situated, as Moroni was, at the end of his life. If we read the Book of Mormon closely, we will discover that, as is typical of real lives, the trajectory of Moroni's life was shaped by the

circumstances into which he was born and by the choices he consciously made. In his case, good choices enabled him to transcend the darkness into which he was cast by his birth.

Moroni teaches us an important truth. In part, no doubt, because he did not have any alternative way to be with other people, Moroni spent much more time than is typical reading scripture. And he seems to have read the scriptures with extraordinary attention and care. He communicated his message using the words of others, in part, because his mind fused to an unusual degree with the minds of the prophets and other righteous people he found inscribed in the scriptural text. This encounter with scripture prepared him to trumpet forth the word of God to millions of his fellow human beings. We may profit from taking this prophet, Moroni, as our scripture-reading model, letting our lives fuse as his seems to have done with the righteous, real lives that are inscribed in scripture.

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