Journal of Book of Mormon Studies

Volume 9 | Number 2 Article 2

7-31-2000

# The Editor's Notebook

John L. Sorenson

NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title** The Editor's Notebook

**Author(s)** John L. Sorenson

**Reference** *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 3.

**ISSN** 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

**Abstract** The introduction to this issue is a discussion of the emphasis of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* as defined by the editors.

## THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

For three years we have been emphasizing that the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* is pitched to the level of the general intelligent reader, not the specialist. Despite a few possible lapses in meeting our own standard, we feel that our aim has been a wise one. Judging by feedback we have received from readers at both levels, general public and specialists, we believe we have more or less succeeded.

We continue to feel strongly that it is possible and highly desirable for informed researchers and writers to communicate with readers in the simplest, most straightforward language possible. We recently found a professor who feels as we do and phrases the need better than we might.

Gerard J. DeGroot, an American and chair of the Department of Modern History at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, had this to say in an opinion piece in the *Christian Science Monitor* (1 May 2000, p. 11):

"In 1998, the British Golden Bull award for academic pomposity was awarded to a Birmingham University professor for research entitled: 'The Measurement of Consumer Criteria for Manufacture Parameter Values in Biscuit Texture.' In other words, the good professor was trying to discover why people prefer crunchy cookies to 'squidgy' ones.

"Unlike previous recipients of the award, the professor took the accolade badly, accusing the Plain English Campaign (sponsors of the award) of crude populism.

"Academics everywhere—be they from the arts or sciences—produce pure research studied mainly by other academics. They apparently need jargon to define membership in their exclusive circle. Those who understand belong; those confused do not. . . .

"In order to give legitimacy to their work, academics mystify it, creating myriad magic circles to which only those who speak the secret language are admitted. Many of them have lost the ability to communicate, except in the sense of communicating with each other. . . .

"I have [a] . . . book on sexuality and social relations, a fascinating topic which deserves attention. Unfortunately, I've never been able to get beyond the first few sentences: 'When we turn our attention to theoretical discourses, our gaze falls on what the discourse itself sees, its visible. What is visible is the relation between objects and concepts that the discourse proposes. This is the theoretical problematic of a given theoretical discipline.'

"I'm proud to admit that I haven't a clue what that's about.

"But what really scares me is that an innocent student might actually think it's intelligent simply because it's incomprehensible. I don't understand why communication is such a problem for academics.

"Isn't teaching supposed to be about conveying knowledge? Perhaps academics feel that sophistication requires complexity, that simple expressions can't convey complicated ideas. But it's more than that. There seems to be a deep contempt for the public and a concomitant belief that any research that is understandable to the lay person is inferior—too populist.

"I recall meeting a colleague some years ago who proudly boasted that his latest book sold only 257 copies. He slept soundly knowing that only specialist libraries had bought it. Ordinary people hadn't managed to get their grubby fingers on it.

"It is a basic truth in education that people learn best that which they enjoy.

"Yet, within the ivory tower, there exists a strange prejudice against academic writing which is interesting or, heaven forbid, entertaining.

". . . The world is confusing enough without academics bringing darkness to every corner of light."

We continue to invite Latter-day Saint researchers who wish to communicate their studies of the Book of Mormon and related topics through the *Journal* to strive to meet Nephi's standard: "plainness unto my people" (2 Nephi 25:4).

Submitting Articles to the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*

Guidelines for preparing and submitting articles for publication in the *Journal* are available on the FARMS Web site (farms.byu.edu), by e-mail request to jbms@byu.edu, or by mail from FARMS. In general, authors should submit a detailed outline or abstract to the editors for approval before submitting a completed manuscript.