



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 21 | Number 2

Article 7

2009

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Hardy, Grant (2009) "Two More Waves," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 21 : No. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol21/iss2/7>

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NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Two More Waves

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Reference *FARMS Review* 21/2 (2009): 133-52.

ISSN 1550-3194 (print), 2156-8049 (online)

Abstract Review of *The Reader's Book of Mormon* (2008), edited by Robert A. Rees and Eugene England; and *The Book of Mormon, translated by Joseph Smith* (2008), introduction by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp.

TWO MORE WAVES

Grant Hardy

Review of Robert A. Rees and Eugene England, eds. *The Reader's Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008. 7 vols. in boxed set. 1048 pp. \$40.00.

Review of *The Book of Mormon*. Translated by Joseph Smith. Introduction by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008. xxxii + 602 pp. \$15.00.

Over twenty years ago, President Ezra Taft Benson issued a call to “flood the earth with the Book of Mormon.”¹ Since that time millions of copies have been printed and distributed, but the real challenge is not just getting copies into people’s hands; rather, it is persuading them to open the book and actually read it. While the standard blue missionary edition is inexpensive and ubiquitous, its evenly spaced, undulating verses—bobbing over an undercurrent of dense cross-references—have sometimes proven daunting to would-be-readers, particularly when the narrative itself includes scores of oddly named characters, multiple story lines, and chronological flashbacks, all set within an intricate, unfamiliar geography. When you add to this an archaic, somewhat awkward writing style, the result is a book that is readily recognized but seldom read. Even Latter-day Saints have at times found reading the Nephite record a struggle or a chore, and as for outsiders, Daniel Walker Howe’s recent comments in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *What Hath God Wrought* are probably an accurate

1. Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, November 1988, 4.

assessment: “The Book of Mormon should rank among the great achievements of American literature, but it has never been accorded the status it deserves, since Mormons deny Joseph Smith’s authorship, and non-Mormons, dismissing the work as a fraud, have been more likely to ridicule than read it.”² Despite the fact that most readers of the *Review* can testify to the spiritual and literary power of the Book of Mormon, these qualities are not readily evident to everyone, and absent a strong religious motivation, many outsiders will see little reason to bother with this literary curiosity.

The situation with the Bible might be similar, but publishers—recognizing that people read the Bible for different reasons—have flooded the market with hundreds of specialized editions, from the *NLT Life Recovery Bible* and the *NCV Livin’ Out Your Faith Bible* to the *NIV Power of a Praying Woman Devotional Bible*, the *TNIV Faithgirlz! Bible*, and the *NKJV Lighting the Way Home Family Bible* (with illustrations by Thomas Kinkade). Surely there is an element of overkill here, mixed with a healthy regard for profit, but Christians have been eager to repackage the Bible in order to reach ever-broader and more diverse audiences, and they have done so very successfully. Perhaps there is a lesson here for lovers of the Book of Mormon. Once someone has thumbed through the blue missionary version and set it aside, there is little reason to give it a second thought later, whereas a new edition, emphasizing particular features, might be intriguing enough to warrant another look.

Starting in the 1990s, Latter-day Saints began to publish new versions of the Book of Mormon with alternative formatting. These include Donald Parry’s *Book of Mormon Text Reformatted According to Parallelistic Patterns* (FARMS, 1992),³ Thomas Valletta’s *Book of Mormon for Latter-day Saint Families* (Bookcraft, 1999), *The Book of Mormon: Heirloom Edition* (Deseret Book, 2001), *The Book of Mormon: Family Heritage Edition* (Covenant, 2003), my own *Book*

2. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 314.

3. Revised edition published as *Poetic Parallelisms in the Book of Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, 2007).

of *Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), and the Doubleday edition of the Book of Mormon (2004). It might appear that in scripture publishing, as in so much else, Latter-day Saints are following the lead of evangelical Christian marketers, and indeed there is ample precedent. In 1920, when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints first printed the Book of Mormon in verses arranged into double columns with chapter headings and footnotes, it was simply adopting the conventions of the King James Bible. The implicit message of the formatting was “This is holy scripture, just like the Bible.”

Nowadays, however, the King James Version is no longer the most widely used English Bible (the New International Version, which has been outselling the KJV since the 1980s, is the new standard Bible for most American Christians, including my most religiously conservative students here in North Carolina).⁴ I cannot speak for other recent editors of the Book of Mormon, but one of my goals was to replicate what the church did in 1920, that is, to present Latter-day Saint scripture in a familiar biblical form, which today means the paragraphs, quotation marks, and poetic stanzas that characterize every modern translation. The strong, pervasive editing of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni—which is unlike anything found in the Bible—makes this modern-style formatting even more appropriate for the Book of Mormon. The page layout of the current official edition (1981) no longer sends the message “This is scripture” and in fact probably constitutes a discouragement rather than an invitation to many potential readers, even those who

4. Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 149. Despite stiff competition from other modern translations, the New International Version has swept the field with more than 300 million copies distributed since its publication in 1978 (Eric Gorski, “Top-selling Bible in North America to be Revised,” Associated Press article, 1 September 2009). A news release from April 2008 reported that in a survey conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals, an organization that claims to represent 40 million evangelical Christians, two-thirds of participating leaders named the NIV as their preferred Bible (www.christianpost.com/article/20080411/niv-bible-tops-list-by-evangelical-leaders/index.html, accessed 30 September 2009). Even the Gideons, famous for providing free Bibles to hotel rooms, recognize that King James English no longer speaks to Americans and have consequently started distributing other translations.

already revere the Bible. This is an issue that may someday need to be addressed. Those who want to expand the audience for the Book of Mormon will continue to repackage the sacred text into volumes they hope readers will find convenient and intriguing.

Two recent publications have taken up this challenge in quite different ways. Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon*, edited by Robert Rees and the late Eugene England, divides the Book of Mormon into seven small paperback volumes, each of which begins with a personal essay (a form much beloved by England) written by a prominent Latter-day Saint author reflecting on the themes and meaning of the chapters that follow. The format was explicitly intended to mirror the enormously popular Pocket Canons published by Canongate (in the United Kingdom) and Grove/Atlantic (in the United States) beginning in 1999, in which individual books of the Bible in the King James Version are paired with introductions by writers such as E. L. Doctorow, Charles Frazier, Doris Lessing, A. S. Byatt, P. D. James, Bono, and the Dalai Lama. The second example, Penguin's Book of Mormon, with an introduction by Laurie Maffly-Kipp, takes the familiar form of the renowned Penguin Classics series. Rees and England's edition is the more ambitious of the two projects, though I suspect that the Penguin volume will, in the end, be more successful. We can assess these works on two criteria—how they handle the text of the Book of Mormon and how well they realize the goals they have set for themselves. We can also ask whether they offer anything to Latter-day Saints who are quite comfortable with their standard copies of the scriptures, the ones they have marked up for years.

Textual Issues and Readability

Both of these new editions had to confront an obstacle unknown to Bible publishers, namely, the fact that the text of the Book of Mormon is relatively fixed. While every new biblical translation can lay claim to authentically representing the best Hebrew and Greek texts in some way or another, the words of the English Book of Mormon were revealed to Joseph Smith and any updating of the language must be authorized by the church. For example, there were enough concerns

about paraphrases like Timothy Wilson's *Mormon's Story* (1993) and Lynn Matthews Anderson's *Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon* (1995, though circulating in electronic form before then) to elicit a warning from Salt Lake:

From time to time there are those who wish to rewrite the Book of Mormon into familiar or modern English. We discourage this type of publication and call attention to the fact that the Book of Mormon was translated "by the gift and power of God," who has declared that "it is true." (Book of Mormon title page; D&C 17:6.) The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon was "the most correct of any book on earth." (*History of the Church*, 4:461.) It contains "the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ." (D&C 20:9.)

When a sacred text is translated into another language or rewritten into more familiar language, there are substantial risks that this process may introduce doctrinal errors or obscure evidence of its ancient origin. To guard against these risks, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve give close personal supervision to the translation of scriptures from English into other languages and have not authorized efforts to express the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon in familiar or modern English.⁵

This means that, although there have been numerous changes in the text of the Book of Mormon over the past 180 years (nearly all grammatical or stylistic in nature), at any particular time only the current official version is canonical. So given these significant textual constraints, how does one repackaging the Book of Mormon to reach a wider audience? How might someone make the Nephite scripture fresh and engaging, without changing the words (or running afoul of the church's legitimate interest in preserving the purity of the text and its doctrine)?

5. "Modern-Language Editions of the Book of Mormon Discouraged," *Ensign*, April 1993, 74. See also Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Delighting in Plainness: Issues Surrounding a Simple Modern English Book of Mormon," *Sunstone*, March 1993, 20–29.

The first thing to recognize is that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints asserts copyright ownership of the official 1981 text, and consequently, publishers unaffiliated with the church have to use other editions. In my case, I reproduced the 1920 version, now in the public domain. I was happy to do so because the editing for the 1981 text was rather light—it differs from the 1920 edition by only about 150 words (out of nearly 270,000)—and because it would mark my reader’s edition as a study aid rather than a rival to the canonical version. Rees and England have instead opted to use the 1830 edition:

The text reprinted in this series comes from the first edition (1830) and retains its nineteenth-century usage; although a few glaring typesetting flaws have been corrected, no attempt has been made to regularize grammar and spelling. This should make reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure, hopefully full of possibilities for deeper insights into the layers of meanings and messages contained therein. (1:vii)

This is a defensible choice. The 1830 text is the “original” publication, and with its full paragraphs, longer chapters (identified by Roman numerals), and lack of verse numbers, it certainly looks different from what Latter-day Saints typically see in their personal scripture study. Furthermore, there has been something of a faithful, countercultural tradition of reading the 1830 edition, at least since it became more widely available with Wilford Wood’s reprinting of it in 1958.⁶ For instance, Hugh Nibley once pronounced the first edition “the most readable,” noting that “for years this writer [Nibley himself] used only the first edition in his classes, and it is still by far the best. It is full of mistakes, but they are obvious ones.”⁷ Similarly, Eugene England, as he was conceptualizing this project, wrote to contributors in 2000, saying, “I have been rereading the Book of Mormon in the original

6. Wilford C. Wood, ed., *Joseph Smith Begins His Work* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1958). The RLDS Church published a facsimile edition in 1970, and Deseret Book followed suit in 1980. There are now some half-dozen 1830 versions in print (including one for Kindle), and the 1830 text is widely available on the Internet.

7. Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 4. This book first appeared in 1967.

edition over the summer, and it has been enlightening and very moving” (1:ix).

So what is it like to read the 1830 version of the Book of Mormon? Sometimes it is jarring, in a good way, just to see familiar words in a different place on the page. Both the longer chapters (the current chapter divisions were introduced in 1879) and the elimination of verse designations foster reading in context and longer reading sessions. In addition, the inability to easily locate particular phrases provides a strong disincentive for proof-texting (indeed, passages quoted in the individual introductions of the Signature edition appear without references, though page numbers would have been helpful). I suspect that Latter-day Saints who read the Book of Mormon in this new edition—with its traditional format—will see new things in the stories and sermons, details that had previously escaped their notice. However, the extended chapters and paragraphs call for greater concentration and a longer attention span than is usual for contemporary readers. It is easy to get lost in the sea of undifferentiated words. A few specific observations follow.

Original Chapters

Royal Skousen argues that the 1830 chapter divisions represent demarcations that were on the gold plates.⁸ This means that the original chapters may reflect the ways in which Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni themselves understood and organized their narratives. Reading 2 Nephi IX (modern chaps. 16–22 = Isaiah 6–12) as a single chapter brings out the themes of God’s judgment and subsequent offers of salvation to recalcitrant Israel; Alma XVI (Alma 30–35; 28 pages in the Rees/England edition!) links Korihor with the Zoramites and emphasizes the connections between Alma’s and Amulek’s sermons at Antionum; Alma XIX (Alma 39–42) encourages readers to perceive all of Alma’s words to Corianton as a single, extended argument; and Helaman V (Helaman 13–16) gives us the entirety of Samuel the Lamanite’s prophecies, as well as the reaction

8. Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 85.

of the people of Zarahemla, in a single sweep. We might also note that Orson Pratt's modern chapter breaks not only created new disjunctions in the narrative, but also regularly erased pauses in the original text. For instance, in 1830 there were chapter shifts between what is now 1 Nephi 19:21 and 19:22, and between Mosiah 13:24–25, Mosiah 28:19–20, Alma 13:9–10, 3 Nephi 21:21–22, 3 Nephi 23:13–14, 3 Nephi 26:5–6, and 3 Nephi 27:22–23.

1830 Paragraphs

Unlike the chapter divisions, the paragraphing of the first edition was not indicated in either the original or printer's manuscript. In fact, the non-Mormon typesetter, John H. Gilbert, later recalled that "every chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end," and it was he who added both the punctuation and the paragraphing to the 1830 printing.⁹ Unfortunately, he edited according to nineteenth-century tastes, and the result (faithfully reproduced by Rees and England) is both overpunctuated with commas and underparagraphed with blocks of text that sometimes go on for pages. The paragraphing is rather naïve—as might be expected from someone who had never seen the text before and was anxious to get a printing job done. In general, Gilbert used "it came to pass" as a paragraph marker, and he started a new paragraph at every occurrence (except when it appeared in consecutive sentences), even when there was no shift in topic.

Thumbing through Rees and England's volume is like looking at a facsimile of the 1830 edition, where regular indentations followed by "and it came to pass" is the most eye-catching feature of the book. The same paragraphing was retained until the text was printed in separate verses in 1879, and it is no wonder that Mark Twain, encountering the Book of Mormon in Gilbert's paragraphs, famously joked of Joseph

9. Gilbert's entire memorandum (dated 8 September 1892) is reproduced in Royal Skousen, "John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). The statement is on p. 402 (p. 3 of Gilbert's memorandum). Or see Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 2:544.

Smith that “and it came to pass’ was his pet [i.e., his favorite]. If he had left that out, his Bible would have been only a pamphlet.”¹⁰ Gilbert’s method works well enough for 1 Nephi, where “and it came to pass” is fairly common, but when the genre shifts from narrative to sermon or direct discourse, the strings of words without a break can seem nearly interminable. In 2 Nephi I the first paragraph is four and a half pages long, and the second is two and a half; Alma’s famous exclamation “O that I were an angel” comes midway through a three-and-a-half-page paragraph (vol. 4:117; Alma 29:1); two entire chapters in the standard edition are presented as a single six-page paragraph (6:6–12; Helaman 14–15); and Jesus’s recital of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi begins rather unobtrusively three-quarters of the way through a four-page paragraph (6:55; 3 Nephi 12:3).

Deviations from the Text

Given their fidelity to the 1830 chapters and paragraphs, I was surprised by Rees and England’s deletions of text. It comes as a bit of a shock when the book begins with “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents . . .” without either Moroni’s title page or Nephi’s introduction to his first book. In fact, nearly all of the original headnotes to both entire books and specific chapters are missing (e.g., 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Alma, Alma III, V, VII, XII, XIII, XVII, XVIII, XIX, Helaman, Helaman III, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi, and Moroni IX). It was clearly an editorial decision to delete the words that John Gilbert had set in italics—perhaps as an attempt to “make the reading of the text fresh for readers” (1:ix)—but those words appear in the original manuscript and thus were apparently on the gold plates. To delete them seems unwarranted, particularly when the omission makes it difficult to follow the narrative. For instance, in both Alma XVIII (chap. 38) and XIX (chaps. 39–42) Alma is addressing his sons, but in the former chapter Shiblon’s name is mentioned only once apart from the headnote, and in the later chapter Corianton’s name is never mentioned. The title page and the headnotes are integral to the book’s

10. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad; Roughing It* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 617. *Roughing It* was first published in 1872.

coherence. (I personally would have also included the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses.)

Nonstandard Usage

The 1830 text is characterized by an awkwardness of language that will no doubt be fresh to most unsuspecting readers, but it may also prove distracting. The ungainly aspects include a great deal of subject-verb disagreement (such as “the tender mercies of the Lord is over all,” 1:3–4), shifting tenses (“Behold, we have took of their wine, and brought it with us,” 5:57), run-ons abetted by odd (over-) uses of commas (“ye shall write these sayings, after that I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they which have seen me, and been with me in my ministry, . . . [the sentence continues for several more lines],” 6:65), archaic verb forms (*a journeying*, *shew*), inconsistent spellings (*deliteth* and *delighteth* just two lines apart, 1:93; “all things had become *knew/new*,” also just two lines apart, 6:63), and nonstandard spellings such as *adultry*, *Camorah* (4:67, 7:22), and *as suredly* (for *as surely*, 7:92).

Rees and England note that they have corrected “a few glaring typesetting flaws” (1:vii), but they have still left plenty for readers to discover on their own, such as “arrest” the scriptures instead of “wrest” (4:56; Alma 13:20), “Gadanton the nobler” instead of “robber” (5:106; Helaman 3:23); “hoops” for “hoofs” (6:79; 3 Nephi 20:19); “with healings in his wings” rather than “healing” (6:91; 3 Nephi 25:2), and “eye singled” instead of “single” (7:28; Mormon 8:15). And as is often the case with large typesetting projects, Signature occasionally introduces brand-new errors into the 1830 text: “bound with the hands of iniquity” rather than the original “bands of iniquity” (3:72; Mosiah 23:12) and “and now blessed were they” instead of “how blessed were they” (7:3; 4 Nephi 1:8).

As one progresses through the text, these quirks can become less bothersome, but since nearly every page offers up an example of one kind or another, the 1830 version tends to bring out one’s inner proof-reader. For many, stumbling over the oddities of the presentation will prove a distraction from the contents of the book, which is unfortunate since the Book of Mormon is, in many ways, an impressive narra-

tive. The 1830 text combines a rather rigorous composition (in which Nephite writers keep track of hundreds of names and places, present tightly crafted theological arguments, offer internal textual allusions, and track the passing years precisely) with an idiom that suggests the humbleness of folk art. The result is something like listening to physics lectures delivered by a professor with a thick Southern drawl. The overall impact seems to highlight the nineteenth-century, homespun nature of the book's origins rather than its claims as an ancient record (though as Royal Skousen has shown, the original language of the Book of Mormon was not exactly that of Joseph Smith's America, or even the King James Bible).¹¹

There are various explanations for the Book of Mormon's awkward language, and indeed there are times when readers may want to focus on that feature in as much detail as possible (a type of analysis that will be facilitated by Royal Skousen's recent Yale edition);¹² but for a publication that seeks to "make reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure" (1:vii), the 1830 text is probably not ideal. In reprinting that early version, the editors have, I think, unwittingly encouraged their most careful readers to adopt a critical, perhaps even condescending, attitude to the words in front of them, although those who make it all the way through the book may respond not with suspicion but rather with unmitigated gratitude that some committee has revised the official edition by cleaning up the messiness that makes a proofreading stance nearly irresistible. If the commitments of Rees and England had been to the Book of Mormon itself rather than to the 1830 edition as a kind of period piece, their version could have benefited immensely from doing a little more with the text. They might have rearranged it into shorter, more intelligent paragraphs, fixed a greater percentage of the typographical mistakes, and regularized the grammar and spelling.

11. Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 28–38; see also his "Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon," *Insights* 25/5 (2005).

12. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Or, alternatively, they might have simply used the 1840 edition, which is what Laurie Maffly-Kipp did. This allows her to present an authentic, historical version of the Book of Mormon that is nevertheless much easier to read. As she explains:

The Penguin Classics edition of the Book of Mormon is based on the 1840 edition published by Joseph Smith Jr. in Nauvoo, Illinois. This was the last edition that Smith himself edited. Smith labored over the text, correcting grammatical errors and changing the words that he thought had been copied incorrectly. This version was chosen for the Penguin Classics edition because it makes for a cleaner text than the original 1830 edition (of which, as one will recall, there were hundreds of different copies), and because it is the one that seems closest to the understanding of Joseph Smith Jr. at the height of his leadership of the Latter-day Saints. (p. xxxi)¹³

This seems to me a better choice (even if it does nothing about the long paragraphs). Maffly-Kipp is interested in presenting the Book of Mormon as a piece of American history, so she takes fewer liberties with the text than Rees and England do, and she has left the updating to Smith himself. Apparently many of the things that seem strange to readers today also bothered the Prophet, and in the second and third editions (1837 and 1840), he made pervasive changes. As noted earlier, however, these were virtually all matters of grammar and spelling, with only a handful of substantive revisions—for example, “mother of the son of God” (1 Nephi 11:18), “yea, even *the Son of the Eternal Father*” (1 Nephi 11:21; 13:40; compare 11:32), “*or out of the waters of Baptism*” (1 Nephi 20:1), “king Benjamin/Mosiah” (Mosiah

13. The description of “hundreds of different copies” is a bit puzzling, but Maffly-Kipp elsewhere explained that because “uncorrected sheets were also kept as part of the [1830] print run . . . nearly each of the copies was unique and contained slightly different versions of the text” (p. xiv). As Latter-day Saint scholar Janet Jenson has noted, “With just the 41 changes so far discovered, it is mathematically possible that each of the 5,000 copies [of the first edition] could be unique.” See her “Variations Between Copies of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 13/2 (1973), 215. For the 1837 edition, Smith corrected scribal errors by consulting the printer’s manuscript; in 1840 he examined the original manuscript as well.

21:28), and “the Son <of> the Only Begotten of the Father” (Alma 5:48; 13:9). Maffly-Kipp comments on just one such revision: “*white/pure* and delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:6), which gained some notoriety when the 1981 edition returned to Smith’s 1840 reading of “pure” (pp. 31–32). So the Penguin volume offers a fresh look (at least for Latter-day Saints) in that it retains the original chapters and paragraphs, while eliminating a high proportion of the textual annoyances likely to be perceived by contemporary readers.

The original 1840 edition included a fair number of obvious typographical errors, and Penguin has corrected most of these. Among those missed, however, are the following:

misspellings—testimoney (p. 93), plainness (p. 120), repententh (p. 167), perservation (p. 253), stubbornness (p. 319), stired (p. 430), iniquity (p. 451), and Isarel (p. 557)

wrong words—“precious unto saw” for “precious unto him” (p. 139), “the time . . . is not for distant . . . yet I trust their remaineth” (p. 173), “but own that they may foresee” rather than “but now that they may foresee” (p. 217) “I say unto, yea” (pp. 320, 321), and “give need” instead of “give heed” (p. 335)

dittography—“in the the repentance” (p. 270), “after the the manner” (p. 375), “I could not not make a full account” (p. 555)

Despite the number of errors listed here, however, the Penguin edition has a couple thousand fewer grammatical and textual problems than the Signature edition does. The references above are all to 1840 typos that have been retained, but as might be expected, a few new mistakes have crept into the text, including these: “be broker [broken] and be snared” (p. 93); “How [Howl], O gate; cry O city” (p. 101); “curry [carry] them forth unto the remnant of our seed” (p. 116); “now, O Kin [King]” (p. 204); and “are specter [a respecer] to persons” (p. 592). Any suspicious readings can be easily checked against a very handy online facsimile of the 1840 edition.¹⁴

14. <http://bookofmormononline.net/1840> (accessed 5 October 2009).

Introductions and the Impact of Design

According to Robert Rees's general introduction, the Signature edition was intended as (1) a tribute to Eugene England, who initiated the project in 2000 and then tragically died the next year, and (2) a means by which readers might be moved "to read the book more deeply and more personally, to let their experience and inspiration enlighten their own and others' readings of the text, to keep the book alive in the minds and hearts of all who come to it openly" (1:xv). As to the first of these goals, let me note that Eugene England is certainly deserving of remembrance and commemoration (full disclosure: Gene came into my life at a critical juncture and was soon thereafter a professor in the class in which I met my wife. I will be eternally grateful for that experience, and there have been many times in the eight years since his passing when I have longed to talk with him). Posthumous literary projects are always difficult endeavors, and Robert Rees has been a true friend in seeing this one through to its conclusion, even though, as he notes, had Gene lived on he might well have chosen to do things differently. More than anything, I miss Gene's voice in these volumes. I wish that Rees would have included a few excerpts that convey Gene's love for the Book of Mormon, perhaps something from his introduction to *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* (Deseret Book, 1989).

What we do hear, however, are the voices of Gene's friends in the personal essays at the beginning of each volume. This juxtaposition of private musings and public canon is the primary way in which the Signature edition attempts to foster "deep insights into the layers of meanings and messages" of the Book of Mormon (1:vii). So does it work? It is often moving to hear people speak candidly of their lives and the way they have been affected by the Book of Mormon. (I know that these essays are meant to be read, but the nature of the genre makes it seem as if they were overheard.) The overall effect, however, is more akin to a testimony meeting—albeit in an exceptionally well-spoken, thoughtful ward—than an academic experience. The focus is always on feelings, anecdotes, homilies, and modern applications rather than on the text itself, which is inevitably loosely paraphrased.

As might be expected, some essays are stronger than others. I enjoyed William Wilson's stories of service in light of King Benjamin's address and Alma's call at the Waters of Mormon to bear one another's burdens. And it was a pleasure to hear from someone (Linda Hoffman Kimball) who first encountered the Book of Mormon as an adult.

If analyzed critically, though, most of the essays are less than entirely satisfying. For instance, Susan Howe vividly describes two African converts who had immigrated to Britain and wonders how "the journey of Lehi and his family might be useful to them as a spiritual guide" (1:xxii). I wish that she had asked them directly, since they were all in the same London ward together. Claudia Bushman shares, refreshingly, some of her frustrations with the Book of Mormon: the sparseness of the record, the dullness of the battles, and the fact that the editors omitted "descriptions of everyday life, which would have brought the lives of these strange people closer to us" (2:xxi). Yet when she frankly confesses that "the beauties of Isaiah elude me," we might wonder if she was the best choice to introduce Second Nephi. And not a single essayist comments on what difference reading the 1830 edition made to his or her understanding of the Book of Mormon. But again, this would be the wrong attitude to take in testimony meeting, and it's probably the wrong approach to these small volumes. They are lovely expressions of faith and a fitting tribute to Gene England (though the belated nature of the project gives it a "passing of a generation" feel—several of the contributors grew up in the 1930s and the youngest were born around 1950).

As a whole, Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon* is probably less successful than the Pocket Canons it emulates. Aside from Latter-day Saints, devout Christians who care about the meaning of scripture tend to gravitate toward modern translations, while nonbelievers, viewing the Bible primarily as literature, much prefer the King James Version with its sonorous cadences and seventeenth-century phrasing. This explains the popularity of the Pocket Canons, which were aimed at reintroducing the Bible to the religiously indifferent, but reintroducing it as great literature. Thus in each small volume a literary introduction leads directly into a literary rendering of scripture.

The volumes of the *Reader's Book of Mormon*, by contrast, pair evocative essays with a version of the text that is considerably less literary than the one Latter-day Saints are used to reading. And it is hard to imagine the appeal to either lapsed Mormons or non-Mormons, who are faced with a text that is either less polished than they remember or less graceful than almost anything they have ever read.

Yet there is one way in which the Signature edition is a triumph. As with the Pocket Canons, the individual volumes are marvelously designed. Ron Stucki does not receive any mention in the general introduction, but the covers that he created are magnificent.¹⁵ Each features a striking black-and-white photograph that responds in some way to the introductory essay. A hammer pounds out a metal plate for “Big Lessons from Little Books” (2 Nephi IV–Words of Mormon), a beggar clutching a plastic cup represents “In the Service of Our Fellow Beings” (Mosiah), and overgrown ancient ruins herald “Last Words” (4 Nephi–Moroni).¹⁶ To my mind, these illustrations nearly always capture something of the tone and content of the Book of Mormon

15. Stucki, who has been a designer at Deseret Book and also with the 2002 Winter Olympics, is now senior designer at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

16. I have two quibbles here. The first is that the covers should have listed the chapters inside by Roman numerals for consistency. For example, “Alma 20–Helaman 4” really means “Alma XX–Helaman IV,” or in the Arabic numerals associated with modern chapter divisions, Alma 43–Helaman 12. The second, more consequential, complaint is that I would have divided the volumes in different places. The first ends with 2 Nephi III (2 Nephi 4). It would have been better to conclude with 2 Nephi 5, in which Nephi brings his narrative to a close with a brief editorial comment (vv. 29–34). After that chapter, Nephi’s writings consist entirely of preaching and prophecy; he never tells another story either from his own life or from the history of his people. Similarly, I would have kept Alma XX (Alma 43–44) in the fourth volume. Presumably England and Rees thought that the account of the Zoramite war belonged in the second half of Alma, with the rest of the war chapters, but this is a mistake. Not only does chapter 44 complete the original book of Alma (“And thus ended the record of Alma, which was wrote [sic] upon the plates of Nephi,” Alma 44:24), it also provides the conclusion for the conversion stories of both the people of Ammon and the Zoramites (key narratives of vol. 4). The Amalickiahite war that begins in Alma 46 is a separate conflict, and it seems more appropriate to begin the “Nephites at War” volume with a prophecy of annihilation rather than with a stunning victory. On the other hand, I quite liked the division of the book of Helaman. It made sense to add Helaman 1–12 to the end of Alma and then include the prophecies of Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 13–16) with the account of their fulfillment at the time of Jesus’s birth and death in 3 Nephi.

chapters inside. The entire set of seven volumes is enclosed within a handsome slipcase executed in black and gold. As much as anything inside, the appealing size of these small books, combined with the exquisite covers, makes them very inviting to potential readers. For instance, my young son, a somewhat reluctant reader, thought he could make it through these volumes one at a time (with the promise of a Book of Mormon action figure at the end of each), and he was even willing to take them to school with him since they don't exactly look like scriptures—an important consideration when your entire school has fewer than half a dozen Latter-day Saint students.

The Penguin Book of Mormon is much less ambitious than the Signature edition—no restructuring of the text, no talk of “lessons for our own lives” or making “reading the Book of Mormon a new adventure” (both phrases are from the brief note at the beginning of each of the Signature volumes)—and consequently its intentions are more fully realized. There is a certain dignity in simply reprinting the 1840 text, with most of the typos corrected, as an American classic. Perhaps because the Signature edition was produced by Mormons for Mormons, they could virtually ignore Joseph Smith and concentrate instead on the Nephite narratives. Indeed, Joseph's name appears nowhere on the covers or the opening pages (I think there is only a single reference to him in the entire work, on p. x of vol. 1). By contrast, Laurie Maffly-Kipp puts Joseph Smith front and center in an introduction that does an admirable job of situating the Book of Mormon in its modern American context. She provides the sort of comprehensive overview that outsiders need, including information on the structure of the text, its production, early reactions to it, and its place in contemporary Mormonism. While her discussions of the Book of Mormon in relation to the Bible, theories of the origins of American Indians, and claims of modern revelation break no new ground, she is generally well-informed and reliable. The tone of her introduction is religiously neutral and academic, as befits someone in the Religious Studies Department at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, and although Maffly-Kipp is not herself a believer, the Penguin edition is nevertheless very respectful of the book's religious claims. She refers

to Smith as the “author/translator” (p. vii), but the cover, graced by the familiar C. C. A. Christensen depiction of Moroni and Joseph Smith at the Hill Cumorah, simply reads “Translated by Joseph Smith, Jr.”

A few of the details from Maffly-Kipp’s introduction are not quite right, as when she asserts that “the Lamanites kill off Mormon and his son Moroni” (p. ix), even though the latter event is nowhere mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Similarly, Joseph Smith did not exactly “announce that he was a prophet chosen by God” in the 1830 title page (p. xiv), the phrase “verily I say unto you” is not pervasive (p. xx; aside from two instances, it is used exclusively by Jesus in 3 Nephi), the introduction to the official 1981 edition is hardly “substantial” (p. xxiv), and Ether never speaks of a “new Bible” (p. xxv). Such criticisms can be multiplied, but the Book of Mormon is a complex text and it is difficult to get everything right. Even the authors of the Signature essays, who know the Book of Mormon well, occasionally get confused (there were not “three days of light” at the Savior’s birth, 1:xiv; it is Moroni, not Mormon, who says, “I speak unto you as if ye were present,” 3:xxi; and the stripling warriors never fought under Moroni’s command, 4:xvi). What is important is that Maffly-Kipp does a credible job in trying to account for the book’s original appeal and in explaining why it should matter to readers today, especially those who are neither Latter-day Saints nor investigators.

It is worth noting that the Penguin edition is entirely a non-Mormon production, probably the first since James O. Wright’s 1858 version (which was also, coincidentally, a reprint of the 1840 text). But where Wright’s was clearly a speculative venture aimed at making money, publishing the Book of Mormon as part of the Penguin Classics series is a recognition of the book’s cultural and historical significance. Unfortunately, for anyone not particularly interested in testing its religious claims, six hundred pages of dense printing and long paragraphs may be intimidating, especially without any additional aids to untangle the complicated narrative such as dates, chapter summaries, an index of names, references for biblical quotations, or indications of where overlapping stories in Mosiah intersect or the long flashbacks in Alma begin and end. (The only concessions to

modern readers are changes in the running heads at the top of pages, where we find “The Third Book of Nephi” and “The Fourth Book of Nephi” instead of the original 1840 heads: “Book of Nephi” and “Book of Nephi.”)¹⁷ Nevertheless, Maffly-Kipp makes a strong case that “for any reader wanting to learn more about the history of American religion, the Book of Mormon is an indispensable document” (p. viii).

The volume’s design fits the Penguin Classics model exactly, which in itself is a wonderful thing. This means that in bookstores all over the country, browsers will encounter the Book of Mormon as the equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Upanishads, the Dhammapada, the Tao Te Ching, the Ramayana, the Bhagavad Gita, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Thomas Aquinas’s selected writings, the Qur’an, and selections from the Talmud—all of which have been recently published in the same format. This is heady company, and Latter-day Saints should be thrilled to see their scriptures packaged in this manner. The editors at Penguin cannot have had President Benson’s charge in mind, yet their edition seeks to make the Book of Mormon accessible to more people, and there are many potential readers who will be more comfortable with a Penguin Classic than with an obviously denominational publication offered by two eager young missionaries. Not everyone interested in religion or history is looking for a conversion experience, and as believers ourselves, we should have enough confidence in the text to welcome any and all comers, even if they are mostly interested in “an intriguing window into religious life in the early nineteenth-century United States” (p. vii).

The Penguin edition would also be good for Mormons who are looking for a change from their ordinary patterns of scripture reading. They might find it enjoyable, or even enlightening, to go through the Book of Mormon in the form it took in Joseph Smith’s day; and as I noted above, as a historic edition for reading, the 1840 text beats the 1830 hands down. This would not simply be an exercise in nostalgia; seeing familiar words and phrases in the context of paragraphs and

17. A couple of the other running heads have been changed as well: the 1840 “Book of Jacob” and “Book of Alma” are now “The Book of Jacob, the Brother of Nephi” and “The Book of Alma, the Son of Alma.”

longer chapters will guarantee new insights. Reading comprehension comes from linking words to words and sentences to sentences. As we are forced to make sense of the text anew, apart from the customary versification, there are hundreds of connections, contrasts, implications, and meanings waiting to be discovered.

As Latter-day Saints continue in their efforts to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon, these two new editions represent small waves. They take very different approaches—one sees the book as a work of literature and spiritual guidance, while the other perceives it as a crucial document in American religious history—but both recognize the Book of Mormon as scripture. For this reason, both publications ought to be welcomed and celebrated. The more people who read the Book of Mormon, for whatever reason, the better. In comparing them head to head, Signature's *Reader's Book of Mormon*, with its remarkable design, has its uses, but the Penguin edition is a milestone marking the increasing academic interest in and respect for the Book of Mormon. I like to think that President Benson would have been pleased.