



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 23 | Number 1

Article 11

2011

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Midgley, Louis and Ricks, Shirley S. (2011) "Out of Obscurity: The Story of Nibley's “Beyond Politics”," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 23 : No. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol23/iss1/11>

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Out of Obscurity: The Story of Nibley’s “Beyond Politics”

LOUIS MIDGLEY AND SHIRLEY S. RICKS

One of the major accomplishments of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and its predecessors has been the assembling and careful editing of the vast collection of Hugh Nibley’s books, essays, and addresses and then making them available in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series, which recently reached its climax with volume 19, *One Eternal Round*. However, an address entitled “Beyond Politics,” which was one of his more popular addresses, is missing from the Collected Works. This paper was read to students and faculty in Brigham Young University’s Political Science Department on 26 October 1973. In 1974 it appeared in *BYU Studies*.¹ But Hugh objected to

its inclusion in the section on politics in a miscellaneous collection of essays entitled *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*.²

Why would Hugh write a note to Shirley Ricks, then readying that volume of the Collected Works, strongly objecting to the reprinting of this popular article therein? We have a theory that might explain this fact. After presenting this speech, Nibley handed his copy to Louis Midgley, who intended to see it published in *BYU Studies*. Hugh’s wife, Phyllis, also provided what she believed was a slightly more robust version of “Beyond Politics.” She suggested that the two versions be melded together and a clean copy be given to her husband. This was done. But when the essay appeared in print, Hugh was troubled

1. Hugh Nibley, “Beyond Politics,” *BYU Studies* 15/1 (1974): 3–28. This essay was subsequently reprinted, with a new introductory paragraph written by Nibley, in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley*, foreword by Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 279–305. It is this version, with only slight corrections, that we have reprinted here.

We have included in italics the brief introduction to this essay that Nibley provided for *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*.

2. *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994). Part 2, “Politics,” is found on pages 105–297.

because he thought that some editor had made him appear foolish. He had spotted a tiny mistake in a classical allusion, which much annoyed him. He blamed the mistake on those responsible for *BYU Studies*. But, it turned out, the tiny mistake was in the original manuscript. We believe that this amusing incident may have lodged in Hugh’s memory and twenty years later could have been the grounds for his unwillingness to have “Beyond Politics” reprinted. Be that as it may, on the manuscript version of “Beyond Politics” that Shirley Ricks provided him, Hugh wrote the following: “This dull article should not

be reprinted!” Signed “H. N.”³ And so it was to be, until now.❏

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3. Editors had hoped that the speech could be published in a later volume of the *Collected Works*, but the right fit never came along.