

structure ambitiously aims at having form mirror function. In the introduction, Barber explains, “The endless thinking on the bicycle was never experienced in ordered chronology or form. Rather, it spun out of the vast reservoir of fragments in my head while my legs relentlessly spun the pedals” (2). This is, after all, how memory works, and how truth is experienced in real time. But Barber’s attempt to weave three storylines often feels more awkward than artistic: the narrative jumps haphazardly between scenes from the early years of her marriage to David, scenes from the present day, and scenes from her bike trip that provide a sort of framing narrative and, inevitably, impose the image of a journey. Ultimately, I found that the succession of vignettes lacked the cohesion necessary for this journey’s satisfactory resolution. Instead, I had a sense of spinning wheels, a glimpse of a destination never reached. And while the individual stamps in Barber’s album possess meaning and beauty, she doesn’t indicate what redemptive value the collection may hold.

But perhaps this sense of unmet potential conveys the memoir’s most enduring message. A life—a self—cannot be circumscribed in tidy ways and always falls short of what might have been. There’s no grand “aha” inscribed triumphantly on the last page of our personal narratives, no scene of ultimate redemption. There is only endurance through struggle, which hopefully yields mercy for others and self. By so candidly sharing her weakness, Barber offers readers an opportunity to face their own; by accepting her raw edges, she shows how our ragged selves fit seamlessly into humanity, and how this unity can salve our individual wounds. Indeed, Barber’s search for self ends as a plea for personal transcendence: “Help me out of myself, please” (214). And while her unsettling journey doesn’t lead to a place of solid truth to rest upon, through her words we hover near enlightenment like the tissue-paper dancers in her mobile, circling around and above the certainty of understanding, continually turning pirouettes on strings.

Breaking New Ground

Grant Hardy. *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Paper: \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-973170-1

Reviewed by Julie M. Smith

In *On the Road with Joseph Smith: An Author's Diary* (2d ed., Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), we get a fascinating peek into Richard Lyman Bushman's psyche immediately after the publication of his monumental *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. It is delightful to find out that he checked the book's rank on Amazon several times per day but sobering to see his reaction to the book's reception by the non-Mormon scholarly community. In a letter to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, he wrote: "The first of the serious reviews of *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* arrived this past week. . . . Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp's reaction to my book is probably about as sympathetic as we can hope for. . . . The review tells me that we cannot expect a positive reaction to the biography—or to Joseph Smith—from scholars. As Laurie says, an epistemological gap yawns between my view of the Prophet and that of most academics. . . . I had hoped my book would bridge this gap, but after this review, I can see it will go only part way. I will be consistently seen as a partisan observer" (101–2). As further reviews showed, his analysis was, unfortunately, spot on: The divide is too wide to be bridged even by a first-rate treatment of the life of Joseph Smith, if its author is a faithful member of the LDS Church.

Which brings us to Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, an attempt to bridge the gap between believers and others through a literary reading of the Book of Mormon, primarily (though not solely) by closely following—and making educated guesses about—the narrative assumptions and intentions of the book's three major narrators, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni. He writes, "I will leave it to others to prove or disprove the historical and religious claims of the book; my goal is to help anyone interested in the Book of Mormon, for whatever reason, become a better, more perceptive reader" (xvi). That is a laudable goal; and for the LDS reader, he succeeds brilliantly. This book belongs, not on the shelf but on the desk—where it can be frequently consulted—of every serious student of the Book of Mormon. But as

much as one might wish otherwise, it is difficult to imagine a sympathetic response to this book from most non-LDS readers.

Hardy asks us to look closely at the text “without worrying too much about whether the mind ultimately responsible . . . was that of Mormon or Joseph Smith” (xiv), but how closely can the non-LDS reader look before noticing a terrible dilemma? As Hardy himself points out, the Book of Mormon has the marks of careful craftsmanship, but “the more complicated and interconnected the text, the less likely it is that Joseph Smith made it up” (xv). In other words, the greater the literary complexity of the Book of Mormon, the more likely it is what it claims to be, which places—to put it mildly—a certain burden upon the reader. The non-LDS reader cannot avoid questions of historicity when Hardy writes on the very first page: “The Book of Mormon [was] produced in a sudden rush of revelation as a young, poorly educated New York farmer dictated the text, one time through” (3). While it should be possible to analyze the Book of Mormon as literature while bypassing sticky questions of historicity, this doesn’t seem to work in practice.

For example, Hardy examines Nephi’s appropriation of Isaiah and Moroni’s inclusion of passages that echo Hebrews because these are necessary exercises for understanding what Nephi and Moroni were doing as narrators, but they require redaction criticism, which means thinking about historicity. The fact that *Rough Stone Rolling* couldn’t completely bridge the divide—even when people regularly enjoy biographies of subjects with whom they would disagree on virtually every topic—does not bode well for the reception of a book that, despite itself, forces the reader to consider the literary complexity of the Book of Mormon on every page. Hardy notes that “this is a book designed to polarize readers” (9), and he is right. But the likely cold shoulder from non-LDS readers should not stop Mormons from embracing this book with open arms.

Hardy’s analysis of the Book of Mormon has more than one moment of pure genius; his insights into the text are often jaw-droppingly compelling. For example, perhaps the most difficult and most crucial component of a close reading is noticing what is missing, and Grant Hardy is unusually adept at doing precisely that. How many readers have slogged through the Book of

Mormon dozens of times without realizing that Nephi never reports on his own kingship or his own sons? Or that when Lehi gathers his family and pronounces final blessings on his posterity, “Nephi’s blessing is conspicuous for its absence” (51)? Hardy points out that Mormon “never speaks of war figuratively or makes it a metaphor for Christian living” (108) and, unlike Nephi and Moroni, never quotes scriptures at length. Hardy notes that there are no stories in the Book of Mormon of good men who fall (no Sauls or Davids), that Captain Moroni never “engage[s] in personal acts of faith” such as proselytizing (174), that Samuel the Lamanite never mentions Jesus’s visit to the Americas, that Jesus never uses parables in the Book of Mormon, and that “a close reading of Ether suggests that Jaredite culture was almost entirely non-Christian” (235).

Hardy also excels at reading against the grain of the text. He finds in Lehi’s lack of response to Nephi’s killing of Laban a telling gap, one filled with something designed to distract the reader: an argument between Sariah and Lehi (and an artfully structured one at that). He not only presents a sympathetic portrait of Laman and Lemuel, but one which, instead of undermining the message of the text, actually enhances it. Similarly, he finds evidence that Mormon strives to create a heroic version of Captain Moroni that might skirt the edge of accuracy (“it is hard to see how the accusation ‘thou art a child of hell’ might have been a successful opening for negotiations” [148]), but the end result is a greater appreciation for both men.

A third strength of *Understanding the Book of Mormon* is Hardy’s gift for noticing textual parallels. His cases for reading Nephi as deliberately structuring his story on the model of the Old Testament Joseph, for comparing Abinadi and Moses, and for seeing the Jaredite record as reversing the Fall are compelling. And, finally, Hardy’s ability to elucidate character is nothing short of astounding. Nephi, Zeniff, Mormon, Captain Moroni, Helaman, and Moroni, are all liberated from what Joseph Smith called “the little narrow prison . . . of paper[,] pen[,] and ink” and into the kind of fully formed reality that just might keep the reader awake during Sunday School.

Understanding the Book of Mormon invites comparison to Terryl L. Givens’s *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that*

Launched a New World Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)—although that work is a history of the book’s reception instead of a literary analysis—and Richard Dilworth Rust’s *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997). Hardy covers some of the same terrain as Rust, but Hardy’s method of organizing material by narrator (as opposed to Rust’s of organizing by literary element) yields a more comprehensive reading and reveals more about the narrators’ character, while Hardy’s consideration of gaps and his reading against the grain expose insights unexplored by Rust. So while it seems rather unlikely that non-LDS readers will be able to accept Hardy’s reading, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* is a groundbreaking work in the analysis of the Book of Mormon, and the wide (LDS) audience that it deserves will be amply rewarded with stunning new insights.

From Exotic to Normal

Brian Q. Cannon and Jessie L. Embry, eds. *Utah in the Twentieth Century*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009. ix, 412 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, index. Cloth: \$32.95. ISBN: 978-0-87421-744-5

Reviewed by David Salmanson

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the state of Utah had been marginalized and exotic; at the 2002 Winter Olympics held in Salt Lake City, however, it presented itself as central and metropolitan. Hailed as the state’s coming-out party, the Opening Ceremonies had distinctly Utahn features. The most memorable images from the games were not the sports, but the opening and closing ceremonies: a little skater, blond, of course, re-creating frontier history, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir belting out a John Williams composition as only it could. It seemed that beneath the veneer of sophistication was the aesthetic of a country cousin striving for cool but winding up a bit tacky. In that sense, Utah was never more American.

How did Utah make that journey from exotic to normal? And