

2011

Book Review: Understanding the Book of Mormon

Terryl Givens

University of Richmond, tgivens@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/english-faculty-publications>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Givens, Terryl. "Review." Review of *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62, no. 3 (2011): 640.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Understanding the book of Mormon. A reader's guide. By Grant Hardy. Pp. xxi + 346.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. £17.99. 978 0 19 973170 1

JEH (62) 2011; doi:10.1017/S0022046911000352

With over 150 million copies in circulation, the Book of Mormon has yet to find its niche in historical, religious or literary studies. Largely ignored by scholars and berated by Evangelicals, the text may find a more successful path to a larger audience, hopes historian Grant Hardy, if historical and religious questions are bracketed in deference to the work's surprisingly complex and interesting literary dimensions. Hardy, a professor at UNC Asheville, makes a splendid case for the Book of Mormon's well-wrought narrative structure, by emphasising three distinct editorial/authorial voices held in tension: Nephi, a Jew who flees Jerusalem and is divinely commissioned to inaugurate a historical record of his clan; Mormon, who abridges the 1,000-year historical record that Nephi had begun, and Moroni, Mormon's son who completes the record with his own additions and commentary. Hardy's readings can be at times idiosyncratic, but he has a discerning eye for the literary. Though he wisely acknowledges the obstacles that the text can present to readers (archaic language, repetitiveness and didacticism, for example), his study none the less requires a leap of faith: not in the book's divine origins, but in the value of giving this controversial religious work the literary benefit of the doubt. For those willing to do so, Hardy makes the journey worthwhile. In his capable hands, the narrators of the Book of Mormon acquire a high level of self-conscious artistry and psychological depth. And that is an enviable accomplishment for any critic, whether the text be ultimately attributed to holy prophets or pious frauds.

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

TERRYL GIVENS