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Abstract Review of *Out of Darkness* (1991), by Keith C. Terry (with Maurice R. Tanner).

Keith C. Terry (with Maurice R. Tanner), *Out of Darkness*. N.p.: JBM International, 1991. 372 pp. $14.95.

Out of Darkness into Light: A Novel Approach

Reviewed by Richard H. Cracroft

The Problem: How to retrieve and issue in a form which is palatable to a larger reading public the recent and remarkable textual discoveries about the Book of Mormon, findings which point up the authenticity of the book's antiquity and its divine origin and message?

The (Unlikely) Solution: Write a novel.

In *Out of Darkness*, Keith C. Terry (with Maurice R. Tanner) has done just that. He has written a novel into which he has folded the findings of F.A.R.M.S.-sponsored studies on evidences in the Book of Mormon of wordprints, chiasmus, Hebraisms, Near Eastern thought and language, ancient warfare, Hebrew culture, and ancient olive cultivation, while managing to fix the reader and the focus of the book on the centrality of the Holy Spirit to the individual's personal response to the Book of Mormon.

Terry has lightened the book's considerable load of intellectual message by packing it into a popular plot: Thomas Kline, a wealthy copper baron, who has come back very late to his Mormon roots and new-found testimony of the Book of Mormon, establishes a $3 million trust to be administered by Dr. Peter Polk, BYU emeritus professor of religion, who brings together a handful of independent and accomplished scholars from a variety of fields of expertise to earn a cool $100,000 each for a seven-week investigation of the Book of Mormon, "to determine if the Book of Mormon has sufficient evidence to qualify it as a work of antiquity" (p. 67).

The initial group of eight (pared by anger and ill-health first to six, then to five) begins its study, guided by lectures presented by other well-paid, independent scholars who report to the group the results of their own six-month studies of an unnamed and anonymously written work (the Book of Mormon) as a work of antiquity. After presenting the findings of Book of Mormon scholars over the past decade, these independent lecturers conclude, one after another, that the book is indeed ancient, and launch the handful of scholars onto their individual

inquiries into such topics as the uncanny authenticity of the book of Jacob's full and accurate depiction of olive culture among the Nephites (an art unknown in the United States until the mid-nineteenth century), and the presence and meaning of chiasmus, wordprints, ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew culture and language, and ancient warfare in the Book of Mormon.

After delving into the available sources, with computers, and taking whirlwind side-trips to upstate New York and to the olive groves of Israel, the scholars all present, one after another, their thoughtful and detailed summaries of these various investigations. They conclude, with careful scholarly stipulations, that the book is a work of antiquity. Before issuing their final report, however, the group insists that Lewis Granger, a leading anti-Mormon writer, be brought in to muster opposing evidences that the book was written in the nineteenth century. By this point, however, the scholars are so knowledgeable and so far on the way to conviction about the book's antiquity that they ravage Granger's conclusions about the Solomon Spaulding manuscript and Michael Coe's *Central American Archaeology* (but omit discussion of some notable theories, such as Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*), send him packing, and prepare to write their report.

En route to this consensus the plot thickens. Craig Kline, Thomas's greedy and nonbelieving son, attempts to stall, then cancel, the project by freezing the money designated by his father, who dies just as the project gets underway. In an exciting cat-and-mouse pursuit, Craig must first find the top-secret location of the estate where the project is centered. Meanwhile, Stephen Thorn, with a Ph.D. in communications, the only nonscholar of the group (who is standing in for his televangelist father-in-law, the Reverend Robert Moore), threatens the others' scholarly objectivity by coming to believe in the divinity of the Book of Mormon, apart from all of the evidences the group is studying. His conversion and his desire to be baptized, aided by a bishop-neighbor-jogging companion, threaten the stability of his marriage to Anney, the Rev. Moore's daughter, whose views about Mormonism have been skewed by a former beau, a faithful Mormon who would not marry her out of the faith. Her faith in her father's integrity and sincerity is shaken, however, when Craig Kline, with a large cash payoff, induces the vain and shallow Moore to reveal the location of the scholars' retreat, and Anney begins to relent and repent.

Stephen Thorn's story—the fictional overlay—though facile, popularly written, and unconvincing as fiction, not only provides a framework on which Terry and Tanner can hang these hitherto too-little-accessible and excellent summaries of the convincing and faith-promoting findings of Book of Mormon scholars over the past decade, but also succeeds in reminding the reader that evidences for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon can never replace individual testimony through the Holy Ghost; that mere *truth* can never replace *Truth*.

Still, the juxtaposition of fact and fiction is jarring and may lead the reader of this occasionally carelessly edited book (punctuation, grammatical, and spelling errors) to hope for a single F.A.R.M.S volume which presents the findings-to-date without neglecting the spiritual essence and purpose of the Book of Mormon.

Truly, the findings which Terry and Tanner summarize in the novel are compelling and persuasive. Individually and collectively they build impressively on the foundations which Hugh Nibley laid forty years ago in *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites*.[1] But presented in a frame of fiction? Using fiction as a genre to gentle or make more digestible the teaching of gospel principles of Mormonism is not new. The fictional-tract (ficto-tract?) seems first to have emerged in Parley P. Pratt's wonderful mockery of Lucifer in "A Dialogue between Joseph Smith and the Devil," in the January 1, 1844, New York *Herald*.[2] Pratt's imaginative *tour de force* may have influenced the publication of the popular perennial ficto-tract, *Mr. Durrant of Salt Lake City*, which in turn may have suggested the popular *Trial of the Stick of Joseph*, wherein the Book of Mormon is placed on trial before a jury—and wins. Nephi Anderson's *Added Upon* (1898) and Octave Ursenbach's *The Quest* (1947) are tracts *cum* novels, and could also be categorized as ficto-tracts. Though there are a number of novels which render stories from the Book of Mormon as fictional redactions and not as doctrinal treatises, such as B. H. Roberts's *Corianton: A*

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1 Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), reprinted as *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, vol. 5 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988).

2 Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, *A Believing People: The Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 133-39.

Nephite Story (1889) and Robert H. Moss's current Nephite Chronicles series,[3] I am not aware of other works which have attempted a Book of Mormon ficto-tract in the manner of *Out of Darkness*.

In this ficto-tract, however, the fiction does not enhance these recent, remarkable discoveries about the Book of Mormon, primarily because of what could be called a mixed—or muddled—paradigm: the conversion of the fictional protagonist is fictional (thus *fictitious*), while the evidences that lead him from *truth* to *Truth* are fact. The reader may be confused by a fictional (and thus less compelling) conversion arising from the literal (and thus compelling) facts, and the one may diminish the other. For some readers, no doubt, the fiction will enhance the experience, but others will find it a diverting obstacle in the way of the remarkable internal evidences of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon, which *Out of Darkness* delineates so very well.

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3 See my review of Robert H. Moss's works in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 107-17.