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Abstract Review of *Daniel and Nephi* (1993), by Chris Heimerdinger; and *Samuel: Moroni's Young Warrior* (1993), by Clair Poulson.

Chris Heimerdinger, *Daniel and Nephi*. Salt Lake City: Covenant, 1993. 197 pp. $9.95.

Clair Poulson, *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior*. Salt Lake City: Covenant, 1993. 263 pp. $9.95.

Through a Glass, Brightly: Happenings in Book of Mormon Fiction

Reviewed by Richard H. Cracroft

In my 1990 review-essay of Robert H. Moss's *The Nephite Chronicles*,[1] I suggested, after surveying the paucity of imaginative literary renderings of Book of Mormon figures and events, that Moss's seven-volume *Chronicles* was "something like an event in the history of fictional treatments of the Book of Mormon." In the same volume of *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* Elouise Bell reviewed Chris Heimerdinger's *Tennis Shoes Among the Nephites,* a novel which has turned out to be, now in its eighth printing, not only another *event* in the rise of Book of Mormon–centered fiction, but a harbinger of further such literary happenings.

In fact, Clair Poulson's *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior* becomes such an event, with a well-told, fast-paced, exciting first novel about Samuel, a sixteen-year-old who becomes a Nephite hero through freeing his village and, on joining Captain Moroni, freeing the entire land from the Lamanite yoke. LDS teenagers will enjoy this work, as will parents willing to wait their turn patiently.

This recent upswing of *new events* in Book of Mormon–centered fiction is good news to those of us who see reading the Book of Mormon as one indicator of the spiritual health of our people. This increase in Book of Mormon–based fiction suggests

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[1] *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 107–17.

a general increase in familiarity with and integration of the stories and message of the Book of Mormon into Latter-day Saint lives. Such familiarity and, one hopes, mastery, promotes among the Saints, young and old, a fiction-engendering common knowledge and confidence upon which a writer of fiction can build his or her stories and extend the borders of our understanding.

Chris Heimerdinger is "anxiously engaged" in the good cause of doing just that. In *Tennis Shoes among the Nephites,* the reader may recall, Heimerdinger time-launches, via a cave-too-deep, three contemporary kids from Cody, Wyoming, into the midst of Book of Mormon warfare, including Helaman and Captain Moroni. In his second Book of Mormon–based novel, *Gadiantons and the Silver Sword*, Heimerdinger flips the plot and transports Gadianton robbers into a present-day confrontation with the same "Tennis Shoes gang," now nearly a decade older.

Now, his dynamic imagination unflagging, Chris Heimerdinger has produced—for adult and teenage reader alike—another *event* of Book of Mormon *and* biblical proportions. In pondering a response to an off-the-city-wall question, "What if Daniel and Nephi had known each other as children," Heimerdinger comes up with a plausible, entertaining, and thought-provoking answer in *Daniel and Nephi*, subtitled *A Tale of Eternal Friendship in a Land Ripening for Destruction. Daniel and Nephi* begins with Daniel, in Babylonian captivity, reflecting upon his long-ago adventures with Nephi, who has since disappeared into the Arabian wasteland. The novel ends with Nephi's recollections, while on a ship bound to Heaven-Only-Knows, of his preteen adventures with Prince Daniel, who has now disappeared into Babylonian captivity.

Recollecting those adventures, *Daniel and Nephi* takes the reader on a whirlwind of Indiana-Jones-like adventures which range from betrayal, murder, and abduction to stealth, ambush, lion attacks, terrible flood, snapping crocodiles, and pitched battles—all played out in a milieu rich in F.A.R.M.S.-substantiated, authentic history and anthropology of Israel, Judah, and Egypt, *circa* 609 B.C., and featuring, in what must be a first-time occurrence, a cast of biblical *and* Book of Mormon characters.

Daniel and Nephi, the protagonists, are two proud and stubborn boys who, enroute to their destinies as men of God, must learn to shed their pride, struggle to keep their faith intact, and make profound moral decisions, all-the-while waging battle with worldly ideas and fending off the treacheries of scheming men.

Other characters are Lehi, Sariah, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and their dying (and unscriptural) sister Hannah; as well as King Josiah and Queen Hamutel and their son Eliakim (later King Jehoiakim); and, of course, Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah).

Though the two lads are sometimes a bit too precocious and articulate for their age, Heimerdinger's characterization of Daniel and Nephi is plausible and dynamic. His portrayals of Laman and Lemuel are as rich and imaginative, but very different from, Orson Scott Card's stereotype-shattering handling of the errant brothers in his *Homecoming* saga. Heimerdinger's Lemuel is, surprisingly, a devout religious zealot who becomes disillusioned in the face of adversity and turns his back on God. Laman, on the other hand, is an agnostic who embraces a *carpe diem* worldview and revels in the fleshpots of Egypt.

Heimerdinger reveals in the merchant Lehi and his sons the seeds of character which will later blossom into the events of 1 Nephi. For example, at one point in the novel Lehi must suffer the consequences of his failure to heed the warning of the Lord, a failure which will prepare him (the reader understands) to heed, obey, and act when, sometime later, he is commanded to take his family and flee Jerusalem. Each of Heimerdinger's characters struggles, with varying success, to find the true God, understand his relationship with God, build faith and trust in God, and learn to love his fellow beings.

This knowledge comes piecemeal to Daniel and Nephi, as the intrepid pair, in an attempt to save King Josiah and the kingdom from the treachery of palace intrigues, embark on a series of Spielbergian adventures which will take them from Jerusalem to Memphis and back to the battlefield of Megiddo, too late to undo the treachery which leads to King Josiah's and Israel's undoing—and eventually triggers the Babylonian captivity and Daniel's role as exiled prince/prophet. But not before he gives his friend Nephi

the present of (aha!) a costly bow, which Nephi will carry with him into his family's self-imposed exile/pilgrimage.

One of my students wrote sagaciously, "Reading *Daniel and Nephi* is like eating breakfast cereal. It's quick, delicious, and underneath it all may be hiding some fortified nutrients if you read the side of the box carefully." Enjoy the meal—though, from the looks of things, it seems we can anticipate more of these plenteous (if nutritionally thin) repasts from the table of Book of Mormon fiction.