



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title

Author(s) Deborah Farmer

Reference *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 178-80.

ISSN 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

Abstract Review of *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior* (1993), and *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe* (1994), by Clair Poulson.

Clair Poulson. *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior*. Salt Lake City: Covenant, 1993. Two audio cassettes, \$9.95.

Clair Poulson, *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe*, Salt Lake City: Covenant, 1994. Two audio cassettes, \$9.95.

Reviewed by Deborah Farmer

Clair Poulson, a Duchesne County sheriff turned novelist, has recently produced two adventure books for young adults set in the tumultuous days of Captain Moroni and the first Gadianton robbers. The publisher, Covenant, has since made these works available as "condensed novels on tape." Reviewing books on tape presented the distinct challenge of assessing both the quality of the books (though I had only one of the texts for comparison purposes) and the quality of the taped narration to determine their independent and combined effectiveness.

Clair Poulson's first young adult novel, *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior*, begins in the midst of Lamanite attacks upon the Nephites—roughly Alma 43. Samuel is a young Nephite who helps free his city from captivity and later—with the help of Gadoni, a young Lamanite war-prisoner turned convert—is instrumental in ridding the land of Lamanite aggression. *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe* opens a few years later with the murder of the chief judge, Pahoran. Samuel and Gadoni, both with young families now, are again forced into action as the land of Nephi is threatened by the emerging Gadianton robbers. The scriptural time frame for this book is Helaman 1:9–2:13.

Samuel, Gadianton's Foe is quite obviously the second of the two novels, for it is superior to its prequel in almost every regard. While both are imaginative, fast-paced adventures, the second book reaches a level of depth and human drama that the first book never does. The dilemmas are more layered, the solutions less obvious, the trials more personal—and everything doesn't always turn out all right in the end. For example, while women in the first novel are employed primarily as rescuable love objects

whose beauty is at times a useful decoy, they thankfully play a more prominent and complex role in *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe*. A particularly well-developed scene involves the reactions and subsequent actions of a group of women abducted into the wilderness to become the robbers' wives. Poulson provides this issue and other equally meaty issues, such as child and spouse abuse and the witnessing of a loved one's death, with more time and care than would be expected in a typical young adult adventure story.

Both novels follow chronologies found in the Book of Mormon; and because Poulson roots Samuel's story in specific events and characters from the Book of Mormon, a basic familiarity with this scripture is required for full comprehension. The books are most appropriate for and would probably be best enjoyed by early adolescents (ages 12–15). However, proficient younger readers and interested older ones could likewise find this enjoyable reading. The tapes make the stories only slightly more accessible to younger or less fluent readers, as will be addressed later.

Poulson's tales are overtly filled with such prominent Mormon themes as learning to love one's enemies, exercising the power of prayer, following the promptings of the Holy Ghost, "doing unto others," discerning and choosing good over evil, "standing for truth and righteousness," finding an eternal companion, and trusting God. Today's Mormon youth will readily recognize the language and phrasings of these messages as the same as that which they hear each week in Sunday School and seminary. In Poulson's story, Samuel grows up hearing the same admonitions as today's Latter-day Saint youth. Samuel, like every youth, is forced to test the strength of his moral character, but with challenges unique to his life and time. Can he forgive and befriend a Lamanite who fought against his people? Young adult Mormon literature, by presenting consistent core beliefs in a variety of contexts, can help adolescents understand the cross-century and cross-cultural applicability of God's commandments. They can see how other young people dealt with tough situations armed with the same beliefs.

As with the stories themselves, the taped narrative quality of *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe* is superior to that of *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior*. I admit that when I first popped the latter into my

reading of the book, condensed to fit onto two 90-minute cassettes. The story is read rapidly and quite dispassionately, and at times I could hear the fatigue of a narrator who had been reading a bit too long. Done properly, audio versions of literature—especially children's/young adult literature—can be an exciting and legitimate medium for both entertainment and pedagogical purposes. As a child, I was reared on Mind's Eye tapes, record versions of Disney movies, and Golden Books on tape, all of which employed the fundamental storytelling techniques of distinguishable, animated voices and dramatic pauses. These recordings enhanced the stories and enticed me to read the books on my own. I could find no pedagogical benefits to listening to the cassette version of Poulson's first novel nor any entertainment value that would make listening preferable to reading the book. For example, the cassette version of the first novel does not make the book more accessible to young readers, for reasons mentioned earlier; and the condensed format isn't conducive to read-along activities for older, nonproficient readers who could benefit from audio-reinforcement while reading. The tapes are, instead, simply a substitute for those people who don't feel like reading the book. In short, when publishers treat children's/young adult literature on tape as uncreatively as they do adult books on tape, we all lose a powerful instructive and entertainment tool.

That said, I'll quickly add that the cassette version of *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe* is superior in both the quality and pace of narration; those children in the upper-elementary school grades who are unable to read the book fluently would find this tape set both accessible and entertaining.

Before listening to the tapes of *Samuel, Moroni's Young Warrior* and *Samuel, Gadianton's Foe*, I wrestled with very mixed feelings about using the Book of Mormon, a sacred text, as fodder for fiction. While I've not completely resolved these misgivings, I have come to regard this type of historical fiction as more honorable than the ever-popular dramatizations of scriptural stories, which often instead become fictionalizations in entertainment's sacred name. Poulson's openly fictional stories offer an imaginative door into the history and lessons of the Book of Mormon (without tampering with the sacred), and provide some enjoyable reading/listening along the way.