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- Abstract** The vibrant fields of narratology and biblical narrative criticism provide common ground from which scholars who either accept or reject the historical reality of the Book of Mormon may speak to one another. To encourage research that may speak across divisions, this article provides a theoretical overview of some of the major areas within the narrative-critical approach (i.e., the intricacies and subtleties of setting, plot, narrative time, characters, point of view, narrators, and implied readers). The applied analysis of select Book of Mormon passages that accompany these overviews illustrates how borrowing from more established fields may expose new considerations, explain different aspects of the text, make familiar narratives fresh, and stimulate greater appreciation for its literary design.
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Beyond Understanding: Narrative Theory as Expansion in Book of Mormon Exegesis

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IN ACADEMIA, WE AT TIMES EXPERIENCE SCHOLARLY ENVY when we read an article or book that we would like to have written. Reading Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon* while I was pursuing graduate studies in American literature and narratology was such a moment for me. In the five years since his seminal text appeared in 2010, I expected to find a burgeoning of Book of Mormon narrative readings as his work had clearly shown how fruitful such readings could be. Instead, I encountered silence. When I discussed his text with others, I heard praise for his work; yet it was often accompanied with what I found to be a problematic assumption that Hardy had uncovered and written about all that could be said within this vein of scholarship. In seeing Hardy's text as the definitive narrative analysis of the Book of Mormon (certified by Oxford no less), we do a great disservice to both the Book of Mormon and Hardy's work. *Understanding the Book of Mormon* should be viewed as the jumping-off point for a narrative-critical approach to the Book of Mormon and as one among many possible readings from such an approach. To aid in this process, I offer an article that is suggestive rather than definitive, theoretical rather than concrete, with more beginnings rather than conclusions. Focusing briefly on Hardy's work, I note what I see as his major contributions and suggest where we might usefully push his scholarship further before turning our

attention to the field of biblical narrative criticism. The narrative-critical approach has become a vibrant field in biblical studies over the past thirty years, and in surveying some of its seminal texts, we find a host of new questions, analytical tools, and emphases that will enliven the future of Book of Mormon studies.

Quite possibly Hardy's greatest contribution to furthering Book of Mormon scholarship within the academy is his decision to bracket questions of historicity and authorship and to focus instead on the form and sophistication of the text via its narrators—coupled, of course, with his ability to illustrate why such a focus is both justifiable and profitable. Using the three major narrators of the Book of Mormon to organize his discussion, Hardy introduces and illustrates some of their specific, representative literary techniques. While he is not the first to analyze literary aspects of the Book of Mormon, Hardy's work is set apart from the work of others (such as Richard Dilworth Rust, James T. Duke, and Mark D. Thomas) in how he combines an introduction to Book of Mormon poetics with a masterful retelling of the narrative that reveals underlying organizational structures of the text often obscured by doctrinal and historical details.¹ When brought to the surface, these organizational structures make the text much more accessible, particularly for those who are new to the Book of Mormon. In essence, Hardy focuses on the narrators as a way to understand the text, revealing that each has “a particular point of view, a theological vision, an agenda, and a characteristic style of writing” (p. 13).² The results are impressive, as Hardy “deconstruct[s] the text in order to construct the narrators” (p. 23). Yet in pushing his foundational treatment of the narrators by borrowing more from the field of biblical narrative criticism, we may reach a mode of studying the text that will better accomplish Hardy's stated aim: “to demonstrate a mode of literary analysis by which all readers, regardless

1. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997); James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2004); Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).

2. Internal references refer to Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of their prior religious commitments or lack thereof, can discuss the book in useful and accurate ways” (p. xvii).

Hardy begins his work by explaining that his approach to the narrators should be acceptable to readers who see them as “actual historical figures” or “fictional characters created by Joseph Smith” because “their role in the narrative is the same in either case. After all, narrative is a mode of communication employed by both historians and novelists” (p. xvi). While most scholars would agree with the latter part of his assertion regarding narrative’s pervasiveness, his treatment of the narrators (and other characters) falls clearly on one side of a heated debate.³ Throughout the text, Hardy illustrates how “the entirety of [the Book of Mormon’s] contents and structure—including omissions, juxtapositions, repetitions, and selectivity—can be read as speech acts that reveal the personalities of its narrators” (p. 25). Similarly, he argues for “how reading for gaps, omissions, inconsistencies, and unexpected details can fill out our understanding of a person [referring to the narrators]” (p. 57). In treating individuals in the text as if they are real people, Hardy aligns himself implicitly (and explicitly as noted in his text; see p. 24) with narratologists such as Seymour Chatman who advance a realist approach to characters in opposition to the purist approach. The realist (or mimetic) approach argues that characters “acquire an independence from the plot in which they occur,” that essentially characters may be viewed and discussed as if they were autonomous beings with motives, values, and personalities.⁴ In contrast, the purist (or functional) approach rejects the idea that characters can be separated from their literary context or analyzed as autonomous individuals.⁵

3. For an overview of this debate between realist (or mimetic) and purist (or functional) approach to characterization, see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 107–26; Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 114–32; Sara M. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?: A Study in Characterization* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 21–25.

4. Fred W. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 4.

5. Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xxiii.

While aligning with the realist approach gives Hardy great freedom to explore questions about the narrators and imagine backstories for them, this approach does limit one's ability to engage with those scholars who adopt the more popular purist approach.⁶ A more far-reaching approach to character (and thus the Book of Mormon narrators) is that used by many narratologists and narrative-critical scholars of the Bible who adopt a middle-ground approach and argue that while characters and events in the text may depict real people, the "events [and characters] are always colored by their portrayal. . . . An actual event [or character] cannot be accessed in any pure state apart from its narrative portrayal."⁷ For instance, Stephen Smith writes, "Undoubtedly, the Jesus of history serves as a model for Mark's characterization. Many, if not all, the incidents reported will, in essence, have been real events in which the real Jesus participated; but the Markan Jesus is nevertheless a character who serves the interests of plot; he is, for example, taken out of real time and relocated in plotted time . . . and his actions not only conform to the structure of the plot, but disclose certain traits of his narrative character."⁸ As we can see, this approach to character does not imply that a scholar does not believe that the characters in the text were real individuals (and consequently may be acceptable to those who accept the Book of Mormon's historicity), but rather that a scholar recognizes that because of the narrative necessity of selection, arrangement, and interpretation, all "literary characters, whether real life or fiction, are given life by an author and re-created in the reader's imagination."⁹

When we acknowledge the gap between reality and portrayal and do not fall for the "referential fallacy" (where we take what is implied or expressed in the narrative as a pure representation of events), we are in

6. See Skinner, *Characters and Characterization*, xxiii; and Marvin Mudrick, "Character and Event in Fiction," *Yale Review* 50 (1961): 211.

7. Scott S. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 8–9.

8. Stephen Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 16.

9. James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 121.

a position where those with disparate views on the origin of the Book of Mormon may engage with one another because our focus is purely on the text and what it presents. Distinctions between history and fiction become increasingly moot as we recognize that, as Scott S. Elliott writes, all representation “is scarred with traces of decisions regarding selection, arrangement, and interpretations of causality.”¹⁰ As Robert Scholes, a leading narrative theorist, summarizes simply, “No character in a book is a real person. Not even if he is in a history book and his name is Ulysses S. Grant.”¹¹ Again, the reality of actual historical figures is not the question for narrative critics; rather, the recognition that any narrative is an approximation of reality and not reality itself enables history, biography, and fiction to all be analyzed from a common lens. Likewise, narrative criticism displaces the question of authorship because it introduces the implied author into the narrative equation. As R. Alan Culpepper explains, “As the real author writes, he or she makes decisions about the narrative, constructs the story, and tells it through the narrator in such a way that the narrator projects an image of the author, but the image may not conform to the identity of the real author at all.”¹² Consequently narrative critics, in general, are not interested in ascertaining the real author but rather the impression of an implied author created through the work. Such a focus again bridges the origin divide and moves us closer to Hardy’s goal of “a mode of literary analysis by which all readers, regardless of their prior religious commitments or lack thereof, can discuss the book in useful and accurate ways” (p. xvii).

As we can see through this brief discussion of how to view characters, the vibrant fields of narratology and narrative criticism have much to offer Book of Mormon scholars if we wish to find a common ground from which to discuss the text. To further research in this vein, I offer a theoretical overview of some of the major areas within the

10. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 9.

11. Robert Scholes, *Elements of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.

12. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 6.

narrative-critical approach, accompanied by examples of applied analysis to the Book of Mormon in order to illustrate how borrowing from more established fields may enrich Book of Mormon scholarship. Since narrative criticism within biblical studies is in many respects quite different than narratology (its closest relative in literary studies at large), I focus my discussion on the narrative aspects most commonly discussed within biblical studies: setting, plot, narrative time, characters, point of view, narrators, and implied readers.

To begin, however, we must first understand what narrative criticism is as employed by New Testament scholars. Narrative criticism stems from new criticism and structuralism and analyzes solely the world internal to the text. It focuses on ascertaining the meaning of the text and discovering how the story communicates its meaning. The starting point for narrative criticism is the differentiation between story and discourse, between the “what” (the content of the narrative) and the “how” (the means by which content is expressed). This distinction allows readers to concentrate on how the narrative constructs its meaning, keeping in mind that everything in a narrative has been chosen, arranged, filtered, and framed.¹³ While some may question the validity of using modern narrative theory to describe ancient texts,¹⁴ the significant research done in the field of biblical studies for the past forty years clearly illustrates its applicability and usefulness. Speaking specifically to the value of narrative criticism for biblical studies, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon writes,

The value of narrative critical readings of the text is that they draw attention to the internal features of the story. It is tempting when

13. For a detailed discussion of the principles and procedures of narrative criticism as currently practiced in New Testament studies, see Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990). For a quick overview, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Did the Theory Develop and What Are Its Main Features?” in *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament*, ed. Paula Gooder (London: SPCK, 2008), 80–87.

14. For an overview of the major objections and biblical scholars’ rebuttal, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 8–11.

we read the Bible to use the narrative like a window through which we look to understand more about the historical events that the story describes. Narrative criticism reminds us of the importance of viewing the text more like a picture, of focusing our attention on what is there rather than what is not and learning to read the significance of various “set” pieces such as typical scenes, reaction of characters, and so on. . . . Through the lens of narrative criticism, we can begin to see how the narrative itself functions both in communicating its message and in drawing the reader into responding to the events described.¹⁵

Narrative criticism invokes many new questions as it makes conscious what often remains unconscious in our reading experience and provides us with the vocabulary to share our discoveries.

Setting

Within biblical scholarship, one of the most significant differences between narrative and historical criticism is the treatment of settings. While historical criticism seeks to identify the actual location of the setting in order to think about how characters may have inhabited a space or moved from one place to the next as well as how that contextual knowledge may enrich our understanding, narrative criticism focuses on the internal meaning of the setting and how it functions. Narrative scholars often explore how settings establish the mood of the narrative, provide the occasion for plot conflicts, develop a character’s mental, emotional, or spiritual state, act as a symbol of choices made, or evoke associations with larger ideals.¹⁶ If we apply this mode of inquiry to Book of Mormon studies, we would no longer focus on discovering the actual location of, for example, the place (and waters) of Mormon;

15. Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 87, 86.

16. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 87–88; David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 63; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 70–74.

instead, we would look only at the internal information within the text to ascertain how the place functions. In such readings, we may analyze how the place of Mormon helps create a sense of safety within the text, provides the space for the formation of the church, and deepens the sense of these new converts removing themselves from society to create a distinct, God-following community. We may observe how collectively the converts take on the description of the place of Mormon and by association become pure, beautiful, and set apart (Mosiah 18). We may also explore how the creation of this safe haven and its subsequent discovery and invasion may affect the implied reader.

As James L. Resseguie reminds us, the definition of setting is expansive, encompassing not only geographical, topographical, and architectural features but also temporal, spatial, religious, political, social, and cultural aspects of the text. Props, clothing, and minor characters may also be saturated with meaning, thus qualifying as aspects of setting worth considering.¹⁷ In the Book of Mormon, the Nephite national treasures (the plates, Liahona, and sword of Laban) are good examples of symbolically rich props that at times further the plot and reveal characters' spiritual state. The Liahona, for instance, first acts in the narrative as a compass for the family of Lehi; but because it only works according to their faith and diligence, it becomes a source of plot conflicts and discloses characters' spiritual state (1 Nephi 16). Later in the narrative, it no longer fulfills its initial function, becoming instead a sign of leadership and authority as it is passed down with the other national treasures (Mosiah 1:16); it also takes on greater symbolic meaning as it is likened to receiving personal direction and the words of Christ (Alma 37:43–45).

Plot

According to M. H. Abrams, "the plot in a dramatic or narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward

17. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 87–88.

achieving particular emotional and artistic effects.”¹⁸ Recognizing differences between the story and the plot or “story as discoursed,” to use Chatman’s phrase, is essential if we want to understand how the Book of Mormon achieves its effects.¹⁹ Most practitioners of narrative criticism follow Gérard Genette’s foundational work and look more specifically at “the way plot serves a story by departing from the chronological order of its events, or expanding on some events while rushing through others, or returning to them, sometimes repeatedly.”²⁰ A brief look at two aspects of Nephi’s narrative illustrates this well. Nephi reports to the reader that his family’s sojourn in the wilderness lasted eight years (1 Nephi 17:4), yet the stories themselves told in rapid succession appear to cover very little time (maybe a year at most). This discrepancy may lead an implied reader to wonder what else occurred during this time or to analyze more closely the stories Nephi does include to ascertain their significance to Nephi’s overall narrative. A focus on plot also helps readers realize that Nephi’s account of events once they reach the promised land consists of Lehi’s death, his brothers rebelling against him, the Lord warning him to depart into the wilderness, his people building a temple, and Nephi becoming their king—story information that essentially occupies a page. The other forty-plus pages devoted to the family’s life in the New World consist of Lehi’s last words to his sons, a sermon from Jacob, Nephi’s recounting of Isaiah, and Nephi’s final words to his people. Noting this emphasizes Nephi’s stated purpose for the small plates, which was to record the things of God (1 Nephi 6:3). This overt emphasis on prophetic words may cause the implied reader to focus on the doctrines and truths found within the text rather than on the characters.

If we follow Elliott’s advice and “attend most closely to moments in the text that are not easily assimilated into the coherent and comprehensive

18. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971), 126.

19. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19–22.

20. H. Porter Abbott, “Story, Plot, and Narration,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.

(comprehensible story),²¹ we will further discover issues that are significant to the implied author and moments that make the implied reader revise conceptions of God, his servants, and the religious life. For instance, Mormon's long epistle regarding infant baptism that Moroni inserts into the text seems out of place within the narrative (Moroni 8)—a fact that may in turn emphasize the significance of this issue for the implied author. Dramatic events such as believers being thrown into a fire or slaughtered as they kneel in prayer may cause the implied reader to rethink what it means to be blessed of God and to prosper in the land (Alma 14:8; 24:21–22). In contrast, many unanticipated one-line statements that are subtly glossed over in the narrative (such as when the Lamanites after their conversion “yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession” or when Nephi raises his brother from the dead) should also cause the implied reader to pause and rethink the miracles that may attend the religious life (Helaman 5:52; 3 Nephi 7:19).

Another useful aspect of plot is analyzing the primacy and recency effects on the implied readers. The primacy effect looks at how the order of the material in a plot creates expectations, while the recency effect looks at how those expectations are fulfilled, modified, or shattered by what comes later.²² The portion of the text written by the implied author Mormon contains multiple examples of this as his narrative follows a basic prophecy and fulfillment pattern: for instance, Abinadi's prophecy of the destiny of King Noah and his people (Mosiah 11:20–25; 17:15–18), repeated prophecy that the Nephites, dwindling in unbelief, would eventually become extinct,²³ and most significantly, numerous messianic prophecies.²⁴ The implied reader comes to trust Mormon unreservedly because he or she sees each of the prophecies fulfilled. However, some moments in the text do alter or shatter expectations. For instance, the

21. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 94.

22. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 209–10.

23. To give just a few examples: 1 Nephi 12:20–22; Alma 45:9–14; Helaman 15:17; Moroni 8:28–29.

24. To give just a few examples: 1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 10:3; Jacob 4:4; Mosiah 3:5; Alma 7:7–10; Helaman 5:9.

implied reader would likely expect Nephi's plan to purchase the plates from Laban to be successful because of his stated faithfulness in following the Lord's commandment to obtain the plates (1 Nephi 3:7, 15–25). However, his initial failure and then subsequent success—when he relies completely on the Lord and, obeying the Spirit, kills Laban—alters the implied reader's fundamental understanding of what it means to follow the Lord (1 Nephi 3:22–4:34). Likewise, the Lord promises Mosiah that he will “deliver [his] sons out of the hands of the Lamanites” and many will “believe on their words” (Mosiah 28:7); however, both the afflictions they face (as they are cast into prison) and the number of Lamanites they convert exceed expectations, emphasizing that man's conception and understanding is not the same as the Lord's.²⁵ If we remember that a plot, as Culpepper explains, “interprets events by placing them in a sequence, a context, a narrative world, which defines their meaning,” we will read the Book of Mormon more intensely as we seek to discover how the implied author “imposes a meaning on the events and convinces the reader that this meaning was implicit in the events all along.”²⁶

Narrative time

Narrative time is closely associated with plot. While story time is the passage of time during the story (i.e., Lehi's family spent eight years in the wilderness, or it has been twenty years since they left Jerusalem), narrative time according to Culpepper (who borrows heavily from Genette) is “the order, duration, and frequency of events in the narrative.”²⁷ As mentioned in the discussion of plot, noticing where the order of events in the narrative does not match the sequence in the story is fertile ground for asking new questions and determining the purpose and workings of the text. More specifically, when we discuss order we may look at “analepses,” which Genette defines as “any evocation after the

25. See, for example, Alma 20:28–30; 26:3–4, 23–31.

26. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 85, 84.

27. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 54.

fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment”²⁸ (e.g., the frequent recall of how the Lord led Lehi’s family to the promised land),²⁹ or “prolepses,” that is, “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later”³⁰ (e.g., Christ’s visit to the Americas; see 1 Nephi 12:6). Genette obtains further precision by labeling analepses and prolepses that reference events entirely before or after the narrative as “external.”³¹ Perhaps the most interesting external prolepses in the Book of Mormon are the prophecies referring to the text itself.³² These prophecies about the role the text will one day play in bringing individuals to a knowledge of Christ serve to link and draw the implied modern reader into the text by casting the narrative forward to his or her time, in effect collapsing time since that which was foretold in the future of the story has already taken place in the implied reader’s past.

Noting closely another aspect of narrative time, duration (how long it takes to narrate a scene) may further enhance our analysis of the Book of Mormon since duration often indicates the importance of an event and its corresponding themes to an author. To analyze duration more systematically, we may think in terms of scenes (which often include dialogue or monologue), summaries (which provide only essential facts), ellipses (moments when a narrative leaves a gap), and descriptive pauses (“passages which mark no advance in story time but give an extended description of a setting, character, or emotion”).³³ When we divide the Book of Mormon this way, we immediately see that emphasis in the text is given to sermons, missionary labors, the church’s founding, military tactics, and Christ’s visit, as these events are repeatedly

28. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, English trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

29. See, for instance, Alma 9:9; 37:38–39; Mosiah 7:20; 3 Nephi 5:20.

30. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

31. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

32. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 27:6–7, 11–14; 33:10–11; Mormon 5:12–14; Moroni 10:2–7.

33. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 71. For more information on duration, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 70–73.

relayed in scenes. Periods of peace, in contrast, such as the four hundred years after Christ's visit, merit a summary telling or become an ellipse (4 Nephi 1). Culpepper also recommends paying attention to those moments when the story time represented may be small but the narrative time "gives the reader an overview of much of the story to be presented in the rest of the narrative."³⁴ Perhaps the best example of this in the Book of Mormon is Nephi's vision that occurs near the very beginning of the story (1 Nephi 11–12). Densely packed with seminal events within the Book of Mormon (the wars between the Nephites and Lamanites, Christ's visit to the Americas, and the Nephites eventual destruction), this vision quickly communicates a great deal of the story and leaves readers with questions that stimulate interest.

Similar to duration, frequency (how many times an event is narrated in a story) leads the implied reader to recognize the significance of certain moments and to think more carefully about what these events signify. In addition, the narration of an event more than once allows different perspectives as well as patterns to become apparent. For instance, Alma the Younger's conversion is narrated three different times, and each narration constructs a different focus and purpose from which to view the events (Mosiah 27; Alma 36, 38). Conversion experiences in general may be seen as oft-repeated events in the Book of Mormon, and we may profitably analyze them to discover patterns and then to ask what these patterns mean. The same is true of numerous other events in the Book of Mormon, such as the preaching of Alma and the sons of Mosiah, the freeing of different groups from captivity, and conflicts between the Nephites and Lamanites. Frequency also becomes a significant narrative tool because the repetition of vocabulary, themes, activities, or setting may create an impression that these were characteristic of the individuals within a text. For instance, sermons, missionary labor, and the conversion of unlikely converts become the norm in the Book of Mormon—as does becoming wealthy, prideful, and turning away from the Lord after receiving rich blessings from his hand. These

34. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 56.

actions and events are repeated so often that they come to define the people as a whole, and the implied reader uses them to fill ellipses and flesh out summaries.³⁵

Characters and characterization

In the past ten years, work on character and characterization in biblical literary studies has exploded, offering Book of Mormon scholars many models by which they may identify characters and analyze their construction.³⁶ In general, scholars divide characters into three groups (though the specific labels may differ). Protagonists are fully fledged characters who exhibit a range of traits and even personality. They are, according to W. J. Harvey, “the vehicle by which all the most interesting questions are raised; they evoke our beliefs, sympathies, revulsions; they incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel. In a sense they are what the novel exists for; it exists to reveal them.”³⁷ Examples of protagonists in the Book of Mormon include Nephi, Alma, Captain Moroni, and Mormon. Ficlles (types, or intermediate characters) are characters who possess limited and stereotypical traits and who often represent a class of people. Culpepper explains that “they exist to serve specific plot functions, often revealing the protagonist, and may carry a great deal of representative or symbolic value.”³⁸ Examples of ficlles in the Book of Mormon include Laman

35. For more information on frequency, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 73–75.

36. For a good overview of Johannine character studies, see Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 3–24. For a good overview of character studies in the Gospel of Mark, see Christopher W. Skinner, “The Study of Character(s) in the Gospel of Mark: A Survey of Research from Wrede to the Performance Critics (1903–2013),” in *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

37. W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 56.

38. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104.

and Lemuel, Teancum, King Noah, the sons of Mosiah, and the two thousand stripling warriors. The last category of characters is background characters (agents) who, as Adele Berlin explains, “appear in the narrative as functions of the plot or as part of the setting.”³⁹ They exist solely for the effect they have on other characters or plot and nothing else is known about them (they are not characterized at all). Examples of agents in the Book of Mormon include Isabel, Ishmael, Zarahemla, and Lehonti. By first identifying which group (protagonist, ficelle, or agent) characters most closely resemble, we may then better recognize the thematic and rhetorical purposes they serve within the narrative. For instance, King Benjamin signifies the benefits of a king and foreshadows Christ as the ultimate king (Mosiah 2–5), while King Noah epitomizes the state of the “natural man” as an enemy to Christ and illustrates the destructive influence of wicked leadership (Mosiah 11, 19, 23). However, Berlin, and more recently Cornelis Bennema, reminds us that no distinct line separates these groups; consequently, it is often more useful to speak of the degree of characterization than of the type of characterization.⁴⁰

Characterization, as Mark Allan Powell explains, “is the process through which the implied author provides the implied reader with what is necessary to reconstruct a character from the narrative.”⁴¹ Characters are created not only by their speech and actions but also by the way others (narrator and characters) speak about and react to them.⁴² Characterization is often broken down into direct characterization (telling)—what we learn about the characters through direct statements about the character by himself, the narrator, or other characters—and indirect characterization (showing)—what we may deduce

39. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 32.

40. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 32; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 20–30.

41. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 52.

42. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 11–13; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 106; and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

about a character through words, thoughts, actions, and reactions of himself and others.⁴³ At times direct and indirect characterization will confirm one another as they do in the portrayal of King Benjamin as a servant-king. His own statements characterize him as such, and these statements are then confirmed through his discourse to his people as well as his actions as recorded by the implied author.⁴⁴ In other instances, though, such as that of Captain Moroni, direct and indirect characterization conflict. The implied author Mormon declares, “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). However, Captain Moroni’s actions frequently make him appear to be highly passionate, aggressive, rash, and quick to anger.⁴⁵ Such seeming discrepancies between direct and indirect characterization

43. For more information, see Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100–101; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 126–30; Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 13.

44. See Mosiah 2:11–19 for King Benjamin’s own statement; Mosiah, chapters 2–5, for his discourse; and Words of Mormon 1:10–18; Mosiah 6:7 for his actions as recorded by the implied author.

45. For instance, in order to reframe readers’ understanding of Captain Moroni’s military actions—such as when he kills four thousand of his own people in the capital city who refused to join him against an impending enemy attack (Alma 51:19)—Mormon repeatedly writes that Moroni “did not delight in bloodshed” (Alma 48:11; 55:19) but did what he saw as necessary to defend the freedom of his nation and the people’s right to worship God. Embedded letters from Moroni to other military leaders included in the text also reveal Moroni to be rash and emotional. In one instance, his temper overwhelms reason, and he breaks off negotiation for prisoner exchange with an enemy leader (Alma 54); in another, he condemns the chief judge of his own people for not sending desired provisions and reinforcements before he realizes that the actual situation hindered the chief judge from doing so (Alma 60:9; 61:9). Yet Mormon recasts and justifies Moroni’s actions by linking them to his commendable passion for liberty and by endowing him with pure motives: for example, he writes that Moroni acts only for “the welfare and safety of his people” (Alma 48:12); he is “firm in the faith of Christ” and will “defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood” (Alma 48:13; 50:1). Consequently, the image that Mormon creates of Moroni in his editorial comments is quite different from the one created solely by embedded historical documents and his actions within the narrative.

may cause the implied reader to think more critically about Moroni's thematic and rhetorical significance and what it may mean to be a man of God according to the implied author.

To understand characters in the Book of Mormon more fully, we will benefit from asking similar questions to that of narrative critics, such as, "With what techniques or devices has [the author] made a living person live on paper, and how is this person related to the rest of narrative? . . . How does what the author chooses to tell about some characters relate to what he chooses to tell about others?"⁴⁶ Analyzing closely the speech patterns (i.e., tone, vocabulary, sentence structure, length of speech) of both major and minor characters in the Book of Mormon will also help us understand both the characters and the process of characterization at a more sophisticated level.⁴⁷ We may come to comprehend the implied authors of the text better as we (1) continuously recognize that in any description there is a necessary element of selectivity and (2) begin to ask what principles or norms for selection are employed by the different implied authors within the Book of Mormon.⁴⁸

Point of view and narrators

Narrators are most often the rhetorical device through which authors tell stories, speak to readers, and put forth a point of view that subjects and filters both characters and events. As Wayne C. Booth reminds us, "there is always a distinction [between author and narrator] even though the author himself may not have been aware of it as he wrote."⁴⁹ Consequently, those of us who accept the Book of Mormon as an actual historical record must

46. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 105.

47. For more information, see Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 79–80.

48. Powell discusses how ironically narrative criticism, which was first touted as a method that shifted the focus away from authorial intent, has come to be used by some to discover author and implied author intent. For a brief overview, see Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 26–32.

49. Wayne C. Booth, "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification," *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961): 65.

acknowledge and accept the space between author, implied author, and narrator if we are to speak about the Book of Mormon within a narrative context. Narrators may be aligned with the author and implied author, or they may not. They may tell the story from an internal perspective (as the main character or an omniscient undramatized voice) or they may tell the story from an external perspective (as a minor character or an undramatized voice of an observer).⁵⁰ Regardless of their position to the story (or their relation to the implied author), the narrator's point of view most often shapes and filters the settings, events, and characters of a narrative. Although point of view may shift throughout the narrative from implied author to narrator to various characters, the crucial matter here is that point of view is always at work selecting and filtering the potentially limitless narrative information.

Although Hardy explores the narrators (and by extension their point of view) to great effect, much still needs to be done in terms of analyzing and contrasting the three major Book of Mormon narrators' style and tempo, actions within and outside of the story, ways of guiding the reader, standards of judgment, and so forth. When analyzing how narrators and point of view are functioning more specifically in the Book of Mormon, scholars may usefully apply Boris Uspensky's four planes of point of view: "phraseological (what words and phrases are used in the narrative?); spatial-temporal (where and when are events narrated?); psychological (what are the characters' thoughts and behaviors?); and ideological (what are the narrator's norms, values, and worldview?)"⁵¹ However, since this article intends to serve only as a brief introduction, we will focus on the ideological, or what Chatman calls the conceptual and Susan Lanser calls the subjective, point of view.⁵²

50. For more information, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 16–17; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 39–40; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 25–27.

51. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 169.

52. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 152; Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 16.

The ideological point of view is the most important for Book of Mormon narrative analysis because it encompasses the narrative's norms, values, and beliefs that the implied author wants the implied reader to adopt. To understand the Book of Mormon as the implied author would have us understand, we must first seek to ascertain the ideological point of view of the major narrators (Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni) by analyzing closely the way characters, events, and settings are described, the words and actions of characters, and what actions, characters, and events are approved or disapproved. Since the Book of Mormon has three distinct points of view (one by each of the major narrators), we may usefully look at the theological distinctions that exist among them or how the narrators expose different aspects of a life narrative or put forth different worldviews. For instance, Nephi waxes eloquent about the scattering and gathering of Israel, Mormon speaks at length about actual missionary labors, and Moroni recognizes the limitations of all efforts. In general, we might say that Nephi's point of view promotes the theoretical and intellectual, Mormon's the practical and experiential, and Moroni's the consequential and postepisodic comprehending.⁵³

Relatedly, we might look at the point of view put forth by Nephi as character and Nephi as narrator and analyze when each of these viewpoints appear and how experience and age affect their perceptions. For instance, Nephi as character constantly implores his brothers to "give heed to the word of God" and "keep his commandments" (1 Nephi 15:25), but Nephi as narrator makes it clear to the reader that they will not.⁵⁴ Similarly, Mormon as character keeps trying to help his people

53. These distinctions may also be seen, for instance, in their discussion of Satan. Mormon's discussion of Satan and his influences are tangible and real as he shares examples of antichrists and secret combinations (Alma 1; 30; Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 3). Nephi's discussion of Satan is more theoretical as he shares and quote others explaining Satan's role at large (1 Nephi 13–14; 2 Nephi 2; 9; 28). And Moroni focuses on the end result of Satan's influence (Ether 8; 15; Moroni 8).

54. Nephi establishes Laman and Lemuel's wickedness from the beginning by describing their "stiffneckedness," "murmuring," and inability to know the dealings of God. He also likens them "unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of [their] father" (1 Nephi 2:10–13). This is only the first of many instances.

spiritually and temporally, but Mormon as narrator recognizes the futility of his efforts.⁵⁵ We may also profitably analyze how each narrator establishes his credibility and what he does to establish his perspective as correct and all conflicting perspectives as defective or strange. For instance, Nephi, from the very beginning of the record, narrates himself as the paragon of obedience who procures a vision even greater than his father's dream (1 Nephi 11–14). Mormon presents himself as being trustworthy by immediately stating how his work is subjugated to the influence of the Lord: “The Lord [who] knoweth all things . . . worketh in me to do according to his will” (Words of Mormon 1:7), and Moroni builds rapport and credibility with his implied reader by stating, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). To ascertain point of view, we may also ask ourselves how the implied reader is expected to view reality differently after reading the Book of Mormon. Such a question places our focus squarely on the narrative's communicative purpose and the last major narrative aspect to be discussed: the ideal reader.

Implied reader

The implied reader, according to Wolfgang Iser, “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. . . . Thus the concept of the implied reader designates a network

Perhaps the most powerful is their refusal to partake of the fruit in Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8:35–36).

55. A good example of this paradox is in Mormon 2:12–13: “And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people. But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.” See also Mormon 2:18, 23–24; 3:1–3, 12.

of response inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text.”⁵⁶ The implied reader is not the actual reader of the text who may resist the narrative, disagree with its standards of judgment, or come with too little or too much knowledge to appreciate the narrative appropriately. Instead, the implied reader is the reader created by the text—one who possesses the necessary knowledge, attributes, and willingness to respond to the text as the implied author intends.⁵⁷ Narratives inevitably create a picture of the implied reader; thus, through detailed analysis we may establish the implied reader for the Book of Mormon, which will allow us to comprehend the text more fully and appreciate it as its authors would have it be appreciated. In particular, noting differences among the implied readers created by the implied authors Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni may help us recognize more clearly the multiplicity of voices and views that are constantly intersecting and interacting with one another to create and challenge meanings within the text. In the Book of Mormon, we may also discover different aspects of the narrative working together to teach the reader how to read the text. The implied author Nephi, for instance, may be seen using the character Nephi to demonstrate the traits and attitude necessary to read the text correctly when he explains what Nephi does to procure his vision (1 Nephi 11:1). Although Nephi’s example may not explicitly deal with a reading experience, it does contain the essential elements to be an ideal reader of the Book of Mormon as sacred text: a desire to discover the mysteries of God as explained in the text, faith that they exist within the text and that the Lord will help one understand them, and initiative to ponder the words of the text.

The implicit purpose of the Book of Mormon is to irrevocably alter the reader’s perception of the world. Consequently, understanding what the text requires of its readers, how it directs the production of meaning, and what happens when someone reads the text should be at the center

56. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 34.

57. For more information, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 7–8; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 147–51; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 137–39.

of a narrative reading of the Book of Mormon. A useful study of the Book of Mormon would be a detailed analysis of how a reader is being led to respond and react. For there are responses implied and required in every line of the narrative: the implied reader must fill gaps, recall earlier parts of the story, anticipate later parts of the story, feel suspense, identify and empathize with characters, have emotions aroused, have expectation raised and revised, trust the narrator's explicit commentary, accept the narrator's judgment and view of the world, and so on. Such a study would help us understand how a narrative may affect the reader and how the narrative works to create that impact. An important aspect of such a study would be looking at how rhetorical figures (such as parallelism, inclusion, anaphora, chiasmus, and rhetorical question) and figures of thought (such as hyperbole, paradox, and metaphor) are to impact the implied reader. While solid scholarship has already identified these literary aspects within the Book of Mormon, I contend that our analysis of these aspects will become much richer when we look at them in relation to the implied reader. Consequently, I argue that poetics such as these should be subsumed under the categories of narrators and implied readers, so that scholars emphasize and analyze the impact of these techniques rather than their mere existence. Such an approach is directly in line with the basic goal of narrative criticism designated by Powell: "to discern how the implied reader of a narrative would be expected to respond to the text"⁵⁸ by analyzing how the reader is guided through these and the other devices (setting, plot, narrative time, characters, narrators) intrinsic to the art of storytelling.

Conclusion

In the 1980s when narrative criticism gained traction in biblical studies, it reinvigorated the field by asking a new set of questions concerning the

58. Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 23.

way the Bible communicates its meaning. Like the seminal narrative-critical texts of the 1980s,⁵⁹ Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon* clearly illustrates the vitality of adopting such an approach and should be mined for its many profound insights into the Book of Mormon and its narrators. And like these seminal texts, Hardy's work should be regarded as the beginning rather than the summation of a narrative-critical approach that should inspire many to look more closely into the field of narrative criticism to see how it may inform our readings. The benefits will be vast as we turn our attention to reading and rereading the Book of Mormon closely, seeking to understand it on its own terms. Through this process, we will expose new considerations, explain different aspects of the text, make familiar narratives fresh, and stimulate greater appreciation for its literary design.

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59. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*; David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

Beyond Understanding: Narrative Theory as Expansion in Book of Mormon Exegesis

Amy Easton-Flake

IN ACADEMIA, WE AT TIMES EXPERIENCE SCHOLARLY ENVY when we read an article or book that we would like to have written. Reading Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon* while I was pursuing graduate studies in American literature and narratology was such a moment for me. In the five years since his seminal text appeared in 2010, I expected to find a burgeoning of Book of Mormon narrative readings as his work had clearly shown how fruitful such readings could be. Instead, I encountered silence. When I discussed his text with others, I heard praise for his work; yet it was often accompanied with what I found to be a problematic assumption that Hardy had uncovered and written about all that could be said within this vein of scholarship. In seeing Hardy's text as the definitive narrative analysis of the Book of Mormon (certified by Oxford no less), we do a great disservice to both the Book of Mormon and Hardy's work. *Understanding the Book of Mormon* should be viewed as the jumping-off point for a narrative-critical approach to the Book of Mormon and as one among many possible readings from such an approach. To aid in this process, I offer an article that is suggestive rather than definitive, theoretical rather than concrete, with more beginnings rather than conclusions. Focusing briefly on Hardy's work, I note what I see as his major contributions and suggest where we might usefully push his scholarship further before turning our

attention to the field of biblical narrative criticism. The narrative-critical approach has become a vibrant field in biblical studies over the past thirty years, and in surveying some of its seminal texts, we find a host of new questions, analytical tools, and emphases that will enliven the future of Book of Mormon studies.

Quite possibly Hardy's greatest contribution to furthering Book of Mormon scholarship within the academy is his decision to bracket questions of historicity and authorship and to focus instead on the form and sophistication of the text via its narrators—coupled, of course, with his ability to illustrate why such a focus is both justifiable and profitable. Using the three major narrators of the Book of Mormon to organize his discussion, Hardy introduces and illustrates some of their specific, representative literary techniques. While he is not the first to analyze literary aspects of the Book of Mormon, Hardy's work is set apart from the work of others (such as Richard Dilworth Rust, James T. Duke, and Mark D. Thomas) in how he combines an introduction to Book of Mormon poetics with a masterful retelling of the narrative that reveals underlying organizational structures of the text often obscured by doctrinal and historical details.¹ When brought to the surface, these organizational structures make the text much more accessible, particularly for those who are new to the Book of Mormon. In essence, Hardy focuses on the narrators as a way to understand the text, revealing that each has “a particular point of view, a theological vision, an agenda, and a characteristic style of writing” (p. 13).² The results are impressive, as Hardy “deconstruct[s] the text in order to construct the narrators” (p. 23). Yet in pushing his foundational treatment of the narrators by borrowing more from the field of biblical narrative criticism, we may reach a mode of studying the text that will better accomplish Hardy's stated aim: “to demonstrate a mode of literary analysis by which all readers, regardless

1. Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997); James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2004); Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).

2. Internal references refer to Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

of their prior religious commitments or lack thereof, can discuss the book in useful and accurate ways” (p. xvii).

Hardy begins his work by explaining that his approach to the narrators should be acceptable to readers who see them as “actual historical figures” or “fictional characters created by Joseph Smith” because “their role in the narrative is the same in either case. After all, narrative is a mode of communication employed by both historians and novelists” (p. xvi). While most scholars would agree with the latter part of his assertion regarding narrative’s pervasiveness, his treatment of the narrators (and other characters) falls clearly on one side of a heated debate.³ Throughout the text, Hardy illustrates how “the entirety of [the Book of Mormon’s] contents and structure—including omissions, juxtapositions, repetitions, and selectivity—can be read as speech acts that reveal the personalities of its narrators” (p. 25). Similarly, he argues for “how reading for gaps, omissions, inconsistencies, and unexpected details can fill out our understanding of a person [referring to the narrators]” (p. 57). In treating individuals in the text as if they are real people, Hardy aligns himself implicitly (and explicitly as noted in his text; see p. 24) with narratologists such as Seymour Chatman who advance a realist approach to characters in opposition to the purist approach. The realist (or mimetic) approach argues that characters “acquire an independence from the plot in which they occur,” that essentially characters may be viewed and discussed as if they were autonomous beings with motives, values, and personalities.⁴ In contrast, the purist (or functional) approach rejects the idea that characters can be separated from their literary context or analyzed as autonomous individuals.⁵

3. For an overview of this debate between realist (or mimetic) and purist (or functional) approach to characterization, see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 107–26; Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 114–32; Sara M. Koenig, *Isn’t This Bathsheba?: A Study in Characterization* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 21–25.

4. Fred W. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 4.

5. Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xxiii.

While aligning with the realist approach gives Hardy great freedom to explore questions about the narrators and imagine backstories for them, this approach does limit one's ability to engage with those scholars who adopt the more popular purist approach.⁶ A more far-reaching approach to character (and thus the Book of Mormon narrators) is that used by many narratologists and narrative-critical scholars of the Bible who adopt a middle-ground approach and argue that while characters and events in the text may depict real people, the "events [and characters] are always colored by their portrayal. . . . An actual event [or character] cannot be accessed in any pure state apart from its narrative portrayal."⁷ For instance, Stephen Smith writes, "Undoubtedly, the Jesus of history serves as a model for Mark's characterization. Many, if not all, the incidents reported will, in essence, have been real events in which the real Jesus participated; but the Markan Jesus is nevertheless a character who serves the interests of plot; he is, for example, taken out of real time and relocated in plotted time . . . and his actions not only conform to the structure of the plot, but disclose certain traits of his narrative character."⁸ As we can see, this approach to character does not imply that a scholar does not believe that the characters in the text were real individuals (and consequently may be acceptable to those who accept the Book of Mormon's historicity), but rather that a scholar recognizes that because of the narrative necessity of selection, arrangement, and interpretation, all "literary characters, whether real life or fiction, are given life by an author and re-created in the reader's imagination."⁹

When we acknowledge the gap between reality and portrayal and do not fall for the "referential fallacy" (where we take what is implied or expressed in the narrative as a pure representation of events), we are in

6. See Skinner, *Characters and Characterization*, xxiii; and Marvin Mudrick, "Character and Event in Fiction," *Yale Review* 50 (1961): 211.

7. Scott S. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 8–9.

8. Stephen Smith, *A Lion with Wings: A Narrative-Critical Approach to Mark's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 16.

9. James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 121.

a position where those with disparate views on the origin of the Book of Mormon may engage with one another because our focus is purely on the text and what it presents. Distinctions between history and fiction become increasingly moot as we recognize that, as Scott S. Elliott writes, all representation “is scarred with traces of decisions regarding selection, arrangement, and interpretations of causality.”¹⁰ As Robert Scholes, a leading narrative theorist, summarizes simply, “No character in a book is a real person. Not even if he is in a history book and his name is Ulysses S. Grant.”¹¹ Again, the reality of actual historical figures is not the question for narrative critics; rather, the recognition that any narrative is an approximation of reality and not reality itself enables history, biography, and fiction to all be analyzed from a common lens. Likewise, narrative criticism displaces the question of authorship because it introduces the implied author into the narrative equation. As R. Alan Culpepper explains, “As the real author writes, he or she makes decisions about the narrative, constructs the story, and tells it through the narrator in such a way that the narrator projects an image of the author, but the image may not conform to the identity of the real author at all.”¹² Consequently narrative critics, in general, are not interested in ascertaining the real author but rather the impression of an implied author created through the work. Such a focus again bridges the origin divide and moves us closer to Hardy’s goal of “a mode of literary analysis by which all readers, regardless of their prior religious commitments or lack thereof, can discuss the book in useful and accurate ways” (p. xvii).

As we can see through this brief discussion of how to view characters, the vibrant fields of narratology and narrative criticism have much to offer Book of Mormon scholars if we wish to find a common ground from which to discuss the text. To further research in this vein, I offer a theoretical overview of some of the major areas within the

10. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 9.

11. Robert Scholes, *Elements of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.

12. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 6.

narrative-critical approach, accompanied by examples of applied analysis to the Book of Mormon in order to illustrate how borrowing from more established fields may enrich Book of Mormon scholarship. Since narrative criticism within biblical studies is in many respects quite different than narratology (its closest relative in literary studies at large), I focus my discussion on the narrative aspects most commonly discussed within biblical studies: setting, plot, narrative time, characters, point of view, narrators, and implied readers.

To begin, however, we must first understand what narrative criticism is as employed by New Testament scholars. Narrative criticism stems from new criticism and structuralism and analyzes solely the world internal to the text. It focuses on ascertaining the meaning of the text and discovering how the story communicates its meaning. The starting point for narrative criticism is the differentiation between story and discourse, between the “what” (the content of the narrative) and the “how” (the means by which content is expressed). This distinction allows readers to concentrate on how the narrative constructs its meaning, keeping in mind that everything in a narrative has been chosen, arranged, filtered, and framed.¹³ While some may question the validity of using modern narrative theory to describe ancient texts,¹⁴ the significant research done in the field of biblical studies for the past forty years clearly illustrates its applicability and usefulness. Speaking specifically to the value of narrative criticism for biblical studies, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon writes,

The value of narrative critical readings of the text is that they draw attention to the internal features of the story. It is tempting when

13. For a detailed discussion of the principles and procedures of narrative criticism as currently practiced in New Testament studies, see Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990). For a quick overview, see Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Did the Theory Develop and What Are Its Main Features?” in *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament*, ed. Paula Gooder (London: SPCK, 2008), 80–87.

14. For an overview of the major objections and biblical scholars’ rebuttal, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 8–11.

we read the Bible to use the narrative like a window through which we look to understand more about the historical events that the story describes. Narrative criticism reminds us of the importance of viewing the text more like a picture, of focusing our attention on what is there rather than what is not and learning to read the significance of various “set” pieces such as typical scenes, reaction of characters, and so on. . . . Through the lens of narrative criticism, we can begin to see how the narrative itself functions both in communicating its message and in drawing the reader into responding to the events described.¹⁵

Narrative criticism invokes many new questions as it makes conscious what often remains unconscious in our reading experience and provides us with the vocabulary to share our discoveries.

Setting

Within biblical scholarship, one of the most significant differences between narrative and historical criticism is the treatment of settings. While historical criticism seeks to identify the actual location of the setting in order to think about how characters may have inhabited a space or moved from one place to the next as well as how that contextual knowledge may enrich our understanding, narrative criticism focuses on the internal meaning of the setting and how it functions. Narrative scholars often explore how settings establish the mood of the narrative, provide the occasion for plot conflicts, develop a character’s mental, emotional, or spiritual state, act as a symbol of choices made, or evoke associations with larger ideals.¹⁶ If we apply this mode of inquiry to Book of Mormon studies, we would no longer focus on discovering the actual location of, for example, the place (and waters) of Mormon;

15. Malbon, “Narrative Criticism,” 87, 86.

16. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 87–88; David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 63; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 70–74.

instead, we would look only at the internal information within the text to ascertain how the place functions. In such readings, we may analyze how the place of Mormon helps create a sense of safety within the text, provides the space for the formation of the church, and deepens the sense of these new converts removing themselves from society to create a distinct, God-following community. We may observe how collectively the converts take on the description of the place of Mormon and by association become pure, beautiful, and set apart (Mosiah 18). We may also explore how the creation of this safe haven and its subsequent discovery and invasion may affect the implied reader.

As James L. Resseguie reminds us, the definition of setting is expansive, encompassing not only geographical, topographical, and architectural features but also temporal, spatial, religious, political, social, and cultural aspects of the text. Props, clothing, and minor characters may also be saturated with meaning, thus qualifying as aspects of setting worth considering.¹⁷ In the Book of Mormon, the Nephite national treasures (the plates, Liahona, and sword of Laban) are good examples of symbolically rich props that at times further the plot and reveal characters' spiritual state. The Liahona, for instance, first acts in the narrative as a compass for the family of Lehi; but because it only works according to their faith and diligence, it becomes a source of plot conflicts and discloses characters' spiritual state (1 Nephi 16). Later in the narrative, it no longer fulfills its initial function, becoming instead a sign of leadership and authority as it is passed down with the other national treasures (Mosiah 1:16); it also takes on greater symbolic meaning as it is likened to receiving personal direction and the words of Christ (Alma 37:43–45).

Plot

According to M. H. Abrams, "the plot in a dramatic or narrative work is the structure of its actions, as these are ordered and rendered toward

17. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 87–88.

achieving particular emotional and artistic effects.”¹⁸ Recognizing differences between the story and the plot or “story as discoursed,” to use Chatman’s phrase, is essential if we want to understand how the Book of Mormon achieves its effects.¹⁹ Most practitioners of narrative criticism follow Gérard Genette’s foundational work and look more specifically at “the way plot serves a story by departing from the chronological order of its events, or expanding on some events while rushing through others, or returning to them, sometimes repeatedly.”²⁰ A brief look at two aspects of Nephi’s narrative illustrates this well. Nephi reports to the reader that his family’s sojourn in the wilderness lasted eight years (1 Nephi 17:4), yet the stories themselves told in rapid succession appear to cover very little time (maybe a year at most). This discrepancy may lead an implied reader to wonder what else occurred during this time or to analyze more closely the stories Nephi does include to ascertain their significance to Nephi’s overall narrative. A focus on plot also helps readers realize that Nephi’s account of events once they reach the promised land consists of Lehi’s death, his brothers rebelling against him, the Lord warning him to depart into the wilderness, his people building a temple, and Nephi becoming their king—story information that essentially occupies a page. The other forty-plus pages devoted to the family’s life in the New World consist of Lehi’s last words to his sons, a sermon from Jacob, Nephi’s recounting of Isaiah, and Nephi’s final words to his people. Noting this emphasizes Nephi’s stated purpose for the small plates, which was to record the things of God (1 Nephi 6:3). This overt emphasis on prophetic words may cause the implied reader to focus on the doctrines and truths found within the text rather than on the characters.

If we follow Elliott’s advice and “attend most closely to moments in the text that are not easily assimilated into the coherent and comprehensive

18. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971), 126.

19. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19–22.

20. H. Porter Abbott, “Story, Plot, and Narration,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.

(comprehensible story),²¹ we will further discover issues that are significant to the implied author and moments that make the implied reader revise conceptions of God, his servants, and the religious life. For instance, Mormon's long epistle regarding infant baptism that Moroni inserts into the text seems out of place within the narrative (Moroni 8)—a fact that may in turn emphasize the significance of this issue for the implied author. Dramatic events such as believers being thrown into a fire or slaughtered as they kneel in prayer may cause the implied reader to rethink what it means to be blessed of God and to prosper in the land (Alma 14:8; 24:21–22). In contrast, many unanticipated one-line statements that are subtly glossed over in the narrative (such as when the Lamanites after their conversion “yield up unto the Nephites the lands of their possession” or when Nephi raises his brother from the dead) should also cause the implied reader to pause and rethink the miracles that may attend the religious life (Helaman 5:52; 3 Nephi 7:19).

Another useful aspect of plot is analyzing the primacy and recency effects on the implied readers. The primacy effect looks at how the order of the material in a plot creates expectations, while the recency effect looks at how those expectations are fulfilled, modified, or shattered by what comes later.²² The portion of the text written by the implied author Mormon contains multiple examples of this as his narrative follows a basic prophecy and fulfillment pattern: for instance, Abinadi's prophecy of the destiny of King Noah and his people (Mosiah 11:20–25; 17:15–18), repeated prophecy that the Nephites, dwindling in unbelief, would eventually become extinct,²³ and most significantly, numerous messianic prophecies.²⁴ The implied reader comes to trust Mormon unreservedly because he or she sees each of the prophecies fulfilled. However, some moments in the text do alter or shatter expectations. For instance, the

21. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 94.

22. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 209–10.

23. To give just a few examples: 1 Nephi 12:20–22; Alma 45:9–14; Helaman 15:17; Moroni 8:28–29.

24. To give just a few examples: 1 Nephi 19:8; 2 Nephi 10:3; Jacob 4:4; Mosiah 3:5; Alma 7:7–10; Helaman 5:9.

implied reader would likely expect Nephi's plan to purchase the plates from Laban to be successful because of his stated faithfulness in following the Lord's commandment to obtain the plates (1 Nephi 3:7, 15–25). However, his initial failure and then subsequent success—when he relies completely on the Lord and, obeying the Spirit, kills Laban—alters the implied reader's fundamental understanding of what it means to follow the Lord (1 Nephi 3:22–4:34). Likewise, the Lord promises Mosiah that he will “deliver [his] sons out of the hands of the Lamanites” and many will “believe on their words” (Mosiah 28:7); however, both the afflictions they face (as they are cast into prison) and the number of Lamanites they convert exceed expectations, emphasizing that man's conception and understanding is not the same as the Lord's.²⁵ If we remember that a plot, as Culpepper explains, “interprets events by placing them in a sequence, a context, a narrative world, which defines their meaning,” we will read the Book of Mormon more intensely as we seek to discover how the implied author “imposes a meaning on the events and convinces the reader that this meaning was implicit in the events all along.”²⁶

Narrative time

Narrative time is closely associated with plot. While story time is the passage of time during the story (i.e., Lehi's family spent eight years in the wilderness, or it has been twenty years since they left Jerusalem), narrative time according to Culpepper (who borrows heavily from Genette) is “the order, duration, and frequency of events in the narrative.”²⁷ As mentioned in the discussion of plot, noticing where the order of events in the narrative does not match the sequence in the story is fertile ground for asking new questions and determining the purpose and workings of the text. More specifically, when we discuss order we may look at “analepses,” which Genette defines as “any evocation after the

25. See, for example, Alma 20:28–30; 26:3–4, 23–31.

26. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 85, 84.

27. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 54.

fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment”²⁸ (e.g., the frequent recall of how the Lord led Lehi’s family to the promised land),²⁹ or “prolepses,” that is, “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later”³⁰ (e.g., Christ’s visit to the Americas; see 1 Nephi 12:6). Genette obtains further precision by labeling analepses and prolepses that reference events entirely before or after the narrative as “external.”³¹ Perhaps the most interesting external prolepses in the Book of Mormon are the prophecies referring to the text itself.³² These prophecies about the role the text will one day play in bringing individuals to a knowledge of Christ serve to link and draw the implied modern reader into the text by casting the narrative forward to his or her time, in effect collapsing time since that which was foretold in the future of the story has already taken place in the implied reader’s past.

Noting closely another aspect of narrative time, duration (how long it takes to narrate a scene) may further enhance our analysis of the Book of Mormon since duration often indicates the importance of an event and its corresponding themes to an author. To analyze duration more systematically, we may think in terms of scenes (which often include dialogue or monologue), summaries (which provide only essential facts), ellipses (moments when a narrative leaves a gap), and descriptive pauses (“passages which mark no advance in story time but give an extended description of a setting, character, or emotion”).³³ When we divide the Book of Mormon this way, we immediately see that emphasis in the text is given to sermons, missionary labors, the church’s founding, military tactics, and Christ’s visit, as these events are repeatedly

28. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, English trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

29. See, for instance, Alma 9:9; 37:38–39; Mosiah 7:20; 3 Nephi 5:20.

30. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

31. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

32. See, for instance, 2 Nephi 27:6–7, 11–14; 33:10–11; Mormon 5:12–14; Moroni 10:2–7.

33. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 71. For more information on duration, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 70–73.

relayed in scenes. Periods of peace, in contrast, such as the four hundred years after Christ's visit, merit a summary telling or become an ellipse (4 Nephi 1). Culpepper also recommends paying attention to those moments when the story time represented may be small but the narrative time "gives the reader an overview of much of the story to be presented in the rest of the narrative."³⁴ Perhaps the best example of this in the Book of Mormon is Nephi's vision that occurs near the very beginning of the story (1 Nephi 11–12). Densely packed with seminal events within the Book of Mormon (the wars between the Nephites and Lamanites, Christ's visit to the Americas, and the Nephites eventual destruction), this vision quickly communicates a great deal of the story and leaves readers with questions that stimulate interest.

Similar to duration, frequency (how many times an event is narrated in a story) leads the implied reader to recognize the significance of certain moments and to think more carefully about what these events signify. In addition, the narration of an event more than once allows different perspectives as well as patterns to become apparent. For instance, Alma the Younger's conversion is narrated three different times, and each narration constructs a different focus and purpose from which to view the events (Mosiah 27; Alma 36, 38). Conversion experiences in general may be seen as oft-repeated events in the Book of Mormon, and we may profitably analyze them to discover patterns and then to ask what these patterns mean. The same is true of numerous other events in the Book of Mormon, such as the preaching of Alma and the sons of Mosiah, the freeing of different groups from captivity, and conflicts between the Nephites and Lamanites. Frequency also becomes a significant narrative tool because the repetition of vocabulary, themes, activities, or setting may create an impression that these were characteristic of the individuals within a text. For instance, sermons, missionary labor, and the conversion of unlikely converts become the norm in the Book of Mormon—as does becoming wealthy, prideful, and turning away from the Lord after receiving rich blessings from his hand. These

34. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 56.

actions and events are repeated so often that they come to define the people as a whole, and the implied reader uses them to fill ellipses and flesh out summaries.³⁵

Characters and characterization

In the past ten years, work on character and characterization in biblical literary studies has exploded, offering Book of Mormon scholars many models by which they may identify characters and analyze their construction.³⁶ In general, scholars divide characters into three groups (though the specific labels may differ). Protagonists are fully fledged characters who exhibit a range of traits and even personality. They are, according to W. J. Harvey, “the vehicle by which all the most interesting questions are raised; they evoke our beliefs, sympathies, revulsions; they incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel. In a sense they are what the novel exists for; it exists to reveal them.”³⁷ Examples of protagonists in the Book of Mormon include Nephi, Alma, Captain Moroni, and Mormon. Ficlles (types, or intermediate characters) are characters who possess limited and stereotypical traits and who often represent a class of people. Culpepper explains that “they exist to serve specific plot functions, often revealing the protagonist, and may carry a great deal of representative or symbolic value.”³⁸ Examples of ficlles in the Book of Mormon include Laman

35. For more information on frequency, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 73–75.

36. For a good overview of Johannine character studies, see Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 3–24. For a good overview of character studies in the Gospel of Mark, see Christopher W. Skinner, “The Study of Character(s) in the Gospel of Mark: A Survey of Research from Wrede to the Performance Critics (1903–2013),” in *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

37. W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 56.

38. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104.

and Lemuel, Teancum, King Noah, the sons of Mosiah, and the two thousand stripling warriors. The last category of characters is background characters (agents) who, as Adele Berlin explains, “appear in the narrative as functions of the plot or as part of the setting.”³⁹ They exist solely for the effect they have on other characters or plot and nothing else is known about them (they are not characterized at all). Examples of agents in the Book of Mormon include Isabel, Ishmael, Zarahemla, and Lehonti. By first identifying which group (protagonist, ficelle, or agent) characters most closely resemble, we may then better recognize the thematic and rhetorical purposes they serve within the narrative. For instance, King Benjamin signifies the benefits of a king and foreshadows Christ as the ultimate king (Mosiah 2–5), while King Noah epitomizes the state of the “natural man” as an enemy to Christ and illustrates the destructive influence of wicked leadership (Mosiah 11, 19, 23). However, Berlin, and more recently Cornelis Bennema, reminds us that no distinct line separates these groups; consequently, it is often more useful to speak of the degree of characterization than of the type of characterization.⁴⁰

Characterization, as Mark Allan Powell explains, “is the process through which the implied author provides the implied reader with what is necessary to reconstruct a character from the narrative.”⁴¹ Characters are created not only by their speech and actions but also by the way others (narrator and characters) speak about and react to them.⁴² Characterization is often broken down into direct characterization (telling)—what we learn about the characters through direct statements about the character by himself, the narrator, or other characters—and indirect characterization (showing)—what we may deduce

39. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 32.

40. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 32; Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 20–30.

41. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 52.

42. For more information, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 11–13; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 106; and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark’s Jesus: Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009).

about a character through words, thoughts, actions, and reactions of himself and others.⁴³ At times direct and indirect characterization will confirm one another as they do in the portrayal of King Benjamin as a servant-king. His own statements characterize him as such, and these statements are then confirmed through his discourse to his people as well as his actions as recorded by the implied author.⁴⁴ In other instances, though, such as that of Captain Moroni, direct and indirect characterization conflict. The implied author Mormon declares, “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). However, Captain Moroni’s actions frequently make him appear to be highly passionate, aggressive, rash, and quick to anger.⁴⁵ Such seeming discrepancies between direct and indirect characterization

43. For more information, see Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100–101; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 126–30; Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 13.

44. See Mosiah 2:11–19 for King Benjamin’s own statement; Mosiah, chapters 2–5, for his discourse; and Words of Mormon 1:10–18; Mosiah 6:7 for his actions as recorded by the implied author.

45. For instance, in order to reframe readers’ understanding of Captain Moroni’s military actions—such as when he kills four thousand of his own people in the capital city who refused to join him against an impending enemy attack (Alma 51:19)—Mormon repeatedly writes that Moroni “did not delight in bloodshed” (Alma 48:11; 55:19) but did what he saw as necessary to defend the freedom of his nation and the people’s right to worship God. Embedded letters from Moroni to other military leaders included in the text also reveal Moroni to be rash and emotional. In one instance, his temper overwhelms reason, and he breaks off negotiation for prisoner exchange with an enemy leader (Alma 54); in another, he condemns the chief judge of his own people for not sending desired provisions and reinforcements before he realizes that the actual situation hindered the chief judge from doing so (Alma 60:9; 61:9). Yet Mormon recasts and justifies Moroni’s actions by linking them to his commendable passion for liberty and by endowing him with pure motives: for example, he writes that Moroni acts only for “the welfare and safety of his people” (Alma 48:12); he is “firm in the faith of Christ” and will “defend his people, his rights, and his country, and his religion, even to the loss of his blood” (Alma 48:13; 50:1). Consequently, the image that Mormon creates of Moroni in his editorial comments is quite different from the one created solely by embedded historical documents and his actions within the narrative.

may cause the implied reader to think more critically about Moroni's thematic and rhetorical significance and what it may mean to be a man of God according to the implied author.

To understand characters in the Book of Mormon more fully, we will benefit from asking similar questions to that of narrative critics, such as, "With what techniques or devices has [the author] made a living person live on paper, and how is this person related to the rest of narrative? . . . How does what the author chooses to tell about some characters relate to what he chooses to tell about others?"⁴⁶ Analyzing closely the speech patterns (i.e., tone, vocabulary, sentence structure, length of speech) of both major and minor characters in the Book of Mormon will also help us understand both the characters and the process of characterization at a more sophisticated level.⁴⁷ We may come to comprehend the implied authors of the text better as we (1) continuously recognize that in any description there is a necessary element of selectivity and (2) begin to ask what principles or norms for selection are employed by the different implied authors within the Book of Mormon.⁴⁸

Point of view and narrators

Narrators are most often the rhetorical device through which authors tell stories, speak to readers, and put forth a point of view that subjects and filters both characters and events. As Wayne C. Booth reminds us, "there is always a distinction [between author and narrator] even though the author himself may not have been aware of it as he wrote."⁴⁹ Consequently, those of us who accept the Book of Mormon as an actual historical record must

46. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 105.

47. For more information, see Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, 79–80.

48. Powell discusses how ironically narrative criticism, which was first touted as a method that shifted the focus away from authorial intent, has come to be used by some to discover author and implied author intent. For a brief overview, see Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 26–32.

49. Wayne C. Booth, "Distance and Point-of-View: An Essay in Classification," *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961): 65.

acknowledge and accept the space between author, implied author, and narrator if we are to speak about the Book of Mormon within a narrative context. Narrators may be aligned with the author and implied author, or they may not. They may tell the story from an internal perspective (as the main character or an omniscient undramatized voice) or they may tell the story from an external perspective (as a minor character or an undramatized voice of an observer).⁵⁰ Regardless of their position to the story (or their relation to the implied author), the narrator's point of view most often shapes and filters the settings, events, and characters of a narrative. Although point of view may shift throughout the narrative from implied author to narrator to various characters, the crucial matter here is that point of view is always at work selecting and filtering the potentially limitless narrative information.

Although Hardy explores the narrators (and by extension their point of view) to great effect, much still needs to be done in terms of analyzing and contrasting the three major Book of Mormon narrators' style and tempo, actions within and outside of the story, ways of guiding the reader, standards of judgment, and so forth. When analyzing how narrators and point of view are functioning more specifically in the Book of Mormon, scholars may usefully apply Boris Uspensky's four planes of point of view: "phraseological (what words and phrases are used in the narrative?); spatial-temporal (where and when are events narrated?); psychological (what are the characters' thoughts and behaviors?); and ideological (what are the narrator's norms, values, and worldview?)"⁵¹ However, since this article intends to serve only as a brief introduction, we will focus on the ideological, or what Chatman calls the conceptual and Susan Lanser calls the subjective, point of view.⁵²

50. For more information, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 16–17; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 39–40; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 25–27.

51. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 169.

52. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 152; Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 16.

The ideological point of view is the most important for Book of Mormon narrative analysis because it encompasses the narrative's norms, values, and beliefs that the implied author wants the implied reader to adopt. To understand the Book of Mormon as the implied author would have us understand, we must first seek to ascertain the ideological point of view of the major narrators (Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni) by analyzing closely the way characters, events, and settings are described, the words and actions of characters, and what actions, characters, and events are approved or disapproved. Since the Book of Mormon has three distinct points of view (one by each of the major narrators), we may usefully look at the theological distinctions that exist among them or how the narrators expose different aspects of a life narrative or put forth different worldviews. For instance, Nephi waxes eloquent about the scattering and gathering of Israel, Mormon speaks at length about actual missionary labors, and Moroni recognizes the limitations of all efforts. In general, we might say that Nephi's point of view promotes the theoretical and intellectual, Mormon's the practical and experiential, and Moroni's the consequential and postepisodic comprehending.⁵³

Relatedly, we might look at the point of view put forth by Nephi as character and Nephi as narrator and analyze when each of these viewpoints appear and how experience and age affect their perceptions. For instance, Nephi as character constantly implores his brothers to "give heed to the word of God" and "keep his commandments" (1 Nephi 15:25), but Nephi as narrator makes it clear to the reader that they will not.⁵⁴ Similarly, Mormon as character keeps trying to help his people

53. These distinctions may also be seen, for instance, in their discussion of Satan. Mormon's discussion of Satan and his influences are tangible and real as he shares examples of antichrists and secret combinations (Alma 1; 30; Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 3). Nephi's discussion of Satan is more theoretical as he shares and quote others explaining Satan's role at large (1 Nephi 13–14; 2 Nephi 2; 9; 28). And Moroni focuses on the end result of Satan's influence (Ether 8; 15; Moroni 8).

54. Nephi establishes Laman and Lemuel's wickedness from the beginning by describing their "stiffneckedness," "murmuring," and inability to know the dealings of God. He also likens them "unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of [their] father" (1 Nephi 2:10–13). This is only the first of many instances.

spiritually and temporally, but Mormon as narrator recognizes the futility of his efforts.⁵⁵ We may also profitably analyze how each narrator establishes his credibility and what he does to establish his perspective as correct and all conflicting perspectives as defective or strange. For instance, Nephi, from the very beginning of the record, narrates himself as the paragon of obedience who procures a vision even greater than his father's dream (1 Nephi 11–14). Mormon presents himself as being trustworthy by immediately stating how his work is subjugated to the influence of the Lord: “The Lord [who] knoweth all things . . . worketh in me to do according to his will” (Words of Mormon 1:7), and Moroni builds rapport and credibility with his implied reader by stating, “Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). To ascertain point of view, we may also ask ourselves how the implied reader is expected to view reality differently after reading the Book of Mormon. Such a question places our focus squarely on the narrative's communicative purpose and the last major narrative aspect to be discussed: the ideal reader.

Implied reader

The implied reader, according to Wolfgang Iser, “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. . . . Thus the concept of the implied reader designates a network

Perhaps the most powerful is their refusal to partake of the fruit in Lehi's dream (1 Nephi 8:35–36).

55. A good example of this paradox is in Mormon 2:12–13: “And it came to pass that when I, Mormon, saw their lamentation and their mourning and their sorrow before the Lord, my heart did begin to rejoice within me, knowing the mercies and the long-suffering of the Lord, therefore supposing that he would be merciful unto them that they would again become a righteous people. But behold this my joy was vain, for their sorrowing was not unto repentance, because of the goodness of God; but it was rather the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin.” See also Mormon 2:18, 23–24; 3:1–3, 12.

of response inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text.”⁵⁶ The implied reader is not the actual reader of the text who may resist the narrative, disagree with its standards of judgment, or come with too little or too much knowledge to appreciate the narrative appropriately. Instead, the implied reader is the reader created by the text—one who possesses the necessary knowledge, attributes, and willingness to respond to the text as the implied author intends.⁵⁷ Narratives inevitably create a picture of the implied reader; thus, through detailed analysis we may establish the implied reader for the Book of Mormon, which will allow us to comprehend the text more fully and appreciate it as its authors would have it be appreciated. In particular, noting differences among the implied readers created by the implied authors Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni may help us recognize more clearly the multiplicity of voices and views that are constantly intersecting and interacting with one another to create and challenge meanings within the text. In the Book of Mormon, we may also discover different aspects of the narrative working together to teach the reader how to read the text. The implied author Nephi, for instance, may be seen using the character Nephi to demonstrate the traits and attitude necessary to read the text correctly when he explains what Nephi does to procure his vision (1 Nephi 11:1). Although Nephi’s example may not explicitly deal with a reading experience, it does contain the essential elements to be an ideal reader of the Book of Mormon as sacred text: a desire to discover the mysteries of God as explained in the text, faith that they exist within the text and that the Lord will help one understand them, and initiative to ponder the words of the text.

The implicit purpose of the Book of Mormon is to irrevocably alter the reader’s perception of the world. Consequently, understanding what the text requires of its readers, how it directs the production of meaning, and what happens when someone reads the text should be at the center

56. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 34.

57. For more information, see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 7–8; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 147–51; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 137–39.

of a narrative reading of the Book of Mormon. A useful study of the Book of Mormon would be a detailed analysis of how a reader is being led to respond and react. For there are responses implied and required in every line of the narrative: the implied reader must fill gaps, recall earlier parts of the story, anticipate later parts of the story, feel suspense, identify and empathize with characters, have emotions aroused, have expectation raised and revised, trust the narrator's explicit commentary, accept the narrator's judgment and view of the world, and so on. Such a study would help us understand how a narrative may affect the reader and how the narrative works to create that impact. An important aspect of such a study would be looking at how rhetorical figures (such as parallelism, inclusion, anaphora, chiasmus, and rhetorical question) and figures of thought (such as hyperbole, paradox, and metaphor) are to impact the implied reader. While solid scholarship has already identified these literary aspects within the Book of Mormon, I contend that our analysis of these aspects will become much richer when we look at them in relation to the implied reader. Consequently, I argue that poetics such as these should be subsumed under the categories of narrators and implied readers, so that scholars emphasize and analyze the impact of these techniques rather than their mere existence. Such an approach is directly in line with the basic goal of narrative criticism designated by Powell: "to discern how the implied reader of a narrative would be expected to respond to the text"⁵⁸ by analyzing how the reader is guided through these and the other devices (setting, plot, narrative time, characters, narrators) intrinsic to the art of storytelling.

Conclusion

In the 1980s when narrative criticism gained traction in biblical studies, it reinvigorated the field by asking a new set of questions concerning the

58. Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism: The Emergence of a Prominent Reading Strategy," in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 23.

way the Bible communicates its meaning. Like the seminal narrative-critical texts of the 1980s,⁵⁹ Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon* clearly illustrates the vitality of adopting such an approach and should be mined for its many profound insights into the Book of Mormon and its narrators. And like these seminal texts, Hardy's work should be regarded as the beginning rather than the summation of a narrative-critical approach that should inspire many to look more closely into the field of narrative criticism to see how it may inform our readings. The benefits will be vast as we turn our attention to reading and rereading the Book of Mormon closely, seeking to understand it on its own terms. Through this process, we will expose new considerations, explain different aspects of the text, make familiar narratives fresh, and stimulate greater appreciation for its literary design.

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59. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*; David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).