

many waters,” “I looked and behold,” etc. The Book of Mormon represents itself as the latter-day messianic figure before the millennium, along with the gathering and final battle—all this points to the Book of Mormon as thoroughly apocalyptic. To go with Bender and call the Book of Mormon postapocalyptic is the equivalent of asserting that the poetry of Emily Dickinson is actually opera rather than poetry.

Bender may be postapocalyptic. Mormon definitely is not. Again the Book of Mormon is a Restoration Apocalypse.

The temptation is ever present for all of us to look upon the sacred text as a mirror, a mirror on the wall, telling us that our personal theology is the fairest of them all. It is more difficult to read scripture well than any other sort of text. It takes courage to read a scriptural text that contradicts one’s cherished values and surprises one’s expectations. Misreadings of scriptural texts have a long and illustrious history. Dozens of systems of Gematria (assigning numerical value to a word or phrase and matching verses that have the same numerical value), spiritualizings, typologies, metaphorical meanings, elaborate chiasmic structures encompassing entire books, multiple literal senses, allegories, moral and hidden secret meanings, code, and yes, poststructural approaches to scripture like Bender’s all fill the stage of scriptural ventriloquism. If Bender has entered with a wooden text in his arms, who among us has not?

*Mark Thomas  
Holladay, UT*

### *Jacob Bender Responds*

I’m flattered that Mr. Mark Thomas felt my essay worth his response. I hope he accepts it as equal flattery that I respond in kind. I would like to address his second objection first, namely, that the Book of Mormon is a “Restoration Apocalypse,” not mere postapocalyptic. I’m actually in complete agreement with him; I wrote that the Book of Mormon’s “effect is not one of final dissolution a la Marquez—quite the opposite, in fact.” The Book of Mormon looks forward to the end of the world not as an ending doom but as a joyous rejuvenation. If my essay did not make that distinction explicit, then I apologize for the confusion.

He is also right to point out how “according to well-established scholarship . . . the inadequacy of words is in fact a hallmark of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writing.” The inadequacy of words is also a hallmark of poststructural apocalyptic writing. In fact, a compare/contrast between the two literary traditions—one super-ancient, the other super-modern—sounds like it would make a fascinating study.

I’m more confused by his accusation that I argue “all meanings shift and collapse”—on the contrary, I don’t argue that meaning collapses, only the signifiers. There is in fact a God in heaven, hell beneath, an Atonement of Christ, and an eternity beyond comprehension. These are what remain after the signifiers collapse. I also agree with Mr. Thomas’s assertion that there is a fundamental dualism outlined in 2 Nephi 2; Satan is also

aware of this dualism, and so, in the words of Brigham Young, he “distracts our minds” with false dualisms, the latter of which the Book of Mormon hastens to deconstruct. I suspect Mr. Thomas and I are ultimately arguing more about semantics than doctrine.

But, I do quibble with him more on his declaration that Moroni 7:46 is “hyperbole.” Mr. Thomas has stated that “Mormon’s notion is much more modest” than mine. On the contrary, I fear that I am too modest for Mormon. This was a man who knew he would lose everyone—everyone—he ever loved, cared for, or knew. Do we fully understand that? He beheld in visions not only the complete destruction of his people, institutions, and civilization, but of ours as well. “Hyperbole” implies that his words exaggerate his subject, but I don’t think any words can exaggerate Mormon’s loss. Like Malachi, he beheld the elements melt with a fervent heat, the mountains made low, the valleys high, and all things made new. When Mormon declares “all things must fail,” there is nothing hyperbolic about that statement—I believe he means us to take him quite literally. Otherwise, we are the ones who ventriloquize over his voice.

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### *Brother, Can You Spare a Book?*

I am writing to make you aware of a project that may be of interest to *Dialogue* readers. Beginning in 2013, the Mormon Studies program at Claremont Graduate University will be hosting a book drive for the International Mormon Studies (IMS) project, which will donate Mormon studies collections to university libraries outside of North America. This will not only enable researchers outside of North America to access the best work in Mormon studies, but will also give them a springboard from which to contribute their own work. Interested parties should email Melissa Inouye at the following address: internationalmormonstudies@gmail.com.

Michelle Inouye  
Claremont, CA

### *Correction*

The following paragraph was omitted from the “Contributors” section for *Dialogue*’s fall 2012 issue: “John G. Turner teaches religious studies at George Mason University. He is the author of *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Harvard University Press, 2012).”