



Writer-director Richard Dutcher, unquestionably the dominant personality in the past decade of Mormon cinema, on location with actors Jo-Sei Ikeda and Ignacio Serricchio for his film *States of Grace* (2005). Dutcher—who has worked as writer, actor, producer, director, and now editor—is credited with launching a new wave of Mormon film with his breakthrough production *God's Army* in 2000, which not only set the stage for multiple theatrical releases of Mormon-themed pictures, but also sought to increase their realism and dramatic depth beyond the limited depictions of Mormons in Hollywood films or, conversely, institutional productions in the style of Judge Whitaker. © Main Street Movie Co.

THE FIFTH WAVE:

CULTURAL AND COMMERCIAL VIABILITY (2000–PRESENT)

The Fifth Wave of Mormon cinema is the current period, in which a culturally robust and commercially vibrant new art form is beginning to emerge. Its most obvious manifestation is in the stream of Mormon-themed theatrical feature films, produced independently of the Church, made by and for Latter-day Saints. Richard Dutcher's much-celebrated *God's Army*, released in March 2000, made him widely recognized as the father of this new movement in Mormon film, but his groundbreaking work actually marks a return to the past. The LDS filmmakers of the First Wave also sought to create 35mm films to be distributed through commercial theaters to a paying public. Mormon film has in many ways come full circle, with Latter-day Saints of the Fifth Wave attempting large theatrical productions at a time when anti-Mormon films are once again more visible in the mainstream. There are, to be sure, several differences between the present and the First Wave: the Church's increased size and prominence, the existence of prolific institutional filmmaking apparatuses, and the continued effect of electronic filmmaking and distribution methods. But perhaps the defining difference was Dutcher's success in reaching LDS audiences; he proved the existence of a profitable niche market for Mormon-themed movies produced independently of both Hollywood and the institutional Church.

The creation of that market has as much to do with the new vitality of Mormon cinema as LDS filmmakers creating films on Mormon subjects. A paying Mormon public has given filmmakers courage to tell more and more varied Mormon stories and has given producers a motive to continue backing such films. Those who continue attributing to Dutcher the existence of Mormon cinema in the first decade of the twenty-first century are ignoring the last decades of the prior century during which the Mormon retail market got its legs and direct-to-video productions both satisfied and sharpened an appetite for film within the culture. The Fifth Wave comes at a time in the development of Mormon culture when there is a sufficient critical mass of Mormon sponsors, Mormon population centers, and Mormon interest in the medium generally to make a return on investment viable.

Dutcher's *God's Army* proved to be the catalyst that tapped this potential. Some have attributed the success of this film to the novelty of making LDS missionaries the central subject of a theatrically released feature film,

Key Films of the Fifth Wave

- *God's Army* (2000, USA, director Richard Dutcher, 107 minutes). Richard Dutcher's breakthrough film that revolutionized Mormon cinema and brought about the Fifth Wave.
- *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001, USA, director Mitch Davis, 113 minutes). The Fifth Wave's first theatrical production not directed by Dutcher, this film signaled that an entire movement was underway.
- *The Singles Ward* (2002, USA, director Kurt Hale, 102 minutes). The first film by HaleStorm, this inaugurated the sub-genre of the goofy Mormon comedy, one of the dominant forms in the Fifth Wave thus far.
- *Angels in America* (2003, USA, director Mike Nichols, 352 minutes). This HBO miniseries adaptation of Tony Kushner's Broadway play was a landmark production in terms of scope, prestige, and awards.
- *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004, USA, director Jared Hess, 95 minutes). This oddball comedy about high school misfits in Idaho became an unexpected international phenomenon.
- *New York Doll* (2005, USA, director Greg Whiteley, 78 minutes). The most significant documentary to date in the Fifth Wave; most critics agree it represents a huge stride forward for Mormon film in general.
- *States of Grace* (2005, USA, director Richard Dutcher, 128 minutes) Richard Dutcher's third Fifth Wave film proved controversial but was critically regarded as one of the finest Mormon films to date.
- *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration* (2005, USA, directors Gary Cook and T. C. Christensen, 60 minutes). This thematic sequel to *Legacy* and *Testaments* follows those films in scope and devotion with significant stylistic differences.
- *Big Love* (begun 2006, USA, various directors, a series of 60-minute episodes). This HBO television series has proven more popular—and highly seen—than any single film dealing with Mormonism.
- *The Mormons* (2007, USA, director Helen Whitney, 240 minutes) A landmark PBS documentary on Mormonism's history and modern makeup; it aired on consecutive evenings on *American Experience* and *Frontline*.

and this may in fact account for initial interest in the movie, but the more important innovation (something equally evident in Dutcher's following film, *Brigham City* [2001] and then his *States of Grace* [2005]) was aesthetic in nature. That is, Dutcher pushed past two-dimensional portrayals of Mormons so common in mainstream or institutional films and created characters and scenarios more reflective of believing Latter-day Saints and their genuine efforts to live their faith. Dutcher's work filled a place left empty by the caricatures of Mormons within Hollywood films and the idealizations of Mormons in Church productions, and Latter-day Saints liked what he did. Others did, too; this authenticity has broadened the appeal of Dutcher's stories beyond LDS audiences. He is recognized as a filmmaker who treats faith and spirituality seriously and does so through stories about the LDS people and faith that he knows.

The advent of successful independent Mormon feature films is the obvious breaking news of the current period, but with the Fifth Wave have come important changes in how Mormonism is being treated, not only in independent feature films but in mainstream and even in institutional Church movies. These three varieties of Mormon film—independent, mainstream, and institutional—continue to be enormously contrastive, but in the Fifth Wave all of these are beginning to convey an increasingly complex understanding of Mormonism.

INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH PRODUCTIONS

Institutional LDS film has in most respects continued the trends of the Fourth Wave into the Fifth. The Church's broadcasting is spreading farther across the globe. Video remains the Church's most important distribution method, with DVD replacing VHS. One innovative method of film distribution has been to include discs with issues of the Church's primary English-language magazine, the *Ensign*.

The Church Audiovisual Department has continued to create seminary videos and other special programs. Many of these seem to have made a quantum leap in recent years in terms of dramatic and cultural sophistication. Historical figures like Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Martin Harris are now portrayed with greater depth and internal life, and modern films have recognized the international nature of the Church by setting productions in a variety of countries, for once making the English-speaking students read subtitles.

But thus far in the Fifth Wave, the Church's only major production has been the feature film *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration*, released



In the Church's major Fifth Wave film about its founder, first-time actor Nathan Mitchell joins a long line of men who have portrayed the Prophet Joseph Smith. Image from the film *Joseph Smith: The Prophet of the Restoration*, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

on December 17, 2005, in honor of the Prophet's bicentennial six days later. Codirected by frequent collaborators T. C. Christensen and Gary Cook—together they had most recently remade the short 1976 film *The First Vision* as *The Restoration* (2004)—this commemorative film represents the culmination of thirty years' effort by the Church to put the Joseph Smith story on the big screen. While not a commercial feature as the 1970s project was conceived, its high profile at the busy Joseph Smith Memorial Building and other LDS visitors' centers throughout North America means that it will be seen by many more viewers than would have gone to a commercially released film, and the Church retains complete control in the process. Church leaders' commitment to the Legacy Theater in particular is evident in the technical improvement of its projection apparatus. *Joseph* was first projected on a 2K Christie projector, the first digital projection done at Temple Square, and will eventually be shown at double that resolution.

As the successor to *Legacy* and *Testaments*, *Joseph* in many ways fits into their mold. It tells the life story of the Prophet with a combination of fictional and historical events, packed in as tightly as narratively possible. Its devotional nature often leans too far toward a hagiographic approach that ignores troubling aspects of Joseph's life, such as polygamy. On the

positive side, there were certain stylistic innovations that enhanced the well-known Joseph Smith story. The directors deliberately chose to tone down the epic spectacle of *Legacy* and *Testaments*, creating a more intimate portrait of the prophet. Christensen, who also shot the film, used a smaller three-perforation Super-35mm stock instead of the 65mm employed with Kieth Merrill's films. While the frame is still large and the glossy aesthetic of previous institutional films remains, certain components of the acting, framing, and particularly music serve to bring us into closer communion with Joseph than has been done with previous films. While some might not notice a change, and some will surely get caught up in the film's many flaws, the depiction of Joseph Smith is arguably more sophisticated aesthetically than in previous Church films and marks a subtle but important change in how the Church is willing to have its founder understood. Though *Joseph* still often falls into the trap of heavy-handed hagiography, it also represents a move toward a more three-dimensional portrait of Joseph Smith.

MORMONS IN MAINSTREAM FILMS

Mainstream depictions of Latter-day Saints in the Fifth Wave also reveal a subtle but important move from two- to three-dimensional portraits of Mormonism, though this may not be obvious initially. As noted above, mainstream depictions of Mormons in the Fourth Wave revived old stereotypes going back to nineteenth-century literature when Mormonism first became tabloid subject matter in the popular press. It may seem that Fourth and Fifth Wave depictions of Latter-day Saints in mainstream films merely echo First Wave films that milked the sensationalistic aspects of Mormonism as readily as they capitalized on the sensuality of Cleopatra or the violence of the Ku Klux Klan. In the Fourth Wave, television only expanded the demand and scope for such hackneyed approaches to Mormonism.

While it is true that sensationalized aspects of Mormonism such as polygamy, violence, and moral hypocrisy continue to sell in the Fifth Wave (as in *Punch Drunk Love* [2002], *Chicago* [2002], or the previously mentioned films *My 5 Wives* [2000] and *Latter Days* [2003]), these are increasingly inflected by the unavoidable and improved public image of the Church and the new social and political dimensions of its expanded size and legitimacy. Old stigmas remain, but increasingly more substantive treatments or objective critiques of Mormonism are appearing—particularly in documentary films. This bifurcation in the treatment of

Mormonism has continued in the Fifth Wave, amplified by increased media exposure of Mormonism—as in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and the 2007 presidential campaign of Mitt Romney—and by the sustained attention to Mormon subjects made possible through the wide reach of cable television series featuring Mormonism. Those series present obvious challenges to the image of the Church and are exploitative in their way. But unlike the vast majority of previous mainstream films depicting Mormonism, they also offer a more complex understanding of Mormonism and its relationship to American culture.

In December 2003, HBO aired *Angels in America*, its landmark mini-series of Tony Kushner's play staged a decade earlier. Adapted by Kushner and director Mike Nichols, this six-hour work became one of the most seen and most critically recognized Mormon-related films in history (4.2 million viewers tuned in to its initial broadcast alone). Set in New York City in 1985, the plot intertwines stories of AIDS, homosexuality, Mormonism, Judaism, and politics to create an indicting portrait of America in the thralls of the new plague of HIV. There are three Latter-day Saint characters and several scenes set in the LDS visitors' center on Columbus Avenue, but the film's relationship to Mormonism goes much deeper, as indicated by the title itself. Most obviously, the central character, Prior Walter, is visited in his bedroom by an angel who unearths a metallic book from under his kitchen floor, provides him with "peep-stones" to read it, and commands him to spread its message.

Those Latter-day Saints aware of *Angels* have always found it inaccurate and often sacrilegious and offensive. Mormon critics, mainly discussing the stage version, have pointed out its shallow understanding of Mormon culture and theology and especially its lack of empathy toward its Mormon characters. All the other characters are eventually accepted into the tapestry of hope presented in the denouement, but Latter-day Saints—and conservatives—are either cast off or must shed their provincial Mormon and conservative identities. Jonathan Langford writes that Kushner's "endorsement of difference . . . does not really extend to serious consideration of ideas that are different from his. Mormonism, conservatism—neither is really allowed a presence or voice in the play, despite their constant conjuration."¹²³ Michael Austin, while noting these deficiencies, has undertaken a much more sophisticated analysis to examine how the play's worldview presents not only the LDS veneer of angels and prophets but is deeply rooted in LDS theology, including eternal corporeality, moral agency and its consequences, and other points. According to Austin, "If *Angels in America* can be said to have a theology at all, it is a theology that, while not overtly Mormon, has more than enough recognizably Mormon

elements to make it worthy of the attention of any Latter-day Saint scholar or critic.”¹²⁴

The diversity of these two critics’ responses is not so important as the discussion itself, signaling how far LDS response to unflattering depictions has evolved. Because of these films’ MPAA ratings or their presentation in outlets not regularly patronized by most American Mormons, many Latter-day Saints are unlikely to encounter them or, when they do, to feel they present any sort of threat to their religion. But Latter-day Saints such as Austin and Langford represent a maturing culture of Mormon film criticism. Independent Mormon periodicals such as *Sunstone*, *Dialogue*, or *Irreantum* and organizations such as the Association for Mormon Letters regularly critique and discuss films in their conferences and online forums. Whether filmmakers (within the faith or without) listen is another matter, but Mormon culture is ready as never before to engage, not merely dismiss, its critics working in this medium.

Upping the stakes recently is HBO’s primetime series *Big Love* (began in March 2006 and now in its second season, with over 4.5 million viewers for the premiere episode). This series, imitating the tone of HBO’s *Sex in the City* or ABC’s *Desperate Housewives*, depicts the domestic trials of a middle-class husband and his three wives living in contemporary Salt Lake City. This time, the Church took the now rare step of reacting to the production, pushing for and getting a disclaimer that aired with the first episode, distancing the Church from polygamy and expressing concern about the effects of any positive portrayal thereof. Many Latter-day Saints have criticized the series for this reason and for its many glancing blows at contemporary (and historical) Mormon life. But the series may do more to critique than to reinforce stereotypes. *Big Love* depicts and plays off the differences among three distinct versions of Mormonism: first, fundamental polygamists in a rural compound led by an aging prophet whose latest wife is sixteen years old, a disturbing throwback to perceived nineteenth-century Mormon polygamy; second, mainstream Latter-day Saints, who appear as minor characters or more peripherally as part of the Utah setting; and third, the series’ central family, who have escaped the compound and attempt to enjoy suburban prosperity while hiding their polygamy from their mainstream Mormon neighbors. This complexity makes it hard to call *Big Love* an anti-Mormon production. The series has found a more receptive LDS audience than *Angels in America*, as many Church members have praised its few LDS characters, its commentary on the ramifications of Mormonism’s heritage, and even its positive depiction of faith, religion, and family values.

Ambiguous and thought-provoking productions like *Big Love* helped prepare Latter-day Saints for the PBS documentary *The Mormons*, which aired across America in two two-hour programs—on *American Experience* and *Frontline*—April 30 and May 1, 2007. The sheer scope of this production ranks it as perhaps the most important documentary on the Church in its history, placing it in the top echelon of publicly prominent films like *Brigham Young* and *Angels in America*. The film's director, Helen Whitney, who specializes in religious documentaries, set out to explore the rich complexities of Mormonism, respectfully challenging its doctrines and culture while simultaneously praising its achievements and dispelling false notions about it as a parochial Western religion. Throughout the piece, Whitney and her coproducers managed to gather articulate and engaging speakers from a full spectrum of backgrounds and weave them together into an interesting and logical sequence. This balancing act and the subsequent respect the film gives the faithful was the main point praised in professional reviews, although reviewers also addressed the film's inaccuracies and deficiencies. Among Mormons the film caused apprehension and then discussion, and, although the official Church response was both measured and gracious, the overall impression among members was decidedly mixed. Marlin K. Jensen, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and the official Church Historian (who therefore received a fair amount of screen time himself) said, "How are church leaders reacting? I think on balance, very favorably. How could you be displeased when you've been the subject of a nationwide television program, stretching over four hours for two evenings and when an in-depth treatment of an essence of the Church has been given? I think, in general, we're very pleased."¹²⁵ This probably wouldn't have been the response if a similar production had been made as little as twenty years ago, let alone eighty, showing how far Mormonism, in cinema as elsewhere, has come in being perceived as a culture deserving critical analysis and respect.

As Latter-day Saints increase in prominence, other such productions—both positive and negative—are sure to follow. As of this writing, attention-getting events like the sesquicentennial of the Mountain Meadows Massacre (on September 11, 2007) and the burgeoning presidential ambitions of Mitt Romney intimate that 2007 will witness an interesting artistic exchange over Mormonism's faults and merits. In theaters Christopher Cain's Mountain Meadows Massacre film *September Dawn* (scheduled for release August 24, 2007), which stars Jon Voight, may prove rich in its cultural analysis of Mormonism, but at present trailers seem to indicate a potboiler, with all the stereotypes and narrative elements of First Wave anti-Mormon films, particularly *The Mormon* (1912), firmly intact.

Stereotypical Mormon characters continue to crop up in films like *Georgia Rule* (May 2007), and Trey Parker and Matt Stone of *Orgazmo* are taking yet another stab at the culture through an as-yet-untitled stage musical (done with Jeff Marx, writer of the play *Avenue Q*), aiming at a Broadway release in 2008. In short, as long as Mormonism continues to enlarge its presence in America and other countries, we will continue to see similar productions that evaluate, satirize, criticize, or attack it. This may seem disheartening to the faithful, who can expect at best uneven treatment of subjects they consider sacred, but the evolving nature of interest in Mormonism is critical. The Mountain Meadows Massacre will provide fodder for many films to come, but, as *The Mormons* demonstrates, non-Mormons are gradually finding more of interest in Mormonism than what stereotyped characters or hackneyed subjects have hitherto offered.

Like other minorities that have also suffered exploitation and misrepresentation, Latter-day Saints are now gaining legitimacy as subject matter in their own right. This was what Richard Dutcher believed possible and what galvanized his motive to innovate films about Mormons that would be more reflective of their actual lives and struggles. He proved to a paying public and to other filmmakers that the more authentic the depiction of Mormonism, the more engaging the movie will be.

INDEPENDENT MORMON FILMS

A successful Mormon feature film has been the holy grail of Mormon cinema since the first decade of the twentieth century. So many LDS filmmakers had floundered for decades in pursuit of it. Why did Dutcher finally succeed with *God's Army*? Certainly his personal vision and persistence were crucial, but many other factors clearly contributed. First, a sufficiently large Mormon market now existed to support independent Mormon films. Church membership was adequate in enough key areas to make theatrical runs long enough to approach a return on investment. Second, this return on investment became much more feasible given the thriving Mormon market for videos and DVDs. The video format not only offered continued revenues after the films had finished their theatrical runs, but it had also provided emerging filmmakers a less-expensive format in which to hone their skills before incurring the huge costs of a theatrically released film. Third, LDS filmmakers generally had the confidence now to produce films about their culture without designing them as proselytizing tracts; they could focus on films' technical and narrative quality. Fourth, after generations of a Mormon cinematic presence, LDS

filmmakers finally had precedents to react against: On the one hand, they rejected the sentimentalism of classical institutional films, while on the other hand they also rejected the inaccurate depictions of Latter-day Saints in mainstream cinema, particularly recent films like *Orgazmo*. Fifth, the growth of the film program at Brigham Young University, combined with the religious education and general atmosphere at the university, provided a training ground that continues to produce a disproportionate number of filmmakers when compared with global Church membership.¹²⁶

By the late 1990s, there were already indications of the approaching paradigm shift. Foremost among these were the many LDS videos that were steadily making a profit, but filmmakers were also creating longer and more polished productions than typical for video release, such as Michael Schaertl's *Christmas Mission* and Rocco DeVilliers's *Only Once* (both 1998). Such films were only a short step from the theaters. And finally, there was Dutcher himself.

Richard Dutcher: Not in Kansas Anymore

Richard Dutcher was born on May 10, 1964, into a Pentecostal family in Illinois. He joined the Church at age eight, eventually served a mission in Mexico, and graduated from BYU's film program in 1988. His initial interest was in acting, which led him to screenwriting and finally directing. After graduation he moved to Los Angeles and spent five years making a feature called *Girl Crazy* (1994), a romantic comedy that sold to HBO but convinced Dutcher that such trivial material was not worth the personal cost involved in producing his own films. At an impasse, he was barbecuing in his backyard when he noticed the gay, lesbian, and other minority film listings in his newspaper. An epiphany struck: Mormons also constituted a niche market. A film made exclusively for Latter-day Saints could be financially successful. More importantly, it could galvanize an entire movement, eventually making Mormon films the world's premiere works on issues of faith and spirituality. Now driven by a cause, Dutcher created Zion Films and went to work, but investors proved harder to convince. Hence, he directed *Eliza and I* in 1997 as a coproduction with KBYU while accumulating funds for a larger project. This took three more years, but by the end of 1999 *God's Army* had wrapped for the tidy sum of \$300,000.

When it opened in Utah on March 10, 2000, *God's Army* hit the Mormon community like a lightning bolt. It was the top grossing film in the state its opening weekend, and it eventually earned \$2.6 million at the domestic box office. Distribution quickly became more than Dutcher could handle, and thus the film was picked up by Excel Entertainment,

which, under the direction of Jeff Simpson and Dean Hale, would become just as important to the growth of Mormon cinema as Dutcher himself. Not only was *God's Army* an amazing financial success, but it convinced a large contingency of LDS filmmakers that they also should produce Mormon pictures, which, of course, was one of Dutcher's main intents.

Indeed, it is instructive to read *God's Army* as metacinema, a manifesto calling the troops to order. The story deals with a new missionary in Los Angeles named Elder Allen, his senior companion Elder Dalton (played by Dutcher), and their rather extraordinary interactions with other missionaries and local residents. Much has been written about its symbolism and autobiographical content, but little has been said about its attempt to be a conscious repudiation of past—particularly institutional—Mormon cinema. This, however, is exactly the purpose of the film's opening moments. It begins with Elder Allen's arrival on an airplane from Middle America. He is picked up by two missionaries in a dingy van that would never appear in a Church film and is immediately affronted with the line, "You're not in Kansas anymore, Elder." This is of course a film reference in itself, but also could refer to the vast legacy of Judge Whitaker and other Church filmmakers. The line of dialogue is followed by a montage of point-of-view shots including strip joints, a police scuffle, and a black man in a wheelchair flipping off the camera, all accompanied by a rock and roll song with



Matthew A. Brown, *right*, plays Elder Allen and Richard Dutcher, *left*, plays Elder "Pops" Dalton in *God's Army* (2000). With this film Dutcher took LDS audiences into new territory. © Main Street Movie Co.

lyrics—tellingly—about having arrived at a new place. Dutcher intends this to be as much about the Mormon audience’s journey as Elder Allen’s, an intention borne out in the rest of the film as he depicts missionaries as rounded characters with immaturities and foibles that, again, reject the traditional representations of institutional LDS films.

With *God’s Army*’s success, Dutcher consciously set the stage for a new movement in Mormon cinema. But while others began putting together their projects from scratch, he used his momentum to dive into his next film, *Brigham City*. A murder mystery set in a small Utah town, this opened on April 6, 2001, to critical acclaim but mixed commercial results. It eventually gained greater distribution than its predecessor but failed to turn a profit at the box office. Still, Dutcher was at the top of his game, and the week of *Brigham City*’s release he announced a multimillion-dollar Joseph Smith biopic called *The Prophet*. A verifiable movement was indeed underway, and by the end of 2001, other filmmakers began to fill out the ranks.

The Best Two Years: 2002–2004

The first of these filmmakers was director Mitch Davis with *The Other Side of Heaven*, released in Utah on December 14, 2001. An adaptation of John Groberg’s memoir *In the Eye of the Storm*, about his missionary service in Tonga in the 1950s, this had been under way for four years, thus making the filmmakers’ ambition independent of *God’s Army*’s success.¹²⁷ Their stakes were also somewhat higher: A budget around \$7 million necessitated a major distribution effort, one eventually undertaken by Disney. The cost also created a need to reach a general as well as an LDS audience; this crossover desire would soon come to dominate the majority of Fifth Wave films, even when made on a fraction of this film’s budget.

The first new Mormon productions to follow Dutcher, however, were aimed squarely at Latter-day Saints. These began with *The Singles Ward* and *Out of Step*, both released in February 2002. *Out of Step* was a troubled but underrated film directed by Ryan Little. *The Singles Ward* was produced at the new company HaleStorm Entertainment, which had been cofounded by Dave Hunter and Kurt Hale, a grandson of Nathan and Ruth Hale, who adopted his mother’s maiden name and christened the entire company with the Hale legacy. The film, an autobiographical comedy by screenwriter John Moyer (Hale directed), addressed Mormonism by focusing on corny references to Utah culture such as Jell-O and minor local celebrities. Its story was uneven and its production values lower than the previous films, but it was funny, and its sheer novelty made it immensely



Mitch Davis's *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001) adapted the missionary memoir of Elder John Groberg (played by Christopher Gorham, right). With its multimillion dollar budget, heavy advertising campaign, and eventual video distribution through Disney, this film represents the largest effort to date for an independent Mormon film to achieve mainstream success. © Excel Entertainment.

popular. It grossed over \$1.2 million. This set off a brief string of formulaic movies—including Hale's *The RM* (2003), *The Home Teachers* (2004), and *Church Ball* (2006)—that brought in increasingly tepid reviews but quickly established HaleStorm as a recognizable and often popular brand. A production arm called HaleStone, born of necessity when Excel refused to distribute *The Singles Ward*, has actually proven the company's most profitable entity, and Eric Samuelsen has pointed out that the creation of a second distribution company actually signaled the advent of an LDS film industry, as competition was now a factor.¹²⁸

Another event was equally critical in legitimizing an independent Mormon film culture, and this was the First International Young LDS Film Festival, held November 30 and December 1, 2001, in Provo. This was the brainchild of Austrian BYU film student Christian Vuissa, who worked indefatigably with a few volunteers and very little sponsorship to create a festival that included film and screenplay competitions, screenings, a forum and panel discussion, and other presentations. The festival, now simply called the LDS Film Festival, has shifted to January (to coincide with the Sundance Film Festival), is hosted at Orem's SCERA Theatre, and has grown tremendously—2,400 patrons attended in 2005, 3,800 in 2006, and 4,800 in 2007. If this serves as a true barometer of interest in Mormon film, then the Fifth Wave's future is bright. More importantly, the festival

itself stands poised to become a cultural center of Mormon film, as it not only brings Mormon film enthusiasts together into a community but will also influence future films in form and content.

In the commercial market, *The Singles Ward* and *Out of Step* set the trend for the first years of the Fifth Wave boom more than *The Other Side of Heaven* or Dutcher's films did. Pictures generally were made by filmmakers much younger than Dutcher and Davis—mostly recent BYU film graduates—and were created quickly and with virtually no budgets in an attempt to capitalize on the mounting interest in Mormon movies, either avariciously or out of a sincere desire to depict Mormon faith and culture in film. Titles include *Charly* (2002), *Handcart* (2002), *Pride and Prejudice* (2003), *The Book of Mormon Movie* (2003), *The Legend of Johnny Lingo* (2003), *Saints and Soldiers* (2004), *Baptists at Our Barbeque* (2004), *The Work and the Glory: Pillar of Light* (2004), and others. Artistic quality varied and commercial success generally did not come until video release, if at all, but audiences were occasionally receptive and by 2004 the films appeared to be improving. In particular, *The Best Two Years* in February and *Saints and Soldiers* in August were critical and popular favorites. The former film's writer and director, Scott Anderson, found himself in the enviable position of having Excel and HaleStone bidding over distribution rights, a healthy competition that boded well for the future quality of LDS films.¹²⁹

The Work and the Glory pictures, based on a popular series of novels by Gerald Lund, promised enough potential that they evidently rekindled the Deseret Book Company's interest in film; on November 15, 2004—nine



The enormously popular series of historical fiction novels by Gerald Lund led to the creation of three films based on *The Work and the Glory* (2004, 2005, 2006). Joshua and Nathan Steed (Eric Johnson and Alexander Carroll) are seated in the front of the wagon, while Joseph Smith (Jonathan Scarfe) rides in the bed. © Excel Entertainment.



A production still from Ryan Little's sophomore film *Saints and Soldiers* (2004), the first Fifth Wave production that exhibited in film festivals before general release in order to garner publicity. Though some criticized its use of Mormonism, it has been among the most-praised films of the Fifth Wave to date. © Excel Entertainment.

days before the first film's premiere—the company acquired Excel Entertainment, thus returning Deseret Book to its cinematic roots that had flourished under Hamer Reiser. In response, both *The Work and the Glory*'s main financier, Larry H. Miller, and Richard Dutcher created their own distribution companies in 2005: Miller's Vineyard Distribution in June and Dutcher's Main Street Movie Company in October. Though many have bemoaned Deseret Book's inevitably conservative approach, the addition of its financial muscle to Mormon film and the proliferation of four major distribution companies promise to be beneficial. This growth also resonated within HaleStorm, which has emerged as the strongest new company of the Fifth Wave's first years. In February 2004, it announced the construction of a full-fledged studio in north Provo. Construction commenced in July 2005, with the facilities beginning use by 2006.

Such growth, however, was tempered by commercial and artistic disasters like *Handcart*, *The Book of Mormon Movie*, and *The Home Teachers*. Others—primarily *Messengers of Truth* (2001), *Suddenly Unexpected* (2003), and *Day of Defense* (2003)—barely reached the screen at all, and several other titles never even reached production. As audiences and



New missionary Hezekiah Calhoun, played by ubiquitous Fifth Wave actor Kirby Heyborne, *right*, is as green as they come in Scott Anderson's *The Best Two Years* (2004). His senior companion, Elder John Rogers (K. C. Clyde), was evidently based loosely on Anderson himself in the mission field. © HaleStone Distribution.

investors grew weary of sub-Hollywood production values and Utah parochialisms, filmmakers began to sense that the honeymoon might be over.

States of Disgrace

The most obvious sign of a decline in Mormon cinema was Dutcher himself, who spent these years in what he wryly describes as a tremendous dry spell. His *The Prophet* proved to be the greatest Mormon film that was not to be. Dutcher championed his cause but felt that potential LDS investors turned a collective cold shoulder. He therefore followed his *God's Army* model and began shooting the biopic without all the funding in place, but this time the miraculous financial intervention that had saved *God's Army* did not materialize. Eventually he turned to a less expensive project in the form of a *God's Army* sequel, *States of Grace*.

In the meantime, audiences had soured. LDS filmmakers had reacted against Hollywood's stereotypes but only succeeded in creating their own, and some detractors pejoratively dismissed the entire Mormon film movement as "Mollywood." If the Utah in-jokes had alienated Latter-day Saints both within the state and without, then the attempts at crossing over by watering down the Mormonism in films like *Pride and Prejudice* had failed to reach the mainstream market. Companies like HaleStorm still claimed a return on investment but the pool of investors had dried up, causing even them to begin aiming at mainstream productions. For

most of 2005 no LDS film was playing in theaters, making this the first such absence since 2002.

Returning to a metacinematic analysis, it is illuminating to compare the movement's two most original films, the mockumentaries *The Work and the Story* (released in August 2003, while the wave was still gaining momentum) and *Sons of Provo* (released in February 2005, the last film before the fallow period). Both are comedies cast as satires of pop Mormon culture, but their manner and effectiveness are strikingly different. Nathan Smith Jones's *The Work and the Story* posits the scenario that Richard Dutcher has disappeared, leaving a vacuum to be filled by the next great LDS filmmaker. It follows competing contenders, chronicling their egomania and how absurdly awful their productions turn out to be. Hindsight of how actual events followed fiction allows us to see it as not only biting satire but a chillingly accurate analysis of the shortcomings of Mormon culture. Contrast this with *Sons of Provo*, the directorial debut of HaleStorm star Will Swenson. This film tackles the semifictitious phenomenon of LDS boy bands in the mold of Jericho Road, particularly their mixing of the sacred and profane into one commercialized package—an ideal analogy for a supposedly religious cinema. Though it begins well, by the second half it becomes clear that the film has failed to



In *States of Grace* (2005), Dutcher sought to take the missionary film beyond even the new boundaries he had established with *God's Army*. Hence, in the second scene of the movie Elder Farrell (Lucas Fleischer) scuffles with members of a street gang before being involved in a drive-by shooting. © Main Street Movie Co.

separate itself from the culture it is lampooning. In its climax of a maudlin acoustical song, *Sons of Provo* retains and even glorifies all the flaws it apparently set out to criticize. It is therefore emblematic of most of the Fifth Wave's films, which also mistake sentimentality for spirituality and quirkiness for entertainment.

Mormon cinema, then, had cried wolf too many times. By late 2005, when more substantial films arrived—particularly Greg Whiteley's documentary *New York Doll* and Dutcher's *States of Grace*—audiences predictably stayed away; the latter film's original title *God's Army 2* actually proved a deterrent to potential viewers. Not only was audience interest nonexistent, but the distributors themselves showed great ineptness in the marketing and release of their films. HaleStorm was wise to release John Moyer's directorial debut *Mobsters and Mormons*, a pleasant comedy that criticizes Mormon sanctimoniousness, on September 9, but this still only recouped half its \$350,000 cost in theaters. The second *Work and the Glory* film, *American Zion*, was released by Vineyard on October 21 and, with Sterling Van Wagenen having taken over direction from Russell Holt, it was a darker and generally more intriguing film than its predecessor. It was still doing reasonably well, therefore, when the two aforementioned films—*States of Grace*, distributed by Main Street Movie Company, and *New York Doll*, distributed in Utah by Excel—were both released, with virtually no warning, on November 4. This head-to-head bungling between



Arthur "Killer" Kane explains how his bass guitar came to be known as Excalibur in this moment from Greg Whiteley's film *New York Doll* (2005). This is arguably the first and only successful crossover film of the Fifth Wave to date. Courtesy Greg Whiteley.

three of Mormon cinema's four distributors—Vineyard, Main Street, and Excel—created a train wreck in which three of the finest LDS films in decades were left unseen, all losing out instead to Disney's *Chicken Little* and the ensuing holiday films.

New York Doll is a tremendously engaging and profound film chronicling the last months of rock star-turned-Mormon Arthur "Killer" Kane. Its box office numbers grew slightly before fading—indicating positive word of mouth among both Mormons and rock fans—and those Latter-day Saints who did see it were generally thoroughly impressed.

States of Grace, however, erupted a torrent of controversy that only grew amid rumors about Dutcher's planned secular productions of *Falling* and *Evil Angel*. *States of Grace* returns to the world of Los Angeles missionaries but this time includes them in a larger milieu of other faiths, races, and worldviews, resulting in a remarkable ensemble performance by the entire large cast. The film was more violent than any Mormon film to date, but it drew most of its criticism for its inclusion of a missionary's off-screen fornication with a lonely actress who had once appeared in a pornographic film. Though this was central to the theme of Christ's saving grace, many, particularly Dave Hunter at HaleStorm, attacked it as completely inappropriate.

Dutcher in turn was awakened to the changed state of Mormon cinema since *Brigham City* and realized that he could no longer hope for an egalitarian utopia of spiritual Mormon films; he had to differentiate his brand of Mormon film from his competitors'. What ensued was a barrage of mudslinging in print and online. Dutcher complained that the movement he started was spoiled by those who followed him,¹³⁰ while others, upset with Dutcher's cynical turn, claimed the father of Mormon cinema "might better be described as the deadbeat dad of an infant art form."¹³¹

After such attacks had simmered down, Dutcher calmly announced his disaffection, for personal reasons, from the LDS Church—and therefore Mormon cinema—in an editorial in Provo's *Daily Herald* on April 12, 2007.¹³² Setting the stage for his farewell announcement, Dutcher sermonized for several paragraphs, challenging fellow filmmakers to save Mormon cinema by producing higher-quality films. A maelstrom of comments—some vicious, some sympathetic—erupted in print and throughout the Mormon online world, but this also subsided fairly quickly with olive branches and hopes that he might rejoin the faith someday. Hence Dutcher has returned to the completely secular and mainstream filmmaking where he began in 1994, expanding into genres such as horror with his upcoming film *Evil Angel*, and while he has not made public whether he still desires to complete his Joseph Smith film—a project that has, for his fans, taken

on the status of legend—he is ironically probably in a better position to do so now than while he was a practicing Latter-day Saint. Still, his departure is a great loss to Mormon cinema, since his trio of theatrical films has provided a strong aesthetic and spiritual foundation for Mormon cinema, even if audiences were not as prepared to embrace them as critics or Dutcher would have wished.

It was not just Dutcher who became disenchanted with the Mormon film market. By 2005 all the major figures who had created Mormon films were getting out as well. HaleStorm, for instance, created a new sister company named Stone Five Studios to make secular productions, though some asserted it was actually to distance these from the poor reputation that had gathered around the original name. So while Hunter and Dutcher had each accused the other of creating inappropriate content under the banner of “Mormon cinema,” when the smoke cleared both HaleStorm and Main Street Movie Co. were leaving for greener pastures. The fact remained that one could no longer make a living strictly by creating Mormon-themed features, and 2006 proved an even more fallow year than 2005.¹³³

What then remains of the theatrical feature film in the Fifth Wave? As noted at the beginning of this article, the current downturn probably represents a slump more than a death knell. The diaspora of filmmakers who glutted the market around 2004 leaves an open playing field for new talent. With Dutcher’s departure in particular, the situation is once again the same as in *The Work and the Story*, but this time the new contenders may come more deliberately, with better plans, more money, and more honed talent. It may yet prove true that Richard Dutcher is indeed the father of the Fifth Wave, but one whose closest progeny will not emerge for ten or fifteen years, causing him at that point to be described as ahead of his time. In the meanwhile, 2007 has already seen the theatrical release of Brian Brough’s modernization and Mormonization of *Beauty and the Beast* and Tyler Ford’s enjoyable British comedy *Piccadilly Cowboy*, about a (Mormon) love triangle between a Montana cowboy and two English sisters in London. And other films are already on the horizon, covering the gamut in terms of genre and style (*Tears of a King* is about Elvis Presley and the Mormons, for instance, while *Passage to Zarahemla* is a children’s adventure story with a Book of Mormon setting and *Return with Honor* is a postmission drama about a returning missionary who dies but is miraculously given sixty more days to finish his life). These films will generally be more carefully made and marketed, which will, in all respects, prove beneficial over the haphazard land rush of the recent past.

Failures and growing pains notwithstanding, the theatrically released feature film has finally arrived as a permanent and central component of

Mormon cinema. Dutcher initiated a new vitality that has conditioned the soil in which additional important films will flower—along with the inevitable weeds. The artistic achievements of these early Fifth Wave films are often brought into question, but their collective cultural achievement has been profound; independent Mormon feature films have breathed new life into Mormon storytelling generally and into the Mormon retail market in particular.

The Fifth Wave Video Boom

One of the most important but least discussed effects of *God's Army* has been the increased stature of video releases, encompassing direct-to-video productions as well as films that first debuted in theaters or on television. The *God's Army* phenomenon bolstered the video market not just for fiction films but especially for documentaries. Video releases obviously gained strength throughout the Fourth Wave, but Dutcher's success and the coincidental rise of DVD as the dominant home video format combined to give new legitimacy to short films, videos, and nonfiction productions that would have otherwise been considered somewhat second-class. DVD sales surely had a great deal to do with Deseret Book's acquisition of Excel, and in 2005 they began marketing many straight-to-video titles like the short documentary *American Mormon* and the secular feature *Down and Derby* much as they would any theatrical release.

Historical documentaries have often been the least innovative but most popular form of nonfiction film. Besides Lee Groberg's steady work, worthy of mention are Matt Whitaker's *Truth & Conviction: The Helmuth Hübener Story* (2002), Scott Tiffany's *Forgotten Voyage: The Mormon Sea Trek That Sparked the Gold Rush* (2002), Peter Johnson's *Journey of Faith* (2005) on the Book of Mormon, and a series of unpolished but highly informative documentaries by Dennis Lyman on nineteenth-century temples.

Verité films and other works based in the present have been equally prolific and often more innovative. *New York Doll*, a theatrical release, probably tops this list in terms of style and spirituality, but many other films are not far behind. Tasha Oldham's *The Smith Family: A Lesson in Love* (2002), about a Salt Lake City family dealing with homosexuality and AIDS, gained the coveted opening position in PBS's prestigious documentary series *POV*. Steven Greenstreet's *This Divided State* (2005), which deals with Michael Moore's controversial appearance at Utah Valley State College during the 2004 presidential campaign, was tremendously successful at festivals, universities, and on video. Other notable productions include Brad Barber's *Troy through a Window* (2002), Melissa Puente's *Sisterz in Zion* (2006), and particularly a series of films known as the Fit for the Kingdom

movement. Spearheaded by BYU film professor Dean Duncan, these short works are deceptively simple profiles of rank-and-file Latter-day Saints. On a lighter note, one overlooked gem was KJZZ-TV's short-lived reality television series *Not on the First Date*, a Utah Valley version of the popular *Blind Date* series that both respected and occasionally lampooned the conservative yet tacitly libidinous courtship practices of Mormon culture.

As Mormon culture grows increasingly prominent and robust, it will be increasingly examined through nonfiction films. As Helen Whitney did with *The Mormons*, Mormon documentarians like Tasha Oldham and Melissa Puente (significantly, they are often women) will increasingly be able to examine their culture without appearing to challenge their faith. *Sisterz in Zion* undertook such an examination in terms of race and economic status, and an even more important film in this regard might be the upcoming *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons*, produced by Darius Gray and Margaret Blair Young. Documentaries on modern polygamy are increasing, as are films on politics (with two planned on Mitt Romney's presidential campaign) and other aspects of Latter-day Saints' lives. But as with *New York Doll* and the hour-long Fit for the Kingdom film *Angie* (2006), the best upcoming Mormon documentaries might very well be those that paint the most intimate portraits of Mormonism's adherents.

Fiction work released on video has featured many duds but frequent jewels like Christian Vuissa's half-hour *Roots and Wings* (2002), about a Mexican family in America torn apart by the wife's and daughter's conversion to Mormonism. John Lyde has been a particularly productive video maker; his work has ranged from abysmal to quite good; the missionary film *The Field Is White* (2002) is rough but sincere while the secular romantic comedy *Take a Chance* (2006) is technically accomplished but narratively flat and clichéd. Directing on video and editing some HaleStorm features allowed him to cut his teeth to the point where his theatrical debut will be the forthcoming *Singles 2nd Ward* in 2007.

Perhaps the most overlooked arena of Mormon videos is in children's media. The post-*God's Army* video boom, combined with the popularity of Christian videos like Big Idea's *VeggieTales* pictures, has created a vivacious LDS children's film market. Foremost among these pictures are LightStone Studios' *Liken the Scriptures* live-action musicals, the animated series *Junior's Giants* and *Max's Attic* (by Excel and Covenant, respectively), HaleStorm's moral barnyard series *Howdy Town*, the interactive series *FHE on DVD*, and even Mormon videos for the very young—in the *Baby Einstein* mold—in the competing *My Little Saints* and *Baby Mormon* series.

MORMONS AND THE MAINSTREAM INDUSTRY

The Allure of Crossing Over

It is still too early in the Fifth Wave to tell which new LDS filmmakers will succeed in the mainstream industry. The most logical bet, however, is on director Jared Hess and those associated with his debut film *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004). Based on the short BYU student film *Peluca* from 2002, this picture depicts the antics of a high school student in Preston, Idaho, and often feels more like extended sketch comedy than an actual feature. Fox Searchlight picked it up at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, and in general release the film quickly became a national, then international, phenomenon, vaulting its star Jon Heder to celebrity status. The film, which cost \$400,000, eventually grossed \$44.5 million, besides immense revenue from international sales, DVDs, and subsidiary tie-in products.

If *Napoleon* became a touchstone in mainstream American culture, then it proved an especially poignant entity within American Mormonism.



A thrift store visit by Napoleon and friends from *Peluca* (2002). Director Jared Hess's 9-minute film, which first screened at BYU's student film festival, Final Cut, became the basis of the 2004 sleeper hit *Napoleon Dynamite*. Courtesy Jared Hess.



Jared Hess, *left*, directs Napoleon (Jon Heder), Pedro (Efren Ramirez), and Principal Svadean (Thomas Lefler) in a scene from *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004), the quirky Mormon-made film that has earned a higher box office return than any to date, proving that independent LDS filmmakers have been able to achieve mainstream success. Courtesy Jared Hess.

Some Utahns and Idahoans began ruminating on how closely their lives came into contact with the filmmakers', and more importantly most Church members lauded the film as an example of Mormonism made palatable for mainstream society. A good deal of this sentiment was fueled by a desire for acceptance and celebrity, but it also put pressure on Mormon filmmakers to steer away from the *God's Army* model and return to secular productions. In the past, such a move would not have been referred to as crossing over, but in the new post-*God's Army* atmosphere, it often has been, particularly as filmmakers who had previously made Mormon-themed material—such as Andrew Black, Ryan Little, or Ben Gourley—went on to create works with no apparent Mormon content.

Prospects for Mormon Cinema

Though some LDS filmmakers, including Richard Dutcher, have turned away from attempting Mormon-themed feature films, this does not sound the death knell for Mormon cinema. The theatrical feature film has been the most visible component of emerging Mormon cinema since 2000, but it is hardly the only one. During the current retrenchment, it

may be easy to deride or dismiss Mormon cinema, but many factors suggest an imminent rebound: the Mormon retail market and DVD sales within it flourish; more and more Latter-day Saints are in the entertainment industry and constitute a corps of artists and technical personnel; film and media production is thriving at Brigham Young University and other Mormon venues; the Church continues to use and implicitly endorse the medium; the LDS Film Festival is growing; Church membership numbers are expanding, especially globally, where Latter-day Saints are hungry for any media about their faith (as evidenced by the first Festival du Film Mormon, held in Brussels during February 2007, followed by a touring program in Francophone cities throughout the year); and Mormon film criticism is now starting to provide serious discussion that should inspire and help refine Mormon filmmaking. And despite the superficiality of Mormonism apparent in some movies, there is a growing and healthy complexity with which LDS characters and themes are treated in Church productions, mainstream movies, and independent Mormon films. Mormon cinema will continue to emerge due to all of these conditions and to a robust, if young, Mormon film culture. Mormon cinema will be able to withstand its own stumbles and move forward, just as Mormon literature has done before it.

Where the Fifth Wave will lead from here is hard to predict, but we can be certain that vying with the Mormon-themed theatrical feature film will be the new forms and uses of film made possible by evolving media and digital culture. Throughout the history of Mormon cinema, societal, artistic, and particularly technological developments in mainstream cinema have presaged similar events within Mormonism. The 16mm film and consumer-level video were each essential to create the Third and Fourth Waves, respectively, and it is likely that the single greatest influence on present and future waves will be the rapidly developing technology of digital video.

This transition has already begun with heavy use of acquisition formats like Mini-DV, Digital Betacam, and high-definition video, and of distribution methods such as DVD and the Internet. Global developments in digital film distribution in 2005 and 2006—including VOD (video on demand), TiVo, the shrinking window between theatrical and DVD release, beaming digital signals to movie theaters, mergers between entertainment and Internet firms, and websites like YouTube.com and MySpace.com—indicate the course that Mormon cinema will surely follow. In the next few years media will become increasingly liquid and democratized, both characteristics that stand to benefit the Latter-day Saint community.

This revolution in consumer control of audiovisual media is set to coincide with the Church's spread outside the United States and across the globe, where Mormon filmmakers, though underrepresented, have already begun to make their presence known. But this revolution does not herald an era of multinational professional filmmakers as much as it does conditions in which the general Church membership will be able to take the camera into their hands to communicate with one another. The expanding Internet will create a cinematic worldwide web providing Latter-day Saints the ability to identify more broadly, personally, and deeply with their counterparts across the globe.

We can look for films, like those already noted from the Clawsons' work forward, about regular people and quotidian activities involved in building up the Church: building a new chapel in Bangalore, preparing the sacrament in Campinas, sending the first missionaries to Beirut, or running a family history center in Parowan. The logical extension of Judge Whitaker's *Church in Action* series, such a massive activity could be undertaken only by the interested individuals themselves. But where Whitaker's films were woefully underdistributed, these productions would be instantly accessible to Church members anywhere with a computer and Internet connection. This development would be the visual equivalent of President Kimball's portable transistor radios with the important addition that the viewer can instantly respond with his or her own visual message, creating a dialogue that fosters global fellowship and the spiritual gathering of a geographically dispersed people.

The path forward is already under construction. The prototype for films like those described above can be found in the Fit for the Kingdom documentaries mentioned earlier, online at <http://fitforthe kingdom.byu.edu>. The Church's website, www.lds.org, has many streamed videos of general conference addresses and other material, and Kent Olmstead's independent website, <http://mormonwebtv.com>, has, as of this writing, posted well over one hundred short streaming videos, including interviews, video blogging, trailers, home videos, and more polished short films. Though small at present, the potential for such a site is enough to revolutionize Mormon cinema and how geographically distant Latter-day Saints might relate to and fellowship with each other.

Just as importantly, BYU Broadcasting Services under John Reim launched BYUTV in January 2000 on the Dish Network and, in March 2007, BYU Television International, expanding the station's reach into Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking areas. BYUTV has also been picked up on numerous satellite, cable, and Internet avenues. In early 2006, it was estimated that BYUTV was available on cable television packages in

40 million homes in the United States (constituting 100 million potential viewers), but more interesting are its statistics concerning international growth. It is estimated, for instance, that it will be available in 15 million homes in Brazil by 2010, and already online downloads of streaming video in China triple those in the U.S.¹³⁴

Despite the increased demand for content created by a second station besides KBYU, Reim and his successors have not yet been given an additional production budget; hence, much of what airs on BYU TV consists of stale lectures, roundtable discussions, and even old football games. The content gap is not a crisis but does indicate how BYU Broadcasting and its entities remain one of the greatest untapped resources for the global dissemination of Mormon cinema. Many hope to see more independently produced films funded and aired on BYU TV, taking their place alongside their in-house counterparts. A production budget to allow such films to go forward would provide vital opportunities for new and developing LDS filmmakers.

Fiction films and, as mentioned, theatrically released features will continue to be a major component of Mormon cinema, and digitization will help them as much as their documentary counterparts. Another great need, therefore, is for a new cadre of filmmakers to come to the fore and create intelligent pictures that do more than poke fun at the exaggerated quirks of Utah culture. Equally important is the realization that potential investors in Mormon films must be willing to provide the resources that will allow this to happen.

Finally, the last great factor presaging a future flowering in Mormon cinema has to be the improvement and proliferation of film criticism. Such criticism will make possible films worthy of the hundreds of thousands of dollars they will cost to produce. Returning to President Kimball's statement cited at this article's beginning, if LDS "motion picture specialists" are to create masterpieces that will, perhaps digitally, "cover every part of the globe in the tongues of the people," then, as Kimball recognized, they must be "written by great artists [and] purified by the best critics."¹³⁵ At present, thoughtful and incisive criticism of Mormon films is appearing, but it is eclipsed by armchair film reviews and informal audience responses. Mormon cineastes may once again draw their example from the Mormon literati: Wayne Booth once said, concerning Mormon literature, that "we won't get a great artistic culture until we have a great critical culture,"¹³⁶ and this has proven true as literary critics such as Richard Cracroft, Eugene England, and others have articulated Mormon theoretical frameworks and applied these fruitfully to Mormon creative writing.¹³⁷ The need for good criticism is much greater in the exponentially more

popular and populist field of cinema: educating audiences and filmmakers alike, honestly criticizing where efforts fall short, and praising Mormon filmmakers when praise is due—including reinserting film credits in institutional films as was the case in Judge Whitaker's period—will all lead to an improved Mormon cinematic culture producing improved films.

This history has attempted to lay the ground for such films and such criticism to flourish. Through the decades, we have seen trends grow concerning the democratization of cinema, the improvement and growth of fiction films, attempts at Mormon film criticism, the spread of original distribution methods, and other components of a robust cinematic culture. A knowledge of their history may now allow for even more conscientious and thus innovative growth in the future. No one may know the destiny of Mormon cinema, but we can certainly learn from its past.

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1. Anonymous (probably Richard or Gwen Dutcher), www.zionfilms.com, ellipses in original. For the source text see Spencer W. Kimball, "The Gospel Vision of the Arts," *Ensign* 7 (July 1977): 5; this well-known version is actually the condensed version of an earlier speech entitled "Education for Eternity" given to BYU faculty and staff on September 12, 1967, printed in *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1967-68* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1968), 12-19. Thus, the website's author, like many others, mistakenly identifies the speech as originating in 1977, when Spencer W. Kimball was President of the Church.

2. Anon., www.zionfilms.com.

3. For two examples see Chauntelle Plewe, "LDS Filmmakers Sacrifice Everything for Their Movies," *Daily Universe*, August 22, 2003, 1, which calls Dutcher "the creator of the first LDS film 'God's Army'"; and Preston Hunter, "What Is LDS Cinema?" written April 30, 2001, amended February 2005, www.ldsfilm.com/lds_cinema.html, in which he claims that though Dutcher was not the first LDS filmmaker or the first filmmaker to include Latter-day Saints in his work, he "was the first to do both—the first Latter-day Saint to make a feature film—a film that played nationally in commercial theaters—*about* Latter-day Saints." Italics in original.

4. By comparison, only roughly forty-five thousand attendees arrived for the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. This festival is considered one of the most prestigious film events in North America.

5. James V. D'Arc, "The Saints on Celluloid: The Making of the Movie 'Brigham Young,'" *Sunstone* 1 (Fall 1976): 20-21. A Twentieth Century Fox newsreel on the premiere may be viewed on *Brigham Young*, DVD, directed by Henry Hathaway (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2003).

6. In 1977 President Spencer W. Kimball's "patriarchal blessing" for the arts was published, officially endorsing Mormon film (see note 1); in 1953 the BYU Motion Picture Department was formed (see page 73); in 1940 Twentieth Century Fox's blockbuster *Brigham Young* debuted; and back in 1913 the first Church-sponsored feature film was created (see pages 35-37). Each of these events precipitated similar responses regarding the arrival of Mormon movies.

7. The film was so expansive that at least one modern critic has dubbed it the sixth feature-length film in American history. Patrick Robertson, *Film Facts* (New York: Billboard Books, 2001), 9-14, 211. "Feature film" grew as a relative term. In 1903, *The Great Train Robbery* was considered a feature at eleven minutes (one reel). For his list, Robertson used the Cinémathèque Française definition, "a commercially made film over one hour duration," and included only those films that were shown in their entirety. Before the first film on his list, *Oliver Twist* (May

1912), at least two other feature-length films were produced in the United States but were released in several one-reel parts. Robertson also identifies *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* as one of the first three documentaries produced anywhere in the world, a curious claim since the film does not resemble a documentary in any way.

8. Journal History of the Church, September 2, 1928, 4, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Church Archives), also available on volume 2 of *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, CD-ROM, 2 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002). The Journal History of the Church is also available on microfilm in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

9. Journal History of the Church, October 28, 1928.

10. <http://mormonlit.lib.byu.edu>. The database's film listings are also divided into these categories.

11. Summaries of each wave and key films from each of them are listed at http://mormonlit.byu.edu/html/Five_Waves_of_Mormon_Film.html, with films linked to their complete entries in the Mormon Literature Database.

12. Richard I. Reeves II, "Utah and the Spanish-American War" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1998), 98–105; A. Prentiss, ed., *The History of the Utah Volunteers in the Spanish-American War and in the Philippine Islands* (Salt Lake City: W. F. Ford, 1900), 50–57; Elias Savada, comp., *The American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States: Film Beginnings, 1893–1910* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 938.

13. Richard Alan Nelson, "Utah Filmmakers of the Silent Screen," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Winter 1975): 5.

14. See, for instance, Rebecca Foster Cornwall and Leonard J. Arrington, "Perpetuation of a Myth: Mormon Danites in Five Western Novels, 1840–90," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 2 (1983), 147–52; Michael Austin, "Troped by the Mormons: The Persistence of 19th-Century Mormon Stereotypes in Contemporary Detective Fiction," *Sunstone* 21, no. 3 (1998): 51–53.

15. Nelson, "Utah Filmmakers of the Silent Screen," 7; Richard Alan Nelson, "The History of Utah Film: An Introductory Essay," unpublished paper for BYU course Communications 691R (1973), 6, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as Perry Special Collections); Richard Alan Nelson, "A History of Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals in the Anti-Mormon Film Era, 1905–1936" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 23; Richard Alan Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance: Mormons and the Silver Screen," *Dialogue* 10 (Spring 1977): 61.

16. Nelson, "Utah Filmmakers of the Silent Screen," 15.

17. J. A. Aberdeen, "W. W. Hodgkinson: The Man Who Invented the Movie Business," http://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/hodkinson_system.htm; Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 13–15; John Douglas Eames, *The Paramount Story* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985), 9, 11.

18. Grant Smith, "Empire Theater," <http://cinematreasures.org/theater/1470/>. My thanks to Travis Anderson for pointing out the existence of this theater to me. Roger Roper, "Going to the Movies: A Photo Essay of Theaters," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 67 (Spring 1999): 112–15; Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 3–5, 23; David

Kent Jacobs, "The History of Motion Pictures Produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967), 17.

19. "Visual Instruction President Will Visit Eastern Centers with View of Introducing Movies into Schools," *Deseret Evening News*, August 3, 1921; Journal History of the Church, August 3, 1921, 3.

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21. Edward H. Anderson, "Social Affairs," *Improvement Era* 14 (September 1911): 1054.

22. Alexander, "Between Revivalism and the Social Gospel," 32.

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24. Stephen H. Fletcher, "Harvey Fletcher," in *Biographical Memoirs*, vol. 61 (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1992), 185; "A Tribute to Harvey Fletcher," http://www.et.byu.edu/~tom/family/Harvey_Fletcher/Harvey_Tribute.html. Some historians claim this title is not completely accurate, as Fletcher's technique relied on spaced pairs of microphones. Modern stereo, based primarily on coincident techniques, was conceived by Alan Blumlein of EMI at about the same time and aimed to overcome the deficiencies in Fletcher's method. Blumlein applied for the key patent in this field in 1931. See "Harvey Fletcher," Reference.com, http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Harvey_Fletcher.

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33. Cornwall and Arrington, "Perpetuation of a Myth," 164–65.
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35. Malcolm R. Thorp, "'The Mormon Peril': The Crusade against the Saints in Britain, 1910–1914," *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 69–88; Malcolm R. Thorp, "Winifred Graham and the Mormon Image in England," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1979): 107–21; Cannon and Olmstead, "Scandalous Film," 48–50.
36. Richard Alan Nelson, "Commercial Propaganda in the Silent Film: A Case Study of 'A Mormon Maid' (1917)," *Film History* 1, no. 2 (1987): 149–62; Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 95–120; Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 20–21, 23; Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance," 59.
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39. Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 145–64; Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance," 63.
40. "Rocky Mountain Moving Picture Company," *Moving Picture World* 3 (August 29, 1908): 155; "Film Manufacturing Plant at Salt Lake," *Moving Picture World* 3 (November 21, 1908): 401.
41. *Journal History of the Church*, June 30, 1910, 7–8.
42. *Journal History of the Church*, April 17, 1913, 5; see also Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 78.
43. "Doings at Los Angeles," *Moving Picture World* 15 (March 1, 1913): 875; "State Rights Selling Fast," *Motography* 9 (June 14, 1913): 450.
44. Quoted in Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 250.
45. Quoted in Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 80.
46. Email from Robert Starling to Gideon Burton, July 2, 2007; Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 72–81; Nelson, "Utah Filmmakers of the Silent Screen," 7–9; Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance," 61–63; Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 9–10; Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 5–9, 39–40; Levi Edgar Young, "'Mormonism' in Picture," *Young Woman's Journal* 24, no. 2 (February 1913): 74–80 (some stills from *One Hundred Years of Mormonism* are included in this article).
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48. Anthon Johan Theodor Sorensen, "Highlights of My Life and Production of Motion Pictures of Book of Mormon, 1915," n.d., unpublished manuscript, Church Archives; "Images Preserve First Filmmaking Attempt," 6.
49. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 14–17.
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51. Harold H. Jenson, "A Providential Escape," *Improvement Era* 27 (November 1923): 62.

52. Fred C. Esplin, "The Church as Broadcaster," *Dialogue* 10 (Spring 1977): 28–29; Pearl F. Jacobson, "Utah's First Radio Station," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1964): 130–44.

53. Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 24–31; Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 180–86; Nelson, "From Antagonism to Acceptance," 65–66; Nelson, "Utah Filmmakers of the Silent Screen," 19–23.

54. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 22–28; "Motion Picture Producer Dies as Blasts Wreck Laboratory," *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 24, 1929, 1–2.

55. *Latter-day Saint Leaders: Past and Present* (1948) is a Frank Wise compilation of some crumbling Clawson brothers films that were discovered in a basement during the late 1940s. These short films show many General Authorities, including the 1910 First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, Anton H. Lund, and John Henry Smith). The compilation includes other footage shot at the time of the April 1916 general conference and some film from the 1920s. A narration gives biographical information.

56. See Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 201–5.

57. Patrick Ford, interview by James D'Arc, April 25, 1979, typescript, 6, 14, Perry Special Collections.

58. Charles Ramirez Berg, "The Margin as Center," *John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era*, ed. Gaylyn Studlar and Matthew Bernstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 79–82.

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60. Biographies of many Mormons involved with movies can be found in the Mormon Literature and Creative Arts database (<http://MormonLit.lib.byu.edu>) and at LDSfilm.com.

61. LeGrand Baker, Kelly D. Christensen, Darren Bell, and Thomas E. Patterson, "Rosel H. Hyde Biography," Register of the Rosel H. Hyde Collection, Perry Special Collections, 5–16.

62. D. B. Jones, "The Canadian Film Board Unit B," *New Challenges for Documentary*, ed. Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 133–47; Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 89–91.

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64. I am indebted to Ardis Parshall for a great deal of information on *Corianton*, including its release and demise. Her work will be presented in a forthcoming article. Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 187–90; Nelson, "History of Utah Film," 31–33.

65. Joseph Smith Peery, interview by Clinton D. Christensen, Salt Lake City, December 2001, Church Archives.

66. Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 4 (1979): 436.

67. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 58–59; Nelson, "Latter-day Saint Screen Portrayals," 192; B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 6:546.

68. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Dramatic Mormon History: On the Air," *Church News*, October 4, 1941, 1.

69. Esplin, "Church as Broadcaster," 29; Lloyd D. Newel, "Seventy-Five Years of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's *Music and the Spoken Word*, 1929–2004: A History of the Broadcast of America's Choir," *Mormon Historical Studies* 5 (Spring 2004): 127–42.

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73. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 63–65; Sheri Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 83–105. Hinckley, "Romance of a Celluloid Strip," 4.

74. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 64–65, 69–70; "Technicolor Tells Utah Story," *Church News*, May 10, 1941, 7; "Photo Expert Helps Draft Color for Mission Service," *Church News*, June 21, 1941, 2.

75. Lorna Maycock and Ruth Peterson, "Recreation," *It Happened in Orem: A Bicentennial History of Orem, Utah* (Orem, Utah: City of Orem, 1978), 115–21.

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79. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 79–83, 91–98; Frank S. Wise, interview by Gordon Irving, December 1980–January 1981, 25–31, James Moyle Oral History Program, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Archives.

80. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 75–78, 84, 97.

81. Wetzel O. Whitaker, interview by Thomas Cheney, July 30, 1985, type-script, 5, Perry Special Collections.

82. Wetzel O. Whitaker, "Pioneering with Film: A History of Church and Brigham Young University Films," unpublished manuscript, n.d. (between 1977 and 1985), 7, Perry Special Collections.

83. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith*, 176–93; Richard O. Cowan, *Temples to Dot the Earth* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 158–60; John C. Thomas, "To Take the Temples to the People," in *Out of Obscurity*, 328–29.

84. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith*, 289, 479–80; David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 166–70.

85. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 101–7; Whitaker, “Pioneering with Film,” 10–11.

86. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 121, 132, 135–38, 157; Whitaker, “Pioneering with Film,” 17–18.

87. Jacobs, *History of Motion Pictures*, 144, 180–82; Ernest L. Wilkinson, “Commencement Remarks [May 31, 1963],” *BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1963), 4. Also available on *Gospelink* at www.gospelink.com.

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95. Nelson, “From Antagonism to Acceptance,” 67. “Wyoming Deacon Is Star in Movie,” *Church News*, March 23, 1974, 10; “House without Windows,” *Church News*, August 31, 1974, 8–9; “New Movies: ‘Against a Crooked Sky,’” *Church News*, December 20, 1975, 14; Golden A. Buchmiller, “6 Join the Church during Shooting of the Movie ‘Rivals,’” *Church News*, March 10, 1979, 5; “Crash Changed Us, We’re Kinder Now”—Movie Recalls Pilot’s Ordeal,” *Church News*, February 12, 1984, 12.

96. Reed A. Benson, “Ezra Taft Benson: The Eisenhower Years,” in *Out of Obscurity*, 57.

97. Tom Milne, “Paint Your Wagon,” *Monthly Film Bulletin* 37 (March 1970): 50.

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109. “The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd,” *Ensign* 30 (September 2000): 33–43.
110. Hess, *Evolution of Media*, 29–38.
111. “Churches Form Cable TV Network,” *Church News*, September 17, 1988, 4. See also “Cable TV Program Is a Tool for Strengthening Families,” *Church News*, June 2, 1990, 11; Julie A. Dockstader, “Network Televises LDS Worship Services,” *Church News*, November 10, 1990, 3; Julie A. Dockstader, “New LDS Program Airs on Television,” *Church News*, November 2, 1991, 3; “‘Center Street’ Highlights ‘Exchange’ Activities,” *Church News*, September 17, 1994, 5.
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113. Quoted in Brian J. Hill and Michael N. Landon, “The Pioneer Sesquicentennial Celebration,” in *Out of Obscurity*, 161.
114. Hill and Landon, “Pioneer Sesquicentennial Celebration,” 171–72.
115. At a panel entitled “Dissenting Opinions: Art from the Dark Side of Happy Valley,” presented August 11, 2006, at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, Neil LaBute stated he was disfellowshipped from the Church shortly after “Church elders” became aware of *bash*. He then referred to ultimately “resigning my membership from the Church about a year ago, . . . finding that, certainly for my children, . . . it was better to have a father who wasn’t a Mormon than who was what they essentially saw as a bad Mormon.” Panel discussion available for download at www.sunstoneonline.com/symposium/symp-mp3s.asp.
116. Ken Verdoia, email to author, July 9, 2005.
117. Terry L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 155.
118. Michael Austin, “The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time,” *Dialogue* 28 (Winter 1995): 141–42.
119. Austin, “Troped by the Mormons,” 54–55.
120. Randall A. Mackey, “*The Godmakers Examined*: Introduction,” *Dialogue* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 14–15; “Godmakers’ Sues for Libel,” *Sunstone* 10, no. 7 (July 1985): 38.
121. For further information, see John Williams, “Hitchcock and Mormonism,” presentation at the 2006 Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City (August 2006), available online at www.sunstoneonline.org.

122. Austin, "Troped by the Mormons," 55.
123. Jonathan Langford, "Not about Mormons: A Review of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*," *Irreantum* 5/6 (Winter 2003/Spring 2004): 138.
124. Michael Austin, "Theology for the Approaching Millennium: *Angels in America*, Activism, and the American Religion," *Dialogue* 30 (Spring 1997): 43.
125. Quoted in "KUED and KBYU Utah Now 'Viewing the Mormons' to Air Friday," May 3, 2007, www.ksl.com/index.php?nid=148&sid=1178430.
126. This final point is from Mary Rindlesbach, "Mormon Cinema," 6–7, unpublished paper for Film Studies 506: Historiography of Film and TV, Emory University, April 26, 2005.
127. Mitch Davis, *Journey of Faith: The Making of The Other Side of Heaven* (Saratoga, Calif.: Vantage Point Press, 2002), 9.
128. Eric Samuelsen, "Finding an Audience, Paying the Bills: Competing Business Models in Mormon Cinema," in this issue, *BYU Studies*, 46, no. 2 (2007): 209–30.
129. Samuelsen, "Finding an Audience, Paying the Bills," in this issue, 209–30.
130. Sean Means, "LDS Film Pioneer Laments the Decline of Once-Hot Genre," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 17, 2006, C1.
131. Jared Cardon, letter to the editor, *BYU Daily Universe*, February 3, 2006, 4. For a cogent summary of the controversy (written from a pro-Dutcher position) see Bruce Young, "Loving States of Grace—and Wondering Why Some People Hate It," *Irreantum* 8, no. 1 (2006): 143–54.
132. Richard Dutcher, "'Parting Words' on Mormon Movies," *Daily Herald* April 12, 2007, <http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/217694/>.
133. For comments by both Dutcher and Hunter, see David McKee, "LDS Movies Struggle to Find an Audience," *Las Vegas Business Press*, February 13, 2006, available at <http://www.lvbusinesspress.com/articles/2006/02/13/news/newso4.txt>.
134. John Reim, personal conversation with the author, January 15, 2006.
135. Kimball, "Gospel Vision of the Arts," 5.
136. Wayne C. Booth, "Question/Answer Session," in *Letters to Smoother, etc.: Proceedings of the 1980 Brigham Young University Symposium on the Humanities*, ed. Joy C. Ross and Steven C. Walker (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, n.d.), 32.
137. See Eugene England, "Mormon Literature: Progress and Prospects," in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 455–505, updated and available at <http://mlldb.byu.edu/progress.htm>; Richard H. Cracroft, "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature," *Sunstone* 16 (July 1993): 51–57.