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Cursing the Queer Family: Shakespeare, Psychoanalysis and *My Own Private Idaho*

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What makes a given appropriation of Shakespeare, a given echo of Shakespeare, worthy of a literary critic's attention? What makes a critic ponder the Bard's appearance on a calendar or a credit card, in 'Fever' or 'Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again,' in *Forbidden Planet* or *The Last Action Hero*, in *A Thousand Acres* or *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*? Until recently – say, the 1980s – to attract a critic's attention, an appropriation had to be located, like Shakespeare, within high culture, and was judged according to aesthetic standards applicable to any work of art, standards of beauty, coherence, suppleness, complexity, intelligence, and so on. Since the 1980s, critics have been attracted by appropriations of Shakespeare located outside of high culture, although, as Richard Burt points out, this attraction has not led critics to abandon the standards that previously demarcated these appropriations as out of bounds. Rather, if critics cannot assess appropriations according to the standards of high culture, they 'try to reclaim' them, 'by showing that they are actually intelligent (that is, politically subversive, as present cultural criticism typically understands popular culture)' (1998, p. xxix).

In a moment, I will turn to some examples of such reclamation in the criticism on the film *My Own Private Idaho*, but before doing so, may I confess that my aim in this chapter is to think about the echo effect implicit in the ways 'present cultural criticism understands popular culture' or anything else? Burt's comment implies a topicality inherent in what we bring to a text – 'as present cultural criticism typically understands' – which might also imply error, or potential error, since the present is always already difficult to grasp, too near and too close. But certainly critical topicality multiplies echoes, booming or slight, with the Shakespearean echo sometimes enhanced, sometimes weakened by

the 'typical understandings' of 'present cultural criticism.' In *My Own Private Idaho*, the homeless and homosexual Mike Waters (played by River Phoenix) wants to create new forms of family and kinship but fails, and fails because director Gus Van Sant cannot silence the echoes of Shakespeare and Freud percolating in his mind. More significantly, though, and this is the metacritical point of this discussion, critics can't seem to silence those echoes either, and in bringing Shakespeare and Freud, especially Freud, so strongly to bear on this film, we fail to support Van Sant's attempt, failed as it is, to find what Judith Butler calls 'forms of kinship [that are] intelligible and livable' outside the incest taboo, the Oedipus complex, and the symbolic law of the father (Butler, 2000, p. 70).

Reclamation, then, is the aim of Matt Bergbusch, for example, who insists that Van Sant's use of Shakespeare in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) only 'appears "clumsy"'; Van Sant's is a knowing clumsiness, Bergbusch assures us, which contributes to 'a specifically allegorical and politically "sophisticated" clumsiness with which the film as a whole is infused' (2000, p. 210). And it is the aim of Curtis Bright, too, who insists that *Idaho* 'is *not* a postmodern fragmentation but a coherent interpretation of Shakespeare's *Henriad* relevant to a global audience' (1997, p. 301). Kate Chedgzoy suggests, contrarily, that a 'resistance to harmonious integration is precisely the point; the film collages together fragments of the Shakespearean texts with shards of modern culture in order to image the late twentieth-century family as the site of dislocation and misrepresentations, of messages which miss their target and codes best left undeciphered' (1995, p. 37). Susan Wiseman, too, finds *Idaho* to be a fragmented film, one whose critical take on 'modern life' and 'the disenfranchisement of sexual identity' is not furthered by its use of Shakespeare. For Wiseman, the film only appears to use Shakespeare to reveal 'the subtextual or latent amusing perversity' in the *Henriad*; it actually uses Shakespeare to keep separate and indeed to contrast the narratives of Mike and Scott Favor (Keanu Reeves), thus 'stand[ing] by the heterosexual potential of the *Henry* plays' (1997, pp. 237, 238).

Chedgzoy's and Wiseman's arguments have won the day; more recent essays on the film follow their leads, accepting that fragmentation significantly contributes to *Idaho's* status as a piece of filmic art. *Idaho* has become *serious stuff*, a hook on which to hang analyses according to the likes of Alain Badiou, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Felix Guattari, Karl Marx, Linda Nochlin, and Slavoj Žižek, among others, as well as a whole lotta punk music and fair hustlers in black leather (Ferguson, 2011; Protic, 2013; Newlin, 2009). For James Newlin, *Idaho's* fragmentation – Newlin,

like Chedgzoy, terms *Idaho's* structure a collage – reveals that what 'Van Sant's film is really escaping is the call for representing the authentic,' whether hustler, rocker, or playwright. The result is 'something fantastical' (2009, pp. 9, 1). Ailsa Grant Ferguson agrees that authenticity is not the point, though she seems less sanguine than Newlin about it, arguing that this is a fact with which we must 'make peace': in *Idaho*, the body that is Shakespeare's text 'at some points [is] neatly commodified and at others tantalizingly fragmented, but always reflects the preoccupying themes and forms portrayed in this new film-text' (2011, p. 22). We must allow, she concludes, a 'multiplicity of [Shakespearean] meanings to become a part of the intertextual artifact' (2011, p. 22).

While I tend to agree with Wiseman that *Idaho* 'stands by the heterosexual potential of the *Henry* plays,' I would point out that in order to make this analysis, Wiseman must discount Van Sant's own assessment of Shakespeare's place in the film. Immediately after noting that 'the film might have suffered a little bit' from the need to make Scott like Hal, there being, after all, 'a difference between being a king and being the mayor's son,' Van Sant explains that Scott is the way he is 'because of the Shakespeare, and the reason the Shakespeare is in the film is to transcend time, to show that those things have always happened, everywhere' (Fuller, 1993, pp. xlii, xlii–xliii). Such an assessment is almost laughable in the present critical moment and certainly was in the mid-1990s when Wiseman published her essay – where has this guy been, one wants to know – and Wiseman is nicely restrained in dismissing it: 'This seems more like a retrospective claim for the transcendent qualities of Shakespeare than a consideration of the specific place of the *Henry IV* plays in the film' (1997, p. 225). Ferguson thinks Wiseman has got this wrong: for Van Sant, 'Shakespeare's "timelessness" is not the same concept as a "universality" of themes; it is "time" that is the key, the relentless forward motion being curtailed by anachronistic fragments, in this case, by "a bunch of Shakespeare in the middle"' (2011, p. 17). Yet I wonder whether Ferguson has got this right, either. She happily drops the latter part of Van Sant's explanation – 'to show that those things have always happened, everywhere' – in her insistence that 'the partially seen textual body of Shakespeare – like Mike's and Scott's partially seen bodies disembodied by the frame – is cut into pieces that emerge, disembodied, at the margins of the cinematic text' (2011, pp. 17–18). Perhaps this is so, but I do not think the visual body tropes, tropes of fragmentation, examined by Linda Nochlin and appropriated here by Ferguson, are 'things that have always happened, everywhere.' Nochlin suggests they gained prominence only toward the end of the eighteenth century.

Is Ferguson, like Wiseman, blinkered by that word 'transcendent'? Does Van Sant make a claim for the transcendent, timeless quality of Shakespeare – the proposition that his 'answers' speak cogently to us? Or does he make a claim for Shakespeare's having noted, too, 'those things' in social life that manifest themselves differently in different societies and thus, in retrospect, appear to 'transcend' time? I doubt Van Sant means the former, for it is not clear that Van Sant could tell us what Shakespeare's answers are; his use of Shakespeare is highly mediated, mainly through Orson Welles, as many if not most commentators on the film have noted (see Arthur and Liebler, 1998, p. 33; Newlin, 2009, p. 7; Protic, 2013). Van Sant is a filmmaker 'influenced by what [he] happen[s] to stumble across' (Handleman, 1991), and he came to the *Henriad* by way of Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* (1966); seeing Welles's film made him realize 'that Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays had this gritty quality about them' (Fuller, 1993, p. xxv). Indeed, when writing *Idaho*, Van Sant 'referred to the original Shakespeare' out of fidelity to Welles, not Shakespeare: 'I tried to forget the Welles film because I didn't want to be plagiaristic or stylistically influenced by it' (Fuller, 1993, p. xxxvii).

Instead, I think Van Sant means the latter, that he uses Shakespeare, as he says, to 'show that these things have always happened, everywhere' (Fuller, 1993, pp. xlii, xliii), to suggest or echo, that is, something about universal – or nearly universal – human or social processes (which, of course, might not be out of line with the claims of structuralist anthropology or psychoanalysis). Van Sant has emphasized that his use of Shakespeare is 'a post-modernist move,' and suggests that in the film Shakespeare functions like 'valleyspeak,' like a 'secret language,' that characters use 'when they're together' in order to have 'fun' (Taubin, 1992, p. 13). Or alternatively, like dubbing. Think of it, he says, as watching a film on 'a plane where there are six different channels: it's all *Awakenings*, but you can switch to whatever language you want. So in the movie the characters are the same, but suddenly they're doing Shakespeare, as if they're traveling back to another time, yet where there were characters like them' (Taubin, 1992, p. 13). Where there were characters *like* them, facing situations not *that* far removed from their own. Precisely this likeness – similar yet different – makes the Shakespearean echoes valuable to us in the present, as we reinscribe their meanings or contest them or produce new ones. The Shakespearean echo is, potentially, a space within which to work, to test the old and the new.

In previous work on this film, I argued that *Idaho's* rewriting of Shakespeare's *Henriad* establishes the film as 'pastoral, as a Western,

and as a work of art addressing the current moment, in particular the complex relationships between personal identity and, on the one hand, familial and social locations and, on the other hand, cultural and economic politics' (2002, p. 34). In that essay I focused on the latter, arguing, among other points, that *My Own Private Idaho* collapses the pastoral distinction between country and city. Certainly the film does not idealize nature. Focusing on the film's opening sequence, Burt thinks Van Sant initially offers up 'a certain kind of aestheticizing, pastoral artifice' as partial compensation for the ills of society, only to reveal that compensation to be empty as the film proceeds (1994, p. 340). But I think Burt is thinking wishfully here, since he offers as evidence only the images representing Mike's narcoleptic state; thin compensation, indeed, this pastoral, if it is available only to the narcoleptic among us. In any event, we agree that the film reveals the country to be no less corrupt than the city; indeed, it is because of its corruption that Mike leaves the country for the city. City dwellers themselves conduct business in the country, like Hans, the auto parts dealer, and even Mike and Scott, for whom Hans is a customer; in so doing, they rely on and are subject to the constraints of a law enforced (or not) by Native Americans, 'natural' men no longer. *Idaho*, a western in which no home on the range is possible, seems also to be a pastoral manqué, offering a witness to an end to pastoral, or at least to a certain kind of pastoral. This is perhaps not surprising in a world that has also marked the end of nature, as Bill McKibben put it in his 1989 best-seller.

In writing this essay, I had hoped to argue that Mike's longing for home and for family is associated in the film with pastoral longing, with a retreat or return to the country – to the open range of the American past and to the Italian countryside of the European past. I had hoped to argue that Van Sant shows both to be illusions, that the country is neither better nor worse than the city and that the home Mike attempts to build on the street (and the love he attempts to kindle in Scott) is just as legitimate as the family into which he was born, which, in retrospect, and given the striking legal and normative progress achieved since 1991 for homosexuals in the US and elsewhere, would have made *Idaho* a profoundly progressive and hopeful representation. But while I stand by the argument that *Idaho* collapses the pastoral distinction between city and country, I do not think the film collapses the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate kinship structures. Nor does it effectively question – or better yet, escape – the heteronormative demands, rooted in the incest taboo, that consign Mike (and many of the other young people in the film) to the margins of society, illegitimate and lost.

The fact is that Van Sant simply begs the question posed by his film about family and home, about kinship, and about the queer subject – ‘why Mike’s on the street’ (Fuller, 1993, p. xli). Mike is on the street, Van Sant tells Graham Fuller, ‘because his real family didn’t work’ (ibid.). ‘Real’ here means biological, I suppose, but the important question for me is this: *Why* doesn’t his real family work?

Van Sant begs the question because the only answer he can provide is one offered in the intellectual space established not by Shakespeare but by another progenitor to which he is indebted, Sigmund Freud. In *Idaho*, Van Sant fails to imagine for his homosexual street kids a compelling alternative to the incest taboo, the Oedipus complex, and the symbolic law of the father, thus reaffirming the psychoanalytic dictum that, as Butler puts it, ‘alternative kinship arrangements attempt to revise psychic structures in ways that lead to tragedy,’ where tragedy is ‘figured incessantly as the tragedy of and for the child’ (2000, p. 70). In ‘Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?’, Butler becomes derisive on this point, breaking tone in a way unusual for her. Many of the homophobic arguments ‘that have been marshaled against gay marriage proposals,’ she avers, ‘focus on fears about reproductive relations, whether they are natural or “artificial,” and what happens to the child, the child, the poor child, martyred figure of an ostensibly selfish or dogged social progressivism’ (2002, p. 21).

Van Sant’s confusion about the larger cultural and philosophical issues at issue in this regard becomes apparent in the film’s ending, which, as a number of critics have pointed out, differs dramatically from the ending published in the screenplay. In the film, Mike finds himself alone again in Idaho, standing on the road that earlier in the film reminded him of a ‘fucked-up face.’ He says, ‘I’m a connoisseur of roads. I’ve been tasting roads my whole life. This road will never end. It probably goes all around the world.’ At which point he collapses, only to be robbed by a couple of passersby and then pulled into yet another car by someone we cannot identify, while ‘America the Beautiful,’ in a slide guitar version, plays elegiacally in the background. In the screenplay, standing on a road in the country, Mike thinks about his failed quest to find his mother, to return home, and about his longing for a normal family, which he had earlier described to Scott as one, ‘you know, with a mom and a dad and a dog and shit like that’ (Van Sant, 1993, p. 159). He says:

I suppose that a lot of kids like me think that they have no home, that home is a place where you have a mom and a dad. (Pause.) But home can be any place that you want. Or wherever you can find ...

My home is right here on the side of this road, that I been to before. I just know I been on this fucking road one time before, you know that? (Van Sant, 1993, p. 186)

After succumbing one last time to narcolepsy, Mike is found lying on the side of the road by a passerby, who 'puts Mike in his car and drives off down the road.' In the published screenplay, that passerby is Scott Favor (Van Sant, 1993, pp. 186–7), which seems intended to verify Mike's final thoughts, his revelation that 'sometimes I had thought that God had not smiled on me, and had given me a bum deal. And other times, I had thought that God had smiled on me. Like now. He was smiling on me ... for the time being ...' (Van Sant, 1993, p. 186).

In mild understatement, Bergbusch comments that 'it is perhaps because Mike's speech rings somewhat hollow that Van Sant chose not to include it in the film' (2000, p. 215). He opts instead for the realistic and hence generally pessimistic conclusion filmed (which, like reality itself, maintains nevertheless a certain hopefulness, our ability to suggest, as have several critics, that in this case the person who picks up the sleeping Mike is a good Samaritan). But one wonders: why should the notion that one can make one's own home or own family ring 'somewhat hollow'? Why should this notion seem a necessary failure, or merely sentimental, when conventional understandings of both have been severely undermined by social realities such that many, many, many of us now live in a vacuum of legal, moral, and even conceptual legitimacy? As with US society generally, the 'normal' family – what Mike describes as one 'you know, with a mom and a dad and a dog and shit like that' (Van Sant, 1993, p. 159) – haunts this film but is not represented in it. People search in vain for that normalcy, like Mike, or run from it, like Scott, recognizing that the only thing normal about it are the structural positions themselves – 'a mom and a dad and a dog.' Others seek to organize new families, new relationships – like Mike who seeks Scott's love, or Bob, who serves as father to many of the boys on the street. And still others, like those opposed to gay marriage, engage in efforts 'to make the state sustain a certain fantasy of marriage and nation whose hegemony is already, and irreversibly, challenged at the level of social practice' (Butler, 2002, p. 36).

Mike has been doubly excluded from a legitimate place in a family or within kinship – first, because his very existence is the result of incest and, second, because he is homosexual. But what is at stake in suggesting that Mike's solution to this exclusion is 'somewhat hollow,' a necessary failure and thus sentimental? Does it matter that Van Sant's own relationships to

Welles and Shakespeare are Oedipal (see Arthur and Liebler, 1998, p. 35; Wiseman, 1997, p. 235)? And what happens when we suggest, as Protic (2013) does, that 'Mike ... remains a symptom through-and-through,' thoroughly constrained by and incapable of penetrating 'the Oedipal relationship he has with women'? Do not we abdicate (and enable Van Sant to abdicate) responsibility to help fill the vacuum of legitimacy? Do we not instead reinforce 'the definitional model that inscribes [Mike's] body as incomplete, inadequate, homeless, wrong' (Bergbusch, 2000, p. 215)? Do not we and Van Sant thereby ratify 'the *reality* of the name of the father [that] continues to shape what is materially and emotionally possible for [Scott and Mike], consigning them respectively, without possibility of appeal, to the legitimate and illegitimate spheres of society' (Chedgzoy, 1995, p. 43, emphasis mine)? Chedgzoy's use of 'reality' is odd and puzzling, since earlier in her essay she acknowledges both that the Oedipus complex 'is, after all, only a heuristically formulated theory within a narrative which has acquired the timeless, incontrovertible status of myth,' and that while 'psychoanalytic theories offer a powerful way of analyzing the sex/gender system of Western societies,' they may nevertheless 'entail a profound complicity with the very discourses and structures which are being critiqued' (1995, p. 36). The 'latter end' of Chedgzoy's 'commonwealth forgets the beginning,' but here she supports the thrust of my argument in this essay (*The Tempest*, 2.1.158).

Our inability – and even Mike's author's inability – to accept Mike's solution does not, I think, indicate a superior sophistication, a superior knowingness, but rather how far we are from achieving a theoretical understanding of the meaning and power of family and kinship in contemporary society, how we remain in thrall to theory that no longer explains the facts (if ever it did) or that, perhaps more accurately, no longer effectively constrains the possibilities of human social organization. We remain in thrall to such theory, and in particular, as *Idaho* and its criticism shows, to the curse of Oedipus and its rearticulations in art, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, as well as in film and literary and cultural criticism. This despite powerful critique of the Oedipus complex by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and despite apparent uneasiness in many of those who do so articulate, an uneasiness rooted, naturally enough, in their professed desires to unsettle the social relations cemented by the curse of Oedipus. As Butler explains in *Antigone's Claim*:

The symbolic place of the father does not cede to the demands for a social reorganization of paternity. The symbolic is precisely what sets

[a] limit ... to any and all utopian efforts to reconfigure and relive kinship relations at some distance from the oedipal scene ... a limit to the social, the subversive, the possibility of agency and change, a limit that we cling to, symptomatically, as the final defeat of our own power. (2000, pp. 20, 21)

In *My Own Private Idaho*, we see the working of that limit, as Van Sant attempts to imagine, as I have already noted, 'forms of kinship [that are] intelligible and livable' outside the incest taboo, the Oedipus complex, and the symbolic law of the father (Butler, 2000, p. 70). For, like Antigone, Mike 'is caught in a web of relations that produce no coherent position within kinship' (Butler, 2000, p. 57). Thus, like Antigone, Mike calls into question the norms that currently govern kinship. As one who 'confound[s] kinship in the rearticulation of its terms,' he tries to find, as Butler puts it, a 'sustaining web of relations [to] make ... [his life] possible' (2000, p. 24). But finally, the film reveals, Van Sant fails to articulate such a web of sustenance, by falling victim to the cultural power of Shakespeare and particularly of Freud – 'fathers' too powerful for him to overcome – cultural power that insists such attempts are sentimental and unworkable, somewhat hollow. In *Idaho*, Shakespeare and Freud reinscribe Oedipus's curse of what it means to live intelligibly within kinship, ensuring that Mike will have no home, not on the range and not even on the streets or the highway, and that Scott will be the one favored by many, all of them hollow. *Idaho*'s reinscription of Oedipus's curse ensures, too, that we continue to live, as Butler suggests, under that same curse: 'Is structuralist kinship the curse that is upon contemporary critical theory as it tries to approach the question of sexual normativity, sociality, and the status of law?' (2000, p. 66).

In *Antigone's Claim*, the implied answer is 'yes,' but in 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?,' Butler arguably holds critical theory to task for allowing itself to be subject to a curse. Pointing out that anthropology has long since moved beyond Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Butler wonders how the structuralist view of kinship, 'which assumes and produces the self-identity of the patrilineal clan' (2002, p. 34), manages to become so prominent in 'the contemporary political horizon,' and in particular, in the debate about gay marriage (2002, p. 30). To explain this prominence, Butler correctly analyzes the utility of invoking 'a largely anachronistic structuralism' (2002, p. 32), and also notes the multiplier effect of psychoanalysis: an outmoded anthropology of kinship finds its way into this debate via

a psychoanalysis that has absorbed it. 'Unfortunately,' Butler writes, 'the important work in what might be called post-kinship studies in anthropology has not been matched by similarly innovative work in psychoanalysis,' which, among 'many Lacanian followers and other psychoanalytic practitioners in France and elsewhere,' continues to rely 'on presumptive heterosexual kinship to theorize the sexual formation of the subject' (2000, pp. 38, 29, 38).

Yet while Butler praises 'post-kinship studies in anthropology' and frankly calls Lévi-Straussian structuralism anachronistic in the present moment, she does not judge psychoanalysis so firmly. Writing as if the problem with psychoanalysis is not psychoanalysis, but anthropology, Butler suggests that 'psychoanalysis does not need to be associated exclusively with the reactionary moment in which culture is understood to be based on an irrefutable heterosexuality ... Indeed, this is the occasion ... for psychoanalysis to rethink its own uncritically accepted notions of culture' (2002, pp. 38, 39). In this, Butler moves to recuperate psychoanalysis, help it along, make it better, rather than make the move one expects, the analogous one pointing out that psychology has long since gotten beyond psychoanalysis, and relegated it to the history of the discipline. That is, she fails to treat psychoanalysis the way she treats kinship, as part of a larger discipline offering competing and compelling alternative theories and explanations. Anthropology got beyond structuralist kinship theory because other anthropologists tested the theory and found it wanting, and because other anthropologists offered better theory, beginning at least as long ago as the 1960s, with David Schneider's work (see Schneider, 1980). Certainly, the same can be said of psychology and work in cognition, human development, and social psychology.

In this, I am reminded of the very careful – perhaps overly careful – conclusions in 'Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture,' where, now almost 30 years ago, rather than call for us to 'abandon' psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool, Stephen Greenblatt also called for psychoanalysis to redeem itself:

if psychoanalysis was, in effect, made possible by (among other things) the legal and literary proceedings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries then its interpretive practice is not irrelevant to those proceedings, nor is it exactly an anachronism. But psychoanalytic interpretation is causally belated, even as it is causally linked: hence the curious effect of a discourse that functions *as if* the psychological categories it invokes were not only simultaneous with but

even prior to and themselves causes of the very phenomena of which in actual fact they were the results. I do not propose that we abandon the attempts at psychologically deep readings of Renaissance texts; rather, in the company of literary criticism and history, psychoanalysis can redeem its belatedness only when it historicizes its own procedures. (1986, p. 221)

And I am moved to ask, as I conclude this chapter, why it is that we humanists cling so tightly to this muddled body of work? Why, in fact, do Freud and Lacan appear prominently in what Jonathan Gil Harris recently has called the 'return of high theory' to our field? Why not, he wonders, newer theoretical models and methods, such as 'queer theory, postcolonial theory, and actor-network theory' (2011, pp. 465–6)? Why the polite tiptoeing around the inadequacies of psychoanalysis, even by thinkers as sophisticated and influential as Butler and Greenblatt? It cannot be because psychoanalysis provides the truth about human behavior or development – a suspect concept among humanists, anyway, who usually disdain the point that the science of psychology has long since abandoned psychoanalysis, not to mention, in some cases, science itself. It cannot be because psychoanalysis provides a progressive understanding of the possibilities of human social interaction or organization, for, as Butler points out, it does not (2002, p. 39).

Is it tenure and the power of institutional and professional status? Is it the sheer difficulty of doing interdisciplinary work, of thoroughly grounding oneself in another discipline? Is it an effect of managerial speed-up in the university, as graduate students and professors are pressed to produce more and more research? Or is it an infernal and eternal gloominess on our parts? I do not know the answers to these questions. But I would say that humanists' inability in 20 or 30 years to shed psychoanalysis from their professional interpretive repertoires bodes poorly for our ability to help effect progressive social change regarding kinship or the family. How can we expect society to free itself from this or any other 'reactionary' theory when we continue to promote and echo it, enhancing its reverberations in intellectual and cultural space? How can we expect a Gus Van Sant to imagine an alternative to traditional kinship structures in his echoing of Shakespeare when we have told him (and when we tell those artists who will follow him) that doing so is impossible or sentimental or dangerous? Butler thinks 'that when psychoanalytic practitioners make public claims about the psychotic or dangerous status of gay families, they are wielding public discourse in ways that need to be

strongly countered' (2002, p. 39). No doubt this is true. And it is no less true of humanists when they make similar public claims about art or the cultural products of the entertainment industries. Here I offer my strong counter: it is time for humanists to stop calling on psychoanalysis to redeem itself, time to join our peers in psychology and consign psychoanalysis to the particular historical moments where it belongs. Let this echo fade.