Kinship and Community: Ancient Texts and Modern Theories
Fall 2016 — IDSEM-UG-1739
Mon. and Weds. 4:55-6:10
Bruce King
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Office hours: Mon. 3-4:45 and 6:15-7:30 and Weds. 3-4:45 (and by appt.) in 614 Gallatin

What is the relation of the family to larger structures of community and of state? Do kinship
bonds provide a model for those of community or must they be superseded in the interest of a
more enlightened state? To what degree do contemporary aspirations for gender equality
entail a radical renovation of our understanding of kinship and of the family? We will
consider these questions through a close reading of ancient texts, from the Greek and Judeo-
Christian traditions, which we will read in conjunction with some contemporary thinkers—
theoretical, poetic, and dramatic—on kinship and the state.

Learning Goals:

1. To gain a knowledge of some of the texts (Greek and Judeo-Christian) that have been
   foundational for western thinking about kinship and the state, as well as for
   contemporary anthropological, psychoanalytic, and queer understandings of kinship.
2. To gain skills in close reading (and in reading from different perspectives) and in
   critical writing.
3. To actively reflect upon the history of some of our contemporary quandaries and
   debates about kinship and its relation to the self and the state.

Syllabus:

Weds. Sept. 7: Intro to the class and to Aeschylus’ Oresteia
Mon. Sept. 12: Aeschylus Oresteia: Agamemnon*
Weds. Sept. 14: Aeschylus Oresteia: Libation Bearers*
Mon. Sept. 19: Aeschylus Oresteia: Eumenides*
Weds. Sept. 21: Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; Adrienne Rich “Diving Into the Wreck”* and
   excerpts from Of Woman Born.* Paper #1 assigned.
Mon. Sept. 26: Sophokles Oedipus Tyrannos
Weds. Sept. 28: Sophokles Oedipus Tyrannos
Mon. Oct. 3: Sophokles Antigone
Mon. Oct. 10: Fall Recess
Weds. Oct. 12: Freud Totem and Taboo, parts I, II.1-3, and IV
P. Clastres “The Bow and the Basket”; J. Butler “Quandaries of the Incest Taboo”*
Weds. Oct. 19: Plato Republic 5*
Mon. Oct. 24: Plato Republic 5*
Weds. Nov. 2 Longus Daphnis and Chloe
Mon. Nov. 7: Longus Daphnis and Chloe
Weds. Nov. 9: Genesis Paper #2 due.
Mon. Nov. 14: Genesis
Weds. Nov. 16: Genesis/Exodus
Mon. Nov. 21: Exodus
Weds. Nov. 23: Thanksgiving Holiday

Mon. Nov. 28: Freud Moses and Monotheism, p. 3-35, 66-117, 142-64

Mon. Dec. 5: T. Kushner Angels in America: Millenium Approaches
Weds. Dec. 7: T. Kushner Angels in America: Perestroika


Sun. Dec. 18: Paper #3 due (or Paper #2, if you’ve chosen the long option—see below).

Books are available at the NYU Bookstore; readings that are followed by an asterisk will be available on the course site on NYU Classes.

Class Requirements:

1. Essays. (75% of final grade). You have two writing options: everyone must complete Essay #1 (6-8 pp.); following that, you can either, 1) write two more 6-8 papers, or 2) write one longer paper (at least 12 pp.) on a topic that you’ve worked out with me. You can, after receiving my responses to your first (and second, if you choose that option) essay(s), rewrite your essay(s) or respond at greater length to one—or more—of my critical points; any rewrites/responses are due at the end of the semester.

2. Class Participation: i) Contributions to class discussion; and ii) Weekly Questions/Reflections, which will take the following form: beginning next week (Sept. 12), please post, in the folder for the week in “Forums” on the Classes site, one set of two or three well-formulated questions/reflections on the week’s reading, by 10 am on either Monday or on Wednesday; it’s your choice whether to offer questions/reflections for the Monday or the Wednesday class, but you must offer questions/reflections for one of those sessions each week. Note, too, that you can read and question/comment upon the posts of your classmates, as well.

Unexcused late essays will be penalized. Weekly Questions cannot be made up.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade.

A number of our readings center on incest and some of our readings contain descriptions of sexual violence. If you’d like a more detailed preview or account of those texts, please contact me, and I’d be glad to provide further details about those texts and to have a follow-up conversation about their place in the class.

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.