rather his culture and times. Damrosch has the conceptual apparatus in place to reject speculations about Blake’s mental health but unfortunately does not draw upon them. He quotes Blake describing insanity as a choice in response to his circumstances (136), and he does not hesitate to criticize Blake’s contemporaries for their accusations of madness: “That this perfectly straightforward poem could be called mad suggests just how conventional most readers’ tastes were” (94). But perhaps most importantly of all, it is against current psychiatric practice to diagnose a client without an interview, because diagnoses of mental disorders are just as much a function of our knowledge of the world surrounding the patient as they are of the patients themselves. Two hundred and fifty years after Blake’s life our knowledge of his specific circumstances is painfully incomplete. Because we do not have the information that we need to make a real diagnosis of Blake’s mental health, and because Blake himself seemed able to distinguish between imagination and material reality, these claims about his mental health do not warrant the attention that they get in Damrosch’s work or in some Blake criticism.

The second shortcoming of this book is one that Damrosch shares with Brothers (and it is not copyediting); they both make short work of religion, and in doing so fail to grapple with the complexity of England’s religious landscape during this period. It is not enough to distinguish among Catholics, Anglicans, and dissenters. Not all Anglicans were alike in Blake’s day, for that matter, nor all Catholics, and there was a wide diversity of dissenting sects competing for Blake’s attention during his lifetime. Again, Damrosch has the conceptual apparatus to do better than this, citing Keri Davies’s and Maria Keith Schuchard’s work associating Blake’s parents with London Moravians and then E. P. Thompson’s work speculating about Blake’s possible Muggletonian background (for which, unlike the Moravian thesis, we have no archival evidence, as Thompson himself admits). Religious influences upon Blake are highly diverse and in some cases overdetermined, so that he sounds both Catholic, dissenting, and Kaballistic in turn, sometimes all three at once. So when Damrosch seeks to describe “orthodox” Christianity, he should probably specify that Blake is most often attacking London Anglicanism at the points of its closest affiliations with Britain’s military and economic interests. It is also important that he specifies to which orthodoxy he refers, as at least three major Christian traditions—Catholic, Anglican, and Reformed—available to Blake claim that mantle, and they are hardly identical in their representation of the deity or in their relationship to Scripture regardless of the points of doctrine that they share.

Overall, Damrosch’s book remains the one I wish I had thirty years ago when I first picked up a copy of Alfred Kazin’s The Portable Blake (1977) and started reading the poet that I had heard sung about on the Daniel Amos album Vox Humana. For that matter, I am grateful I read it now. His engagement with Blake is almost always even-handed, engaging, and insightful, an impressive feat given the scope of Damrosch’s coverage of Blake. This book is useful for any general reader who seeks a more in-depth engagement with Blake’s work, for budding Romantics who want to find that golden thread into Blake’s complex mythology, and for longtime Blake readers who would appreciate Damrosch’s deft handling of the art and poetry that they love.

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Given the wealth of literature on Goethe’s explications of human affinities and relationships, one could be forgiven for thinking that there is little new left to say on the matter. Susan E. Gustafson’s recent monograph delivers, however, a sharp corrective to any such impression via a series of fresh, incisive, and beautifully nuanced readings that recast our understanding of Goethe’s art and sensibilities.

Drawing on and developing a rich vein in the scholarship—one that includes such studies as Peter J. Schwartz’s After Ienca: Goethe’s Elective Affinities and the End of the Old Regime (2010), as well as important essays by Friedrich Strack (“Väter, Söhne und die Krise der Familie in Goethes Werk,” Jahrbuch des Deutschen Hochstifts [1984]), HELD Schlipphacke (“"Die Vaterschaft beruht nur überhaupt auf der Überzeugung": The Displaced Family in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,” Journal of English and Germanic Philology [2003]), and Elisabeth Krimmel (“Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: Paternity and Bildung in Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre,” The German Quarterly [2004])—Gustafson pursues a new line of argument by extending attention beyond conventional heterosexual relationships and biological family constellations to all relations of love, including those between women and women, men and women, men and men, and configurations of families with two fathers or two mothers, or group families with a number of same-sex partners and/or with several parents drawn together in heterosexual and same-sex, and/or nonexclusive, and person-based relationships.

This breadth of focus is ambitious and might, in the wrong hands, run the risk of becoming unwieldy; however, such is Gustafson’s mastery of the material—and such is the clarity and succinctness of her prose—that it stands here as one of the study’s prime strengths, allowing for the identification of a far greater complexity in Goethe’s literary depictions of the family than has previously been recognized:

The underlying aim of Goethe’s Families of the Heart is to map the “overarching narratives and representations” (44) of family connections and affinities in a selection of the author’s work. The main texts analyzed are Die Wahlverwandtschaften (Elective Affinities), the Stella plays, Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship), and Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre (Wilhelm Meister’s Journeysman Years), and a chapter is devoted to each. The readings are prefaced by a short introduction that is remarkable for its conciseness of presentation. In the space of just eight pages, Gustafson situates the study in relation not only to the existing scholarship on Goethe’s representations of family, but also to earlier work on his portrayal of same-sex relationships (e.g., Alice Kuzniar, Outing Goethe and His Age [1996], Robert Tobin, Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe [2000], Katharina Mommsen, Kein Rentungsmittel als die Liebe: Schiller and Goethes Bündnis im Spiegel ihrer Dichtungen [2010], and Daniel W. Wilson, Goethe Männer Knaben. Ansichten zur “Homosexualität” [2010]), as well as to further writings on the institution of family in the eighteenth century, from Peacock’s History of Sexuality to significant academic studies by Günter Säde (Die aufgelöste Familie. Untersuchungen zur Genese, Funktion und Realitätsbezogenheit des familien Wertsystems im Drama der Aufklärung [1988]) and Isabel V. Hull (Sexuality,
State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815 [1996]). In addition, she succeeds in laying the intellectual groundwork for the study and establishing a number of its key premises. A first of these is that Goethe thinks beyond eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century normative precepts by portraying an array of same-sex relationships (male and female), as well as both biological and adoptive family configurations. A second is that he engages in a sustained critique of repressive aristocratic and civil family structures and that his literary works supply a critical counter-discourse that argues for the importance of love rather than utilitarian calculations and/or biological determination as the true founding stone of human relationships. The third premise is that the affinities of Goethe’s characters are seldom fixed and unchanging, but rather fluid and evolving: Gustafson adopts and adapts here the categories of “nonexclusive” and “person-based” attraction developed by Lisa Diamond in her 2010 study on Sexual Fluidity as a useful means of conceptualizing the manner in which the ever-shifting affinities in Goethe’s work challenge assumptions about the stability of love and desire. The picture that emerges—both here and in the subsequent readings—is of a radical and experimental Goethe who determinedly explores possibilities outside the orthodoxy of his age and who poses a series of penetrating questions concerning the essence of “family” that continue to resonate to the present.

The substantive chapters differ quite markedly in scope, if not quality: the exhaustive analysis of the Lehrjahre (67–138), for instance, runs to more than three times the length of the relatively short excursus on the Stella plays (45–66). Not that this much matters; indeed, the imbalance is probably only to be expected given the richness of the respective works. More relevant is that each of the four chapters succeeds in opening up novel and productive perspectives. The first, on same-sex, nonexclusive, and adoptive affinities in Die Wahlverwandtschaften, “Das Reuen” (1998), and Don Juan (2003), highlights that the text is of central importance to Juven (2003), Goethe’s conceptions of relationships is, of course, a given in the critical literature, and Gustafson duly notes the presence of many of the recurring motifs and images associated with the family that we encounter in Goethe’s oeuvre. Her gaze immediately stretches beyond this, however, to the extent to which—and specific ways in which—the text “foregrounds elective affinities as the principal foundation for relationships including families” and “asserts that love and attraction are fluid and can be (and consistently are) redirected or cause redirections of affections allowing for both heterosexual and same-sex connections” (10–11). Via close analysis of the exchanges between the characters of Charlotte, Eduard, the Captain, and Ottillie—and an especially meticulous reading of the reactions described in the famous fourth chapter of the text—Gustafson presents a compelling argument that not only advances the current scholarship as a stand-alone contribution, which also sharpens the conceptual premises for the sections that follow. In the second chapter on the Stella plays, the focus falls on the text’s positive depiction of the bond between the title-figure and Cécile—not, as is commonly supposed, as one of friendship, sisterly affection, or shared maternal feeling but rather as a “true love relationship” (56) that outstrips their respective heterosexual relations with Fernando. The interpretation of the Lehrjahre, in chapter 3, reads the novel as a narrative of development through which Wilhelm and the other major characters discover new meanings of love, family, and relationships as they contest and transcend established social and economic norms. The final chapter extends these lines of thought to the Wanderjahre as a text in which the possibilities afforded by such redefinition are presented in still more radical form, most notably in the idealized model family established by Wilhelm, Felix, Joseph, and Mary.

Such a summary hardly does justice to the sophistication of Gustafson’s analysis, which adroitly combines close textual study with a careful attentiveness to historical and cultural context. The engagement with the existing literature is comprehensive and critical, yet always evenhanded—the purpose seems never to be polemical, but rather to carry the discussion of Goethe’s representations of family relations a stage further by introducing new questions and reflections. The readings that emerge from such an approach are lucid and authoritative; they are, moreover, written with an impressive lightness of touch and refreshingly jargon-free. All in all, this is a skillfully crafted work that constitutes a distinctive and rewarding contribution to existing Goethe scholarship and to eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century German studies more generally.

If Gustafson’s study provides an exemplary illustration of the fresh interpretation scholars can obtain from well-tilled soil, the same doubtless holds true of Karin Schütjer’s Goethe and Judaism: The Troubled Inheritance of Modern Literature. The question of Goethe’s relationship to Judaism has occupied commentators for close to two centuries, and there now exists an extensive body of scholarship that seeks to make sense of his diverse statements and representations concerning Jews. Recent landmarks in the field include the collections edited by Annette Weber ("Außerhalb waren sie ja auch Menschen": Goethes Begegnung mit Juden und Judentum) and Klaus Bergmann and Jens Hermand (Goethe in German-Jewish Culture) from 2000 and 2001, respectively, both of which compile a number of informative contributions on Goethe’s engagement with, and portrayals of, Judaism. A wider review of the literature reveals, meanwhile, that these issues have continually—if perhaps only sporadically—piqued interest throughout the past thirty years, yielding a number of essays and articles by scholars such as Wilfried Barner ("150 Jahre nach seinem Tod: Goethe und die Juden," Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts [1982]), Gunter Hartung ("Goethe und die Juden," Weimarer Bezie (1994)), Jürgen Gidion ("Goethe und die Juden," Neue Sammlung [2000]), and Giuseppe Velti ("Jews and Judaism in Goethe’s Esthetic and Reactionary World: A Typological Study."

The leading claim of Schütjer’s study is that, while undeniably valuable, much of this work has been marked by two particular limitations. The first is an overreliance on historical and biographical materials to the detriment of engagement with Goethe’s literary works; the second, an over-eagerness to evidence a consistent or unitary position on the part of the author and a corresponding tendency either to ignore or to attempt to explain away a substantial portion of his comments—most notably those that carry with them the anti-Semitic or anti-Semitic sentiment. Schütjer’s aim is to redress these shortcomings by offering a first extended literary study of Goethe’s complex representations of Jews and Judaism—one that is not concerned with “accusing or acquitting Goethe of prejudice,” but rather with “discerning the function and logic of his relationship to Judaism, as seen within his work” (4).

The boldness and ambition of this undertaking is inspiring. The source matter is vast and diffuse, spanning the breadth of Goethe’s (enormous) corpus; the manner in which Schütjer marshals the material into a coherent narrative is in itself an impressive feat of critical scholarship. Sensibly, no claims to completeness are made; the study aims neither to offer an exhaustive survey, nor to be the “last word on Goethe and Judaism” (37). Rather, it pursues the more limited objective of cutting new light on Goethe’s engagement with Judaism via a series of contextualized readings that in turn allow for a reconsideration of the common tropes and ideas that pervade his oeuvre and of how these might be mapped onto broader paradigms of modernity in his work.

In the introduction, Schütjer plants the seed that Goethe’s conception of Judaism is not only complex and challenging, but also entwined with his concerns and aspirations regarding the trajectory of his age—fleeting reference is made at this point to the presence of an “anxiety of influence” that captures the “fraught dynamic of dependence and rejection at the heart of Goethe’s reception of Judaism” (192n14), though the correspondence to the Bloomian notion is only loose and limited. More significant for the subsequent development of the