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Review of *The Dynastic Imagination: Family and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Germany*

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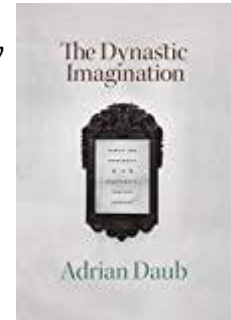
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Adrian Daub. *The Dynastic Imagination: Family and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 253 pp. \$29.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-226-73787-4.



Reviewed by Emily Bruce (University of Minnesota Morris)

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Commissioned by Jasper Heinzen (Department of History, University of York)

That the family was central to nineteenth-century German culture is almost a truism. But what did that really mean for the diverse philosophers, poets, novelists, composers, political theorists, and even psychoanalysts who left their mark over the long century? What kinds of families were idealized, and why? How were the wrong kinds of family relations held responsible for moral and national failure? In his new book, Adrian Daub brings a critical dimension of these questions to light: the dynasty.

Dynastic thinking, as Daub documents across a diverse set of writers, is the idea that we can know and perhaps even have obligations to long distant ancestors and descendants. He offers examples from discussions about *Dynastie*, but more commonly *Geschlecht*, *Stamm*, *Haus*, *Sippe*, *Ahnenreihe*, or *Väter*. Beyond the introduction, he is more interested in how private individuals imagined dynasty and less in the question of political legitimacy assured through dynastic inheritance within royal families, although he acknowledges that was on his subjects' minds (particularly after

the French Revolution). Daub distinguishes between the mediate or nuclear family and the dynastic family, showing that the former—modern, bourgeois, sentimental—was increasingly cast as opposed to the latter—traditional, aristocratic, uncanny. Although he notes several social groups that operated dynastically in Europe, including craftsmen and peasants, this is squarely a bourgeois story (albeit sometimes concerned with middle-class views of the aristocracy). Later in the century, dynastic thinking became entangled with ideas of genetic heredity as some thinkers “replaced the divine right of kings with the evolutionary right of bourgeois families” (p. 14).

Historians will want to know (and Daub is clear) that the book is thus concerned with literary and philosophical ideas about the family, not real family practices or formation. Although the dynastic imagination is a profoundly historical topic (changes over time in how people thought about time), Daub's project is not a work of social or political history. It is driven by analysis of canonical authors: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Novalis,

Mary Shelley, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Richard Wagner, Émile Zola, Sigmund Freud, Stefan George. However, each chapter brings in a diverse set of connections and influences beyond the more well-known titular figure.

Since the book's subtitle names "Nineteenth-Century Germany," I occasionally found myself uncertain about the book's temporal and geographic intentions. Daub argues fairly persuasively that the dynastic as "terminal moraine came to matter more and matter differently in Germany than it did elsewhere"—meaning in western Europe (p. 7). But he also relies on other traditions, including significant analysis of works by Shelley, Zola, Marcel Proust, French counter-Enlightenment philosophers, and Austrian or Hungarian writers. For example, Daub makes very good use of Shelley's novel *The Last Man* to reveal it as a battle between private sentiment (the nuclear family) and the fate of humanity (the dynasty), but without explaining why this particular text is useful comparatively. Temporally, the book traverses quite a long nineteenth century, engaging with Nazi ideology in several respects throughout the second half of the book.

Chronologically, Daub traces dynastic thinking from the early nineteenth century, when it was rejected as a remnant of the old regime, through a return to it later in the century as a means of critiquing the bourgeois family. The book is especially driven by three recurring topics: Goethe in the first third of the century, Hegel in the middle, and decadence into the twentieth century. Some of the texts are deliberately chosen to illuminate key historical moments, such as 1848. For others, Daub's selection criteria are less explicitly stated.

Daub wisely opens with a chapter that lays bare the most direct example of dynastic anxieties at the turn of the nineteenth century: the literary trope in which an individual is confronted with the decay of an ancestral portrait gallery. Daub's marvelous scene-setting draws the reader into his tour of examples from Ludwig Uhland, Goethe, a

Gothic play by Franz Grillparzer (1817), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Theodor Fontane, novellas by Adalbert Stifter and Gottfried Keller, and Gustav Freytag's long cycle *Die Ahnen* (1874–80). Class positionality is critical to understanding this trope, as Daub observes: "the [bourgeois] reader was not meant to to inhabit [it] but rather to experience [it] as exotic, as an index of obsolescence" (p. 35). He thus situates the Restoration (and its discontents) within the family romance.

In chapter 2, Daub considers the battle between the nuclear family and the dynasty for Romantic writers across forms. This chapter features an interesting reflection on what was German about the Romantic reactions to ideas associated with the Enlightenment. Here, the key texts are by Novalis (including his writing about Queen Luise); Friedrich Schlegel; the conservative French philosophers Joseph de Maistre and Louis de Bonald; their German counterpart Johann August Freiherr von Starck (work which Daub calls "a gossipy, cantankerous, scattershot, and frequently ad hominem stocktaking of what the author considered the disastrous influence of Enlightenment philosophy," p. 54); a Swiss theorist in the same mold named Karl Ludwig von Haller; the early sociologist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl; and the novelist Adelbert Stifter. Daub shows effectively that the counter-Enlightenment, counterrevolutionary thinkers were not as worried about children rebelling against their parents as they were about the nuclear family forgetting the dynasty and atomizing.

In the first significant departure from German authors, chapter 3 turns to organicism in Shelley's novel *The Last Man* (1826), juxtaposed with Schelling and Goethe. Daub essays a promising intervention in the scholarly neglect of late Romanticism, and links that to the feelings about legacy (or dynasty and procreation) of Romantics themselves. He also considers Schelling's philosophical novel (or novelistic philosophy) *Clara* (published

1862) and Goethe's *Faust II* (published 1832). Daub is especially good at situating the German texts within their intellectual context—for example, explaining the creature “Homunculus” that Faust's assistant asexually creates in a beaker in terms of debates about Hegel that contemporary readers would have recognized (p. 81).

Chapter 4 pursues two intertwined subjects: Hegel's legacy and differences in the dynastic thinking of women and men feminists. The most interesting evidence here comes from Louise Aston and Bettina von Arnim. Unfortunately, the exploration of women feminists' dynastic imagination is somewhat crowded into the question of Hegel's intellectual legacy. This seems a missed opportunity to examine the feminists' writing on generations, women's family roles, the erasures of patrilineality, and other dimensions of historical transmission in which nineteenth-century German women theorists were engaged. For example, Daub points out that Hegel believed that “each marriage begins a new family, and dissolves a previous one,” but of course feminists were keenly aware that women's ties were erased more utterly in this than men's (p. 111). Although Daub thinks with gender throughout the book, more questions about women's roles and women thinkers are raised here than directly addressed.

The composer Wagner's ideology and family business are in focus for chapter 5. Daub examines dynastic thought both through Wagner's storytelling (although not the music) and through the family drama of controlling his legacy into the twentieth century, a legacy which included ideas of the influential antisemite Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law. Wagner makes for an interesting contrast with the earlier philosophers, as they wrestled with the dynasty as a solemn duty, or with some novelists' resigned cynicism about families. Instead, Daub shows how comfortable Wagner was comfortable with inconsistencies and paradoxes in how he thought about family bonds and generations. We are thus re-

minded that neither racism nor such “family values” had to be logical.

The sixth chapter again expands the borders of the nineteenth-century German imagination by exploring some harrowing dynasties in the Rougon-Macquart cycle of Émile Zola (1871–93) and an “improbable” one in Marcel Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1921–22). The chapter meanders through the image of the hothouse, starting with Gregor Mendel's peas and ending with Proust's garden. Here, the dynastic imagination centers on reproduction, and therefore on sexuality and race. The importance of this concept to Zola's novels is especially undeniable, as Daub writes: “Everything depends on deciding what is progress and evolution and what is just eternal recurrence” (p. 149). Note: while Daub uses original-language versions of the German and English texts, he cites the Zola and Proust novels in translation. For the German, he often and usefully supplies the original quotations as well as his translation.

A persuasive investigation of dynastic thinking in psychoanalysis for chapter 7 brings us back to German (-language) writers Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Léopold Szondi, although venturing significantly into the twentieth century. As Daub acknowledges, we might presume that Freudian ideas about the family were entirely contained within the parent-child dynamic. But Freud did start thinking about heredity on a longer scale in his later work, hypothesizing that repressed memories could affect distant generations. Furthermore, as in the chapter on Wagner, Daub uses the idea of dynasty to explore the intellectual legacies and conflicts within psychoanalysis, particularly through Jung's break with his mentor Freud. This, Daub argues, was itself partly driven by disagreements about the scale of family influence on the psyche (nuclear vs. dynastic). Through the work of Hungarian analyst Léopold Szondi, Daub surfaces a related psychoanalytic debate

about fate and inheritance (set within the family-shattering trauma of the Shoah).

Finally, in chapter 8 Daub explores how Stefan George and his followers understood dynastic relations and myths within a homosocial and homoerotic community. Queer family formation and legacy were sustained in this group through what George sometimes called a *Bund* but also a *Kreis* or a *Reich*. Daub explicates the fascinating circular ideas of lineage and “begetting” in George’s poetry—a connection that can mysteriously “grow back in time” (p. 185). This notion of family was thus shaped through queer temporality as well as through homosexual affairs. And once again, Daub applies his own dynastic imagination to the split in George’s legacy—one that began before he died, and was complicated by Nazism—about how his artistic inheritance should be passed on. Daub’s analysis of dynasty and sexuality then extends into the epilogue with an insightful observation that “there’s no heteronormative family without its queer shadow” (p. 210). The epilogue also carries forward questions of denazification and intergenerational guilt.

Throughout the book, there is occasional fuzziness around the phenomenon Daub is pursuing—among the linked aspects of dynasty, time, tradition, legacy, generation, influence, and history. The author does acknowledge this in the epilogue, writing that often the “interrogation of family dynamics, of the relationship between generations, offered something of a philosophy of history” (p. 207). But is every school of thought dynastic? Is all myth (e.g., Jung’s idea that the phenomenon of psychological transference makes the doctor into a spiritual savior, p. 164)? Are all traditions (e.g., the sadistic hazing at Eton that poet Algernon Swinburne wrote about, p. 178)? The boldness of this idea leaves several openings for further work.

Daub’s excavation of what the literary bourgeois believed about history and their own moment is something that historians of the family

could take up productively to see some of the ways that it translated in reality. In particular, “the dynastic imagination” of German cultural figures could be fruitfully compared with changing inheritance practices in the nineteenth century. Transitioning to his discussion of Wagner’s racism, Daub writes, “Wagner’s families were bourgeois in yet another dimension” (p. 118), meaning the composer’s antisemitism. But of course there was a significant Jewish bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century central Europe, and it would be illuminating to apply Daub’s framework to other Jewish writers (in addition to Freud and Szondi). And while Daub mentions ideas about children several times, the intersection of a dynastic imagination and life stage deserves more attention. Daub writes very poignantly about late Goethe and his sense of the Romantics: “His onetime sparring partners are missing, but he isn’t finished sparring with them” (p. 67). Similarly, it was when Freud was engaged in identifying intellectual heirs in later life that dynastic thinking appeared with greater force in his work (p. 160). Is the dynastic imagination tied to the life course?

As a social historian of the family, I confess that I began reading this book with some skepticism about its approach. But Daub pulled me in with his persuasive case for the ubiquity of the dynasty “problem” in nineteenth-century German literature. The questions above and others provoked by this book’s creative and wide-ranging analysis attest to the valuable contribution Daub has made.

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