Foreboding Forefathers: Cross(br)ed Desire, A Child and Dubious Parenthood. Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (Translated by Kate Brooks)

By Tanja Nusser, University of Greifswald, Germany

Abstract:
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Elective Affinities* [*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*] was published in 1809. With the character of the child, Otto, Goethe takes up the debate surrounding female/maternal imagination and its supposed influence on the development of the embryo; however, he takes it out of the context of the discourse on monstrosity, in which it was traditionally discussed. When I study Otto as the result of parental imagination and relate this to the debate surrounding maternal imagination, I notice the "artificiality" of procreation and the apparent break with the genealogy in this so-called monstrous imagination. In other words, I am interested in the artificial and artistic status of the child whose birth appears to be the consequence of an artificial insemination.

1 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Elective Affinities* [*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*] was published in 1809, and although it may seem astonishing, the novel can be related to a discourse which was no longer current at that time. With the character of the child, Otto, Goethe takes up the debate surrounding female/maternal imagination and its supposed influence on the development of the embryo; however, he takes it out of the context of the discourse on monstrosity, in which it was traditionally discussed. With the child, Otto, as a "product" of parental imagination, Goethe refers to a centuries-old debate, in which medical and scientific as well as philosophical writings thematized the history of the gaze and the imagination. In the history of the individual, this imagination begins before birth and explains the monstrosity as an illustration of reality or as an illustration of an illustration of reality, which comes into existence through too vivid maternal imaginations.

2 While the novel has been interpreted many times over in German Studies' scholarship, and while Otto has been the focus of interest more than once because he does not resemble his parents and thus through his outer appearance signals the "elective affinities of relationships," to the best of my knowledge, there is no interpretation connecting Otto to the discourse of maternal imagination that had existed since the thirteenth century and no interpretation asking about the relationship between maternal imagination and the debate over creative capability.

3 When I study Otto as the result of parental imagination and relate this to the debate surrounding maternal imagination, I notice the "artificiality" of procreation and the apparent break with the genealogy in this so-called monstrous imagination. In other words, I am interested in the artificial and artistic status of the child whose birth appears to be the consequence of an artificial insemination and in this way plays two concepts of insemination

against one another: the biological/natural and the imaginative/artificial.

4 A physiognomic way of observation, which attempts to look for similarities with the father figure in order to explain "differences in appearance," comes to the foreground with the debate concerning maternal imagination. This debate began in the thirteenth century with the reception of Aristotle, but was increasingly discussed in the sixteenth century by a wide range of scientists, medical doctors, and philosophers, and continued to have effect until the mid nineteenth century. The face, but also the external surface of the body, was declared to undeniably testify to origin/ancestry and point, in the case of lack of resemblance, to imaginary and imagined adultery: Someone else has stepped into the role of the father and taken his place.

Creative Mothers. Imaginations Gone Wild: the Debate Concerning Maternal Imaginations

5 In 1510, Agrippa von Nettesheim published *De Occulta Philosophia*, in which his thoughts concerning the soul engage with its ability to transform one's own body or that of another person. The soul can cause these physical changes because the imagination or fantasy controls it as it follows sensory perceptions. Agrippa von Nettesheim does not attempt to explain how the relationship between (changed) object, imagination, and memory presents itself other than to emphasize "resemblance apprehended by [the] imagination" (201) and the results of imitation — a discussion which in the eighteenth century increasingly focused on the relationship of imagination to sensuality and reason (see Dürbeck) and which touched on maternal imagination only peripherally. He remains certain that the "passions of the soul [. . .] cannot only change their own body, but also can transcend so, as to work upon another body, so that some wonderful impressions are thence produced in elements, and extrinsical things, and also can so take away, or bring some diseases of the mind or body" (204).

6 In Agrippa's text, resemblance emerges as the fundamental episteme of perception and an *Order of Things* such as Foucault describes them for systems of thought until the end of the sixteenth century. Resemblance "largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts [. . .] organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them" (Foucault, *Order* 17). The Order (of things), structured by resemblance, is to be understood on the one hand as an internal law of things and, on the other hand, as that which exists only through a grid of perception and allocation in sign systems (see xix-xx). This empirical order is both based on relationships of resemblance and structures perception and the world. In this order, this structure is understood as an

internal law and order of things. In the field of maternal imagination, which can reach another body with its effect, it will lead to the fact that the external appearance of the "monstrous child" is given a truth. This truth can be understood because the child's resemblance, as well as lack of resemblance to the father can point to a "deceitful" desire of the mother. The monstrous body is thus read as a sign within a "discourse of depth" which conceptualizes order as already present "waiting in silence for the moment of its expression" (xx) and whose similarity in its seclusion "must be indicated on the surface of things" (26). In the discussions about maternal imagination, the appearance of the child is given an ambivalent status since not only the visible monstrous body points to the invisible similarities with the object of the mother's desire, but rather — in a logical consequence which in the course of the discussion about maternal imagination is in fact considered to be the most dangerous threat — the "normal" body of the child can become a sign whose "invisible analogies" (Ibid.) point not to the husband, but rather to the father of the child — in other words to the adultery and lastly mark the child who resembles his father as the "real monster" (see Huet 79-82).

7 The infidelity of the woman as the truth of the monstrous (but also normal) body is not only thematized as actual adultery, but much more often is addressed as imagined adultery, which refers to a straying desire of the mother. This desire, however, is not only to be understood in terms of an erotic or sexual desire, but rather takes on much more sweeping traits and can extend to all manner of objects. These emotional triggers can include feelings of fear, religious awe, and anxiety, which in their intensity become triggers for the matter-forming power. Animals, fruit, vegetables, humans, objects, and paintings are affected by this female emotional exuberance. It appears as though the female imagination can only imitate in order to create resemblance in the way that the woman observes religious art or thinks about objects, humans, or animals during her pregnancy (and in a narrower sense during conception). This process is a reproduction, which transfers an "original" onto a second "original," which ends up only having the status of an imitation of the first original.

8 In this way, maternal/female imagination becomes for Agrippa von Nettesheim "monstrous imaginations of women with child" (204) which can only produce monstrosities. A displacement of the "mis-formed" body of the child onto the intellectual/spiritual capabilities of the mother occurs, in which grotesque ideas are perceived as monstrous as the history moves along. One should ask whether the maternal imagination is grotesque because in addition to objects, humans, and animals, it imitates with unusual frequency pictures, rather than living models. If the various texts which engage with maternal imagination are any indication of the interest in this phenomenon, then it can be established that the maternal

imagination often makes a representation of a representation, which nonetheless receives the status of a living model. It certainly collapses the border between presence and representation and undermines the distinction between art and nature (see Huet 13-35). Put differently: Are the monstrosities signifiers or signified?

9 A wealth of themes was continually used, handed down, and transported from text to text and had an amazing importance well into the nineteenth century which still has an effect today. By today's scientific standards, none of the authors of these texts provides empirical proof for this story. In the end it centers on questions of faith, which appear to be rooted beyond any power of proof. In this question of faith, scientific insight mixes with an untouchable Christian faith that is not thematized. As the debate surrounding maternal imagination shows, they are able to coexist in texts unhinderedly. Even if upcoming theories about preformation in the seventeenth century attempted to explain monstrosities in the context of a divine story of creation, the model of explanation still did not differ that much from Paracelsus' thoughts from 1537. As one of the few who supposedly knew a treatment for the "inculcated birthmark" (*Liber* 280), he blamed the devil in order to explain their presence (see *De natura* 61).

10 It is not — as in Paracelsus — the devil who marks "his children through the imagination of the mother who has evil cravings, evil lusts and evil thoughts during conception" (Ibid.). However, Paracelsus' way of reading the physiognomy of the monstrous body would keep intact for centuries. As previously written, the body's surface becomes the place where resemblance and lack of resemblance could give information about maternal desire based on a belief in the readability of physiognomy and in a Christian-influenced value system. Even after James Blondel had accused the "Imaginationists" of irrationality in the first third of the eighteenth century during the Blondel-Turner dispute, which was very influential in the medical community (see Boucé, *Imagination* and Wilson), maternal imagination, continuing into the nineteenth century, was met with reference to historically established capacities (von Haller, Boerhaave, Vidovici, and Malebranche) and with a power of faith, which believed itself to function as a scientific power of cognition (see Boucé, *Sexual Beliefs*). Such a belief can be seen in a text from the middle of the eighteenth century, which received the first place prize from the imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg for answering the following question: "What the nearest cause may be why a change may occur in the body of an unborn child and not on the body of the mother who has suffered from a great emotional shock; and specifically why it happens on precisely that part of the body of the child, where the mother touched herself with her hand?" (Krause 3).

11 Because the maternal imagination is considered to have the ability to give birth to monstrosities and in this way to produce an imitation, which can lay claim to the status of the new, it is apparent that this ability to copy or illustrate can also be valued positively. Recognizing the power to shape matter, the pregnant woman is called upon to take the "beautiful arts" as a model and is advised to hang a "beautiful painting" over the bed in order to guarantee that in an imitation the child will be born well-formed (see Roodenburg 709). This demonstrates the ambivalent valuation of the maternal creative abilities: On the one hand, they appear to be threatening because imagination no longer follows the laws of reason and their creativity is no longer merely reproductive but productive. On the other hand, the positive potential of this creative force is only recognized as long as it is limited to, and directed towards, the beautiful.

12 The century-long discussions concerning maternal imagination are imbedded in the various scientific models of human reproduction. Even by the middle of the eighteenth century, human sciences still did not have a "temporal definition of development" (Lepenies 45) and understood "evolution" as pre-formation in which all beings on earth existed from the beginning already in a complete form (including monstrosities), preformed either in the male's semen or the female's ovaries and needing only to be "rolled out" after birth. A temporality that would allow evolution to be thought of as a process of development first occurred with the development of epigenesis. In regard to monstrosities and in particular bodily deviations, the pre-formation theory was pushed to its limits of explanation: Either the monster was a sign from God, in which case it could not have existed in the "embryo," or God placed it there when creating the universe, in which case its existence contradicted the idea that godly creation was purposeful. In the last decade of the eighteenth century this limitation led to a "redefinition of formation deviations as a phenomenon of nature" (Hagner 87) in connection with the developing theory of epigenesists, which assumed that the individual parts of the body are formed from unorganized matter and that thus a disturbance in the development could lead to a disturbance in the physical appearance. Nevertheless, both the preformists (whether Animalculists or Ovists, whose controversy was first settled when Oscar Hertwig proved in 1875 that conception occurred through the fusion of the egg and sperm) and the epigenesists had proponents of the effects of maternal imaginings on the unborn fetus.

13 Because monstrosity laid claim to a new real space, which was understood simultaneously as mimesis or imitation, a quite complicated relationship between reality and duplication developed in the models of the previously mentioned sixteenth century texts. This relationship comes into being not because maternal imagination only reproduces that which it

sees without differentiation (whether a living model or representation) (see Huet 19-21) but, according to Ambroise Paré, because it has considerable power over the sperm and reproduction (38). The problem facing Renaissance thinkers was that the maternal imagination not only crosses out the paternal position — in both the Aristotelian tradition and the simple assumption that the child has to resemble its legitimate father — it also questions the distinction between art and nature so that — to change now to contemporary terminology — the distinction between original and copy threatens the authoritarian position of the male author (see Huet Part I). If the threat consisted in the fact that the woman attained a non-differentiating power of creation for herself, Nicolas Malebranche's *The Search after Truth/ De la Recherche de la Vèritè* (1674) shows that the potential danger of copying also comes from the fact that this is not about an identical copy as we understand it today, but rather that only exterior attributes, or surfaces, are imitated as exactly as possible. Using the example of an imagination that was emotionally touched by a painting, Malebranche assumes that the mother "imitated it at least in posture. [. . .] But, the fibers of the child's flesh, being [. . .] susceptible to all kinds of configurations, the rapid flow of the spirits produced in its flesh all that was necessary to make it exactly like the image it perceived. And the imitation to which children are the most disposed is nearly always as perfect as it can be" (116-117). While the imitation's accomplishment is emphasized here, because the mother does not understand the inner connections and can only grasp the surface, this accomplishment is deadly and thereby threatening to the generative patriarchal order.

14 In *De generatione animalium*, Aristotle's reflections laid the foundation regarding the nature of imagination that produces such illustrations. In his writings, insemination is understood as the male act of giving a soul to the female matter: "While the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male" (738b). This act defines the relationship between the sexes in the sense that the woman "is a mutilated male, and the catamenia are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul" (737a). The idea that the woman is always only able to be a mutilated male is at the base of Aristotle's conviction that "the movement imparted by the male will make the form of the embryo in the likeness of itself" (767b); a paternal copy that will only be maternal and therefore incomplete if "the first principle does not bear sway and cannot concoct the proper nourishment through lack of heat nor bring it into its proper form, but is defeated in this respect, then must needs the material which it works on change into its opposite" (766a). While these descriptions constitute a clear hierarchy in which the man has taken on the creative and creating function, Aristotle's argumentation hints to a possibility that will only be discussed at length much

later; it suggests that something else can demand and unfold its own creative powers in the uterus against the paternal/male powers. The maternal imagination of the pregnant woman has gone wild because it is no longer moderate and points to a closely related image of hysteria as an illness of the womb. It also shows that when a "deficient" being independently creates or is creative, the act in itself is abnormal/unnatural and can only give birth to monstrosities, which must be read as signs of a disturbed order of the sexes. Form and matter are out of joint. With the monstrous births, it is not only the distinction between art/nature and original/copy which is threatened but much more foundationally, the debate surrounding maternal imagination discusses the question of truth as well as gender attributions bound up with it, the process of creating standardizations as well as controls.

(In)visible Natures. Imaginary and Real Affinities; Otto's Physiognomy Speaks Volumes

15 While in the debate surrounding maternal imagination the appearance of the child was a signifier for a roaming desire, Otto's physiognomy points not only to maternal, but also to paternal deceitful/ unfaithful desire. In the novel the cross(br)ed contaminating desire is imagined as the chemical act/phenomenon of elective affinities. Goethe's novel confirms the elective affinities' threatening and deadly affinities, which had been described the previous year in Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert's *Views from the Dark Side of Science* [*Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft*] which strongly influenced the romantic movement. He describes this in chapter four:

> Where the individual powers and elements unite according to their own law of affection and elective affinity, products and phenomena of sickness and death come into being in living organic bodies. In this way everything that the individual natures of our present world, by virtue of their mutual relationship of exchange and elective affinity most internally and most strongly search for, leads immediately on the next and shortest path to decline and annihilation [. . .]. One could thus say that the individual elements of this world, following the law of death, mutually search and strive for each other unto death, and mutually betray each other through the kiss of love. (99-100)

16 Schubert's proclaimed history of decline and disease, death and decay is situated against the background of a past nature which he evokes, in which at one time "generally higher principles reigned in regard to which products and effects were possible, which were so different from the present relationships of exchange in dead nature as the movements and stirrings of fermentation and decay are from that of organic life" (99). Elective affinities are taken up in this treatment as one of these examples, which, similar to animal magnetism, clairvoyance, and somnambulism, make clear that in the natural science as well as with the planets, "a dark side in the spiritual sense" (5) can be proven, which has at its disposal two

(non)metaphorical lights: The one "reflected, carries the recognizing observing human spirit" (Ibid.) into nature and the other "allows itself to be observed in passing as strange light of nature" (Ibid.) This peculiar phosphorescent light, as Schubert describes the planetary shimmer of light in the night that is not called forth from any known light source, turns itself to a "related part of our being" which lives "more in half dark feelings" (Ibid) and marks ambivalence and uncertainty for him, like for example the oracle sayings. In this way, the example of the elective affinities serves the theorizing of scientific unproven phenomena, whose scientific "dark side status" serves as part of a reflection of the recognizing human intellect and spirit.

17 Schubert's "speculative" philosophy of nature, which bears the religious stamp of an ordering world soul to which the entire organic (including human beings) and inorganic world belong, came into being at a time when the empirical, i.e. experimental, sciences established themselves. In the end his thoughts stay in the natural sciences without consequences and according to some Goethe scholarship (see Hoffmann and Selbmann, esp. 156-159), the chemical model of elective affinities, also called the theory of affinities, was already considered outdated at the time of Schubert's paper and Goethe's novel. While it has been shown from many sides that in this regard the model cannot be interpreted as an anticipating interpretation or "miniature image" of the novel development (Breithaupt 308), the chemical model can be read that, in it, the relationship between reality and representation, between reality and imagination, as well as between nature and symbol(ism) are named as some of the central themes of the novel.

18 The readability of the world, to borrow a phrase from Hans Blumenberg, appears in the novel to be one that produces a misunderstanding and points out that the will "of interpretation and interpretability of the world cannot rely on the visibility of meanings" (Noyes 133) and thus the "unreliability of the visible symbol" (Ibid.) becomes evident. The symbolic processes of structuring and meaning production (see Blondeau, Schneider, Weinhold, and Daemmrich 613-618) keep catching up with nature — that is both landscapes as external aesthetic nature and "human nature", whereby each nature is a horizon of interpretation for the other. However, by the end of the novel they are shown to no longer correspond with one another. The various textualizations and medializations (letters, diaries, copies, tableaux vivants, maps, the novella, *The Curious Tale of the Childhood Sweethearts*, the letters *E* and *O* on the drinking glass, the paintings in the chapel, etc.) bear witness to these efforts, but also to their failure. The protagonists' trust in signs is wrapped up in a game of signs by the narrator that, based on repetitions, multiplications, references, and deceptions,

shows (Kritschil 245) that this attempt at mutual interpretability, which is based on the principle of similarity, is treated with skepticism by the narrator as being a proliferous imagination. Mittler's attempts to mediate understanding and consensus can only intervene without success in the other characters' process of understanding because he always only operates with, and within, the split between presence and presentation, between object or event and the representation, but cannot unite this split. Jochen Hörisch interprets Mittler's "ubiquitous will to speak and understand" as a "discursive power practice," which shows the failure of a hermeneutically oriented literary studies (309). Whether post-modern, structuralist, deconstructivist, or psychoanalytic analyses (to name just a few) would be able to approach the text more adequately than a hermeneutic analysis (or whether this would fail as well) remains a question; however, most efforts of understanding the text are similar in that they continually describe the processes of understanding and constructions of meaning in the novel as working through the relationships between reality/existence (*Dasein*) and representation (as illustration and idea) (see Breithaupt and Peucker). Even if one does not want to understand the child's, Otto's, existence only allegorically or metaphorically, he becomes the character through which the relation of imagination as a creative ability to both object (object of imagination) and illustration/idea is thematized.

19 Earlier I referred to the protagonists' undertaken, if failed, reference to nature and "human nature." However, using Foucault, one can argue that the importance that both of these terms get in the time of Classicism shows that there was an attempt to "guarantee the kinship, the reciprocal bond, between imagination and resemblance" (*Order* 71). Foucault argues that in the classical period a displacement announces itself, in which resemblance, which had previously functioned as a category of cognition, is rejected, but is nonetheless still a necessary category covered by "knowledge [. . .] to its full extent" (68). Based on this assumption, he describes the function of similarity as that which is most distanced from cognition: Through similarity, the representation can be recognized. But the resemblance "manifested only by virtue of imagination, and imagination, in turn, can be exercised only with the aid of resemblance" (104). The abilities to remember, to relate two things to each other, and to eventually produce an order that can connect the present with the past allow to "transform linear time of representation into a simultaneous space containing virtual elements" (*Order* 70) as well as to name the similarity of things without immediately classifying or ordering them. Here, two opposed moments come to the fore, which for Foucault can only experience their "unit[ity] in the idea of a 'genesis'" (Ibid.). However, what interests me in this passage is only the side of "analytic of imagination" (69). Since the middle

of the eighteenth century, imagination had been conceptualized in multiple ways, differentiated from similar notions (or not) (see Unger), and increasingly moved to the center of philosophical interest in the attempt to "rehabilitate 'lower cognitive capacities'" (Trede 347). In this process, the imagination received, as Larissa Kritschil formulates it in relation to Goethe's novel, "productive components (as a capacity of invention, as a spark) as well as a reproductive component (as capacity of empathy and memory)" (10). Negotiated between these two poles, theorists of imagination struggled either in an effort to remove imagination's potentially threatening power as a creative capacity that can take on "pathological traits" or to theorize it as a reflexive capacity. Precisely for literature, and in particular in the theoretical essays concerning poetry, the significant meaning that imagination is given as an actualization and conceptualization of pictures becomes visible (see Schulte-Sasse 103-105). Returning then to the Poetics of Aristotle and following in the footsteps of Leibnitz and Wolff, some theorists of imagination argued that things should be thought and presented in their absence but beyond that also in their potential developments following principles of abstraction and combination. However, this only works — according to a reduction that Breitinger and Bodmer undertake — as long as the possible is conceived as the probable. The debate surrounding imagination reveals that it should be continually emphasized, by the romantics for example, as an outstanding creative capacity, but at the same time that limits should be set that only allow the probable (Kritschil 18-20) and thus, in the end, the similarity appears not only through the power of imagination but rather is replaced as the prerequisite for a productive imagination: Above all, the reproductive function is always superimposed upon the productivity of the poetic imagination.

20 Larissa Kritschil argues that the topos of resemblance unfolds in Goethe's later work (208) and that the topos implies that nature is imitated but that at the same time the imitation should resemble nature and also present its own "truth"; thus productive and reproductive imagination unite but do not aim at a mimesis of nature. In *Elective Affnitnies*, Goethe is, on the level of content, occupied with imagination and its relationship to nature and "human nature" as a relationship of resemblance but also as a reflection. However, as already mentioned, he does not allow these to exist unbroken and he emphasizes the completely "pathological" traits of an imagination in which resemblance as a capacity of cognition can be misleading. Nature is misread or misinterpreted not least because the world or nature is not

imitated, but rather because nature is only meant to reflect the self. The narrator explains this most clearly with the character of Edward.[1]

21 In Immanuel Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-seer explicated through Metaphysics* (*Träume eines Geistersehers erläutert durch die Metaphysik*), published more than forty years before *Elective Affnitnies*, imagination (understood as *imaginatio* and fantasy) is led into the territory of nothingness which can nonetheless bring about productive results. It is not about an imagination led or gone astray as in the case of Goethe, but rather "the effect of the imagination of pregnant women" is ordered into the category of absurdities (just as supernatural visions, divining rods, premonitions) that "gain entry even to those who are reasonable simply because they are generally talked about" (969). Kant describes the "wild phantoms of the spirit-seer," Swedenburg, as a monstrosity whom the collector of nature "exhibits in his cabinet" (981). Not everyone was allowed to view this, however, because among the boldest people, there could be pregnant women "upon whom it might make a bad impression" (Ibid). Fearing for an ideal conception, which could follow as well as predate monstrosity, it would "make him sorry, if they would have some kind of an accident" (Ibid). The accident/mis-seeing as a basis for a (re)productive imagination that produces those kinds of monstrosities that are displayed as (metaphysical) objects in the natural history collection and in this way evade the separation between intellect/spirit and body/soul and the eye, which Kant is working on in his text, is based on a twofold textual "nothingness." Because Kant's work "in the end results in nothingness" (981), he also stands before nothing and hopes he will not be "blamed for the mooncalves, that on this occasion are likely to be born from their fruitful imagination" (Ibid). This virgin conception by a "nothing" marks exactly the problems around which Kant's text circles (see Weissberg 44). His efforts at classifications and establishment of boundaries that should position the metaphysical, as well as visions, in a geographical process of localization can be understood as "imperialistic gestures" (Ibid). In this effort it is continually revealed that this search for empirical confirmation — "for an 'experience' that he himself must still determine" (35) — must continually fail.

22 Kant's text presents the way in which perception and truth are coupled in the thematic of imagination; imagination cannot only be dangerous, but it can also bring about (re)productive work that is coming from an accident/a mis-seeing based on nothingness and can claim an empirical effect. *Elective Affnitnies* can be observed in the afore-mentioned context of the eighteenth century's new and higher valuation of imagination on the one hand as artistic creative capacity and on the other as a planning, goal-directed capacity. Both

[1] See Edward's comment that humans are narcissists who like to see themselves reflected everywhere and use themselves as measure for everything (112).

capacities serve to function in the novel as a "visual appropriation of the world," (Schneider 290) which often turns out to be self-deceiving (see Kritschil 260-272) because the gaze does not leave the boundaries of panoramic perception and continually focuses only on the subject of perception.[2] In the figure of the child, Otto, this creative imagination is crossed with a procreative (in the medical sense) imagination.[3] This points to a completely different, multi-faceted discourse on maternal imagination that is mostly set off from the aesthetic discussion. It does not occupy itself with the question of what kind of capacity imagination might be, but rather names countless examples of the effects of this ability (see Boucé, *Imagination*).

23 The child, Otto, has the middle (and formerly first) name of the father as well as that of the Captain (a friend of the family) and furthermore points to both *Ott*ilie and Charl*ott*e (see Schlaffer). Thus, he signifies the various hypothetical parental and selected relational constellations. Due to the fact that we do not discover the last names of the individuals who take part in this cross(br)ed desire, Otto's first name makes his lineage "unclear." This lineage must be all the more urgently signified and verified through the passing on of the parental/paternal name because it is based on a genealogy of the name which is on the one hand unknown (last name) and on the other not unequivocally attributed (first name). The 1804 (1808 for the Kingdom of Westphalia in German) publication of the *Napoleonic Code* established that the genealogy of names was unable to guarantee without a doubt the children's legitimacy. The code's new institutionalized law in the first book, *Of Persons*, in title 7, § 312 named the husband as father of a child conceived during marriage unless he could prove that "either because of absence or some other reason making it physically impossible, he had been unable to have intercourse with his wife from the entire time in the interim between the 300th to the 180th day before the birth of the child" (136, 138).

24 While Otto's name does not allow for an unequivocal recognition of his origins but rather establishes the cross(br)ed desire of the quartet as a part of his inheritance and doubles the parents, his appearance reveals this desire even more clearly than his name. "He seemed a miracle, a prodigy: handsome to behold, big, well-proportioned, strong and healthy; and what was more amazing was the dual resemblance that was growing more and more apparent. In features and figure the boy increasingly came to look like the Captain; his eyes became

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[2] Horst S. Daemmrich points out that the panorama as a perspective of interior space finds expression in the circular forming of the landscape and is only questioned by Ottilie when she suggests building the house on a hill.

[3] Larissa Kritschil points out that Goethe was possibly referencing Jaques-Henri Bernardin de Saint Pierre's novel Paul and Virginia (1788). In the novel, which is considered to be one of the first examples of French exoticism, it is concluded that Paul resembles his patron saint, Saint Paul, because his mother, Margaret, feeling "while pregnant, abandoned by all the world, and continually occupied in contemplating the image of this benevolent recluse, her offspring had contracted some resemblance to this revered object" (53).

increasingly hard to distinguish from Ottilie's" (Goethe 232). Otto does not resemble his biological parents at all and, corresponding to this, it is not surprising that his appearance against the backdrop of maternal (but in Goethe also paternal!) imagination is read physiognomically. His physical appearance bears witness to what happened only imaginarily: "This child is the result of a double adultery" (238). In *Le Affinità elettive*, a film adaptation of *Elective Affnitnies* from 1996, the marvelous quality of this wonder child is bound up more unequivocally in the discourse of monstrous imagination: "This strange night of love," as the narrator explains (as voice over) "had born a wonder or perhaps a monster." Otto's appearance bears "a striking resemblance to the Captain" (216): That his physical form in the Goethean sense of formation/education points less to the meaning of formation stemming from the middle of the eighteenth century in the sense of an unfolding definition of formation or development of one's personality as it does to the *form* (*Bild*) in the word *formation* (*Bildung*) as well as to the productive imagination of all the participating characters. His form is an illustration that testifies to the (pro)creative act of the parental imagination and signifies the topos of resemblance in which nature is imitated but presents its own truth as a monstrous deviation since the imagination's capacity of invention remains in the framework of a capacity of memory through reproductive imitation and resemblance, but lays claim to the status of the new. The child, Otto, presents a new reality that can no longer be understood as an artistic representation but rather questions the status of nature, art, model, and copy and in this way points to the threatening and pathological traits of an imagination that can form matter and not only signs. However, Otto also illustrates the desire that drives the individual characters to decode the material world and nature as sign or reflection of "human nature," as the "monstrous" failure which is threatening to societal order. The reflections, as it turns out at the end, evoke the "false face" and show that the ego always fails but also that human nature is always layered with a cultural nature that can no longer be understood in a relationship of resemblance.

25 Bearing children (*erzeugen*) and bearing witness (*bezeugen*) are close to one another at the etymological level of interpretation of *Elective Affnitnies* but they point to different and mutually exclusive genealogies in the character of Otto: As figures they repeat the cross(br)ed and contaminating desire of the four protagonists. Bearing children and bearing witness can no longer function in the character of the small Otto as generative models that declare without a doubt one father and one mother because they point in different directions and fall away from one another. As witness to a truth that never occurred, Otto becomes a displaced sign that attributes a reality and a power of creation to the imaginations that in the end form matter

and are able to point out in a psychoanalytical argument the fragility of the law of the father (see Braidotti 86) whose side of signification is always threatened by repressed desire.

26 The imagination in Goethe's *Elective Affinitites* refers ex negativo to scientific thoughts that admit to the ability of maternal plastic imagination to allow the monstrosity (the adultery) to appear in "genetic camouflage" (see Boucé, *Imagination* 94) as normalcy (the child has the appearance of the husband) and thus does not allow monstrosity to be understood as anatomical. In this way Goethe works within the discourse and expands it to include the procreative effects of a paternal imagination and thereby ties it back to its own story: The "normal" (the child, Otto) becomes a monstrous sign because it refers not only to the matter-forming, and thus contaminating and displaced desire of the parents but also shows how the dietary discipline of the parents, which structures the novel, simply fails in the desire for the Other. As Foucault explains based on Plato's *Nomoi* and the pseudo Aristotle: In a diathetic model of desires, the thoughts of those participating in the act of conception should be concentrated on one another if good, attractive children should be the result. However, "it is so often the case that the children of human beings do not resemble their parents, the reason is that the latter, at the time of the sexual act, had many other things on their minds instead of thinking only of what they were doing at the moment" (Foucault, *Pleasure* 124). Goethe's novel is reminiscent of a discussion that had been going on for centuries in an attempt to explain different bodies and faces and it adds an important meaning without the narrator of the text being in the position of the one by whom these absurdities gained entry. The narrator's distance to the narrated story marks this model of explanation in the way he reaches for the story of maternal imagination as one which thematizes the borders or the limitation of truth and untruth. In this way maternal imagination becomes a displaced examination of the creative capacity of imagination.

27 The labeling of the wonder child may initially refer to the amazement of people who see Otto for the first time and it in this way indirectly thematizes the history of the eye and of the gaze, but it can also be related to the history of monstrosities. These had been marked since Aristotle's thoughts regarding the generation of living creatures as wonder animals (Part V Book IV 4) and as a wonder of nature. Goethe's text stands more at the end of one or of several scientific epoch(s) in which the most varying theoretical models attempted to explain "deviations of formation" by playing the maternal imagination against the generative power of the male semen and thus established two models of conception as natural versus artificial/abnormal. Nonetheless, his novel, which finds itself in the literary company of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Jean Paul, and Lessing, points back to the centuries-long ongoing medical

history of maternal imagination and tells the story of "abnormal" visualization, even in a displacing movement, one more time.

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