

**“Was bedeutet der Stein?”:  
Fetishism, Profanation, and Parody in Fontane’s *Grete Minde***  
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*This article explores the function of the precarious (non-)significance of the thing in Theodor Fontane’s 1879 novella Grete Minde. On the surface a simple tale of exclusion and revenge in seventeenth-century Brandenburg and a seeming anomaly in Fontane’s oeuvre, the novella also contains a barely visible leitmotif of the agency of things on the cusp of their disempowerment, not to say fall into vulgar parody and obscene joke. This article reads the status of the thing in Grete Minde not only as a key to some of the text’s more curious narrative choices, but also as a mark of the persistence of the ontological and aesthetic questions of the Reformation and as Fontane’s ambivalent self-reflection on the task of the novelist in the modern era.*

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I

Though it retains a dubious canonicity as a text of the right size and sentimentality to be foisted on high school students, Theodore Fontane’s 1879 novella *Grete Minde*, while a bestseller in its day, is no longer one of his better-known works. Based—so the subtitle tells us—“on an old chronicle of the Mark [Nach einer altmärkischen Chronik],”<sup>1</sup> the novella tells the story of Valtin and Grete, only children and half-orphans who live in neighboring houses in the town of Tangermünde in the early seventeenth century, just before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. Grete, the daughter of a Spanish Catholic by way of Bruges and a Tangermünder patrician, is treated with neglect and scorn by her sanctimonious sister-in-law, Trud. After her father’s death, Grete—described, like her late mother

before her, as a great beauty—finally reaches the limits of her endurance and runs away from Tangermünde together with Valtin. When the narrative rejoins the pair after an ellipsis of several years, Grete and Valtin have become members of the same travelling acting troupe that had fascinated Grete years before and are the parents of a young child—and Valtin, wounded in a duel to defend Grete’s honor, lies dying in the attic of the inn where the actors are lodging. As his final wish, Valtin makes Grete promise to return to Tangermünde and throw herself on the mercy of her half-brother, Gerdt. When Grete attempts to make good on her promise to Valtin, however, her brother refuses her both sanctuary and the rightful inheritance that she demands in its stead. When the town councilmen, to whom Grete subsequently takes her claim, rule against her and in favor of her brother, Grete sets fire to Tangermünde, holding Gerdt and Trud’s young son aloft as she tumbles with him from the town’s bell tower into the flames below.

In the scant critical literature devoted to it, Fontane’s novella is usually read as a fable of injustice and revenge in the vein of Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas*,<sup>2</sup> a minor tragedy of familial ties and small-town relations,<sup>3</sup> a melodrama of the failed search for individual emancipation and personal happiness in a repressive society,<sup>4</sup> or a parable of bourgeois self-interest and criminality in the manner of Fontane’s own *Unterm Birnbaum*. In what follows here, however, Fontane’s novella will be approached less in terms of its plot and psychological or social content, and more in terms of its form: or rather, in terms of the ontological and cultural assumptions upon which form is premised. Specifically, the present article will be concerned with the precarious status of the thing in *Grete Minde*. For running through Fontane’s moralizing (yet also highly morally ambiguous) tale of family conflict and societal values is also a subtle but insistent leitmotif of the ambivalent agency of things on the cusp of their disempowerment, their troubling presence between imposition, availability, and withdrawal. As this article will claim, it is the thing—better: the idea of the thing—that acts as both hidden operator of the novella’s plot and the vehicle for Fontane’s negotiation of the task of the writer in the mid-nineteenth century. Far more than the mere “genre and character picture [Sitten- und Charakterbild]” that Fontane himself claimed it to be,<sup>5</sup> *Grete Minde* is

Fontane's tentative reflection on the possibility and potential risks of an art that would undertake to portray the world in its empirical, material "reality": through the mirror of the past, an early and ambivalent testing ground for the literature of the present.

## II

Constituting what is in fact a partial departure from the realist program towards the arguably more established genre of the historical novel, the plot of *Grete Minde* is loosely based on actual events—albeit ones even more scurrilous than the tale Fontane himself will eventually make out of them.<sup>6</sup> Almost all critics have noted the peculiar anachronistic quality that this background gives to Fontane's novella, whose characters' motivations and actions, not to speak of its narrative style and language, more often than not have a distinctly modern cast.<sup>7</sup> Birgit Jensen has shown how such anachronicity also functions as a fundamental element of plot, as the novella's characters act out a conflict between an early modern ethos of sin and mercy and a proto-capitalist ethos of rational action.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Bernhard Losch has stressed the element of historical transition and contrast in regard to the novella's portrayal of systems of law, whereby Grete's act of extrajudicial revenge in feudal Tangermünde would serve as Fontane's warning to modern, post-revolutionary democracies about the necessity of providing for channels of *legal* dissent.<sup>9</sup> However, such temporal stereoscopy may also be examined not just in terms of its cultural repercussions, but also for what it reveals about the novella's formal problems and their resonance for its literary-historical context. That is, beyond its implicit message of socio-historical change, another effect of the novella's anachronicity—both linguistically, in the fluctuation between conscious archaism and modern colloquialism, and generically, in the uneasy mixing of historical chronicle, fairy tale, idyll, melodrama, and social novel—is to denaturalize, and thus to emphasize, its own techniques and narrative strategies: those that belong to earlier eras which Fontane consciously mimics, of course,<sup>10</sup>

but also, even more significantly, the newer techniques and strategies of literary realism itself.

Such an effect of denaturalization can be perceived, for example, in the passage describing the appearance of Trud and her cousin (and Valtin's stepmother) Emrentz at a town feast for the visit of the local prince-electoral. In this passage, the narration pauses to note that both women "were dressed with a peculiar richness and splendor, in necklaces and high ruffs, and Emrentz, in spite of the July heat, had not been able to bring herself to forgo her little ermine-trimmed jacket [beide waren absonderlich reich und prächtig gekleidet, in Ketten und hohen Krausen, und Emrentz, aller Julihitze zum Trotz, hatte sich ihr mit Hermelinpelz besetztes Mäntelchen nicht versagen können]" (GM 51). The descriptive precision of this passage—not "Mantel" but "Mäntelchen," for example; not "Hitze" but "Julihitze"—and, still more, the muted irony of the narration both firmly date this passage (one among many other similar passages in the novella) quite far from the sensibilities and literary style of the era in which it is in fact set. In adapting a modern literary style to seventeenth-century events, Fontane makes the nineteenth century loudly heard.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the authorial irony or "humor"<sup>12</sup> that characterizes so much of nineteenth-century realist prose (and not just Fontane) may be claimed as a product of anachronism in a general sense: that is, of the historicism and regionalism that is similarly defining for the intellectual production of the nineteenth century, insofar as it is precisely the consciousness of the discrepancy between past and present, or one community and the other, that furnishes the conditions for cultural self-awareness and hence a certain wry detachment in regard to *tempora et mores* generally. In this sense, the overt historicism of *Grete Minde* has a potentially recursive effect, allowing the world view that is a late product of such historicism to appear almost more strange than the portrayed historical era itself, and the literary style associated with this world view—whose very name seems to imply the *lack* of both aesthetic and epistemological doubt—to be destabilized, its "realness" subject to the same questioning as the representational conventions of previous centuries.

And yet the formal denaturalization of *Grete Minde* is also more than just an incidental byproduct of its being set in a historical past *as such*; in addition, its *specific* historical setting necessarily foregrounds the same problems and tensions that the novella's anachronicity already evokes on the level of style. For Fontane's novella is not only incidentally set in the years leading up to the Thirty Years War; its plot also prefigures the war's own confessional conflicts, which themselves, in turn, map onto some of the most pressing concerns regarding knowledge and artistic form in Fontane's own era. In other words, it is neither chance nor local historical interest nor even writerly uncertainty alone that leads Fontane to adapt the story of Margarete von Minden—whose less than sympathetic protagonists and matter-of-fact cruelty make it indeed for him a rather unlikely choice of source material—for his second longer work of fiction. Beyond any of these possible motivations, Fontane's sentimental tale exploits its historical background as a way to reflect, in the ontological/aesthetic questions of another era, the aesthetic/ontological questions of his own.

One of the most pressing among these, once again, is the question of the thing. More precisely, it is the question of the thing as something represented and—thereby—invested with meaning. The iconoclastic controversies that raged during the Reformation were not just controversies regarding the image, but also controversies of the thing insofar as the thing is made into an image: that is, into a sign for something more than or beyond itself or an entity invested with agency and spiritual life. As Andreas Karlstadt writes in his 1522 polemic “On the Removal of Images [Von Abtuhung der Bilder],” the text that would ignite the iconoclastic debate in the German-speaking world, “The maker of images makes an image / and bends down before it. [...] Thus have they forgotten / that the eyes of images do not see and they have no understanding in their hearts [Der bildmacher mach eyn bilde / und krümet sich vor yme. (...) Also haben sie vergessen / das die augen der bilder nicht sehen und das sie in yrem hertze nicht verstehnd].”<sup>13</sup> These lines are particularly interesting in that they constitute a rewriting—or perhaps merely a misreading—of Isaiah 44:18, explicitly referenced by Karlstadt, where it is not, as in Karlstadt, the *idols* who are blind and uncomprehending, but, more conventionally,

the idolaters in their idolatry. Karlstadt's silent *re*interpretation of the Old Testament passage thus inscribes, *ex negativo*, the fear of the livingness of the inanimate image into the efforts to abolish it. Whereas in Isaiah, the condemnation of the image is based on the image's profane materiality—the same wood used to cook one's food and heat one's house is worshipped as a god when put into the form of a fetish—in Karlstadt, the condemnation of the image is based explicitly on the image's failure to be the spirit that it promises (and latently, on the repudiated, but nevertheless threateningly present, case of the image's *non*-failure).

What is in question in such iconoclastic controversies above all, then, is not the fact of the image itself, but the thing *as* image and the image *as* thing: or rather, the material image of the thing as an image of the un-imaginable and immaterial thing, the deceptively concrete (not to mention impiously miniaturizing) embodiment of the divine totality—or later, secularized, the “human heart”<sup>14</sup>—itself. Thus even in its most dogmatically iconoclastic formulations, the accusation of idolatry in the representations and rituals of Roman Catholicism had to do less with the image *per se*, and more to do with the dangerous tendency of the material and visual to accrue value in excess of itself, to have its mere material presence confused with the spiritual content that it may indeed indicate, but must not actually *be*.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the disenchantment of the thing demanded by the iconoclastic position results in the thing's being in excess of itself in a different sense: as an abject and dead materiality, an alien presence all the more meaningless for the meaning once attributed to it, for the formerly supposedly seeing gaze that now stares out blind and uncanny.

Such controversies, which never truly disappear, reemerge in especially pointed and overdetermined form in the “return to thingliness/materiality [Rückkehr zur Dinglichkeit]”<sup>16</sup> of German literature and culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in which was combined, among other things, a distaste for the perceived excesses of the previous decades' romantic speculation, the consciousness of rapidly expanding capitalist economies,<sup>17</sup> a new emphasis on positivism in the natural sciences, and a general mood of political caution and reaction. Julian Schmidt's and Gustav Freytag's assertion (in their address to the

readers of the literary-political journal *Die Grenzboten* on the occasion of their taking over of its editorship) that “literature only has justification to the extent that it immerses itself in life, devotes itself to it warmly and without reserve [Die Literatur hat nur noch insoweit Berechtigung, als sie sich in das Leben versenkt, sich warm und ohne Vorbehalt hingibt]” is paradigmatic for the rejection during this period of romanticism’s flights of fancy and the turn in literature and art to ostensibly objective representations of the current era’s “robust nature [robusten Natur].”<sup>18</sup> But despite all ambitions to break free from abstraction and fantasy and to narrate “the world as it is,” it is in fact rather the *disavowal* of empiricism and the *rejection* of the portrayal of individual phenomena that is constantly emphasized by the writers and theorists of realism. As Fontane himself stresses in his programmatic essay “Our Lyric and Epic Poetry since 1848 [Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848]”: “Realism does not want the merely material world and nothing but this [Der Realismus will nicht die bloße Sinnenwelt und nichts als diese].”<sup>19</sup> Yet such a purely negative definition of literary or “poetic” realism—which Fontane, despite his own protests, does not get much beyond in his essay—makes the dual problem it faces only all the more apparent: that of describing the sensual world and its objects in a way that is not merely “mere,” “the naked reproduction of everyday life [das nackte Wiedergeben alltäglichen Lebens],”<sup>20</sup> and at the same time, of handling the added value of the empirical world in such a way that one does not attribute this value to “mere” things as such.

Of the many dangers threatening the realist program, then, two are: the danger of abandoning the “poetry” of poetic realism entirely in favor of a vulgar mechanized materialism—a debate that would later achieve its full expression in the polemics around Naturalism—and the not unrelated danger of regressing to a pre-Kantian (if not indeed fully pre-modern) veneration of the empirical and the sensual, in which the particular is no longer a part subsumed into a larger whole, but is instead in its very particularity falsely invested with all the force of the absolute.<sup>21</sup> In this light, Fontane’s work in general—and *Grete Minde* in particular—may be read as an attempt to stake out what is effectively a modern version of a moderate Lutheran position between a presumed Catholic idolatry and a radical

Protestant iconoclasm.<sup>22</sup> The moderate position is here indeed the most dangerous one: for it admits the necessity of both material reality and its “objective” representation insofar as human life is only knowable as lived, embodied experience, but, for this same reason, is unable to foreclose the possibility that precisely this *embodiment* of experience will draw attention away from that for which it is supposed to be the ephemeral instance or mere sign.<sup>23</sup> In such a context, the thing—or perhaps, “the thing”—thus takes on a strange doubly synechdochic function, simultaneously standing in for the false evaluation of part to whole and being the false part of every whole to which it fails to be adequate. Without proper vigilance, the thing in realism risks at every moment turning into (a fetish image of) the “thing in itself.”

### III

Nowhere are these problems more apparent in *Grete Minde* than in the scene in the novella’s fifth chapter between the young Grete and the town pastor, Gigas. In response to Gigas’s question about the nature of her prayers, Grete guilelessly recites a pious little song that she has learned from her nursemaid Regine, a Catholic just as Grete’s late mother had been. Gigas immediately reproaches Grete, gently but firmly, for the song’s espousal of the anathematized Catholic doctrine of good works. However, the real heresy is yet to come:

“For you see, all our good works are nothing and mean nothing, for all our actions are sinful from the very beginning. We have nothing but faith, and there is only one thing that can atone for us and that has value: the Crucified One.”

“Yes, sir...I know...and I have a sliver from his cross.” And in happy agitation she pulled a golden capsule from her bodice.

Gigas recoiled for a moment, and his red eyes seemed to have become even redder. But he gathered himself again quickly [...] and said calmly, “That is idolatry, Grete.”

“Denn sieh, unsre guten Werke sind nichts und bedeuten nichts, weil all unser Tun sündig ist von Anfang an. Wir haben nichts als den Glauben, und nur eines ist, das sühnet und Wert hat: der Gekreuzigte.”

“Ja Herr ... ich weiß ... Und ich hab einen Splitter von seinem Kreuz.” Und sie zog in freudiger Erregung eine Goldkapsel aus ihrem Mieder.

Gigas war einen Augenblick zurückgetreten, und seine roten Augen schienen röter geworden. Aber er sammelt sich auch diesmal rasch wieder [...] und sagte dann ruhig: “Es ist Götzendienst, Grete.” (GM 28)

The significance of this dialogue, of course, lies in its character-establishing function, allowing Fontane to set up the simultaneous innocence and otherness of Grete that will eventually prove to be the source of so many of her troubles.<sup>24</sup> But this dialogue’s significance also lies in what it indicates about the aesthetic controversies and challenges of the novella itself: for what Gigas accuses Grete of in her childish naïveté is also precisely what was perceived as the main threat to the development of a realist literature by its theorists and practitioners in Europe and, especially, in the German states. “Idol worship doesn’t become better just because you put a freshly cleaned-up fetish on the altar [Der Götzendienst wird darum nicht besser, wenn man einen neu aufgeputzten Fetisch auf den Altar stellt],” remarks Julian Schmidt in a representative polemic against the so-called “Märzpoeten.”<sup>25</sup> If in this essay, the issue is that the engaged writers of the early nineteenth century are just the new romantics, replacing the previous decades’ metaphysical idols with political ones, this valuation can easily tip over (as it will later do a fortiori with naturalism) and lead to an excessive and inaesthetic concentration on the material world as such: an art of things indeed, but without form or redemptive guiding idea behind them.

In other words: the doctrinal problem of how to worship the true incarnate God without deifying the body *as such*, such as Fontane dramatizes in its historical literality in the scene between Grete and Gigas, maps directly onto the epistemological-aesthetic problem of how to deal with the phenomenal world in such a way that one neither falls into a vulgar materialism or a seductive fixation on the sensual and the physical, nor floats away in the referenceless abstraction of an enervated romanticism. The “programmatically Realists”—among whom Fontane may, with qualifications, be included<sup>26</sup>—understood their task as that of maintaining the delicate balance between these twin excesses of idealization and materialism, establishing the “broadening and deepening of moral ideas in the detail of real life [Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der sittlichen Ideen in das Detail des wirklichen Lebens] as “the necessary, the only basis of a true and great literature [die nothwendige, die einzige Grundlage einer echten und großen Poesie].”<sup>27</sup> In this context, it is anything but incidental that Fontane rewrites *Grete Minde*’s source story partly as a religious conflict, for such a balance was conceived not only as a modern, but also—in a clear line of derivation from the *Bildersturm* controversies—as an explicitly Protestant accomplishment. Julian Schmidt, once again, formulates this view succinctly at the end of the first volume of his 1853 *History of German Literature in the Nineteenth Century* [*Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*]:

Protestantism gathered together the contraries of the divine and the earthly within the human heart, where they developed in their concrete fullness; whereas in both the old Church and the new Jesuitism, Heaven and Earth were two worlds that battled with one another in a completely external way. For the true Protestant writer, life, character is a continuity, the soul an organic whole.

Der Protestantismus nahm die Gegensätze des Göttlichen und des Irdischen in das menschliche Herz auf, wo sie sich in concreter Fülle entfalteten; während sowohl in der alten Kirche, wie in dem neuen

Jesuitismus der Himmel und die Erde zwei Welten waren, die sich ganz äußerlich bekämpften. Bei dem wahrhaft protestantischen Dichter ist das Leben, der Charakter eine Continuität, die Seele ein organisches Ganze.<sup>28</sup>

The fatal error of radical materialism and Roman Catholicism alike is that of separating the material and the spiritual worlds, and worshiping mere bodies in spirit's stead (in materialism deliberately, in Catholicism so to speak merely as by-product).<sup>29</sup> When it is realized that the meaning with which these bodies have been invested is not inherent but arbitrary—as will always take place—what remains is mere matter, the fetish as corpse.<sup>30</sup> And yet, once again, this same act of investing bodies and things with meaning is *also* one of the main tasks of the realist writer, insofar as the human experience that realist literature explicitly privileges must spring from the very same material world that it is at the same time to transcend. Without this transcendence, however, the things of the realist novel threaten to become mere sensual appearances or sheer allegories, all the more dangerous because set up on the stage of the novel as objects of contemplation significant in themselves.<sup>31</sup> The thing that shapes the realist novel also constantly threatens to elude its networks of value.

Even if Fontane's own version of realism is clearly far more character- and dialogue-driven than descriptive or scenic,<sup>32</sup> his work is nevertheless suffused by the ambivalent relation to the thing and its modes of portrayal. From his early career as an art critic—in particular, as a critic of historical painting, that most narrative of pictorial genres—Fontane was acutely aware of the vexed relationship between material objects and the stories told around them (and conversely, between stories and their material/pictorial illustration).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the very dialogical, quasi-dramaturgical nature of Fontane's prose makes the rare passages of description in his novels stand out all the more in their disruptive clarity. This can be seen, for example, in the ekphrastic description of Grete's gold reliquary that forms the midpoint of the aforementioned dialogue with Gigas (elided in the previous quotation of the scene):

Gigas recoiled for a moment, and his red eyes seemed to have become even redder. But he gathered himself again quickly and looked at [the capsule]. It hung on a little chain. In the top section of the capsule was a Mother of God, etched in fine lines, but underneath that was a little piece of red silk, and inside this, the sliver of wood. The old man snapped the lid shut [...].

Gigas war einen Augenblick zurückgetreten, und seine roten Augen schienen röter geworden. Aber er sammelte sich auch diesmal rasch wieder und nahm die Kapsel und betrachtete sie. Sie hing an einem Kettchen. In das obere Kapselstück war eine Mutter Gottes in feinen Linien eingegraben, innerhalb aber lag ein rotes Seidenläppchen und in diesem der Splitter. Der Alte knipste das Deckelchen wieder zu [...]. (GM 28)

The ekphrasis embedded within this passage—just as Grete’s Virgin is embedded in her capsule—momentarily brings the action to a standstill, turning the reader’s attention to the same static presence of the thing that, at least traditionally, stands in an antagonistic position to the dynamism of *mythos* that is literature’s privilege alone. Such *anti-dramatic* stasis is only further emphasized by the description of Grete’s Virgin as being “etched in fine lines [in feinen Linien eingegraben]” (GM 28). The not merely homophonic relationship between engraving and the grave that these words evoke—“eingraben” meaning both “to bury” and “to carve, to inscribe”—is made all but literal through the fact that Grete’s sacrilegious capsule is *also* a heirloom from her dead and never known mother: “the only thing I have from her [alles, was ich von ihr hab’]” (GM 28).<sup>34</sup> And underneath this dead iconic image, problematic enough, lies the truth of the picture itself: the fetish object, the same bit of wood that Andreas Karlstadt, evoking Isaiah, reminds his readers is also used to cook meat and warm bodies.<sup>35</sup> Without the fetishistic faith that had once lent the reliquary an efficacious (if also, in Gigas’s view, false) spiritual

content, the previous meanings of divine and motherly love, are as it were, separated out, leaving only a mere scandalous bit of debris; it becomes, at best, the *memento mori* of itself, a sign for nothing but the potential mortification of an art no longer animated by living spirit. Grete's relic—in both senses of the word—figures the process by which things come to reveal the suspect nature of their own meaningfulness.

#### IV

This theme of the process of the disappearance of the meaningfulness of things, their slide into obsolescence and illegibility, forms no less than the hidden leitmotif of Fontane's novella as a whole. In the novella's pivotal chapter, "By the Wendish Stone [Am Wendenstein]"—which narrates the moment of Grete's fateful resolution to run away from home—Grete and Valtin have climbed up on a hill outside of town, ostensibly to get a look at the aforementioned festivities surrounding the local prince-electors visit (in which, incidentally, the theme of religious conflict and cultural change appears yet again, in the recent conversion of the prince-electors—clearly modeled after the historical Johann Sigismund, Markgraf von Brandenburg—from Lutheranism to Calvinism). Before they are able to reach a proper vantage point, the children get tired and turn into the deep grass, coming suddenly upon an old wall:

On the top of the wall there was a boulder of peculiar form and so thickly covered with lichens that only a few half weathered-away characters could be made out with difficulty. And they sat on this boulder.

"What does the stone mean?" asked Grete.

"I don't know. Maybe it's a Wendish grave."

"How's that?"

"Don't you know? This is the field where the great battle of Tanger was. Heathens and Christians. And the heathens won."

And on either side of this dirt wall where we're sitting [...] they lie in the thousands."

Auf der Höhe des Walles lag ein Feldstein von absonderlicher Form und so dicht mit Flechten überwachsen, dass sich ein paar halb verwitterte Schriftzeichen daran nur mühsam erkennen ließen. Und auf diesen Feldstein setzten sie sich.

"Was bedeutet der Stein?" fragte Grete.

"Ich weiß es nicht. Vielleicht ein Wendengrab."

"Wie denn?"

"Weißt du denn nicht? Dies ist ja das Feld, wo die große Tangerschlacht war. Heiden und Christen. Und die Heiden siegen. Und zu beiden Seiten des Erdwalls, auf dem wir hier sitzen, *vor* uns bis dicht an den Wald und *hinter* uns bis dicht an den Fluß, liegen sie zu vielen Tausenden." (GM 54)

Fontane's *Wendepunkt am Wendenstein* thus turns, not just on a thing, but on a thing that has been overgrown, worn away, eroded to the point where it cannot be decided if it ever had significance at all: a merely *potential* pagan fetish, it rises up doubly dead above the thousands of corpses to which it fails even to bear proper witness. Grete's question of what the stone "means" not only repeats Gigas's words about the doctrine of works years earlier, but also evokes their message: letters, stone, and good works alike "mean nothing," but only refer in their lack of signification to the signification they cannot in fact promise.<sup>36</sup>

That the repercussions of this loss of signification of the thing for realist representation is a concern of Fontane's novella is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the subplot of the "traveling folk [fahrende Leute]," the itinerant actors whose performances of "The Last Judgment" and "The Fall"—in that order—almost bookend the novella.<sup>37</sup> This subplot is clearly meant to be read with the various Reformation bans on the theater in mind, where Trud's Cromwellian comment that "It repulses me to see God and the Devil as mere puppets [Es

widersteht mir, Gott und Teufel als bloße Puppen zu sehen]” (GM 16) is only the most explicit of the novella’s multiple indications of the problematic nature of the puppeteers’ performances. Although the novella’s sympathies clearly lie with neither the character Trud nor her iconophobic convictions, her words are nevertheless allowed to resonate uneasily in the novella, which equivocates on the question of both the artfulness and the propriety of the puppeteers’ art. “They’re only puppets [Es sind ja Puppen],” comments Valtin to the young Grete just before the first curtain rises, whereupon Grete responds, in a comment that could stand as motto for the novella as a whole, “But they still mean something, and I don’t really know if it’s right [Aber sie bedeuten was, und ich weiß doch nicht, ob es recht ist]” (GM 17). Indeed, to all intents and purposes the novella does not contradict, but actually corroborates Trud’s critique—“That’s something that Trud drummed into your conscience [Das hat dir Trud ins Gewissen gered’t]” (GM 17), responds the frivolous Emrentz blithely to Grete’s aesthetic anxiety—, portraying the puppeteers’ work not merely as an act of carefree blasphemy in the sensual presentation of the divine word per se, but as an outright travesty of the divine word as gaudy popular spectacle, in which not only the sublimity of religion but also art’s own spiritual task have been all but annihilated.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the aforementioned spooling back of holy history within the order of the actors’ repertoire indicates less the *reversal* of original sin than its standstill or repetition, as one of the troupe’s members relates to the tavern owner, in the novella’s sole comic interlude: “Played twice every day, first the puppets and then us. And always a full house and no apples [tossed] to the ground [Zweimal gespielt jeden Tag, erst die Puppen und dann wir selber. Und immer voll und kein Apfel zur Erde]” (GM 72). Or as the “Türkenweib” (GM 20) Zenobia tells Grete, in what are her only spoken lines: “‘Member, Gret’, ‘ere’s still ‘nother play today. They want the ‘Rig’nal Sin.’ Them folks don’t give us no peace [Denk, Gret’, ‘s gibt noch a Spiel heut’. Den ›Sündfalk‹ wollen’s. Das Leutvolk last uns ka Ruh nit]” (GM 78). Such repetition makes a mockery of the “origin” of original sin, turning representation (as a copy of an ur-image) into perpetually self-generating performance. Grete’s own personal iteration of the Fall, meanwhile, is not only concretely manifested in the form of her

nameless infant child, but also linked to the theater fire early in the novella—a burlesque of hell gone awry—as well as to her final act of revenge, through Gerdt’s vulgar double entendre to the Tagermünder aldermen: “I’ve got nothing in common with females who light their fires between hedge and ditch [ich habe nichts gemein mit Weibern, die zwischen Heck’ und Graben ihr Feuer zünden]” (GM 96).

It is moreover instructive that Fontane—in a detail otherwise essentially irrelevant—specifically remarks on the theatrical transition in the novella from *puppets* to *live actors*. Contrary to what one might expect, the replacement of marionette figures with real live human beings does *not* lead to a greater humanization or true-to-lifeness of the medieval folk theater, but, to the contrary, results in a kind of *marionettization* of its human actors, in which they are mere fungible bodies fitted into stock figures, themselves the parody of the sacred scripture from which they are taken. As the novella’s penultimate sentence relates with heavy irony: “No one noticed the change that had taken place in the lineup [Niemand achtete des Wechsels, der in Besetzung der Rollen stattgefunden hatte]” (GM 102).<sup>39</sup> Indeed, a strange inhuman thingliness even surrounds the novella’s central character herself, and from her very first entry in the novella:

Now her shape became visible for the first time. It was a half-grown girl, very delicately built, and her fine lines, but even more the oval and the color of her face, indicated a foreigner.

Jetzt erst sah man ihre Gestalt. Es war ein halbwachsendes Mädchen, sehr zart gebaut, und ihre feinen Linien, noch mehr das Oval und die Farbe ihres Gesichts, deuteten auf eine Fremde. (GM 8)

As in the above cited scene between Grete and the pastor Gigas, a short descriptive passage brings a temporary halt to the flow of dialogue with which the novella begins, forcing the reader to linger on static appearance rather than being carried along by dramatic action. But it is not only this fact that binds these two moments in the novella: the “feinen Linien” of Grete’s physical appearance in the

above passage are *the very same words* that will be used by Fontane in the later scene to describe the Virgin of Grete's idolatrous reliquary. Thus Grete appears proleptically and from the very beginning as an image, a portrait, in the vignette-like oval of her face already en-capsulated, marking her out from the start as an object of adoration, of fear, and, indeed, of death.<sup>40</sup> In defiance of the realist emphasis on the reconciling power of the human "heart," Grete's exotically beautiful face already shows up as something as "foreign" and unreadable as the heathen stone about which she will later inquire. Even if Fontane's description of Grete is not ekphrastic in the strict sense, her symbolic connection to the portrait in the pendant she carries with her and by which she is, throughout the novella, metonymically defined registers the fear that is, so to speak, the other side of Achilles' shield: that is, that ekphrasis could also work the other way around. If the still image and the inanimate object can be spurred to life through narration—through *anthropomorphization*—the spirit that narrative grants may be exposed as illusion, believed in only by children and heathens, and the supposedly living and breathing lives of realist fiction revealed as so many fetishes and "half weathered-away characters [halb verwitterte Schriftzeichen]" (GM 54), not only unconvincing, but actively sacrilegious (including and especially the secular religion of humanism) in their claims to agency and meaning.

## V

It comes perhaps as no surprise, given the widespread convention of using artist figures as authorial stand-ins, that the plainest of such commentary on the socio-historical conditions of the novella's form is provided by the leader of the puppeteer troupe in the aforementioned tavern interlude, directly after the narrative ellipsis and before the recounting of Valtin's untimely death. Remarking on the reference to a local convent in the lyrics of an improvised song, the actor exclaims,

But why nuns? There aren't any nuns any more. I mean, here in this country. Down below, in the Empire, they've still got plenty of

them. [...] But here! Everything revoked, what they call “secularizing.”

Aber woher denn Nonnen? Es gibt ja keine Nonnen mehr. Ich meine hierzuland. Unten im Reich, da hat's ihrer noch genug. Nicht wahr, Zenobia? Aber hier! Alles aufgehoben, was sie „säkularisieren“ nennen. (*GM 73*)

On the most literal level, of course, the actor's words refer to the seizure of church lands and property by lay regimes as practiced in Europe from the Reformation to the nineteenth century: a historical situation set out graphically by Fontane in the very next chapter, wherein Grete petitions the old abbess—now living almost alone in her cloister slowly being overtaken by the surrounding nature—to provide Valtin with the Christian burial denied him by the local preacher. On a second level—which Fontane also no doubt intends—the words may be read as a kind of social and political critique, with Fontane's actor bemoaning the reinvestment of the spiritual force of religion in earthly goods and gods, the most obvious candidate for which in the novella would in fact be money: not only the commodity fetishism that Fontane gently mocks in Emrenz's unseasonable fur collar<sup>41</sup> but also the inheritance whose painful loss inspires Grete to transform her childhood fear of hellfire into a tool of personal revenge. In this interpretation, the “aufgehoben” of the above passage can be read with all its Hegelian connotations intact, as the decaying old order—Catholic, pre-modern, agrarian—gives way to the Protestant private enterprise systems of Fontane's Prussia. It is on the basis of such a reading that Georg Lukács describes Fontane as a “waving figure [schwankenden Gestalt],”<sup>42</sup> critical of the worldly avarice of bourgeois capitalism but ignorant of the fact that the values he opposes to such avarice—romantic love and individual freedom—are themselves inseparable from the advent of the bourgeois capitalist culture that he condemns.

However, the passage just cited may also suggest yet a third reading, one that touches on a transformation perhaps even more radical than—if every bit as

conflicted as—that to which Lukács applies his ideological critique. For the lines of Fontane’s in the actor’s mouth also anticipate Walter Benjamin’s insight into the melancholy immanence of the baroque *Trauerspiel* vis-à-vis the eschatological transcendence of the medieval mystery play,<sup>43</sup> whose commercialization and loss of socio-cultural relevance, or at least its repurposing as popular entertainment, Fontane’s novella, again, indeed describes in some detail. But the disenchanting theater of *Grete Minde*—once again befitting the strange anachronicity of Fontane’s text—also indicates something decidedly *contemporary*: for the worldliness that to the mystery play is unknown and for the *Trauerspiel* is a source of affliction is for the realist novel not only desired, but *formally necessary*. If the transition from mystery play to *Trauerspiel* results, for Benjamin, in that allegory whose function “is not so much to unveil material objects as to strip them naked,”<sup>44</sup> the subsequent transformation into the total worldliness of the realist work—which is only highlighted by the resistance to this worldliness and its corresponding strategies of compensation—is a presentation of the material object as already naked: already, so to speak, no longer the object, despite everything still turned towards the human being, but now only the mere, illegible and inhuman *thing*. Thus, and with all due respect to Fontane’s actor, what takes place in *Grete Minde* is in fact less a successful secularization than a *profanation*, in the sense that Giorgio Agamben has given the term, that is to say, a removal from the sphere of the sacred *entirely*. As Agamben points out, secularization involves a change of position, but not a change of quality. Profanation, in contrast, “neutralizes what it profanes”<sup>45</sup>: it strips away the charmed field that surrounds the phenomenon; in other words, it returns the *fetish* to the *thing*.

Such profanation, however, is not simply a fall from grace; nor, clearly—at least not in Fontane’s presentation—is it an ecstatic freedom from the pressures of religion and an escape into untroubled materialism and carefree play. For profanation, too, contains its residue.<sup>46</sup> Just as in the puppeteers’ performances, the fall and salvation history of biblical chronology is presented as a sporadic and iterative loop, in the profane theater of Fontane’s novella—both that which is thematically represented in the subplot of the travelling actors, and that which the

novella itself constitutes—is presented the unresolved repetition of the drama of the thing and its ever-contentious, ever-imperfect spiritualization: in which, moreover, the repressed *juridical* theater of the historical Margarete von Minden's tortured and dismembered body<sup>47</sup> returns as all too empirical evidence for the severability of the thing from that same whole that the aesthetics of realism paradoxically calls upon the severable thing to comprise.<sup>48</sup> And though Fontane's Grete's fiery end has little of the gruesome physicality of that of her namesake (effectively abridging the latter's execution to its very last scenes), it makes the same point of the final self-assertion of the thing, anagrammatically transforming the wooden splinter of Christ's cross with which Grete had thought herself to be saved into the burning roof beams that crumble away under her own feet to make her arsonist, infanticide, and suicide all at once. In Grete's final act—a pure parody of martyrdom—the transformation of the fetish object back into the materiality from whence it sprang is accomplished to dire effect.

It is thus no exaggeration to claim the anachronistic anomaly that is *Grete Minde* as the exemplary work of Fontane's realism, the novella in which not only Grete, but thingly representation—indeed, realism itself—is placed on trial. Trud's dismissive comment about the traveling actors towards the beginning of the novella—“Heathens and Turks, they are [Heiden und Türken sind's]” (*GM* 16)—bears witness not just to a puritanical xeno- and theatrophobia, but also to the anxiety about the always potentially idolatrous investment of spiritual meaning in inanimate things that finds itself ambivalently reflected in Fontane's novella. The compromise formations of realism, which were to have laid such controversies to rest, in fact constitute their return: “And the heathens won [Und die Heiden siegten]” (*GM* 54). Such a victory, however, is itself highly ambiguous, crossed from the beginning by violence and death, by forgetting, by travesty, by the profanation of the very thing the heathens should have so erroneously venerated. In this way, Fontane's reinterpretation of the terrible fate of Grete Minde presents realism's anxious negotiation between the spiritual elevation of the thing and the thing's repudiation as a kind of tragedy in its own right, the impossibility of sustaining the delicate equilibrium that is the condition of its existence.

<sup>1</sup> Theodor Fontane, *Grete Minde*, 7. Hereafter cited within the text as *GM*. All

<sup>2</sup> See Hertling, "Kleists *Michael Kohlhaas* und Fontanes *Grete Minde*"; Globig, "Theodor Fontanes 'Grete Minde'"; and Losch, "Widerstandsrecht bei Fontane."

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Guarda, *Theodor Fontanes „Neben“-werke*.

<sup>4</sup> See Giel, "Grete Minde."

<sup>5</sup> From a 1878 letter of inquiry to Paul Lindau (Fontane, *Briefe* 568).

<sup>6</sup> Accounts differ in detail, but the basic story runs more or less as follows. After the death of one Peter von Minden, a Tangermünde patrician gone into exile on charges of murder, a woman claiming to be his widow arrives in the town and demands his inheritance for herself and her daughter, Margarete. After some hesitation, the dead man's family agrees to grant Margarete a small pension upon her reaching marriageable age. Margarete eventually marries an outlaw named Tonnie Meilahn, with whom she quickly squanders her inheritance, keeping the rough company of itinerant beggars and thieves. On September 13, 1617, a fire destroys Tangermünde. In 1619, Tonnie is arrested for robbery. Questioned, he admits not only to the robbery, but also to the arson, implicating his wife in the bargain. Later, under torture, Margarete admits to the arson as well, whereupon she is administered a gruesome public execution in the town square by dismemberment and burning at the stake. See Lück, "Leben und Sterben am Abgrund," and Däther, *Der Prozeß gegen Margarete Minden und Genossen*.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Demetz, *Formen des Realismus*, esp. 94-95; and Müller-Seidel, *Theodor Fontane*, esp. 72.

<sup>8</sup> See Jensen, *Auf der morschen Gartenschaukel* 46-55; also Jensen, "Die Entfaltung der kindlichen Vitalität in Theodor Fontanes *Grete Minde*."

<sup>9</sup> See Losch, "Widerstandsrecht bei Fontane," esp. 69-71.

<sup>10</sup> Müller-Seidel criticizes *Grete Minde* for constituting a regression vis-à-vis the "developments toward a higher level of historical consciousness" of nineteenth century historicism, and accuses Fontane of promoting a "kind of ballad-ideology" in his use of the historical past "as mood and archaizing ornament" (Müller-Seidel 71 and 81).

<sup>11</sup> The above passage from Fontane might be taken as a rather literal example of Peter Demetz's claim that "the novelistic characters of the nineteenth century are the first ones (naively put) who wear clothes and live in visible rooms" (Demetz, "Zur Definition des Realismus" 34).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Preisendanz, *Humor als Dichterische Einbildungskraft*. In the section on Fontane (214-241), Preisendanz particularly stresses how the mediation of what he terms "humor" constitutes precisely the criterion of *art* in Fontane's contemporarily set novels and prevents them from being works of (an ostensibly) merely objective reportage.

<sup>13</sup> Karlstadt, "Von Abtuhung der Bilder," 12.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hegel on the emergence of a precisely modern form of art and literature in which "art strips away from itself all fixed restriction to a specific range of content

and treatment, and makes *Humanus* its new holy of holies: i.e. the depths and heights of the human heart as such" (Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics* 607).

<sup>15</sup> In his discussion of Lessing's classic separation of the arts in *Laocoon*, W. J. T. Mitchell formulates this idea even more strongly, noting that, for Lessing's aesthetic perspective, "Religion fetters painting by removing it from its proper vocation, the representation of beautiful bodies in space, and enslaves it to a foreign concern, the expression of 'significance' through 'symbolic representations'" (Mitchell, *Iconology* 106).

<sup>16</sup> Becker, *Bürgerlicher Realismus*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> On the socio-economic background of realism's interest in things in particular, see e.g. Berman, *Rise of the Modern German Novel*, esp. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt and Freytag, "Den Lesern der Grenzboten," 2.

<sup>19</sup> Fontane, "Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848," 242.

<sup>20</sup> Fontane, "Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848," 240.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Bischoff, *Poetischer Fetischismus*, 18: "As a thing-symbol that establishes eternity in the here and now, [the fetish] gets mapped onto it the gap between the incommunicable and the incommensurable [des Nicht-Vermittelbaren und Inkommensurablen]. In its claim to present something absolute, it competes with the grand designs of idealism, while at the same time making use of something like dialectical materialism's historical model, so that it crystallizes, as it were, into a thing."

<sup>22</sup> On Luther's basically pragmatic approach to the *Bildersturm* controversies of his time, see e.g. Möseneder, *Paracelsus und die Bilder*, 26-31.

<sup>23</sup> Christian Begemann, e.g., describes the realist project as a conflict between "the realist postulate on the one hand, and on the other, a profound aversion to the reality of modern life, against which literature was to set its own 'truer' and 'more essential reality'" (Begemann, introduction to *Realismus* 8). See also Barthes' conclusion to "The Reality Effect," in which he argues that the descriptive style of realism finally signifies not reality, but only "the real" as empty signifier—which, in terms of the present inquiry, would in fact constitute a kind of abortive sublation of the thing or a midpoint between "the thing" and "the true" (Barthes, "The Reality Effect" 148).

<sup>24</sup> Eckart Pastor has emphasized this aspect in terms of Fontane's repeated practice of depicting a milieu through the double technique of 1) focalization by an outsider character and 2) implicit ethical judgment of that milieu in terms of its treatment of outsider figures.

<sup>25</sup> Schmidt, "Die Märzpoeten," 7.

<sup>26</sup> On the qualifications, see Bowman, "Fontane and the Programmatic Realists."

<sup>27</sup> Schmidt, "Die Märzpoeten," 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, 497.

<sup>29</sup> Precisely this conflict is what Hans Ester neglects in his assessment of Grete Minde's conflict as one between the "pure teaching [reinen Lehre]" of Luther, represented in the person of Gigas, and Grete's "self-actualization [Selbstverwirklichung]": the real question is not that of universalist piety versus individual fulfillment, but that of the self-presentation of Luther's teaching as "pure,"

decoupled from the empirical. See Ester, "Grete Minde," here 59 and 60.

<sup>30</sup> As Richard Brinkmann has put it: "What the nineteenth century understood by reality was merely the occasion for the real 'reality,' as one conceived of it at the time: for adventures, experiences, insights on the part of the individual subject. This is not a matter of subjective perspective in the experiencing of some reality, but rather of the galvanizing experience of a particular occurrence emancipating itself within the subject itself, with its own laws and processes of development. [...] In this way, reality, in the sense of an 'objective' factuality outside of the subject, was exposed as mere superficial deception and unreality" (Brinkmann, *Wirklichkeit und Illusion* 327-328).

<sup>31</sup> *Locus classicus* of this problematic is of course to be found in Georg Lukács, for example: "When a writer attempts as an observer and describer to achieve a comprehensive description, he must either reject any principle of selection, undertake an inexhaustible labor of Sisyphus or simply emphasize the picturesque and superficial aspects best adapted to description. In any case, the loss of the narrative interrelationship between objects and their function in concrete human existence means a loss of artistic significance" (Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 130-131).

<sup>32</sup> On subjectivism as ordering principle in Fontane (here pejoratively), see Berman, *Rise of the Modern German Novel*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed analysis of Fontane's art criticism and the image/text relation, see Osborne, *Theodor Fontane. Vor den Romanen*, esp. 163-205. For Osborne, Fontane's engagement with visual art ultimately leads him to a subordination of the visual to the narrative (see 205). While this may well be, it is just as clear that such subordination is not self-evident but, much to the contrary, hard-won.

<sup>34</sup> Further inquiry would also have to take into account the not exactly latent sexuality (or rather, genitality) of Grete's capsule with its "rotes Seidenläppchen"—and by extension, the multiple and well-documented connections between the fetish, the female phallus, and the idea of the real.

<sup>35</sup> See Karlstadt, 12-13; also Isaiah 44:15-19.

<sup>36</sup> Reinhard and Lupton read the biblical commandment against idolatry, via Lacan, as *the* condition for the stabilization of symbolic language against both picture thinking and word magic: "The commandment establishes the difference between any referent and its representation—hence its possible prohibition of all visualizations—by recourse to the limit case of God, the singular referent for which there can be no adequate symbol. [...] The commandment against idolatry serves to call the signifying chain back to its anchoring in the unary signifier, not only in defense against the primary imaginary emblemized by autochthonous gods and polymorphous perversion, but also in reaction to the secondary imaginary, in which word and object coincide in the embrace of an absolute meaning that would resolve all contradictions" (Reinhard and Lupton, "The Subject of Religion: Lacan and the Ten Commandments," 78).

<sup>37</sup> Gaby Pailer also points to the importance of the acting troupe in Fontane's novella, but primarily merely in order to make a connection to possible intertexts of the Spanish baroque, in the context of an analysis of Fontane's critique of racial

(particularly “gypsy”) stereotypes.

<sup>38</sup> Fontane’s publicity speech of the actors upon their initial appearance in the novella is veritable parody of, at once, the sensationalism of a commercialized art, and the self-restraining concessions that such a commercialized art must make to public sentiment: “The Last Judgment! Dramatic spectacle in three acts, with Christ and Mary, including the reward for the virtuous and the damnation of the wicked. Also angels and devils, and a fireworks extravaganza, but without any banging or explosions and suchlike hazardousness in order to not, so we hope, be in any way troublesome or displeasing to ‘the lovely ladies’ [Das Jüngste Gericht! Großes Spiel in drei Abteilungen, mit Christus und Maria, samt dem Lohn aller Guten und der Verdammnis aller Bösen. Dazu beides, Engel und Teufel, und großes Feuerwerk, aber ohne Knall und Schießen und sonstige Fährlichkeit, um nicht, ‚denen schönen Frauen‘, so wir zu sehen hoffen, irgendwie störend oder mißfällig zu sein]” (*GM* 15-16).

<sup>39</sup> Such a presentation also acts as a tacit response to the early nineteenth-century’s censorship of the marionette theater, which, in Christopher Wild’s words, “aimed at the elimination of ‘low’ theatrical practices, whose parodic and parasitic existence implicitly put ‘high’ theater into question” (Wild, *Theater der Keuschheit* 14). Also of interest for the present essay is Wild’s subsequent discussion of guilt and original sin, in reference to Kleist’s “Über das Marionettentheater.”

<sup>40</sup> Another way of reading this connection, of course, is as a pointed analogy on Fontane’s part between the innocence of the Virgin Mary and the actual innocence of Grete against the opinion of conventional morality as represented by Gerdt and especially Trud. The present argument does not exclude this sentimental/ethical reading; however, it does suggest, again, that in the analogy between Mary and Grete there is more in play than simply an opportunity for social critique.

<sup>41</sup> In another of Fontane’s internal allusions, the “absonderliche Form” of the boulder on which Grete and Valtin make their decision to flee Tangermünde echoes the “absonderlich reich” costumes of their respective stepmothers at the prince-electors’ feast happening at the same time, thereby analogically returning the affectation and vanity of the women—and by extension, of society at large—to the heathen fetish practices they would ostensibly have overcome.

<sup>42</sup> Lukács, “Der alte Fontane,” 272.

<sup>43</sup> On this point, see Samuel Weber, “Storming the Work.”

<sup>44</sup> Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 185.

<sup>45</sup> See Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” 77.

<sup>46</sup> See Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” 78. For an example of this, see also Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” 87: “No one knows better than children how terrible and disquieting a toy can be once the game it forms a part of [for Agamben, the paradigm of profanation] is over. The instrument of liberation turns into an awkward piece of wood; the doll on which the little girl has showered her love becomes a cold, shameful wax puppet that an evil magician can capture and bewitch and use against us.”

<sup>47</sup> From the 13 March 1619 report of the *Schöppenakten der Städte Brandenburgs*: “Whereas the prisoner shall formally repeat her confession before the criminal

court; so may she for this reason, before she is finally put to death, be carried on a cart to the place of judgment, her five fingers on the right hand be pulled off with glowing tongs, one after another. Thereupon shall her body be seized by four glowing tongs, namely in her breast and arm, [...] lastly, she shall be bound to a high post by iron chains, burned alive and in this manner conducted from life to death, as the law decrees [Da nun gefangene solches bekendniß vor dem peinlichen halßgericht nochmalen bestendig wiederholen wirdt; *So mag Sie deswegen vor endlicher Tötung uff einem wagen biß zu der Richtstädte umbgeführt, ihre fünff finger an der Rechten Hand einer nach dem andern mit glühenden Zangen abgezucket, Nachmalen ihr leib mitt vier glühenden Zangen, nemlich in der brust und arm gegriffen, (...) Folglich mitt eisernen Ketten uff einem erhabenen Pfahl angeschmiedet, lebendig geschmochet und also vom leben zum tode verrichtett werden, von Rechtts wegen]*" (quoted in Däther, 80-81).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Schneider and Hunfeld, introduction to *Die Dinge und die Zeichen*, 13: "And yet it is precisely in this apparent objectivity of things that a refuge is created for the confused and the esoteric, for the wayward and the whimsical [...]. Thus the narration of things undermines realistic narrative, by falling out of the story instead of illustrating it."

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