The Chain of Things

Downing, Eric

Published by Cornell University Press

Downing, Eric.
The Chain of Things: Divinatory Magic and the Practice of Reading in German Literature and Thought, 1850–1940.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/58144

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2092721
One of the several threads running throughout this study concerns the connective quality of reading at its most magical. That holds, too, for the writing of this book, whose most lasting joy has been the weave of relations that supported it. Such connecting influences shaping a text most often remain hidden. It is my pleasure to make them manifest here.

I owe special thanks to Christopher Wild. Almost all of the ideas and readings making up this text were worked through during walks and talks together among the trees and mountains of North Carolina, over dinner tables and conference tables, and over phone lines and email exchanges. His intellectual friendship meant that this project was never a solitary one, and always a happy one. I owe special thanks, too, to Derek Collins, whose scholarship, correspondence, and encouragement were crucial to launching the earliest stages of this project: it couldn’t have begun without his guidance. And I owe most special thanks to Catriona MacLeod,
who read drafts, early and late, of every chapter, gave invaluable feedback, and, most essentially, brought the magic of her friendship and support to bear on the undertaking as a whole. I’ve been very fortunate in my friends.

Many other colleagues and friends read or heard portions of this book and provided useful criticism. I would like especially to single out Leslie Adelson, Ruth von Bernuth, Rory Bradley, Lindsey Brandt, Paul Fleming, Mary Floyd-Wilson, Kata Gellen, Eva Geu len, Willi Goetschel, Jason Groves, John Hamilton, Martha Helfer, Jonathan Hess, Peter Hohendahl, Brook Holmes, Dania Hueckmann, David Jenkins, Andrea Krauß, Alice Kuzniar, Dick Langston, Michael Levine, Pablo Maurette, John McGowan, Helmut Müller-Sievers, Thomas Pfau, Inga Pollman, Jim Porter, Jane Rice, Anette Schwarz, John H. Smith, Lauren Stone, Elisabeth Strowick, Christian Thomas, Jane Thrailkill, and Gabriel Trop. I need to thank, too, my students at both the University of North Carolina and in the Carolina-Duke Graduate Program in German Studies for listening patiently and responding so insightfully to many of the ideas behind this study in their most inchoate form.

Audiences at the University of Chicago, Cornell, Duke, and Johns Hopkins University all heard parts of this work and provided their encouragement and criticism. I am especially grateful to those whose invitations made those occasions possible. I thank, too, the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina for a semester’s leave to help lay the groundwork of this project, and the members of the seminar at the Institute that accompanied that leave. Thanks are also due to the editors of the Signale series who helped steer this work to publication, Peter Hohendahl, Mahinder Kingra, Marian Rogers, and Kizer Walker, as well as to the anonymous readers who reviewed the manuscript for Cornell University Press. Their advice was very helpful, and this book is clearly better for it.

Finally, first and last, my thanks to my family. To my mother, to whom I dedicate this work, and to Nancy and Jessica, the binding magic in my world.

Portions of the introduction and of chapter 3 originally appeared in print, in different form, as “Magic Reading,” in Literary Studies
and the Pursuits of Reading, edited by Eric Downing, Jonathan M. Hess, and Richard Benson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 189–215. Part of chapter 1 was published, in different form, as “Binding Magic in Keller’s Der Grüne Heinrich,” Germanic Review 90 (Fall 2015): 156–170; part of chapter 3 as “Divining Benjamin: Reading Fate, Graphology, Gambling,” MLN German Issue 126, no. 3 (2011): 561–580, © 2011 Johns Hopkins University Press; and a German version of part of chapter 2 as “Sprachmagie, Stimmung, und Geselligkeit in Theodor Fontanes Der Stechlin,” in Herausforderungen des Realismus: Theodor Fontanes Gesellschaftsromanen, edited by Peter Hohendahl and Ulrike Vedder (Breisgau: Rombach, forthcoming). I gratefully acknowledge these journals and presses and their editors for their permission to include these pieces in revised form in the present study.
The Chain of Things