

• Walter •
Benjamin

*The Complete
Correspondence
1928-1940*

Theodor W.
Adorno

THEODOR W. ADORNO AND
WALTER BENJAMIN

*The Complete
Correspondence
1928–1940*



Edited by Henri Lonitz
Translated by Nicholas Walker

Polity Press

This edition copyright © Polity Press, 1999. First published in Germany as *Briefwechsel 1928-1940* by Suhrkamp Verlag, © 1994.

First published in 1999 by Polity Press
in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

This book is published with the assistance of Inter Nationes.

Editorial office:

Polity Press

65 Bridge Street

Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Marketing and production:

Blackwell Publishers Ltd

108 Cowley Road

Oxford OX4 1JF, UK

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN 978-0-7456-3214-8

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Contents



Abbreviations

The Correspondence 1928-1940

- 1 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 2.7.1928
- 2 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 1.9.1928
- 3 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 29.3.1930
- 4 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 10.11.1930
- 5 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 17.7.1931
- 6 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [BERLIN,] 25.7.1931
- 7 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 31.3.1932
- 8 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO POVEROMO (MARINA DI MASSA), 3.9.1932
- 9 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [NO INDICATION OF LOCATION,] 10.11.1932
- 10 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 1.12.1932
- 11 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 14.1.1933
- 12 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 29.1.1934

- [13 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 4.3.1934](#)
- [14 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
9.3.1934](#)
- [15 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 13.3.1934](#)
- [16 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
18.3.1934](#)
- [17 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 5.4.1934](#)
- [18 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
9.4.1934](#)
- [19 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
FRANKFURT A.M., 13.4.1934](#)
- [20 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BROOKLYN \(WEST DRAYTON\), 21.4.1934](#)
- [21 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
28.4.1934](#)
- [22 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
24.5.1934](#)
- [23 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 6.11.1934](#)
- [24 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN
REMO, 30.11.1934](#)
- [25 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 5.12.1934](#)
- [26 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 16.12.1934](#)
- [27 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN 17.12.1934](#)

- 28 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN REMO, 7.1.1935
- 29 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO MONACO-CONDAMINE, [EARLY APRIL 1935]
- 30 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 1.5.1935
- 31 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 20.5.1935
- 32 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 31.5.1935
- 33 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 5.6.1935
- 34 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 8.6.1935
- 35 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 10.6.1935
- 36 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 19.6.1935
- 37 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 5.7.1935
- 38 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [FRANKFURT A.M., 12.7.1935]
- 39 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO AND GRETEL KARPLUS TO BENJAMIN HORNBERG, 2-4 AND 5.8.1935
- 40 BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS AND WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [PARIS, 16.8.1935]
- 41 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 27.12.1935

- [42 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
\[FRANKFURT A.M.,\] 29.12.1935](#)
- [43 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO
\[PARIS,\] 3.1.1936](#)
- [44 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
LONDON, 29.1.1936](#)
- [45 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
7.2.1936](#)
- [46 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
27.2.1936](#)
- [47 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
LONDON, 18.3.1936](#)
- [48 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO
\[PARIS, SUBSEQUENT TO 18.3.1936\]](#)
- [49 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 28.5.1936](#)
- [50 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 2.6.1936](#)
- [51 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
4.6.1936](#)
- [52 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 16.6.1936](#)
- [53 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
20.6.1936](#)
- [54 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
30.6.1936](#)
- [55 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 6.9.1936](#)
- [56 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN
REMO, 27.9.1936](#)

57 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 15.10.1936
58 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 18.10.1936
59 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 19.10.1936
60 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 26.10.1936
61 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 5.11.1936
62 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 7.11.1936
63 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 28.11.1936
64 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN REMO, 2.12.1936
65 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 29.1.1937
66 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN OXFORD, 17.2.1937
67 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 1.3.1937
68 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [PARIS,] 16.3.1937
69 GRETEL KARPLUS AND WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN WÜRZBURG, 31.3.1937
70 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [PARIS,] 13.4.1937
71 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN FRANKFURT A.M., 15.4.1937

72 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 20.4.1937

73 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
23.4.1937

74 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 25.4.1937

75 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
1.5.1937

76 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 4.5.1937

77 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
9.5.1937

78 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 12.5.1937

79 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
OXFORD, 13.5.1937

80 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO
[PARIS,] 17.5.1937

81 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS,
15.6.1937

82 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN NEW
YORK, 17.6.1937

83 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN
ABOARD THE 'NORMANDIE', 2.7.1937

84 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN
REMO, 10.7.1937

85 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [SAN
REMO, AROUND THE MIDDLE OF JULY 1937]

86 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO SAN
REMO, 21.8.1937

- 87 THEODOR AND GRETEL WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN LONDON, 13.9.1937
- 88 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN LONDON, 22.9.1937
- 89 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR AND GRETEL WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 23.9.1937
- 90 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR AND GRETEL WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BOULOGNE SUR SEINE, 2.10.1937
- 91 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [LONDON,] 22.10.1937
- 92 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BOULOGNE SUR SEINE, 2.11.1937
- 93 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR AND GRETEL WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BOULOGNE SUR SEINE, 17.11.1937
- 94 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [LONDON,] 27.11.1937
- 95 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [LONDON,] 1.12.1937
- 96 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BOULOGNE SUR SEINE, 4.12.1937
- 97 WIESENGRUND-ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [LONDON,] 1.2.1938
- 98 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO PARIS, 11.2.1938
- 99 THEODOR W. AND GRETEL ADORNO TO BENJAMIN [NEW YORK,] 7.3.1938
- 100 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR W. AND GRETEL ADORNO PARIS, 27.3.1938

- [101 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\]
8.4.1938](#)
- [102 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR W. AND GRETEL
ADORNO PARIS, 16.4.1938](#)
- [103 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\]
4.5.1938](#)
- [104 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\]
8.6.1938](#)
- [105 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR W. AND GRETEL
ADORNO PARIS, 19.6.1938](#)
- [106 THEODOR W. AND GRETEL ADORNO TO
BENJAMIN BAR HARBOR, MAINE, 2.8.1938](#)
- [107 THEODOR W. AND GRETEL ADORNO TO
BENJAMIN WRITTEN ON A LETTER FROM MEYER
SCHAPIRO TO ADORNO \[BAR HARBOR, MAINE, C.
12.8.1938\]](#)
- [108 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR W. AND GRETEL
ADORNO SKOVSBOSTRAND, 28.8.1938](#)
- [109 BENJAMIN TO ADORNO SKOVSBOSTRAND,
4.10.1938](#)
- [110 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\]
10.11.1938](#)
- [111 BENJAMIN TO ADORNO PARIS, 9.12.1938](#)
- [112 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\]
1.2.1939](#)
- [113 BENJAMIN TO ADORNO PARIS, 23.2.1939](#)
- [114 THEODOR W. AND GRETEL ADORNO TO
BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\] 15.7.1939](#)
- [115 BENJAMIN TO THEODOR W. AND GRETEL
ADORNO PARIS, 6.8.1939](#)

- [116 GRETEL AND THEODOR W. ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\] 21.11.1939](#)
[117 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN \[NEW YORK,\] 29.2.1940](#)
[118 BENJAMIN TO ADORNO PARIS, 7.5.1940](#)
[119 ADORNO TO BENJAMIN NEW YORK, 16.7.1940](#)
[120 BENJAMIN TO ADORNO LOURDES, 2.8.1940](#)
[121 BENJAMIN TO HENNY GURLAND \[AND ADORNO?\]\[PORT BOU, 25.9.1940\]](#)

[Editor's Afterword by Henri Lonitz](#)

[Textual Notes and Source References](#)

[Bibliographical Index](#)

[Name Index](#)

Abbreviations



Principal works referred to in the annotations of the main text and repeated in the Textual Notes and Source References at the end of the book are abbreviated as follows:

GS [1-20]: Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann with the assistance of Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz. 20 volumes. Frankfurt a.M. 1970-86.

GS [I-VII]: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser with the assistance of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem. 7 volumes. Frankfurt a.M. 1972-89.

Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*: Theodor W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin. Aufsätze. Artikel. Briefe*, annotated by Rolf Tiedemann (revised and expanded edition). Frankfurt a.M. 1990.

Briefwechsel Adorno/Krenek: Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Krenek, *Briefwechsel*, edited by Wolfgang Rogge. Frankfurt a.M. 1974.

Briefwechsel Adorno/Sohn-Rethel: Theodor W. Adorno and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Briefwechsel 1936-1969*, edited by Christoph Gödde. München 1991 (Dialektische Studien).

Briefe: Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, edited and annotated by Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno. 2 volumes. 2nd. ed. Frankfurt a.M. 1978.

Briefwechsel Scholem: Walter Benjamin-Gershom Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933-1940*, edited by Gershom Scholem. Frankfurt a.M. 1980.

Benjamin-Katalog: Walter Benjamin 1892-1940. Eine Ausstellung des Theodor W. Adorno Archivs Frankfurt a.M. in

Verbindung mit dem Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach am Neckar. Bearbeitet von Rolf Tiedemann, Christoph Gölde und Henri Lonitz. Marbacher Magazin Nr. 55.3. Marbach a.N. 1991.

1 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 2.7.1928

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Your cordial lines¹ have encouraged me in the pleasant anticipation of receiving your 'Schubert' manuscript.² For that is surely what you allude to. I can only hope that in the meantime you have brought the piece to a successful conclusion. Might I request in advance your permission to communicate the manuscript to Bloch³ as well? It would be a great advantage for me if I could read the text with him.

You showed so much friendliness and support for my friend Alfred Cohn⁴ that time in Berlin that I feel I really have to inform you about how matters have turned out, or more unfortunately and more precisely, about the liquidation of the business in which he is employed and the consequent loss of his position there. None of this is as yet official – the liquidation of the business is still a commercial secret. But by October his situation will certainly have become extremely difficult, unless his friends are able to intervene on his behalf. In this connection I must and shall now do my best: but that can only succeed if I speak to you again concerning my friend. Naturally I understand that the suggested Berlin arrangement is impossible. Do you not feel there may now be certain possibilities for him in Frankfurt?

I know I have said enough for you to express your friendship and influence once again, if you think there is any prospect of success in the matter.

Here I am, commencing with a request, and then it strikes me that I may seem to have forgotten my intention of inviting Fräulein Karplus⁵ to drop in on me. But this is not a case of forgetfulness on my part. It is simply that during the last few weeks I have felt so preoccupied with various tasks and predicaments, which have all become dreadfully entangled with one another,⁶ that I have not had the opportunity to approach her.

As soon as things are better here, very shortly I hope, you will hear from me through her.

With warmest regards for the present,

Yours,
Walter Benjamin

2 July 1928
Berlin-Grunewald
Delbrückstr. 23

1 *Your cordial lines:* Adorno and Benjamin had first got to know each other in Frankfurt in 1923 and had subsequently met up once again in Frankfurt, and possibly – in September 1925 – in Naples, to continue their discussions. However, the correspondence between them apparently only began to lead to greater intimacy and communication in the summer of 1928, after Adorno had spent some weeks in Berlin in February of that year – The letters Adorno wrote to Benjamin prior to 1933 were left behind in Benjamin's last apartment in Berlin when he was finally forced to leave Germany in March 1933 and have all disappeared.

2 *your 'Schubert' manuscript:* cf. Adorno, 'Schubert', in *Die Musik* 21, Issue 1 (October 1928), pp. 1-12; now in GS 17, pp. 18-33. – No manuscript of the essay has survived.

3 *your permission to communicate the manuscript to Bloch*: Ernst Bloch, whom Benjamin had known since 1919, had been shown a draft and sketches for the Schubert piece by Adorno and had strongly encouraged the author to complete the essay. (cf. *Briefwechsel Adorno/Krenek*, p. 70.)

4 *my friend Alfred Cohn*: for Alfred Cohn (1892–1954), a very close school friend of Benjamin, cf. *Briefe*, p. 866. – Since the beginning of 1928 Benjamin had been attempting to help Cohn, a businessman by profession, to find a new position: ‘He [sc. Benjamin] is also pursuing his aim of getting one of his friends employed in the same business as Gretel [Karplus], and it seems to be working out.’ (Unpublished letter from Adorno to Siegfried Kracauer of 28.2.1928.) The attempts which Adorno made in Frankfurt and Gretel in Berlin – *the suggested Berlin arrangement* – came to nothing in the end.

5 *my intention of inviting Fräulein Karplus*: Margarete Karplus (1902–1993), later Adorno’s wife, had got to know Benjamin at the beginning of 1928.

6 *various tasks and predicaments ... dreadfully entangled with one another*: Benjamin is probably referring here to the resumption of work on the ‘Goethe’ article for the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* (cf. GS II [2], pp. 705–39.) – The heart attack suffered by Benjamin’s mother in July also contributed substantially to the increasing difficulties of Benjamin’s personal situation, largely determined by the conflict between his planned journey to Palestine (cf. Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin – die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a.M. 1976), pp. 185–90) and his renewed intimacy with Asja Lacis (cf. *ibid.*, p. 187).

2 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 1.9.1928

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

It would prove truly difficult to find an excuse for my long silence. Therefore please take these few lines as a word of explanation. But first I must properly thank you for your manuscript.¹

As it happened, I was with Bloch when it arrived and he was so impatient to take the material home with him that, *contre cœur*, I let him have it. And then, owing to circumstances which suddenly took him away from Berlin, he was unable to find an opportunity to study it or, unfortunately, to return it to me.

And that is why it is only in the last few days that I have managed to reclaim it. But since I should not like to compound this misfortune with another, namely that of reading your 'Schubert' all too hastily, I have decided simply to let you know in brief that you may expect a substantive response in a week, together with what I hope will be a rather less formal thank you.

But to deal with the whole humiliating business all at once: the editorial board of 'The Literary World' had responded immediately and enthusiastically to my suggestion that they should approach you for the planned contribution to the journal's George issue.² They assured me that they would be in contact with you directly. I was foolish enough to believe the whole matter was settled, without reckoning with the infinite incompetence of such organizations. In this regard too I must tender my apologies.

Anticipating more fortunate auspices for the future,

and with cordial regards for now,

Yours,
Walter Benjamin

1 September 1928
Berlin-Grunewald
Delbrückstr. 23

Many thanks for everything you have done for my friend.³
Since the matter is still in progress I shall come back to it if
the opportunity arises.

¹ *your manuscript*: the manuscript of the 'Schubert' essay
and the series of aphorisms 'Motive III' (cf. *Musikblätter
des Anbruchs* 10, issue 7 (August/September 1928), pp.
237-40; now in GS 16, pp. 263-5 and GS 18, pp. 15-18.
The version which Benjamin probably had before him was
entitled 'Neue Aphorismen'.

² *the editorial board of 'The Literary World' ... contribution
to the journal's George issue*: on the occasion of Stefan
George's 60th birthday the weekly journal 'Die literarische
Welt', edited by Willi Haas for the Rowohlt publishing
house, had commissioned a survey, the results of which
were published in the issue of 13.7.1928. Benjamin had
obviously attempted to get Adorno accepted as one of the
respondents to whom the survey was directed. – On the
George issue and Benjamin's contribution to it, cf. GS II
[2], pp. 622-4 and GS II [3], pp. 1429f.

³ *everything you have done for my friend*: nothing further
is known about the steps taken by Adorno to assist Alfred
Cohn.

3 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 29.3.1930

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Please forgive me for disturbing you, but I was careless enough to forget the name of one of the authors you mentioned¹ amongst those who had written about Kraus. I think I was even somewhat amazed by the name when you mentioned it. I remember Liegler,² Haecker,³ Viertel⁴ – but there was also another one. If I am not mistaken, you referred to him as a student of Kraus.

Would you be so kind as to let me know by postcard as soon as possible?

With sincere thanks!

Yours,
Walter Benjamin

29 March 1930

Berlin W

Friedrich Wilhelm Str. 15^{III}

¹ *one of the authors you mentioned*: apart from the authors mentioned in the letter, Benjamin also cites works by Robert Scheu and Otto Stoessel in his 'Kraus' essay (cf. GS II [1], pp. 334–67), on which he was working around this time; whether one of these two was the author whose name Benjamin had forgotten – and if so, which one – can no longer be determined.

² *Liegler*: Leopold Liegler (1882–1949), Secretary of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, was also secretary to Karl

Kraus until 1924; Benjamin is quoting from the book *Karl Kraus und sein Werk* (Vienna 1920).

3 *Theodor Haecker*: Haecker (1879–1945) was a principal contributor to the journal 'Brenner'; there is a passage about Kraus in his book *Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit* (Munich 1913). – In his letter Benjamin had spelt the author's name as Hecker, presumably confusing it with that of the famous philologist Max Hecker.

4 *Berthold Viertel*: Kraus had published poems by Berthold Viertel (1885–1953), poet, writer, dramatist and director, in the journal 'Fackel'; Viertel's book *Karl Kraus. Ein Charakter und seine Zeit* had been published in Dresden in 1921.

4 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 10.11.1930

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

My mother passed away a few days ago,¹ which is why I have delayed in writing. I regret that I shall have to be briefer than I would have wished. Your letter touched upon so much that is important to me that I would dearly like to respond in detail, but I have so much urgent work to do.² Your thoughts upon the subject I proposed for Frankfurt³ correspond closely to my own reservations. I am therefore particularly happy to adopt your formulation: 'On the Philosophy of Literary Criticism'. I am writing about it to Horkheimer⁴ in the next few days. But it would be very nice

if you could communicate this new formulation to him right away, and suggest further in the same connection that, in view of the recent bereavement I have mentioned, I would be particularly grateful if my address could be postponed to some time after Christmas – like the middle of January perhaps.

You should be very pleased to learn that your gently insistent remarks about ‘The Old Curiosity Shop’⁵ have finally defeated my external inhibitions on the subject, and that I have been absorbed in the book for some days now; awareness of the way in which you have already read it makes me feel as though someone with a lamp were guiding me along these dark passageways. I have seen the most astonishing veins of silver light up before me.

How much I would like to communicate my thoughts to you in something written of my own, since the resounding echo of the extended and extremely stimulating conversations I am currently enjoying – in my meetings with Brecht⁶ – has yet to reach you. I was rather relying on the *Frankfurter Zeitung* – I am thinking especially of my Kästner article⁷ here – but things are proving extremely difficult with them. It is obvious that they are busy considering every option.

I have read Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*.⁸ Rather faltering steps – so it seems to me – in the right direction.

Please let me know the fate of your own work⁹ as soon as possible. I will also ask Fraulein Karplus about this when Brecht next comes to visit.

With cordial regards,

Yours,
Walter Benjamin

10 November 1930

Berlin-Wilmersdorf
Prinzregentenstrasse 66

1 *My mother passed away a few days ago:* Benjamin's mother had died on 2 November 1930.

2 *so much urgent work to do:* in connection with the journal 'Krisis und Kritik', which Benjamin planned to edit in collaboration with Brecht and Herbert Ihering and publish with Rowohlt Verlag; Benjamin's 'Memorandum' for the journal contains a list of prospective contributors, including Adorno; cf. GS VI, pp. 619–21.

3 *the subject I proposed for Frankfurt:* the projected lecture for the Institute of Social Research, which Benjamin was probably invited to give by Max Horkheimer, Director of the Institute since October 1930, seems never to have materialized.

4 *I am writing about it to Horkheimer:* no letter from Benjamin to Horkheimer at this period seems to have survived.

5 *The Old Curiosity Shop':* the novel by Charles Dickens; cf. the German translation: Charles Dickens, *Ausgewählte Romane und Novellen. Zweiter Band: Der Raritätenladen. Unter Benutzung alterer Übertragungen neu gestaltet von Leo Feld*, (Leipzig, undated); sometime towards the end of September 1930 Adorno had read the novel 'with enormous emotion' and described it as 'a book of the very first rank – full of mysteries compared with which the Blochian kind reveal themselves as the toilet stench of eternity which they are' (unpublished letter from Adorno to Kracauer of 27.9.1930). – Towards the end of the year Adorno composed 'A Discussion concerning The Old Curiosity Shop of Charles Dickens' which was first broadcast on Frankfurt radio and subsequently appeared

in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 18.4.1931. (cf. GS 11, pp. 515–22).

6 *in my meetings with Brecht*: in connection with the project for the new journal mentioned above; Benjamin had got to know Brecht in May 1929.

7 *my Kästner article*: cf. Erich Kästner, *Ein Mann gibt Auskunft* (Stuttgart, Berlin 1930); Benjamin's review, entitled 'Linke Melancholie. Zu Erich Kästners neuem Gedichtbuch', was rejected by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and appeared in 'Die Gesellschaft' 8, vol. 1 (1931), pp. 181–4; now in GS III, pp. 279–83.

8 *Korsch's Marxism and Philosophy*: cf. Karl Korsch, *Marxismus und Philosophie* (Leipzig 1930).

9 *the fate of your own work*: Adorno had just submitted his work 'The Construction of the Aesthetic in Kierkegaard's Philosophy' under Paul Tillich as his *Habilitationsschrift* (Post-Doctoral Dissertation), which was formally accepted in February 1931.

5 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 17.7.1931

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Now that my initial Berlin arrangements¹ have been settled, *tant bien que mal*, I am in a position to respond. A prior condition was my having read your inaugural lecture² in its entirety and having studied it in detail. I have spoken also to Ernst Bloch about it and he also gave me your letter³

to read. To come directly to my own view: there is no doubt that the piece as a whole succeeds in its aim, that in its very concision it presents an extremely penetrating articulation of the most essential ideas which we share, and that it possesses every quality 'pour faire date', as Apollinaire put it. I think Bloch is right to claim that the connection between materialism and the ideas in question seems forced in places, but this is fully justified by the spiritual climate and can probably be defended wherever it is a question not simply of 'applying' Marxism like a coat of fresh paint, but rather of working with it, and that means, for all of us, struggling with it. He seems to have a stronger point in his remarks about your critique of the Vienna Circle.⁴ I believe I understand the appropriate diplomatic considerations you have brought to your formulation in this respect. It is almost impossible to discern clearly how far one can go in this direction. But there is no question about your critique of the development taken by phenomenology;⁵ what you claim about the role of death in Heidegger is decisive. What strikes me as particularly congenial generally is not so much the diplomatic attitude itself as the extremely subtle and persistent manner in which your address combines this attitude with such, so to speak, authoritative claims, in short the masterly fashion in which at certain places you avoid the traditional polemics so beloved of philosophical 'Schools'.

And now a word concerning the question Bloch raised about the possible mention or otherwise of my name. Without the slightest offence on my side – and hopefully without causing the slightest offence on yours – and after close study of the piece, the very importance of which seems in part to justify such otherwise undignified questions concerning original authorship, I must now take back the remarks I made in Frankfurt.⁶ The sentence which decisively

articulates the positions you have taken up over against the philosophy of the 'Schools' runs as follows:

'The task of systematic enquiry⁷ [Wissenschaft] is not to explore the concealed or manifest intentional structures of reality, but to interpret the intentionless character of reality, insofar as, by constructing figures and images out of the isolated elements of reality, it extracts the questions which it is the further task of enquiry to formulate in the most pregnant fashion possible'.

I can subscribe to this proposition. Yet I could not have written it without thereby referring to the introduction of my book on Baroque Drama,⁸ where this entirely unique and, in the relative and modest sense in which such a thing can be claimed, new idea was first expressed. For my part I would have been unable to omit some reference to the book at this point. I do not need to add that if I were in your position this would be even more the case.

I hope you will also perceive from this the great sympathy which I feel for this, as it seems to me, extraordinarily important lecture, as well as the desire to maintain our philosophical friendship in the same alert and pristine form as before.

Perhaps I may express the wish that you would discuss the matter with me, if the lecture should be published and you did want to mention my name in it as you suggested.

I read your 'Words without Songs'⁹ with the greatest pleasure, and most especially with regard to the fourth and the resounding conclusion of the final two pieces.

Many thanks for the tobacco pouch.¹⁰

As always, cordially yours,
Walter Benjamin

17 July 1931

Berlin-Wilmersdorf
Prinzregentenstr. 66
PS Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Schoen^{[11](#)} is here again and asking all kinds of things of me with which only you can help. Would you be so kind as to respond to his two, rather urgent, questions? Could you 'please send' the following to his address, Eschersheimer Landstrasse 33:

- 1) The melody and the text of your favourite setting of 'To the gate the beggar flees'.^{[12](#)}
- 2) The melody of 'At the mountain there I stood'.^{[13](#)}

Many thanks,
WB

^{[1](#)} *my initial Berlin arrangements*: i.e. after Benjamin's return from the south of France.

^{[2](#)} *your inaugural lecture*: Adorno presented his academic inaugural lecture under the title 'The Actuality of Philosophy' on 2 May 1931; the manuscript is dated 7 May (first published in GS 1, pp. 325-44). – Benjamin, Kracauer and Bloch had all received typescript copies of the piece.

^{[3](#)} *your letter*: Adorno's letter to Kracauer of 8 June gives some idea of Bloch's criticisms as outlined in his letter to Adorno (now lost) and addressed in Adorno's letter in response (also lost): 'Dear Friedel, and in great haste: yesterday I received a rather substantial letter from Bloch concerning my inaugural lecture, and which I have also answered in some detail. Since the drift of his letter very much coincides with your own (the introduction of materialism; I assume that shared discussions lie behind all this), the answer I gave him is also effectively my answer to you. I have already asked him to show you the

letter, and would ask you to read it as soon as possible since I believe I have defended fairly carefully the things which you attacked. Above all, why the transition to materialism is made in the way it is, and not from the perspective of the 'totality'. The whole question is addressed less tactically than perhaps you imagine. What is essentially at issue is an attempt to attain a new approach to materialism, one which I believe is pointing in the right direction, although I am fully aware of the problems attached to the project. – The question about the essay must be put into its concrete context. It is a response to the objections raised against the Kierkegaard book by [Max] Wertheimer and [Kurt] Riezler and which I have literally reproduced in the essay. It must also be understood in the light of a quite specific situation. It goes without saying that I would not wish arbitrarily to reduce philosophy to the essay form. I simply believe that the essay genre harbours a principle which could be very fruitfully exploited with regard to philosophy at large.

I would be delighted if you could take up the discussion as I have elaborated it in my letter to Bloch. – In so far as your objections concern university *tactics*, then I am more than ready to agree with you. On the other hand, the theme demanded of me did not really permit me to produce anything very different from the lecture as it was. I am not entirely clear about what it was that so upset people about it. Everyone expressed a different opinion. Mannheim's was the most foolish of all: he thought that I had defected to the Vienna positivists!!!!' (Unpublished letter from Adorno to Siegfried Kracauer of 8.6.1931)

4 *your critique of the Vienna Circle*: cf. GS 1, pp. 331f.

5 *your critique of the development taken by phenomenology*: cf. *ibid.*, pp. 327–31; the passage

concerning *the role of death in Heidegger* is found on p. 330.

6 *the remarks I made in Frankfurt*: the remarks in question, which Benjamin probably made during a meeting with Adorno at the end of June or the beginning of July at Frankfurt station on the way back from Paris to Berlin, and which he now wished *to take back*, may have concerned the question whether his name and 'The Origin of German Tragic Drama' should be expressly mentioned and cited as sources. On his first reading of the lecture, or parts of it, in Frankfurt he still seems to have thought not. As Benjamin's letter suggests, a close reading of the text and the influence of Bloch caused him to think differently about the issue.

7 *'The task of systematic enquiry'*: cf. GS 1, p. 335; in the inaugural lecture Adorno actually says 'the task of philosophy'; otherwise Benjamin reproduces the original correctly.

8 *the introduction of my book on Baroque Drama*: cf. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* [The Origin of German Tragic Drama] (Berlin 1928); now in GS I [1], pp. 203-430; for the 'Erkenntniskritische Vorrede' [Epistemo-critical Preface], cf. *ibid.*, pp. 207-37.

9 *your 'Words without Songs'*: cf. Adorno, 'Worte ohne Lieder', in the Frankfurter Zeitung, 14.7.1931; now in GS 20 (2), pp. 537-43.

10 *the tobacco pouch*: probably a present from Adorno to Benjamin on his birthday on 15 July.

11 *Schoen*: Ernst Schoen (1894-1960), musician and writer, was one of Benjamin's closest friends since his school days, and from May 1929 was employed as director of artistic programmes with South-West German Radio in

Frankfurt; in 1933 he emigrated to London (cf. *Benjamin-Katalog*, pp. 77–81).

[12](#) *'To the gate the beggar flees'*: on the significance of this verse from Wilhelm Taubert's 'Wiegenlied' [Lullaby] for Adorno, cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, nr. 128 (GS 4, p. 227); see also letters 94, 96 and 105 below.

[13](#) *'At the mountain there I stood'*: it has not proved possible to identify the song in question.

6 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [BERLIN,] 25.7.1931

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

Thank you for your last letter.

I think we can now see land at last. It is my sincere, even urgent wish that your piece^{[1](#)} should appear. How could I possibly be a hindrance to the programmatic announcement of a view which I so strongly share myself.

I hope you will be quite happy if I express a preference for a dedication over a motto.^{[2](#)} We can surely postpone mutual discussion about your precise formulation until the time comes for publication. On the other hand I have already started looking around for the quotations and discover that you can choose between pages 21 and 33;^{[3](#)} perhaps the second one is the more significant.

I would send you a new copy of the book immediately, were it not for the fact that with the collapse of Rowohlt^{[4](#)} I have been unable to lay my hands on any copies for the moment.