

Walter
Benjamin

Correspondence

1930-1940

Gretel
Adorno

Correspondence 1930–1940

GRETEL ADORNO
AND WALTER BENJAMIN

Correspondence
1930–1940

Edited by Henri Lonitz and
Christoph Gödde
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Editors' Foreword

A reflection, albeit a fading one, of intellectual life in the Berlin of the late 1920s provides this correspondence, which begins properly only after Benjamin's emigration to France, with the framework within which the portrait of this friendship takes shape. It was Gretel Karplus who urged Benjamin to emigrate and told him about Adorno's plans and Bloch's movements, thus maintaining the connection between the old Berlin friends and acquaintances. She helped him through the most difficult times with regular money transfers, and organized financial support from the Saar region, which was initially still independent from the Third Reich. But the correspondence also shows the great importance of this personal communication to both correspondents, and thus the autonomy of their friendship. Benjamin's interest in fashion, following Baudelaire and Mallarmé, is also echoed by Gretel Karplus when she writes, in August 1935, 'I would truly love to have a conversation with Helen Grund, and not only about the fashion products of the major companies, but also about the laws according to which fashions ultimately move socially downwards in the provinces and the middle classes. I am encountering this problem almost daily in my work, but I am not interested in it purely for professional reasons; this cycle has always interested me, and I would almost go so far as to say that the closer I am to it, the more difficult it seems to find the solution, and the more questionable I find the notion of taste.' Once in New York, she attempts to entice Benjamin to America with her descriptions of the city and the new arrivals from Europe. In May 1939 she writes: 'I wish we could go for a walk together down by the Hudson and talk about everything at leisure.' Unfortunately, not all of Benjamin's letters were preserved by their addressee, so there remain a number of sensitive gaps that cannot be filled. Benjamin's letters have been reproduced in accordance with the

edition *Gesammelte Briefe*, and the notes appended there have also remained mostly unchanged. Gretel Adorno's letters have all been reproduced from the original manuscripts and typescripts. The editor's have marked indecipherable words with an x in square brackets, and inserted a question mark in square brackets where they were uncertain. The original letters are in the Walter Benjamin Archiv at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

The following editions of works and letters are cited in abbreviated form:

Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann in collaboration with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schultz, vols 1–20 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86); abbreviation: GS [1–20].

Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity, 1999); abbreviation: *Adorno–Benjamin Correspondence*.

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927–1969*, vol. 1: 1927–1937, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); abbreviation: Adorno–Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel I*.

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927–1969*, vol. 2: 1938–1944, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004); abbreviation: Adorno–Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel II*.

Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Křenek, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Wolfgang Rogge (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974); abbreviation: *Adorno–Křenek Correspondence*.

Theodor W. Adorno and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Briefwechsel 1936–1969*, ed. Christoph Gödde (Munich, 1991); abbreviation: *Adorno–Sohn-Rethel Correspondence*.

Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, in collaboration with Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–89); abbreviation: GS 1–7.

Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Christoph GÖdde and Henri Lonitz, vols 1–6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995–2000); abbreviation: *GB* 1–6.

Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1933–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985); abbreviation: *Scholem Correspondence*.

Walter Benjamin 1892–1940, an exhibition of the Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, Frankfurt am Main, in collaboration with the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Christoph GÖdde and Henri Lonitz (*Marbacher Magazin* 55), 3rd edn (Marbach am Neckar, 1991); abbreviation: *Benjamin-Katalog*.

Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15: *Briefwechsel 1913–1936*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995); abbreviation: Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1913–1936*.

Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16: *Briefwechsel 1937–1940*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995); abbreviation: Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1937–1940*.

1 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS
TRONDHEIM, 25.7.1930

Dear Miss Karplus,

once one has left Berlin¹ the world becomes beautiful and spacious, and even has room aboard a 2000-ton steamer for your silently cheerful servant alongside various travelling rabble. Just now I am offering it the spectacle of a droll, moustachioed old lady sunbathing in an armchair on the ship's terrace – for it simply must be a terrace, whether on the boulevard or in the fjord – with her cup of coffee beside her, scribbling away at her handicraft. So take this simple crochet piece, then, meant for us as a manner of antimacassar for our friendship, as a sign of old kinship from the undeterred traveller, descendant of *Schelmuffsky*² W. B.

Original: picture postcard: Trondhjem. Elgsæter bro m/Høiskolen; stamp: Tromsø, 25.[VII] 30. Manuscript.

1 At the end of July, Benjamin had embarked upon his trip to Scandinavia from Hamburg; see his 'Reisenotizen' [Travel Notes] (GS 6, pp. 419–22), which then became the *Denkbild* 'Nordische See', which appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on 18 September 1930 (see GS 4 [1], pp. 383–7).

2 An allusion to Christian Reuter's parody of a travel novel, *Schelmuffsky's Curiose und Sehr gefährliche Reisebeschreibung zu Wasser vnd Land* [Schelmuffsky's Curious and Very Dangerous Travel Report by Water and Land], first published in 1696, which Benjamin had spoken about on 28 March on Southwest German Radio. Schelmuffsky flees from Hamburg at the start of his trip and subsequently travels to Sweden (see GS 2 [2], pp. 648–60).

2 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS
SAN ANTONIO (IBIZA), c.MID-MAY 1932

Dear Gretel Karplus,

such is life – 12 hours after I sent my last letter off to you I received yours,¹ which has afforded me a feeling of infinite relief. Perhaps it is simply the inability to take in a series of cloudless days as they come that leads to such oppressive questions as those circulating in my last letter. For it takes a long time to adjust to so climatically alien a situation, unless a certain degree of hotel comfort acts as an intermediary between the country and ourselves. And you can see from the little picture enclosed² how far removed we are from that here. After weeks of work, the acquaintances who brought this little house to life again

after years of disrepair have now succeeded in making it a very habitable place. The most beautiful thing is the view from the window onto the sea and a rocky island, which lets its lighthouse shine in here at night, as well as the distance between inhabitants through an astute allocation of space and walls almost a metre thick, which prevent any sound (or heat) from getting through. I am leading the sort of life centenarians tell reporters of as a secret: I get up at seven o'clock and bathe in the sea, where not a soul is to be seen on the shore far and wide, perhaps at the most a sailor on the horizon around the level of my forehead; then I sunbathe, leaning against a willing tree-trunk in the forest, and its healing powers spread to my head through the prism of a satire by Gide³ (Paludes), and then a long day of abstinence from countless things – less because they shorten life than because they hardly exist here, or are so inferior that one is happy to dispense with them – electric light and butter, spirits and running water, flirts and newspaper-reading. For the perusal of the issues of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which appear with a week's delay, already has more of an epic character. If you consider also that all my mail goes to Wissing⁴ – who has so far sent me not a single piece of writing – then you can see that I am not exaggerating. I have spent a long time focusing solely on books and jottings; it is only in the last few days that I have emancipated myself from roaming the shore and taken a number of longer hikes into the even wider, even more lonely surrounding area. Only then did I become fully conscious of being in Spain. Of all the habitable country I have seen, these parts⁵ are surely the most severe and untouched. It is difficult to give you a clear idea of them, yet if I should succeed in the end, I will not keep it from you. So far I have not made many notes with this intention, but I was surprised to find myself taking up the form of representation used in *One-Way Street* for a number of elements connected to the most important in the book. Perhaps I can show you some of this in Berlin. Then we shall also speak about Corsica⁶ I am very glad you have now seen it; there is really something very Spanish about the countryside there; but the Corsican summer does not, I think, carve quite such harsh and tremendous contours into the land. Hopefully you also stayed at the wonderfully quiet and old-fashioned Grand Hotel in Ajaccio for a few days. You must also tell me in detail how things went for Wiesengrund in Marseilles. I think I should be reaching there in the course of the next few weeks, but I can never quite decide on the specific dates. You will understand if you consider that I am living here on a mere fraction of what I need in Berlin; I am therefore drawing out my stay for as long as I possibly can, and will not be back before the start of August. But I hope very much to hear from you before then.

Well, if – encouraged by your letter, which was very pleasing to me – I may request a small gift, it would be to send me a little bag (envelope) of smoking tobacco as a ‘sample without value’ – All right von Eicken or some other brand. There is absolutely nothing smokable here.

I too received a letter from Daga, and one from her mother,⁷ before my departure. Furthermore, I was completely immersed in Russian for two weeks: first I read Trotsky’s history of the February revolution, and now I am just finishing his autobiography. I think I have not consumed anything with such breathless excitement in years. There is no question whatsoever that you must read both books. Do you know if the second volume of the history of the revolution – October – has been published yet?⁸ I will return to my Gracian⁹ soon and probably write something about it.

For now my best and kind wishes

Yours,

Walter Benjamin

Original: manuscript.

On the dating: Benjamin tells Gretel Karplus of completing Trotsky’s volume on the February revolution, which he does not appear to have finished reading before 10 May (see *GB* 4, letter no. 734); this suggests that the letter was written around the middle of May.

1 Neither has survived.

2 No picture of the ‘little house’ referred to in the letter is known to the editors. It is also possible, however, that Benjamin means a photo so far dated to 1933, which shows him, Noeggerath and Selz on the ‘bare’ terrace of the ‘little house’ (see *Benjamin-Katalog*, fig. 83).

3 *Paludes* was first published in 1895.

4 Egon Wissing (1900–1984) was Walter Benjamin’s maternal cousin; he had studied medicine and later worked as radiologist at the Massachusetts Memorial Hospital in Boston. His first wife was Gertrude (Gert) Frank, née Feiss (?), who died in Paris in November 1933.

5 Benjamin wrote ‘Ibizenkische Folge’ [Ibiza Sequence] and the second series of ‘Kurze Schatten’ [Short Shadows] (see *GS* 4 [1], pp. 402–9 and 425–8); see also *GB* 4, letter no. 734 and the note there).

6 Gretel Karplus and Adorno had crossed over to Corsica at the end of March and taken a trip there to Bonifacio, at the southern tip; on 3 April they stayed in Ajaccio. Benjamin had spent a week in Corsica in June 1927.

7 The formulation suggests that Gretel Karplus had met Asja Lacis and her daughter during their stay in Berlin.

8 This was only published in 1933.

9 Benjamin was thinking at the time of writing an essay on Gracian for *Die literarische Welt*, as a short list entitled 'projects' (see GS 6, p. 157) indicates (see also GB 4, letter no. 741); one year later, also in Ibiza, he considered writing a Gracian commentary (see GB 4, letter no. 780). No notes for this project have survived. Slightly under a year later Walter Benjamin gave Gretel Karplus a copy of the *Hand-Orakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit* [Hand Oracle and Art of Worldly Wisdom] by Balthasar Gracian (no. 423 in the *Insel-Bücherei* catalogue), 'newly edited by Otto Baron von Taube using the translation by Arthur Schopenhauer', which bore the dedication 'Walter Benjamin für Gretel Karplus 3 März 1933'; the book does not contain any notes by Benjamin.

3 GRETEL ADORNO TO WALTER BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 29.3.1933

29 March 1933.

Dear Walter Benjamin,

a thousand thanks for the telegram and your kind letter.¹ Please do not let the delay in my reply prevent you from sending me further news as soon as possible; above all, I would like to know how our friend Detlef² is faring. I am greatly concerned about him, and, as I am sure you have spoken to him, I cannot think of anyone better to tell me how he really is and what prospects he has at the moment.

Except for having caught a decent spring cold, I am well enough. On Monday I plan to begin my trainee work; they are being very friendly and accommodating. The old company will not be sold; it is more likely that the factory will be rented out without the properties. – Teddie's plans are entirely uncertain, but at least Berlin is showing itself to him in somewhat more tempting colours now. During the last few days we have been spending a great deal of time with the Wiener Streichquartett, who are giving 3 concerts here at the moment; I believe you also know Rudi³ personally. – I was informed by telephone that the tenant[?] Sch.⁴ bought his own cupboards, so I have been spared making the acquaintance of Krumme Strasse for the time being. Karola's friend⁵ wrote me a few pleasant lines from Hotel Bellevue in Graubünden. – The secretary⁶ you had last year, whom you have incidentally withheld from me to this day, sounds so charming from your description that I could almost become jealous. – As I have a fair amount of free time, an acquaintance⁷ has employed me to maintain his library; there are some quite interesting volumes in it. I shall send you a list as soon as I have finished sorting it.

Fond and warm regards

ever your Felicitas

Original: manuscript.

1 Not preserved.

2 Benjamin had adopted the pseudonym *Detlef Holz* for his German publications. Gretel Karplus subsequently addressed him by this name.

3 The violinist and leader of several string quartet formations Rudolf Kolisch (1896–1978), who had been a friend of Adorno since the latter's studies with Alban Berg in Vienna.

4 This presumably refers to Werner von Schoeller, who rented Benjamin's last apartment in the Prinzregentenstrasse.

5 This refers to Ernst Bloch, who had been together with Karola Piotrkowska (1905–1994) since 1927 and married her in November 1934. Gretel Karplus knew both of them from their time in Berlin, and was in postal communication with Ernst Bloch; of that correspondence, unfortunately, only one letter by Gretel Adorno, from 16 November 1970, has survived.

6 Uncertain. It is likely that Benjamin had mentioned Jean Selz (1904–1997) in his letter, with whom he had close contact in Ibiza. Benjamin and Selz were planning to translate the former's *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (published in English as *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006]) into French. Five pieces from the 'Enfance berlinoise' were completed in the spring of 1933 (see GS 4 [2], pp. 979–86).

7 This is Benjamin, of course, who had asked Gretel Karplus to look after the books he had left behind in the Prinzregentenstrasse.

4 GRETEL KARPLUS TO WALTER BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 30.3.1933

30 March 1933.

Walter Benjamin, my dear,

I received your second letter¹ just after I had sent off my reply to you yesterday, and I wish to answer it immediately so that the pictures² still reach you in Paris. Even if you are now no longer completely alone, which I am especially glad to hear, I would still like to keep you company in this somewhat primitive fashion. I put on the green dress for the occasion, and I am sure you will forgive me if my hairstyle is still from '31. To assist your imagination a little, I enclose a small sample of the material – for stroking.

I already knew the things you wrote about Blei³ from Marieluise v. Motesiczky,⁴ whom you once met at my place; her uncle Ernst v. Lieben is Billie's divorced husband and probably down there too, and

it is certain that he financed the whole thing. Please do write a word to Piz (Mrl. V. M) if you need anything Vienna IV. Brahmsplatz 7, or I can inform her if you would prefer.

Have you found anything worth recommending in recent French literature? Your letters are the dearest and most important thing I have at the moment; happiness is still taking its time in arriving. I look forward to your next message, very warm regards your

Fe-li-ci-tas.⁵

I do wonder: are you satisfied with me?

Original: manuscript.

1 Not preserved.

2 They could not be traced.

3 Franz Blei (1871–1942) seems to have settled in Majorca in 1931 for financial reasons; his daughter had a chicken farm there. The town of Cala Ratjada was also inhabited by Friedrich Burschell (1889–1969) and Karl Otten (1889–1963).

4 Gretel Karplus was a close friend of the Vienna-born painter Marie-Louise von Motesiczky (1906–1996), who was known as ‘der Piz’ [translator’s note: meaning unknown].

5 In her correspondence with Benjamin, Gretel Karplus adopted this name, which belonged to a figure from Wilhelm Speyer’s play *Ein Mantel, ein Hut, ein Handschuh* [A Coat, a Hat, a Glove], in which Benjamin had been a collaborator.

5 GRETEL KARPLUS TO WALTER BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 14.4.1933

14 April 33.

Dear Walter-D,

today just a quick message: as Teddie feels so lonely here, he will probably be moving in at the Prinzenallee¹ around the middle of next week. So I would then ask you to send the letters in duplicate, now and again perhaps also one to the following address: Georg Tengler, Dresdenerstr. 50/1. for me – we could also arrange for them to be kept *poste restante** if we decided on a particular day of the week. I await your suggestions and look forward with impatience to hearing from you. Many warm regards, best wishes for your move in Ibiza, ever warmly

Your Felicitas

* S 14 Dresdenerstr. 97

I scribbled this card down quickly in the tram. Just think how strange: GT. used to have his business in the house of your friends Scho,² who still had their printing company back then. Please forgive the businesslike tone of the card.

F.

Original: postcard; stamp: Berlin, 15.4.33. – Manuscript.

1 Gretel Karplus lived there with her parents.

2 The parents of Benjamin's friend Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) had their printing office in the Neue Grünstrasse in Berlin-Charlottenburg.

6 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS
SAN ANTONIO (IBIZA), 15.4.1933

Dear Felizitas,

I would long have given you¹ news of myself and my circumstances, if only I had found any peace – discounting sleep – during the last ten days. And even now it would not really be time yet, if I did not have the courage to take it up with the most miserable illumination in the world – not candles, but rather a dim electric light attached to an unattainably high ceiling. I travelled for eight days to get here from Paris – stops in Barcelona, in Ibiza – and then practically stumbled into a house move. For the house from last year, which only this winter had played a not unimportant role in my imagination, had been rented out to someone else by the Noeggeraths² a few hours before my arrival. And if they had kept it, I would no longer have found any part to inhabit after the various changes that had meanwhile been made.

The ceiling with the dim light, then, is in a different house. Compared to the old one it has the advantage of being one-quarter or one-eighth more comfortable, but the disadvantages of a less convenient location and architectural banality. For it was built on the outskirts of San Antonio by the doctor there, who had to move away, and is three-quarters of an hour away from the beautiful patch of forest in which I spent the last summer. But this is no more than a miniature mirror of great public changes on the scale of my private life. For it is scarcely possible, notwithstanding some less than elegant building work, to find accommodation in San Antonio at the moment. As a result, prices have risen once again. And so the economic and demographic changes are balancing each other out. In relation to the fantastically cheap overall level, however, neither of these is all too sensitive. It is a little different with the current population increase in the area. For the isolation of last summer is more difficult to find not

only through the topographical changes, but also through the appearance of 'summer guests', where one cannot always distinguish between summer season and twilight years. The only person you are likely to know of among those here would be Raoul Hausmann.³ I have not yet been introduced to him, incidentally, and am in general avoiding contact wherever possible.

But one does not need it, as one learns more here about the background and nature of the people in days than one sometimes learns in years in Berlin. And so, when you come here in a few months,⁴ I can guide you on a fairly instructive tour through the local garden of fates. Incidentally, a new centre for this or that entanglement has come about through a Frenchman – the brother of that married couple⁵ I told you about – who is opening a bar in Ibiza, directly by the harbour, and the gradually emerging character of its space promises very pleasant quarters.

I received quite a lengthy letter from Max⁶ in Geneva, and what I can at least gather from it is that the journal is to be continued and my collaboration is still reckoned with. It goes without saying that a sociology of French literature, which is what they are expecting from me first of all, is not so very easy to produce from here. But I at least prepared it as well as I could in Paris. It seems that I can expect some reviews later on. I am also writing these for other publications at present, without having any illusions about the uncertain editorial fate of the manuscripts. May I make a request of you in this context? While I was in Paris I asked my maid⁷ to forward me the review copy of a collection of letters by Dauthendey⁸ that the Frankfurter Zeitung had sent me. It has not arrived here so far, and I would like to receive it quite soon. Perhaps you could ask about it by telephone. Incidentally, I have been informed in a letter that my review of Wiesengrund's book⁹ appeared in the literary supplement of the Vossische Zeitung on the 2nd or the 9th of April. I did not receive the specimen copies and would be most especially grateful to you if you could send me two here, or have the ones probably lying about in my apartment forwarded.

Naturally I hope to hear very soon about the progress of your undertakings since 1 April. Not only about them, but also about your health. And finally how Wiesengrund's projects have developed. I am almost certain that he will meanwhile be inclined to accept my last spoken suggestions.¹⁰ You must tell him that Max asked after him with some concern in the aforementioned letter. For me, the crux of your affairs is the question of your summer trip and its goal. I would be most dejected if you were to forget about the perspectives of our long conversation in Westend. But I am sure that you will take care of everything as astutely and precisely as I have always known you to do. Give me details about that.

I have started learning Spanish seriously, and am being guided by three different systems: an old-fashioned grammar book, the Thousand Words and finally a new, very clever suggestive method. I think it should lead to something in the foreseeable future. Tomorrow is Easter – I then intend to take my first longer walk into the country. But shorter ones have also convinced me that one can find all the old beauty and solitude of the region half an hour away from the houses, and I hope that I will not have to undertake all my expeditions alone. It is incidentally very hot sometimes during the day, but at night still cool, just like last year.

Since I began this letter, the view of the new house has already cleared a little. I am accommodated very decently in a room that even has a sort of dressing-room, where one can even take a hot bath in a tub after heating the wash-boiler for a long time: for Ibiza, that is truly the stuff of fairy tales. But it is also useful, as bathing in the sea will be inconceivable for me for another four to six weeks. The room contains a bookshelf and a cupboard, furthermore, so I can place the few things I have and the little papers around me in a very orderly fashion.

Many thanks for Ernst's address. I will send him a card in the next few days. I have not heard much from the great wide world since I have been here. But I expect your next letter to compensate for that too.

For today warm regards

15 April 1933 Detlef

Ibiza (Balearic Islands)

San Antonio Fonda Miramar

Original: manuscript.

1 Translator's note: this marks the first use in the correspondence of the informal address *Du* (as opposed to the formal *Sie*). As both correspondents occasionally switch between the two in later letters, however, each subsequent use of *Sie* will be pointed out in a note.

2 The New York-born Felix Noeggerath (1885–1960), who had assumed German nationality in 1909. Benjamin first met Noeggerath in 1915 in Munich while the latter was studying philosophy, Indology and Indo-Germanic linguistics. Noeggerath lived in Ibiza with his third wife and his son Hans Jakob (Jean Jacques) (1908–1934), who studied Romance languages in Berlin.

3 The painter and poet Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971), who had co-founded the Club Dada in 1918, emigrated to Spain in 1933 and remained there until 1936. Further stops were Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Paris and finally Limoges, where he lived until his death.

4 Gretel Karplus did not visit Benjamin in San Antonio.

5 This is Guy Selz, regarding whom no further information could be found.

6 Horkheimer's letter from 3 April 1933; see Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1913–1936*, pp. 99f.

7 The name of Benjamin's maidservant in Berlin was Erna Dohrmann.

8 Benjamin reviewed Max Dauthendey's *Ein Herz im Lärm der Welt: Briefe an Freunde* [A Heart amidst the Noise of the World: Letters to Friends] (Munich, 1933) on 30 April 1933 for the *Literaturblatt* [literary pages] of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* under the title 'Briefe von Max Dauthendey' (see GS 3, pp. 383–6).

9 Benjamin's review of Wiesengrund's *Habilitation* [post-doctoral examination] thesis on Kierkegaard had appeared on 2 April (see GS 3, pp. 380–3).

10 Adorno, who was forbidden from lecturing in the summer semester of 1933 – he was divested of the *venia legendi* that autumn due to the Aryan paragraph of the *Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums* [Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service] – had gone to Berlin in January to seek authorization as a private music teacher for composition and theory. Despite favourable references, this does not seem to have been granted; he was instead advised, in February, to take a shortened examination. Even at the end of April he still spoke of taking the examination for private musical teachers in a letter to Kracauer. At the same time, Adorno made attempts to write for newspapers and journals. No information could be found regarding the 'last spoken suggestions' made to Adorno by Benjamin in Berlin.

7 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS
SAN ANTONIO (IBIZA), c.19/20.4.1933

Dear Miss Karplus,

you¹ requested a report on my situation.

Well – things have cleared up sufficiently within the last week for me to deliver it. I only wish it could have turned out a little more well rounded and pleasant than is probably the case.

Certainly – I can essentially be satisfied with a constellation that – for two months at least – guarantees a roof over my head. And over this roof the blue sky and all around a wonderful country. But it can now no longer be denied that everything lying between these two poles – the sober: accommodation, the romantic: having a paradise – is looking extremely difficult.

The house rented by the Noeggeraths, which I had approached with distrust from the start, if only for its construction, which greatly deviates from the customary style here, has proved unusable for any sort of work, in fact even for concentrated reading. A ground plan would

perhaps give you some notion of the situation, but it could never give you a genuine impression of the play of the wind in these rooms, of the doors that are no more than thin planks, or of how every word reverberates in all corners. I have reached the point where I must place all my faith in that good old Brechtian maxim: overcoming an evil through an accumulation thereof.² So the various temporary guests that walk up and down here will soon be joined by a number of permanent guests. This will then lead me to shift my daytime position entirely away from the house to my forest from last year. And I would already have done so, had there not been such a constant strong wind during these afternoons that even my virtuoso technique would not have sufficed to hold on to sheets and bits of paper while writing.

It remains to be seen, however, what it will mean to spend a full day outdoors in this climate. Returning – for lunch, say – is as inconceivable through the distance as a change of domicile, which could only lead me to a fonda, where there would by no means be any better chance of working.

Nonetheless, I am quite sure that it was right to come here, and I think that behind the backs of all the new characters who have appeared here since last year I will still get around to my things after all. The previous year I gave myself four weeks before getting down to work. This year that is out of the question. But, even under the very difficult conditions of the last few days, I managed to send off two new manuscripts.³ I do also have some hope in a few cafés or bars that are opening partly in San Antonio, partly also in Ibiza, and where I will perhaps find a room to work in.

If this account arouses in you sufficient clemency or consideration towards the little letters that come about amid the scenery I have described in order to imagine that scenery, then it has already served a purpose.

So I have not been able to take up all my old habits from last year again; but I have – if one could put it this way – continued one of them, by now reading the final volume – ‘October’ – of the massive peasant novel⁴ I began here last year, in which the mastery of Kritrotz is perhaps even greater than in the first. I would very much like to take up ‘Berliner Kindheit’ again after a while; but only, of course, once I have found a solution for my mode of working that I can consider at least somewhat secure. En attendant there was opportunity to ride about a little on my hobby horse, Art Nouveau. This was for a review in which I had to occupy myself with the extremely interesting volumes of Dauthendey’s letters that were discovered posthumously.

The next study will now be the one on the sociology of French literature which I already mentioned to you in Berlin. It is naturally extraordinarily difficult to write it from here. I had to go so far as to

ask Max, in my last letter,⁵ to send me – if necessary à conto of my future payment – some volumes that are indispensable. Those were naturally ones that I do not own. Unfortunately, however, it has turned out that I also cannot do without some of the latter (those which I do own). I have listed them on a bit of paper⁶ enclosed here. It is almost impossible to expect you to pick out these books – among the French paperbacks – and send them to me, which could cost you half a Sunday – I know all that, but not what to do. The only thing I could perhaps ask – and even here I am not sure that you might not misunderstand me – would be whether Wiesengrund would be prepared to do me this great service. He would have the advantage of being able to go upstairs on weekday mornings when the tenant is in the office.

At any rate, I shall have Miss Dohrmann call you at the apartment around ¼ past 1. Perhaps you can then also arrange with her when she should bring you the rest of my things.

Now it is enough, more than enough. Write soon, and in detail. Give Wiesengrund my best regards. I would be pleased if he were to write to me.

Warm regards

yours,
WDetlef Holz

Original: manuscript.

On the dating: This letter with the formal address follows the request in Gretel Karplus's postcard of 14 April. It is thus highly likely that the following letter – which once more uses the intimate form of address – originally belonged to letter no. 7, as the identical folding of the two sheets indicates.

1 *Sie*.

2 This exact formulation could not be traced, though the motif frequently appears: possibly it was only transmitted orally. In his 'Kommentare zu Gedichten von Brecht', Benjamin refers to 'the overcoming of difficulties through accumulation thereof' as an 'old maxim of dialectics' (GS 2 [2], p. 540).

3 The Dauthendey review and probably that of Marc Aldanov's *Eine unsentimentale Reise: Begegnungen und Erlebnisse im heutigen Europa* (Munich, 1932); see GS 3, pp. 386–8.

4 This is the second volume of Leo Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, which describes the October revolution.

5 Not preserved.

6 This has not survived; see letter no. 10, however, where Benjamin repeats his request for the books.

8 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETEL KARPLUS
SAN ANTONIO (IBIZA), c.19/20.4.1933

Dear Felizitas,

I am lying on my bed and, as it is described in medieval chronicles, having a warm bath prepared for me. And indeed, everything is positively medieval here. The only anachronism is the enamel bathtub; but at the same time a serious compensation offered by the house for a number of other things I already mentioned to you.

But outside there is an icy wind blowing.

I received your Easter letter and also the card. For now, I can only thank you for the former by telling you how you would thus become my escort on the little excursions to Ibiza that I undertake once a week.¹ For, as modest as the 'urban' pleasures I seek there might be – essentially the café; in the cinema the air is too bad – they would otherwise lie beyond the sharp-edged boundary known as my budget.

Today, however, I shall drink your health with a second glass of anise (or even rum) in this manner. This rum, incidentally, is the finest thing one can sample on this island, and one of its sights to boot. How so? – I will not tell you yet, so that we have one little sensation more when you come here.

I will hopefully soon learn more about that, and indeed about your response to the long letter I wrote you last week. I hope the new housing regime you mentioned in your Easter letter also has its pleasant sides for you. Write to me soon about all these things

and a thousand warm regards

Detlef

Original: manuscript.

1 Benjamin visited Jean Selz, who lived in the city of Ibiza, roughly every seven to ten days, as indicated by a list dealing with the time between 9 April and 7 June, noted on the reverse of a letter from Dora Sophie Benjamin of 8 April 1933.

9 GRETEL KARPLUS TO WALTER BENJAMIN
BERLIN, 24.4.1933

24 April 1933.

Dear Walter Benjamin,

it is a great load off my mind to know that there are at least a few modest prospects for you¹ once more. I am thinking of Max, and

would be glad to learn of the other possibilities. Did my Easter egg arrive, and was it the right crème? I have meanwhile enquired here at the post office and found out that one can send 10 Reichsmark = c.27.75 Pesetas by postal order. This is a great comfort to me in that I can thus perhaps look after little Detlev after all; I would be embarrassed if I had to leave you to take care of him all alone.

My last card was a false alarm, by the way: Teddie is staying in the guesthouse, so our dispositions are as before. His father is in favour of a trip to England, but that is not directly imminent. He is writing for the *Europäische Rundschau*² here, also making a lot of music, and I could not think of anything lovelier. As we were at home over Easter we are going to Schloss Marquardt³ next weekend⁴ – my health is in urgent need of a rest, the old migraine complaints again with all their attendant circumstances; I also plan to try out some colonic irrigation.

I am having very bad luck with your girl; I cannot reach her at all, and now I have written to her repeating your wishes, and requesting that she call me or write to me, but unfortunately still without success. I am very unhappy about it; for it could easily seem as if I am neglecting the tasks I have been entrusted with, but unfortunately I really do not have the time to go there, other than in genuine emergencies. As soon as I now have a reply from you I shall at least order the Ullstein issue with the review of the Kierkegaard book. At any rate, I enclose a list of your things⁵ so that it is always evident which books on my shelves are yours. The compilation is very superficial, but I think it is sufficient for the purpose.

Would you find it very immodest of me if I asked you to tell me more precisely about your life there? How is it with your daily routine; do you have the necessary quiet to work? Is your yearning for steak very great, and do you have the gramophone with the nice new Parisian records there? Everything relating to you is extremely important to me. I would like to suggest numbering our letters; I now have four from you including the card letter, and I have also sent four with today's one and two postcards. It just occurred to me that I have not mentioned anything to Teddie regarding Max's concern about him; please write to him yourself if you consider it appropriate, Pension Fritz Unter d. Linden 62/3. In part it seemed too far away, in part I did not want to show him the letter.

Dear Walter please preserve our friendship, even if I am handicapped on all sides and cannot help you much. Please believe with me in the good foundation that even adverse conditions cannot shake, and forgive me if it seems that you must be so patient with me. As I was unable to use the short breathing space to seek greater freedom, I must now reckon with being all the more tied up for the time being. My isolation is almost complete once more, and your absence is a

disaster for me, even in purely external terms. It is a great comfort for me to know that you are there, even if only very far away. You will now scold me for my sentimentality and admonish me to be strict. I will gladly concede, and remain, with my best and very warm regards,
ever your friend
Felicitas

Original: typescript.

1 *Sie*.

2 The editor of this journal between 1933 and 1938 was Joachim Moras (1902–1961); Adorno's article 'Abschied vom Jazz' [Farewell to Jazz] (see GS 18, pp. 795–9) was published in the May issue, and his 'Notiz über Wagner' [Note on Wagner] (see *ibid.*, pp. 204–9) in the July issue.

3 This palace in East Havelland, near Potsdam, had been converted into a hotel in 1932. Fontane deals with Marquardt in the third volume of his *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*.

4 *weekend*: Translator's note: in English in the original. Henceforth: EO.

5 A three-page typed list of books has survived among Benjamin's belongings. It could not be ascertained whether it is the list mentioned in the letter.

Contemporary German authors

Berthold	: Versuche (several volumes with grey binding) : Hauspostille : Eduard II : Im Dickicht der Städte : Trommeln in der Nacht
Rudolf Borchardt	: Der Durant : various volumes
Stefan George	: Die Fibel : Der Stern des Bundes : Shakespeare [sonnets] : Facsimiles of the manuscript of the Dante translation
Georg Heym	: Umbra vitae
Scheerbart	: Lesabëndio : various volumes
Adolf Loos	: Ins Leere gesprochen : Trotzdem
Morgenstern	: Palma Kunkel : Galgenlieder : Palmström : Horatius Travestitus
Musil	: Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless

Reventlov	: Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen
Rilke	: Geschichten vom lieben Gott
	: Sonette an Orpheus
	: Weise von Liebe und Tod
Robert Walser	: Der Gehülfe
	: Geschwister Tanner
Donald Wedekind	: Ultra Montes
Frank Wedekind	: Mina Haha

Translations

Baudelaire	: The Depraved
	: Purgatory
	: Poems translated by Kalkreuth, red leather-bound volume
	: Poems and Sketches
	: Poems and Prose Verses
Boccaccio	: Decameron (3 brown leather-bound volumes)
Cervantes	: Don Quixote
	: Novellas (2 volumes)
Dante	: Divine Comedy (translated by Bachenschwanz)
	(3 small octavo volumes in cardboard)
Joyce	: Ulysses
Leopardi	: Aphorisms
Lucretius	: Nature translated by Knebel
Manzoni	: The Betrothed (2 volumes)
Meleager von Gadara:	Wreath of Blossoms
Petrarch	: To Posterity
Swinburne	: Poems translated by Borchardt
Rabelais	: Gargantua translated by Regis (2 half-bound volumes)
Sterne	: Tristram Shandy (3 half-bound volumes)
	: A Sentimental Journey
Simrock	: Church hymns Latin and German
Thackeray	: Vanity Fair (3 volumes)
Gesta Romanorum	:

Illustrated works

Atget	: Photographs
Octavius Hill	: Photographs
Guttman	: Old Photography
Recht	: Early Photography
	: The Victorian Age (photographs)
Bukovich	: Paris (photographs)
Sidorow	: Moscow (photographs)
Gröber	: Old Children's Toys
Rumpf	: Toys of the Peoples of the World (large portfolio with coloured plates)

Hobrecker	: Old Children's Books
von Boehn	: Puppets and Puppet Plays (2 volumes)
le Mercier	
de Neufville	: Marionette

and a large number of other illustrated works on cultural history

Collected editions

Hauptmann	: Collected Works
Ibsen	: Collected Works

Varia

Creuzer	: Picture Atlas of Mythology and symbolism (small quarto volume)
Molitor	: Philosophie der Offenbarung (Everything I could find)

10 WALTER BENJAMIN TO GRETTEL KARPLUS
SAN ANTONIO (IBIZA), 30.4.1933

Dear Felizitas,

you can hardly imagine the décor surrounding me as I sit under a fig tree writing this letter: a Sunday afternoon with a completely over-cast sky, neither a ray of sunshine nor the slightest breeze – which latter one finds quite pleasant, for there is such a strong wind during most hours that one can barely work outside. I have covered my feet with my coat; yet I am cold all the same. My thoughts more or less match nature's mood, but have sadly not been produced by her. The house has meanwhile become only a little habitable; a project such as retreating to a secluded mill does have its dark sides, and aside from that also has little chance of being realized. Work on various reviews is still proceeding; but I do ask myself whether it might come to an end, or whether my efforts to be entrusted with new releases now and again might ultimately show some results.

It is not so much books that I lack as someone with whom to exchange a few words. But this latter, except for my Parisian friends in Ibiza, whom I see almost once a week, is completely absent. That last winter which N. spent here – partly alone with his son – seems to have pushed itself between him and his former interests like a barricade. It does not improve matters that he – for obvious reasons – has taken on further paying guests¹ besides myself. Admittedly, such circumstances only become problematic with time; I fear that time will come, however, if time does not offer anything else.

After all this it is doubly superfluous to tell you in many words how much your messages mean. The one I received yesterday² – from the 24th – was written before you had received my last, long letter, which contained very warm thanks for the Easter parcel and also a request for four or five books from my library that I urgently need in order to write the essay for Max. By my reckoning, you should have received my letter by now.

It would be a shame – though most definitely no tragedy – if it had been lost. For it also contained a description of my first impressions after arriving. As far as my request for books of my own is concerned, these are to be found among the paperbacks, partly in the lower rows of shelves by the window, but mostly opposite, also in the lower rows – I am essentially thinking of three books by E. Berl: *Mort de la morale bourgeoise*, *Mort de la pensée bourgeoise*, *Le bourgeois et l'amour*,³ in addition Thibaudet: *La république des professeurs*.⁴ And finally there are still one or two Cendrars translations⁵ among the books above the sofa that it would be important to me to have. And I repeat my request to forgive me for demanding this great effort of you, as well as asking whether you could not entrust Wiesengrund with the task.

I do not mind telling you that I am surprised – now that my review of 'Kierkegaard' has been printed – that he has not written me a single line about it. Admittedly I am not yet in possession of a specimen, but I think I can safely assume that it was printed faithfully. At the moment I am occupied with a review of Bennett's 'The Old Wives' Tale',⁶ which I would recommend to you once again. I intend to make various fundamental points about the novel in it, and it is possible that something might come of it.

I am glad that you will be going to Schloss Marquardt for a few days; it saddens me, however, that you are in need of it. You should already start thinking about how you could do something useful for yourself in the summer, and take great note of the suggestions in my last letter and write to me about them. As you are already so empathetic as to ask about my yearning for steak, am glad to report – to speak in the style of the Goethe–Zelter correspondence⁷ – that, so far, more elevated inclinations have been making themselves known within my interior, especially the need to cast an occasional glance at periodicals. So, should you or Wiesengrund ever stumble on a 'Europäische Revue' or 'Neue Rundschau' or suchlike, I would be pleased if you could send it off to me once it had served its purpose.

Let us then continue to build the curved bridge between our two rather isolated positions, and I am perfectly happy to follow your suggestion and number its pillars, so I shall inscribe this letter with a highly visible three.⁸

30 April 1933 Detlef
Ibiza (Balearic Islands)
San Antonio Fonda Miramar

Original: manuscript.

2 Gretel Karplus's letter of 24 April, which Benjamin had received on the 29th, i.e., 'yesterday'.

4 See Albert Thibaudet, *La république des professeurs*, Paris, 1927.

5 For his essay, Benjamin used only Blaise Cendrars' *Moravagine* (Paris, 1926), which had been published in Lissy Radermacher's translation in Munich in 1928. He had a further German translation: Blaise Cendrars, *Gold: Die fabelhafte Geschichte des Generals Johann August Suter* [Gold: The Fabulous Tale of General Johann August Suter], trans. Yvan Goll (Basel, 1925).

6 Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* had been published in 1908. Benjamin's review, 'Am Kamin: Zum 25jährigen Jubiläum eines Romans' [By the Fireplace: On the 25th Anniversary of a Novel], was published on 23 May 1933 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (see GS 3, pp. 388–92). Translator's note: the German edition, to which Benjamin is referring, bore the title *Konstanze und Sophie, oder Die alten Damen* [Konstanze and Sophie, or The Old Ladies].

⁷ I.e., adopting the elision of the pronoun 'I' used frequently there.

8 Benjamin is counting the letters sent to Gretel Karplus from Ibiza, taking nos. 7 and 8 as one letter.

⁹ These are firstly Ernst Schoen (1894–1960), whom Benjamin had known since his youth and who, as programme director of the Sudwestdeutscher Rundfunk, was able to create many opportunities for him in the late 1930s, and secondly Ernst Bloch (1885–1977).