Benjamin

The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940

Adorw.
Adorno



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THEODOR W. ADORNO AND WALTER BENJAMIN

The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940

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Contents



Abbreviations	vii
The Correspondence 1928–1940	1
Editor's Afterword by Henri Lonitz	343
Textual Notes and Source References	347
Bibliographical Index	365
Name Index	374



Abbreviations

700

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-Gerhsom Scholem, Briefwechsel 1933–1940, edited by Gershom Scholem. Frankfurt a.M. 1980.

Abbreviations

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 Gödde und Henri Lonitz. Marbacher Magazin Nr. 55.3. Marbach a.N. 1991.

The Correspondence 1928–1940



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, 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's 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 Fräulein 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 älterer 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. 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; 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, 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' 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,

Schoen¹¹ 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 piece¹ 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 Rowohlt⁴ I have been unable to lay my hands on any copies for the moment.

You should now pursue the question of finding a publisher⁵ even more intensively. What do you think of Cohen in Bonn?

And do you ever write to Grab? If you do, please tell him that I have responded to his request,⁶ but that because of many similar undertakings to send off my writings the warehouse is short of copies and it is no easy matter to get hold of them now. But I shall not forget about it.

Since I have now touched upon the subject of my own affairs, I have to report the monstrous circumstance that – because of some printing error – in my essay⁷ for the last issue of 'The Literary World' a cancelled part of the manuscript actually appeared as the conclusion.

The essay now ends with the word 'fair'. A correction will appear in the next issue.

And now the only thing I still have to tell you is that I harbour no resentment whatsoever, or anything remotely like that which you may have feared, and that in a personal and substantive sense matters have been perfectly clarified by your last letter.

With the most cordial greetings,

Yours,

Walter Benjamin

25 July 1931

- 1 your piece: Benjamin is referring to the Inaugural Lecture 'The Actuality of Philosophy' mentioned in his previous letter.
- 2 dedication . . . motto: The typescripts amongst Adorno's literary remains contain neither a dedication to Benjamin nor a motto by him.
- 3 quotations . . . you can choose between pages 21 and 33: cf. GS I, p. 335.
- 4 the collapse of Rowohlt: as the result of a financial crisis the publisher Ullstein acquired two-thirds of the share in Rowohlt publishing company.
- 5 the question of finding a publisher: Adorno's inaugural lecture was not in fact published during his lifetime.
- 6 Grab . . . his request: since the mid 1920s Adorno had been on friendly terms with Hermann Grab (1903-49), born in Prague, who originally graduated in philosophy and jurisprudence, spent a short time in chambers, and then pursued a career as a writer and musician. Grab also got to know Benjamin through Adorno. - Grab had attempted to make contact with the Prague Germanist and Baroque specialist Herbert Cysarz, who later became a Nazi sympathizer, in order to help Benjamin to obtain a university teaching post. To this end Grab had obviously asked Benjamin, in a letter which has not survived, to send him some of his publications, which Grab was clearly intending to pass on to Cysarz, as an undated and unpublished letter from Grab to Adorno written in April or the beginning of May reveals: 'First of all I must report the following in haste: I have just come from Cysarz, to whom I have spoken in enthusiastic terms concerning Benjamin; I found him very interested and reliable, and realized once again that, of all the people with an academic position, he is probably the only one whom one can really seriously consider in this connection. Benjamin's approach will initially have to reckon with a superabundance of prospective lecturers in the field of German studies, but they are all so second-rate (in Cysarz's eyes as well) that competition for academic advancement from that quarter should not be too much of a problem. I simply wanted to mention this fact, but do not ascribe that much importance to it. Without wishing to raise too much 'hope', I can honestly say that success is certainly a possibility. Cysarz is not acquainted with Benjamin's literary-historical writings and will obviously have to express an opinion after consulting them. I would ask you to ensure that

Benjamin sends the following to my address: 'The Origin of German Tragic Drama', his work on Goethe's 'Elective Affinities', and any of his other publications which he considers important. Cysarz particularly asked . . . to see reviews (not reviews of Benjamin's work but reviews by Benjamin on the works of other authors). Cysarz will not be able to read the material before the second half of July, but would like them to be sent as soon as possible. The essay on Kraus need not be included since I have rather illegitimately kept a copy of Dr Benjamin's and will pass this on to Cysarz with his permission. That is everything which I have to relate at the moment, but it would be wonderful if things turn out successfully. The strictest discretion must be maintained concerning the fact that I have instigated the business.' Grab's intervention proved unsuccessful; cf. also letter 8.

7 my essay: cf. Benjamin, 'Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus. Eine Rede über das Sammeln' ['Unpacking my library'], in 'Die Literarische Welt', 17.7.1931 (year 7, nr. 29), pp. 3–5, and ibid., 24.7.1931 (year 7, nr. 30), pp. 7f (now in GS IV [1], pp. 388–96); for the cancelled conclusion, cf. GS IV [2], pp. 997f.

7 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 31.3.1932

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

It is a real delight to read how you weave your invitation to me¹ with the description of the country and climate down there where you are, and I feel somewhat embarrassed to see our shared hopes of reliving in intensified form those former wonderful days in Königstein² gradually evaporating. But the reason is just that I cannot for the simplest of reasons³ manage to get away as yet. This might prove possible by the beginning of May - but by then time might well be very short for both of you. My route⁴ may therefore turn out to be rather more meandering than it would have been in different circumstances. I have asked after some brochures according to which one can make the fourteen-day sea trip via Holland and Portugal in a relatively human fashion for 160 Marks - albeit in third class, naturally. Accordingly, I shall most likely depart Hamburg for the Balearic Islands on 9 April. Whether all this works out or not, you will soon receive information about my whereabouts in any case. Hopefully I shall still be able to contact you on the Côte d'Azur. All friendly and affectionate regards to you and Gretel,

Yours,

Walter Benjamin

31 March 1932 Berlin-Wilmersdorf Prinzregentenstr. 6

- 1 your invitation to me: Adorno had obviously sent a postcard from Ort le Trayas, located between St Raphäel and Cannes, inviting Benjamin to visit him and Gretel Karplus, with whom Adorno had been staying there for ten days since around the middle of March.
- 2 those former wonderful days in Königstein: in order to work undisturbed, Adorno frequently stayed in Königstein im Taunus or in nearby Kronberg, where Benjamin occasionally visited him between 1928 and 1930. Benjamin is probably referring here to the days in September or October 1929 when he read out passages from the early drafts of the Arcades project to Adorno and Horkheimer (cf. GS V [2], p. 1082).
- 3 for the simplest of reasons: in order to earn some money, Benjamin had compiled a 'Bibliographie raisonnée' of literature on Goethe for the literary section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* 'A Hundred Years of Literature on Goethe' which appeared anonymously in the edition of 20.3.1932 (now in GS III, pp. 326–40).
- 4 My route: Benjamin actually sailed from Hamburg to Barcelona on the merchant steamer 'Catania' on 7 April, not 9 April as suggested in his letter, and then crossed over to Ibiza.
- 8 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO POVEROMO¹ (MARINA DI MASSA), 3.9.1932

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

I have had to wait such a long time for your letter that it has proved a great pleasure for me now it has arrived. Especially because of how closely certain passages in it coincide with the design of the properly culminating and conclusive final section of 'The Natural History of the Theatre'.2 I must sincerely thank you for your dedication. The entire sequence arises from a highly original and truly baroque perspective on the stage and its world. Indeed, I would even like to claim that it contains something like a series of 'Prolegomena to any Future History of the Baroque Stage', and I am particularly gratified to see how you have illuminated these subterranean thematic connections through the dedication.³ It is hardly necessary for me to say that this piece has turned out to be a complete success. There are, however, also some very fine things in the 'Foyer' section,⁴ such as the image of the two clock faces⁵ and the extremely perceptive remarks about fasting6 during the interval. I hope to be able to consult your essay for the Horkheimer Archive very soon – and, if I might be allowed to express a further variation on this wish, along with the essay I hope to receive the first issue of the Archive, in which I am naturally extremely interested. We have a good deal of time for

reading here. I have already worked my way through the small library⁸ which I brought with me when I left five months ago. You will be interested to learn that once again it includes four volumes of Proust which I frequently peruse. But now to a new book which came into my hands here and which I would like to draw to your attention -Rowohlt has published a history of Bolshevism⁹ by Arthur Rosenberg, which I have just finished reading. It seems to me a book that cannot under any circumstances be ignored. For my own part, at least, I have to say that it has really opened my eyes to many things, including those areas in which political destiny bears upon individual destiny. Various circumstances, along with your own recent references to Cysarz, give me cause to think about the latter. I would be quite interested in establishing some contact with him. But I still do not understand why he hasn't taken any steps to approach me himself, either directly or by letter from Grab, if he is interested in the same thing. I have no doubt that, in a comparable situation, I would do so in his place. Otherwise, it is naturally not for reasons of prestige that I hesitate, but because I am well aware that mistakes made at the beginning of such a relationship tend to be magnified proportionately in what follows. I imagine that Cysarz's influence, for example, would be sufficient to procure me an invitation to lecture from an appropriate body or institute in Prague. You might be able to inform Grab about this if an opportunity arises. In the meantime, however, I must express my sincere gratitude for the invitation which you append¹⁰ to the report on the meetings of your seminar. I know there is no need to assure you either of how pleased I would be to attend or of the great value which I attach to the opportunity of consulting the documents of the proceedings so far. 11 It would, of course, be highly desirable if we could do this together. At the moment, however - and this touches upon my chances of getting to Frankfurt – I am even less than ever master of my own decisions. I know neither when I shall be able to return to Berlin nor how things will work out there. I shall almost certainly be here for the next few weeks. After that I shall probably have to return to Berlin, partly to deal with the problem of accommodation, 12 partly because Rowohlt seems to be insisting on publishing my essays¹³ after all. In itself, however, the temptation to remain in Germany for any length of time is certainly not very great. There will be difficulties everywhere and those arising in the field of broadcasting¹⁴ will probably ensure that my appearances in Frankfurt are even rarer. If you happen to know how things are going for Schoen, please let me know. I have heard nothing from him. That is all for today. The only other thing I wanted to mention is that I am now working on a series of sketches¹⁵ concerning memories of my early life. I hope I shall be able to show some of them to you very soon.

With the most cordial greetings,

Yours,

Walter Benjamin

3 September 1932 Poveromo (Marina di Massa) Villa Irene

PS To my great delight I have discovered your piece on 'Distortion'. ¹⁶ – The remark by Wolfskehl cited in my review ¹⁷ goes like this: 'Should we not say of the spiritualists that they are fishing in the *Beyond*?'

- 1 Poveromo: following an invitation from Wilhelm Speyer (1887–1952), Benjamin had left Ibiza in the middle of July and travelled to Italy via Marseilles and Nice. He advised Speyer while the latter was working on his play Ein Hut, ein Mantel, ein Handschuh [A Hat, A Coat, A Glove], and was to receive 10 per cent of the theatre takings for his assistance; cf. Benjamin-Katalog, p. 178. His principal literary concern at this time however was A Berlin Childhood Around 1900.
- 2 the design ... conclusive final section of 'The Natural History of the Theatre': cf. Adorno, 'Naturgeschichte des Theaters', in 'Blätter des Hessischen Landestheaters Darmstadt' 1931/32, nr. 9, pp. 101–8 and nr. 13, pp. 153–6; Adorno had sent Benjamin a typescript of the section 'Cupola as Culmination' which was never published (now in GS 16, pp. 319f); for the entire text see GS 16, pp. 309–20.
- 3 *the dedication*: the typescript with the dedication of the final part has not survived; cf. Adorno's note on the first publication of this letter: 'The unpublished final part was dedicated to Benjamin in the manuscript' (*Briefe*, p. 559).
- 4 *the 'Foyer' section*: the penultimate section of 'The Natural History of the Theatre'; cf. GS 16, pp. 317–19.
- 5 the image of the two clock faces: cf. ibid., p. 317.
- 6 perceptive remarks about fasting: cf. ibid., p. 318.
- 7 your essay for the Horkheimer Archive: Benjamin is referring to 'The Journal for Social Research', the first issue of which appeared in 1932. The first issue (actually a double issue) contained the first part of Adorno's essay 'On the Social Situation of Music' and the third issue contained the second part. For the complete essay, cf. GS 18, pp. 729–77.
- 8 the small library: cf. Benjamin's 'List of Writings Read' in which he entered all the books he had read while he was in Poveromo between August and November (GS VII [1], pp. 465f.

- 9 a history of Bolshevism: a book by Arthur Rosenberg (1889–1943) which appeared in 1932 under the title: Geschichte des Bolschewismus von Marx bis zur Gegenwart.
- 10 an invitation to lecture ... the invitation which you append: such an invitation to Benjamin to deliver a lecture in Prague never materialized; for his part Adorno had obviously invited Benjamin to visit him in connection with his two-semester seminar on recent contributions to aesthetics, in the course of which Benjamin's book on Baroque Drama in particular was discussed.
- 11 documents of the proceedings so far: Benjamin is referring to the as yet unpublished protocol reports of Adorno's seminar.
- 12 Berlin ... the problem of accommodation: cf. Briefwechsel Scholem, p. 30.
- 13 my essays: since 1928 Benjamin had been planning a volume of his own 'Collected Essays on Literature' to be published by Rowohlt (cf. Briefwechsel Scholem, p. 23); the contract drawn up in 1930 in this connection names the already published essays on Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Karl Kraus, Julien Green, Marcel Proust, on Surrealism, together with 'The Task of the Translator', and mentions pieces still to be written on André Gide, Franz Hessel, Robert Walser, 'The Novelist and the Writer', 'On Art Nouveau' and 'The Task of the Critic'.
- 14 difficulties . . . arising in the field of broadcasting: Benjamin's financial position in these years had been alleviated by radio lectures on literary subjects that he was invited to present by Ernst Schoen and which Benjamin composed between 1929 and 1932 for South-West German Radio in Frankfurt; as a result of the increasing political pressure exerted on the radio broadcasts, first by von Papen's government and subsequently by the Nazi authorities, it was no longer possible for Schoen to facilitate similar broadcast opportunities for Benjamin. (cf. GS II [3], p. 1505).
- 15 a series of sketches: i.e. A Berlin Childhood Around 1900; for the genesis, gestation and publishing history of the piece, cf. GS IV [2], pp. 964–70 and GS VI, pp. 797–9.
- 16 your piece on 'Distortion': cf. Adorno, 'Zerrbild' [Distortion], in the Frankfurter Zeitung, 31.8.1932 (year 76, nr. 648/649); now in GS 20 [2], pp. 565f.
- 17 The remark by Wolfskehl cited in my review: Benjamin had written a review of Hans Liebstoekel's book Die Geheimwissenschaft im Lichte unserer Zeit [Secret Knowledge in the Light of the Present Age] (Zürich, Leipzig, Wien 1932), which appeared in the literary section of the Frankfurter Zeitung on 21.8.1932 under the title 'Erleuchtung durch Dunkelmänner' [Illumination at the hands of Obscurantists]; the text was distorted because of a misprint and read 'im Trüben' [in the dark] instead of 'im Drüben' [in the beyond]. The review is now in GS III, pp. 356–60.

9 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO [NO INDICATION OF LOCATION,] 10.11.1932

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

I hear that you are back from Berlin.

I am now on the way there myself, and since this time I shall probably only be able to spend a very short time in Frankfurt, I would really like to arrange a proper rendezvous with you here and now.

I shall be arriving on Sunday midday, at around one o'clock. I shall probably be staying with Schoen. For me that Sunday evening would be an ideal time to meet. Perhaps you will be able to manage this. Any further details could best be arranged with Schoen.

Shall I already be able to see the galley proofs of the Kierkegaard book?

This time I am also extraordinarily keen to see Horkheimer. And indeed for a quite particular reason. If the Institute ever can and will give some support to my work, now is certainly the time to do so, since it is currently being sabotaged¹ on all sides. (You understand what I mean; and you will also understand if I ask you here and now to deal with my arrival in the most confidential manner.)

I should like to make some relevant proposals to Horkheimer concerning a major essay for the Archive, very much comparable to your own.² Please inform him urgently of the necessity for a discussion in this regard.

I am bringing with me a new manuscript³ – a tiny book in fact – which will amaze you.

Cordially as ever,

Yours,

Walter Benjamin

10 November 1932

[Benjamin's letter of Thursday, 10.11.1932, carries no indication of where it was written; since the precise date of Benjamin's departure from Poveromo is unknown, and he writes in the letter that he is already on the way to Berlin himself and expects to arrive in Frankfurt on Sunday, 13 November, it seems likely that the letter was written after he had left Poveromo. Because of shortage of money, Benjamin was obliged to make the return trip to Germany in Speyer's car with Speyer at the wheel.]

1 some support to my work . . . since it is currently being sabotaged: Benjamin was complaining at this time that the radio as well as the newspapers were closed off to him. – He seems to have agreed with Horkheimer to produce the essay 'Zum gegenwärtigen gesellschaftlichen Standort des französischen

Schriftstellers' [On the Present Social Situation of the Writer in France]; cf. the 'Journal of Social Research' 3, Issue 1 (1934), pp. 54–77; now in GS II (2), pp. 776–803.

2 a major essay . . . very much comparable to your own: see the preceding note; Benjamin was thinking of Adorno's essay 'On the Social Situation of Music' mentioned in the previous letter.

3 a new manuscript: i.e. A Berlin Childhood Around 1900, first mentioned in letter 8. – Adorno related the impression made upon him by Benjamin's readings of the piece in a letter to Kracauer: 'Benjamin has been here. He read me a large part of his new piece, A Berlin Childhood Around 1900. I think it is wonderful and entirely original; it even marks a great advance over One-Way Street in so far as all archaic mythology is thoroughly liquidated here and the mythical is sought only in what is most contemporary – in the 'modern' in each case. I am convinced that it will also make a great impression on you.' (Unpublished letter from Adorno to Kracauer of 21.11.1932.)

10 BENJAMIN TO WIESENGRUND-ADORNO BERLIN, 1.12.1932

Dear Herr Wiesengrund,

I am interrupting my reading of the Kierkegaard book¹ for a moment simply in order at last to give you some (still provisional) idea of the impression which this extremely interesting and most significant piece of work is making upon me. It is truly, as I would say, a reading in Kierkegaard. I do not yet feel competent to speak at this stage about the overall argument and structure of the text. And the conclusion is still missing. I am expecting decisive clarification from the completed copy-text. Merely possessing the proofs produces an enormous temptation to immerse oneself in the loose pages, a temptation which is truly rewarded. Whether I turn to your presentation of the baroque motif in Kierkegaard, to the ground-breaking analysis of the 'intérieure', to the marvellous quotations which you supply from the philosopher's technical treasure trove of allegories, to the exposition of Kierkegaard's economic circumstances, to the interpretation of inwardness as citadel or of spiritualism as the ultimate defining limit of spiritism - I am constantly struck in all of this by the wealth of insight, as well as by the penetrating character of your evaluation. Not since reading Breton's latest verse² (in the 'Union libre') have I felt myself so drawn into my own domain as I have through your exploration of that land of inwardness from whose bourn your hero never returned. Thus it is true that there is still