



Walter Benjamin (left)
and his brother Georg,
circa 1902

Berlin Childhood
around 1900

WALTER BENJAMIN

*Translated by
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Berlin Childhood around 1900

FINAL VERSION

O brown-baked column of victory,
With winter sugar of childhood days.

In 1932, when I was abroad,¹ it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth.

Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body. I sought to limit its effect through insight into the irretrievability—not the contingent biographical but the necessary social irretrievability—of the past.

This has meant that certain biographical features, which stand out more readily in the continuity of experience than in its depths, altogether recede in the pres-

ent undertaking. And with them go the physiognomies—those of my family and comrades alike. On the other hand, I have made an effort to get hold of the *images* in which the experience of the big city is precipitated in a child of the middle class.

I believe it possible that a fate expressly theirs is held in reserve for such images. No customary forms await them yet, like those that, over the course of centuries, and in obedience to a feeling for nature, answer to remembrances of a childhood spent in the country. But, then, the images of my metropolitan childhood perhaps are capable, at their core, of preforming later historical experience. I hope they will at least suggest how thoroughly the person spoken of here would later dispense with the security allotted his childhood.

Loggias

For a long time, life deals with the still-tender memory of childhood like a mother who lays her newborn on her breast without waking it. Nothing has fortified my own memory so profoundly as gazing into courtyards, one of whose dark loggias, shaded by blinds in the summer, was for me the cradle in which the city laid its new citizen.

The caryatids that supported the loggia on the floor above ours may have slipped away from their post for a moment to sing a lullaby beside that cradle—a song containing little of what later awaited me, but nonetheless sounding the theme through which the air of the courtyards has forever remained intoxicating to me. I believe that a whiff of this air was still present in the vineyards of Capri where I held my beloved in my arms; and it is precisely this air that sustains the images and allegories which preside over my thinking, just as the caryatids, from the heights of their loggias, preside over the courtyards of Berlin's West End.²

The rhythm of the metropolitan railway and of carpet-beating rocked me to sleep. It was the mold in which my dreams took shape—first the unformed ones, traversed perhaps by the sound of running water or the smell of milk, then the long-spun ones: travel dreams and dreams of rain. Here, spring called up the first shoots of green before the gray façade of a house in back; and when, later in the year, a dusty canopy of leaves brushed up against the wall of the house a thousand times a day, the rustling of the branches initiated me into a knowledge to which I was not yet equal. For everything in the courtyard became a sign or hint to me. Many were the messages embedded in the skirmishing of the green roller

blinds drawn up high, and many the ominous dispatches that I prudently left unopened in the rattling of the roll-up shutters that came thundering down at dusk.

What occupied me most of all in the courtyard was the spot where the tree stood. This spot was set off by paving stones into which a large iron ring was sunk. Metal bars were mounted on it, in such a way as to fence in the bare earth. Not for nothing, it seemed to me, was it thus enclosed; from time to time, I would brood over what went on within the black pit from which the trunk came. Later, I extended these speculations to hackney-carriage stands. There, the trees were similarly rooted, and similarly fenced in. Coachmen were accustomed to hanging their capes on the railing while they watered their horses, first clearing away the last remnants of hay and oats in the trough by drawing water from the pump that rose up out of the pavement. To me, these waiting-stations, whose peace was seldom disturbed by the coming and going of carriages, were distant provinces of my backyard.

Clotheslines ran from one wall of the loggia to another; the palm tree looked homeless—all the more so as it had long been understood that not the dark soil but the adjacent drawing room was its proper abode. So decreed the law of the place, around which the dreams of its inhabitants had once played. Before this place fell prey to

oblivion, art had occasionally undertaken to transfigure it. Now a hanging lamp, now a bronze, now a china vase would steal into its confines. And although these antiquities rarely did the place much honor, they suited its own antique character. The Pompeian red that ran in a wide band along its wall was the appointed background of the hours that piled up in such seclusion. Time grew old in those shadowy little rooms which looked out on the courtyards. And that was why the morning, whenever I encountered it on our loggia, had already been morning for so long that it seemed more itself there than at any other spot. Never did I have the chance to wait for morning on the loggia; every time, it was already waiting for me. It had long since arrived—was effectively out of fashion—when I finally came upon it.

Later, from the perspective of the railroad embankment, I rediscovered the courtyards. When, on sultry summer afternoons, I gazed down on them from my compartment, the summer appeared to have parted from the landscape and locked itself into those yards. And the red geraniums that were peeping from their boxes accorded less well with summer than the red feather mattresses that were hung over the windowsills each morning to air. Iron garden chairs, made in imitation of winding branches or of wickerwork, comprised the seating arrangements of the loggia. We drew them close together

when, at dusk, our reading circle would gather there. Gaslight shone down, from a red- and green-flamed calyx, on the pages of the paperback classic. Romeo's last sigh flitted through our back yard in search of the echo that Juliet's vault held ready for it.³

In the years since I was a child, the loggias have changed less than other places. This is not the only reason they stay with me. It is much more on account of the solace that lies in their uninhabitability for one who himself no longer has a proper abode. They mark the outer limit of the Berliner's lodging. Berlin—the city god itself—begins in them. The god remains such a presence there that nothing transitory can hold its ground beside him. In his safekeeping, space and time come into their own and find each other. Both of them lie at his feet here. The child who was once their confederate, however, dwells in his loggia, encompassed by this group, as in a mausoleum long intended just for him.

*Imperial Panorama*⁴

One of the great attractions of the travel scenes found in the Imperial Panorama was that it did not matter where you began the cycle. Because the viewing screen, with places to sit before it, was circular, each picture would pass through all the stations; from these you looked, each

time, through a double window into the faintly tinted depths of the image. There was always a seat available. And especially toward the end of my childhood, when fashion was already turning its back on the Imperial Panorama, one got used to taking the tour in a half-empty room.

There was no music in the Imperial Panorama—in contrast to films, where music makes traveling so soporific. But there was a small, genuinely disturbing effect that seemed to me superior. This was the ringing of a little bell that sounded a few seconds before each picture moved off with a jolt, in order to make way first for an empty space and then for the next image. And every time it rang, the mountains with their humble foothills, the cities with their mirror-bright windows, the railroad stations with their clouds of dirty yellow smoke, the vineyards down to the smallest leaf, were suffused with the ache of departure. I formed the conviction that it was impossible to exhaust the splendors of the scene at just one sitting. Hence my intention (which I never realized) of coming by again the following day. Before I could make up my mind, however, the entire apparatus, from which I was separated by a wooden railing, would begin to tremble; the picture would sway within its little frame and then immediately trundle off to the left, as I looked on.

The art forms that survived here all died out with the

coming of the twentieth century. At its inception, they found their last audience in children. Distant worlds were not always strange to these arts. And it so happened that the longing such worlds aroused spoke more to the home than to anything unknown. Thus it was that, one afternoon, while seated before a transparency of the little town of Aix, I tried to persuade myself that, once upon a time, I must have played on the patch of pavement that is guarded by the old plane trees of the Cours Mirabeau.

When it rained, there was no pausing out front to survey the list of fifty pictures. I went inside and found in fjords and under coconut palms the same light that illuminated my desk in the evening when I did my schoolwork. It may have been a defect in the lighting system that suddenly caused the landscape to lose its color. But there it lay, quite silent under its ashen sky. It was as though I could have heard even wind and church bells if only I had been more attentive.

Victory Column

It stood on the wide square like a red-letter date on the calendar. With the coming of the anniversary of Sedan, the calendar page was supposed to be torn off.⁵ When I was little, it was impossible to imagine a year without



The Victory Column on Königsplatz, Berlin, early twentieth century

Sedan Day. After the Battle of Sedan, there were only military parades. So when Uncle Kruger⁶ came riding down Tauentzienstrasse in a carriage in 1902, after the Boer War had been lost, I stood with my governess in the crowd to gaze in astonishment at a man in a top hat who reclined on cushions and had “led an army” (as people said). This sounded magnificent to me, but not entirely satisfactory—as though the man might have “led” a rhinoceros or a dromedary and won his fame doing that. What could possibly come after Sedan anyway? With the defeat of the French, world history seemed to be safely interred in its glorious grave, and this column was the funerary stele.

As a schoolboy, I would climb the broad steps that led to the rulers of Victory Lane. In doing so, I was concerned only with the two vassals who, on both sides, crowned the rear wall of the marble décor. They were lower down than their sovereigns, and easier to look at. Best of all, I loved the bishop holding a cathedral in his gloved right hand; I could build larger churches with my building blocks. Since that time, I have met with no Saint Catherine without looking around for her wheel, with no Saint Barbara without hoping to see her tower.⁷

Someone had explained to me where the decorations for the Victory Column came from. But I was still rather

confused about the cannon barrels included among them. Had the French gone to war with golden cannons, or had we first taken the gold from them and then used it to cast cannons? A portico ran around the base of the column, concealing it from view. I never entered this space, which was filled with a dim light reflected off the gold of the frescoes. I was afraid of finding effigies that might have reminded me of pictures in a book I had once come across in the drawing room of an old aunt—a deluxe edition of Dante’s *Inferno*. To me, the heroes whose exploits glimmered in the portico were, secretly, quite as infamous as the multitudes forced to do penance while being lashed by whirlwinds, encased in bloody tree stumps, or sealed in blocks of ice. Accordingly, this portico was itself the *Inferno*, the opposite of the sphere of grace that encircled the radiant Victory overhead. On many days, people would be standing there up above. Against the sky they appeared to me outlined in black, like the little figures in paste-on picture sheets. Once I had the buildings in place, didn’t I take up scissors and glue-pot to distribute mannikins like these at doorways, niches, and windowsills? The people up there in the light were creatures of such blissful caprice.⁸ Eternal Sunday surrounded them. Or was it an eternal Sedan Day?

The Telephone

Whether because of the structure of the apparatus or because of the structure of memory, it is certain that the noises of the first telephone conversations echo differently in my ear from those of today. They were nocturnal noises. No muse announces them. The night from which they came was the one that precedes every true birth. And the voice that slumbered in those instruments was a newborn voice. Each day and every hour, the telephone was my twin brother. I was an intimate observer of the way it rose above the humiliations of its early years. For once the chandelier, fire screen, potted palm, console table, gueridon, and alcove balustrade—all formerly on display in the front rooms—had finally faded and died a natural death, the apparatus, like a legendary hero once exposed to die in a mountain gorge, left the dark hallway in the back of the house to make its regal entry into the cleaner and brighter rooms that now were inhabited by a younger generation. For the latter, it became a consolation for their loneliness. To the despondent who wanted to leave this wicked world, it shone with the light of a last hope. With the forsaken, it shared its bed. Now, when everything depended on its call, the strident voice it had acquired in exile was grown softer.

Not many of those who use the apparatus know what devastation it once wreaked in family circles. The sound with which it rang between two and four in the afternoon, when a schoolfriend wished to speak to me, was an alarm signal that menaced not only my parents' midday nap but the historical era that underwrote and enveloped this siesta. Disagreements with switchboard operators were the rule, to say nothing of the threats and curses uttered by my father when he had the complaints department on the line. But his real orgies were reserved for cranking the handle, to which he gave himself up for minutes at a time, nearly forgetting himself in the process. His hand, on these occasions, was a dervish overcome by frenzy. My heart would pound; I was certain that the employee on the other end was in danger of a stroke, as punishment for her negligence.

At that time, the telephone still hung—an outcast settled carelessly between the dirty-linen hamper and the gasometer—in a corner of the back hallway, where its ringing served to multiply the terrors of the Berlin household. When, having mastered my senses with great effort, I arrived to quell the uproar after prolonged fumbling through the gloomy corridor, I tore off the two receivers, which were heavy as dumbbells, thrust my head between them, and was inexorably delivered over

to the voice that now sounded. There was nothing to allay the violence with which it pierced me. Powerless, I suffered, seeing that it obliterated my consciousness of time, my firm resolve, my sense of duty. And just as the medium obeys the voice that takes possession of him from beyond the grave, I submitted to the first proposal that came my way through the telephone.

Butterfly Hunt

Apart from occasional trips during the summer months, we stayed, each year before school resumed for me, in various summer residences in the environs of Berlin. I was reminded of these, for a long time afterward, by the spacious cabinet on the wall of my boyhood room containing the beginnings of a butterfly collection, whose oldest specimens had been captured in the garden of the Brauhausberg.⁹ Cabbage butterflies with ruffled edging, brimstone butterflies with superbright wings, vividly brought back the ardors of the hunt, which so often had lured me away from well-kept garden paths into a wilderness, where I stood powerless before the conspiring elements—wind and scents, foliage and sun—that were bound to govern the flight of the butterflies.

They would flutter toward a blossom, hover over it. My butterfly net upraised, I stood waiting only for the

spell that the flowers seemed to cast on the pair of wings to have finished its work, when all of a sudden the delicate body would glide off sideways with a gentle buffeting of the air, to cast its shadow—motionless as before—over another flower, which just as suddenly it would leave without touching. When in this way a vanessa or sphinx moth (which I should have been able to overtake easily) made a fool of me through its hesitations, vacillations, and delays, I would gladly have been dissolved into light and air, merely in order to approach my prey unnoticed and be able to subdue it. And so close to fulfillment was this desire of mine, that every quiver or palpitation of the wings I burned for grazed me with its puff or ripple. Between us, now, the old law of the hunt took hold: the more I strove to conform, in all the fibers of my being, to the animal—the more butterfly-like I became in my heart and soul—the more this butterfly itself, in everything it did, took on the color of human volition; and in the end, it was as if its capture was the price I had to pay to regain my human existence. Once this was achieved, however, it was a laborious way back from the theater of my successes in the field to the campsite, where ether, cotton wadding, pins with colored heads, and tweezers lay ready in my specimen box. And what a state the hunting ground was in when I left! Grass was flattened, flowers trampled underfoot; the hunter him-

self, holding his own body cheap, had flung it heedlessly after his butterfly net. And borne aloft—over so much destruction, clumsiness, and violence—in a fold of this net, trembling and yet full of charm, was the terrified butterfly. On that laborious way back, the spirit of the doomed creature entered into the hunter. From the foreign language in which the butterfly and the flowers had come to an understanding before his eyes, he now derived some precepts. His lust for blood had diminished; his confidence was grown all the greater.

The air in which this butterfly once hovered is today wholly imbued with a word—one that has not reached my ears or crossed my lips for decades. This word has retained that unfathomable reserve which childhood names possess for the adult. Long-kept silence, long concealment, has transfigured them. Thus, through air teeming with butterflies vibrates the word “Brauhausberg,” which is to say, “Brewery Hill.” It was on the Brauhausberg, near Potsdam, that we had our summer residence. But the name has lost all heaviness, contains nothing more of any brewery, and is, at most, a bluemisted hill that rose up every summer to give lodging to my parents and me. And that is why the Potsdam of my childhood lies in air so blue, as though all its butterflies—its mourning cloaks and admirals, peacocks and auroras—were scattered over one of those glistening Limoges enamels, on

which the ramparts and battlements of Jerusalem stand out against a dark blue ground.¹⁰

Tiergarten

Not to find one's way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one's way in a city, as one loses one's way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs,

The goldfish pond in the Tiergarten, Berlin, early twentieth century



and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks. No, not the first, for there was one earlier that has outlasted the others. The way into this labyrinth, which was not without its Ariadne, led over the Bendler Bridge, whose gentle arch became my first hillside.¹¹ Not far from its foot lay the goal: Friedrich Wilhelm and Queen Luise. On their round pedestals they towered up from the flowerbeds, as though transfixed by the magic curves that a stream was describing in the sand before them. But it was not so much the rulers as their pedestals to which I turned, since what took place upon these stone foundations, though unclear in context, was nearer in space. That there was something special about this maze I could always deduce from the broad and banal esplanade, which gave no hint of the fact that here, just a few steps from the corso of cabs and carriages, sleeps the strangest part of the park.¹²

I got a sign of this quite early on. Here, in fact, or not far away, must have lain the couch of that Ariadne in whose proximity I first experienced what only later I had a word for: love. Unfortunately, the "Fräulein"¹³ intervenes at its earliest budding to overspread her icy shadow. And

so this park, which, unlike every other, seemed open to children, was for me, as a rule, distorted by difficulties and impracticalities. How rarely I distinguished the fish in its pond. How much was promised by the name "Court Hunters' Lane," and how little it held. How often I searched in vain among the bushes, which somewhere hid a kiosk built in the style of my toy blocks, with turrets colored red, white, and blue. How hopelessly, each spring, I lost my heart to Prince Louis Ferdinand, at whose feet the earliest crocuses and daffodils bloomed.¹⁴ A watercourse, which separated me from them, made them as untouchable as though they were covered by a bell jar. Thus, coldly, the princely had to rest upon the beautiful; and I understood why Luise von Landau, who belonged to my circle of schoolfriends until she died, had to dwell on the Lützowufer, opposite the little wilderness which nourished its flowers with the waters of the canal.¹⁵

Later, I discovered other corners, and I heard of still more. But no girl, no experience, no book could tell me anything new about these things. And so, thirty years later, when an expert guide, a Berlin peasant,¹⁶ joined forces with me to return to the city after an extended, shared absence from its borders, his trail cut furrows through this garden, in which he sowed the seeds of silence. He led the way along these paths, and each, for

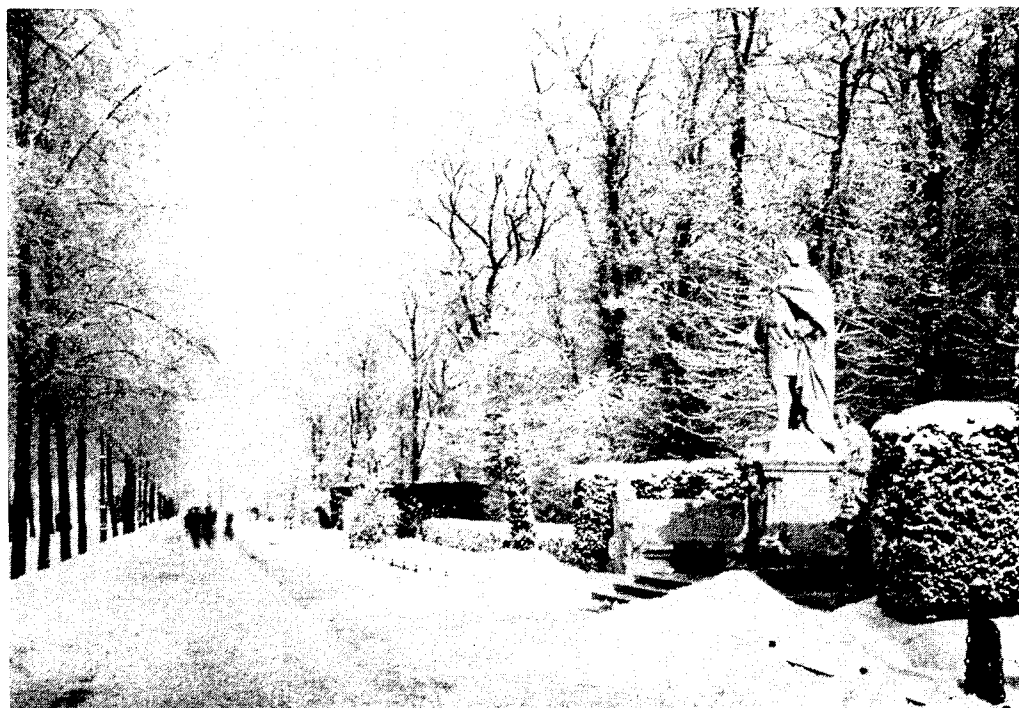
him, became precipitous. They led downward, if not to the Mothers of all being,¹⁷ then certainly to those of this garden. In the asphalt over which he passed, his steps awakened an echo. The gas lamp, shining across our strip of pavement, cast an ambiguous light on this ground. The short flights of steps, the pillared porticoes, the friezes and architraves of the Tiergarten villas—for the first time, we took them at their word. But above all, there were the stairwells, which, with their stained-glass windows, were the same as in the old days, though much had changed on the inside, where people lived. I still know the verses that filled the intervals between my heartbeats when, after school, I paused while climbing the stairs. They glimmered toward me from the colored pane where a woman, floating ethereally like the Sistine Madonna, a crown in her hands, stepped forth from the niche. Slipping my thumbs beneath the shoulder straps of my satchel, I would study the lines: “Work is the burgher’s ornament, / Blessedness the reward of toil.”¹⁸ The house door below swung shut with a sigh, like a ghost sinking back into the grave. Outside it was raining, perhaps. One of the stained-glass windows was opened, and I went on climbing the stairs in time with the patter of raindrops.

Among the caryatids and atlantes, the putti and pomonas, which in those days looked on me, I stood closest

to those dust-shrouded specimens of the race of threshold dwellers—those who guard the entrance to life, or to a house. For they are versed in waiting. Hence, it was all the same to them whether they waited for a stranger, for the return of the ancient gods, or for the child that, thirty years ago, slipped past them with his schoolboy’s satchel. Under their tutelage, the Old West district became the West of antiquity—source of the west winds that aid the mariners who sail their craft, freighted with the apples of the Hesperides, slowly up the Landwehr Canal, to dock by the Hercules Bridge.¹⁹ And once again, as in my childhood, the Hydra and the Nemean Lion had their place in the wilderness that surrounds the Great Star.²⁰

Tardy Arrival

The clock in the schoolyard wore an injured look because of my offense. It read “tardy.” And in the hall, through the classroom doors I brushed by, murmurs of secret deliberations reached my ears. Teachers and students were friends, behind those doors. Or else all was quite still, as though someone were expected. Quietly, I took hold of the door handle. Sunshine flooded the spot where I stood. Then I defiled my pristine day by entering. No one seemed to know me, or even to see me. Just as the devil takes the shadow of Peter Schlemihl,²¹ the



Berlin's Tiergarten in winter, early twentieth century

teacher had taken my name at the beginning of the hour. I could no longer get my turn on the list. I worked noiselessly with the others until the bell sounded. But no blessedness crowned the toil.

Boys' Books

My favorites came from the school library. They were distributed in the lower classes. The teacher would call my name, and the book then made its way from bench to bench; one boy passed it on to another, or else it trav-

eled over the heads until it came to rest with me, the student who had raised his hand. Its pages bore traces of the fingers that had turned them. The bit of corded fabric that finished off the binding, and that stuck out above and below, was dirty. But it was the spine, above all, that had had things to endure—so much so, that the two halves of the cover slid out of place by themselves, and the edge of the volume formed ridges and terraces. Hanging on its pages, however, like Indian summer on the branches of the trees, were sometimes fragile threads of a net in which I had once become tangled when learning to read.

The book lay on the table that was much too high. While reading, I would cover my ears. Hadn't I already listened to stories in silence like this? Not those told by my father, of course. But sometimes in winter, when I stood by the window in the warm little room, the snowstorm outside told me stories no less mutely. What it told, to be sure, I could never quite grasp, for always something new and unremittingly dense was breaking through the familiar. Hardly had I allied myself, as intimately as possible, to one band of snowflakes, than I realized they had been obliged to yield me up to another, which had suddenly entered their midst. But now the moment had come to follow, in the flurry of letters, the stories that had eluded me at the window. The dis-

tant lands I encountered in these stories played familiarly among themselves, like the snowflakes. And because distance, when it snows, leads no longer out into the world but rather within, so Baghdad and Babylon, Acre and Alaska, Tromsø and Transvaal were places within me. The mild air of light holiday literature which permeated those places tinged them so irresistibly with blood and adventure that my heart has forever kept faith with the well-thumbed volumes.

Or is it with older, irrecoverable volumes that my heart has kept faith? With those marvelous ones, that is, which were given me to revisit only once, in a dream? What were they called? I knew only that it was those long-vanished volumes that I had never been able to find again. They were located, however, in a cabinet which, as I perforce realized on waking, I had never met with before. In the dream, it appeared to me old and familiar. The books did not stand upright in it; they lay flat, and, indeed, in its weather corner.²² In these books there were stormy goings-on. To open one would have landed me in the lap of the storm, in the very womb, where a brooding and changeable text—a text pregnant with colors—formed a cloud. The colors were seething and evanescent, but they always shaded into a violet that seemed to come from the entrails of a slaughtered animal. As inef-

fable and full of meaning as this forbidden violet were the titles, each of which appeared to me stranger and more familiar than the last. But before I could assure myself of the one that came first, I was awake, without so much as having touched, in my dream, the boys' books of old.

Complete Table of Contents, 1932–1934 Version

From Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972). The arrangement of the forty-one section titles is by the editor, Tillman Rexroth, as based on the text first published in 1950 and edited by Theodor W. Adorno.

Tiergarten	The Otter
Imperial Panorama	Blumeshof 12
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*In German, *Schmöker*. The text of this section is virtually identical to that of the section entitled "Boys' Books" in the 1938 version.

Cabinets	Loggias
Beggars and Whores	Crooked Street
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Notes

1. Benjamin was in Spain and Italy from April to November 1932, at a time when the situation in Germany was rapidly darkening. It was during this period that he began work on the *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, which evolved out of the *Berliner Chronik* (A Berlin Chronicle), written in the first half of 1932 (and translated by Edmund Jephcott in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999], pp. 595-637). Benjamin completed a first version of the text in 1934 (see below). The final version of the *Berliner Kindheit*, for which Benjamin wrote this introductory section, dates from 1938. The epigraph is adapted from an undated note on hashish intoxication (now in Benjamin's *On Hashish* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006], Protocol 12). For more on the genesis of the text, see the Translator's Foreword.

2. Much of Benjamin's childhood was spent in the affluent western sections of Berlin.

3. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 5, scene 3, lines 116-120.

4. The Imperial Panorama (Kaiserpanorama) was located in an arcade, the Kaiser-Galerie, built in 1869-1873, that connected Friedrichstrasse and Behrenstrasse. The panorama consisted of a dome-like apparatus presenting stereoscopic views

to customers seated around it. For more on nineteenth-century panoramas, see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 527–536, 992–993.

5. The Victory Column was erected in 1873 to commemorate the Prussian victory over the French at Sedan on September 2, 1870. In the early part of the twentieth century, it stood at the center of the Königsplatz (now the Platz der Republik) and bore bronze reliefs depicting Prussia's victories over Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and France. The Battle of Sedan, in which Napoleon III was taken prisoner, led to the end of the Franco-Prussian War and the union of Germany under Wilhelm I. The column was moved to its present site, near the center of the Tiergarten, in 1938; the battle reliefs were removed after the German defeat in 1945. Benjamin puns here: the phrase "man hätte sie abreissen sollen" means both "the calendar page was supposed to be torn off" and "the column should have been torn down."

6. Paul Kruger (1825–1904), a South African soldier and statesman, was a leader of the Boers (descendants of Dutch settlers). He escaped to Europe at the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, residing in Holland and Switzerland until his death. The German government had looked with favor on the Boers' struggle against the British.

7. Saint Catherine of Alexandria (died A.D. 307) was tortured on a wheel and decapitated. The seventh-century legend of Saint Barbara tells of her imprisonment in a stone tower, where she too was beheaded; the prison tower became her special emblem.

8. Allusion to the opening lines of Hölderlin's poem "Hyperions Schicksalslied": "You walk up there in the light / On

floors like velvet, blissful spirits." "Hyperion's Song of Fate," in *Friedrich Hölderlin, Eduard Mörike: Selected Poems*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 5.

9. The Brauhausberg lies to the south of Potsdam. It was a popular destination for people wishing to stroll along its paths and climb to its belvedere, which afforded views to the west.

10. Limoges, France, has been known for its enamel works since the twelfth century.

11. It was Ariadne, goddess of dawn and the moon, whose ball of thread enabled Theseus to find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth.

12. The park in question is the Tiergarten, which extends from the Brandenburg Gate to the district of Charlottenburg. In the years immediately following 1900, the Tiergarten was undergoing a gradual change from natural forest to public park. The park gives its name to the central district of Berlin in which it is located.

13. The "Fräulein": the boy's governess, but also the early death of Luise von Landau (see the end of this paragraph and the section entitled "Two Enigmas" below).

14. A statue of Friedrich Ludwig Christian, prince of Prussia (1772–1806) stands in the Tiergarten. The prince distinguished himself as a commander of troops in the first war of the coalition against the French republic in 1792. He died leading the Prussian advance guard at the battle of Jena and Auerstadt.

15. The reference is to the Landwehrkanal, which separates the Tiergarten from the elegant Old West district where the Benjamin family lived; it traverses the district of Kreuzberg, running from the Silesian Gate to Charlottenburg, and connects the upper and lower Spree River.

16. Making allusion to Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (Paris Peasant) of 1926, this refers to Benjamin's friend and collaborator Franz Hessel (1880–1941), whose book *Spazieren in Berlin* (On Foot in Berlin) Benjamin reviewed in 1929. The review appears in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 262–267 (trans. Rodney Livingstone).

17. See Goethe's *Faust, Part II*, Act 1, line 6264. Faust visits the chthonic "Mothers" in search of the secret that will enable him to discover Helen of Troy. Compare Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 416 (Convolute M_{1,2}).

18. Schiller, "Das Lied von der Glocke." This "saying" is in lines 317–318.

19. Hercules either stole the apples of the Hesperides (clear-voiced maidens who guarded the tree bearing the golden apples given by Gaea to Hera at her marriage to Zeus) or had Atlas steal them for him.

20. Grosser Stern, a turnaround in the center of the Tiergarten. The "wilderness" is a wooded area in the park.

21. In Adelbert von Chamisso's story of 1814, "Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte" (The Strange Tale of Peter Schlemihl), the hero sells his shadow to the devil in exchange for an inexhaustible purse, losing his peace of mind in the process.

22. The "weather corner" (*Wetterecke*) is that part of a country or region in which the weather is especially severe.

23. A section of West Berlin.

24. The region, formerly part of Prussia, of which Berlin is the chief city.

25. The German writers Jean Paul (pen name of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter; 1763–1825), Novalis (pen name of Baron Fried-

rich von Hardenberg; 1772–1801), Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), and Zacharias Werner (1768–1823), all produced texts in which mining motifs play a prominent role. Biedermeier was a period style in Germany (ca. 1815–1848); in furniture and interior design, painting and literature, it was characterized by a simplification of neoclassical forms.

26. *Wallensteins Lager* (Wallenstein's Camp), a play by Friedrich Schiller, scene 2 (lines 1052–1055).

27. This phrase, *das gewogene Herz*, also means "the affectionate heart." In this section, "enigmas" translates *Rätselbilder*, which can be rendered more literally as "picture puzzles."

28. With these powers the child conspired, *steckte unter einer Decke* (literally, "hid under a blanket").

29. In Teutonic mythology, the giant, fire-breathing wolf Fenrir, offspring of the demon Loki, kills the god Odin at *ragna rok*, the end of the world, and is in turn slain by Odin's son Vidar.

30. Peacock Island, a pleasure park, was laid out by Friedrich Wilhelm III. Glienicke is a hunting palace originally built for the Great Elector in 1682; it was remodeled in the Renaissance style in 1862. The Hohenzollern were a German royal family who ruled the duchy of Brandenburg from 1415 and later extended their control to Prussia (1525). From 1871 to 1918 Hohenzollern monarchs ruled the German Empire.

31. All of these are imperial residences. The Neues Palais (New Palace), built by Frederick the Great in the years 1763–1769, was the summer residence of the emperor. Sans-Souci was built by Frederick the Great in 1745–1747 as his main residence; the Wildpark, or game preserve, is a part of the Park