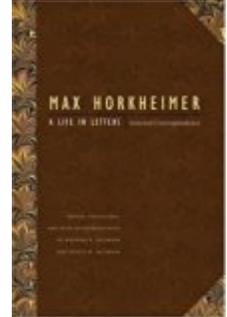




**Max Horkheimer.** *A Life in Letters: Selected Correspondence.* Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. viii + 440 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8032-2430-8.



**Reviewed by** Francesca Albertini

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The director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt and one of the more active figures of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer's (1895-1973) intellectual development began in Germany and continued during his exile in the United States, from where he followed the events of the Second World War.

The letters selected by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson and translated for the first time into English show, on the one hand, the influence of the historical events of the twentieth century on Horkheimer's thought, particularly the roles played by the Holocaust and the Vietnam War in the development of his critical theory and dialectic of enlightenment. On the other hand, the letters outline the very uneven trajectory from an early optimism about the possibility of a revolutionary change to a radical critique of orthodox Marxism, from Horkheimer's faith in revolution to a commitment to the transformative power of pedagogy.

Horkheimer's correspondence also shows the role played by some intellectuals and artists of nineteenth and twentieth centuries in his thought,

such as Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud, Theodor Adorno, Karl Marx, and Herbert Marcuse. By using the term "role," I do not mean only the assimilation of their way of thinking, but also the conflicts and tensions which Horkheimer had with them during and after his exile in the United States.

From this correspondence Horkheimer's personality clearly emerges; these letters offer a glimpse of the broad spectrum of his relationships with colleagues and friends in Europe as well as in the United States. For researchers dealing with gender studies, Horkheimer's correspondence with his future wife may appear somewhat bothersome: one can well wonder why he fell in love with a woman, whom he was not ready to accept as she was. Rather, he intended to mold her into an intellectual according to his own criteria. It is very troubling to see the pressure Horkheimer imposed on his future wife, for instance, dictating which books to read and providing deadlines for her to report her commentary. Such behavior also jibes with later reports by many of Horkheimer's female students in Frankfurt, where his approach

to the "gentle sex" does not seem to have experienced any maturation. In any case, I do not intend my review to be used for less-than-useful gossip unrelated to Horkheimer's philosophy.

Jacobson and Jacobson's selected correspondence focuses on two main topics: Horkheimer's analysis of anti-Semitism in Europe before, during, and after World War II, as well as his critique of Hegel's idealism. His arguments with Adorno on both topics allow us to follow very closely the different phases of the Frankfurt School's development, which had a strong echo in the United States, too.

I deeply regret that the arguments with Jürgen Habermas and Hans Georg Gadamer--significantly emphasized in the German edition of Horkheimer's correspondence--did not receive the same attention here. Since the English edition anthologizes four volumes of letters into 440 pages, an all-embracing work should not be expected, yet we hope that some future supplements will offer the English-speaking audience a more complete perspective on Horkheimer's philosophy.

From the English edition Horkheimer's pioneering concept of education clearly emerges, which is also nowadays a guidepost both in Europe and in the United States. Horkheimer's philosophy of education must be understood as relating to the practices, concepts, and symbolic development which form emotions, conceptual apparatus, conscience, and consciousness, as well as relating to the historical individual and collective possibilities and limitations. Both aspects of Horkheimer's philosophy of education are highlighted in Jacobson and Jacobson's selection of correspondence and are among the merits of this first English edition.

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