

Odysseus's Tattoo:

On Daniel Ganzfried's *The Sender* and Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments*

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Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley remade the traditional trope of the book-as-offspring by dubbing her *Frankenstein* “my hideous progeny,” thus rendering uncanny and monstrous what had been an innocuous metaphor, and positing the literary birth as unnatural and deformed precisely by virtue of its incongruously natural progenitor.¹ In what follows we consider two texts that implicitly reverse this formulation: by shaping their very different narratives around or against the Holocaust, they implicitly acknowledge that extra-literary event as a hideous progenitor, and as the monstrous sponsor of human histories (those of the survivors) that demand to be retold. Furthermore, the Holocaust has become productive of histories of another sort: those of the postwar, “second” generation, which through the operation of what Marianne Hirsch has called “postmemory” uses the experiences of the survivor generation as a means of fashioning a coherent identity in a globalizing world of weakened national, confessional, and humanist codes.² In a grotesque sense, the ethical self-fashioning made available by a relationship to narratives and memories of the Holocaust might be said to represent the literary construction of a progenitor. The Holocaust seems, in other words, to be the cause for the affects and

¹ “My hideous progeny” derives from the author’s preface to the 1831 revised edition of her novel. See for an excellent variorum collation Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, the 1818 text edited with an introduction and notes by Marilyn Butler (London: W. Pickering, 1993).

² On “postmemory” see Marianne Hirsch, “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” *Poetics Today*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (winter 1996) 659-686.

symptoms felt in the post-Holocaust self that is in the process of coming into being through this very operation.

This metaphorical moment of autocreation has been given a literal turn with the accusations of fraud leveled at *Fragments*, by Benjamin Wilkomirski, who is alleged to have literally fabricated for himself a past as a child survivor of the camps. The person responsible for the accusations, Daniel Ganzfried, is himself the author of a book, *The Sender*, a fictionalized second-generation memoir in which these very temptations of self-fashioning, of self-authorization through the Holocaust, are thematized and worked through with subtlety and rigor. In the essay below we take up first Ganzfried's novel, with its resistance to the lure of the Holocaust as literary progenitor and its construction of an alternative memory, the subject of which will remain somewhere on the border between father and son, self and other, history and fiction. The second half treats Wilkomirski's text and the ramifications of its full-frontal and yet very likely fraudulent eyewitness recounting of the events of the Holocaust for a late-postwar generation accustomed to blurring phenomenological boundaries in its aesthetic life-world. And yet it is precisely this generation, which will outlive the eyewitnesses and the survivors, that is in need of accuracy and truth for its appraisal of the disastrous past out of which it has arisen. As members of such a cohort, and having been vexed for some time now with this same problem, we count ourselves fortunate to have had our own engagements formed by Stanley Corngold: to whom in grateful tribute this work.

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At a crucial point in the climactic reunion scene with his father in Homer's *Odyssey*, Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, manifests doubt about the identity of the man who has just revealed himself as the long-awaited hero, returned from his ten years of wandering

following the end of the Trojan War. “Well,” replies this man, effectively, “I am the only Odysseus you’re going to get.”³ At this, Telemachus is reconciled to the man who is in fact present before him, and who had until that moment consisted for him of little more than a collection of stories. The son has been tested by his own wanderings through the farther reaches of his homeland, as well as by an impromptu apprenticeship with his father’s comrades Nestor and Menelaus. He is now prepared to lend his efforts to the task of re-establishing this Odysseus as King of Ithaca, husband to his mother Penelope, and rightful administrator of the patrimony Telemachus himself had earlier been called upon, in view of his father’s long absence and presumed death, to bestow anew.

And yet Telemachus would not, in theory, have to make do with only this bald declaration as proof of his putative father’s identity. Once Odysseus, disguised as a wandering mendicant, has been smuggled into the besieged palace, his true identity is “read” and recognized conclusively by a faithful retainer. The servant, Euryclea, who has been called upon to give the stranger a foot-bath, notices a scar on Odysseus’ leg and, since she had been that man’s nurse when he was young, is able to recall the origins of the wound in an episode from her charge’s gallant youth. The final seal is set to the process of recognition when Penelope herself, the faithful wife, tests and then formally recognizes Odysseus as her husband, on the basis of his possession of a piece of information (the nature of their marriage-bed) to which only the two of them had been privy.

³ See the *Odyssey* XVI 202-6: “Telemachus, it doesn’t befit you to be too amazed nor to wonder overly much at your dear father being present: for no other Odysseus will be coming hither, but here I am, just as you see me, I’ve suffered evils, quite a few in fact, and I’ve come after twenty years to my fatherland” (our translation).

These three stages of recognition -- let us call them testimony, physical proof, and cross-examination -- are also the subject of Daniel Ganzfried's novel of second-generation Holocaust memory, *The Sender (The Sender)*, in which a son confronts a long-lost father who happens to be a survivor of the Nazi work- and death-camps.⁴ But the uses of these stages of recognition are significantly different in the epic poem and the contemporary novel, as much as the latter recalls the former thematically. Telemachus in the *Odyssey* moves through his putative father's testimony to an encounter with physical proof (the scar) and cross-examination (the shibboleth of the bed), respectively notarized and carried out by others more qualified than he, all of which will establish Odysseus as the counterpart to the corpus of stories Telemachus has heretofore had as the sole and undisputed legacy of his father. The hero of Ganzfried's novel, meanwhile, follows a path that is the reverse of this one. Faced with the solid and uncontroversial presence of a man he has no reason to doubt is his father, Ganzfried's Georg must himself carry out the cross-examination of this man, as well as the inspection of the physical proof of his identity, that will cause the store of anonymous tales to which Georg has gained access to fit this particular, undisputed father. Where Telemachus gives primacy to the man, in other words, Georg gives primacy to the story. Telemachus does not believe that the man he sees before him can be the actual hero of the stories he has heard, and must be led to a belief in the authenticity of this all-important figure through the series of proofs evinced above: he must make the man fit the stories. Georg, meanwhile, cannot believe that the stories he has been listening to in his capacity as transcriber of taped accounts of concentration camp survivors can possibly refer to this figure, whom he knows beyond

⁴ Daniel Ganzfried, *Der Absender* (Zurich: Rotpunktverlag, 1995), hereafter referred to as *The Sender*.

any doubt to be his father. He must struggle with versions of the same sort of proofs as confront Telemachus in his attempt to make the stories fit the man.

But Georg's stories have primacy not only because of the relatively uncontroversial identity of the man in question. The particular stories Georg has been hearing belong to the foundational history of his time, to the corpus of eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust, of its precursors, its effects, and its survivors, to what might be termed the *Iliad* of the modern era. Now, Telemachus' stories, the accounts of his father's exploits both on and off the battlefield, comprise in fact the original, veritable *Iliad*, as well as that saga's continuation in the equally celebrated but no longer extant cycle of *Nostoi*, or tales of return from the Trojan War. And yet even that seminal store of Hellenic myths pales in comparison with the flesh-and-blood hero of the *Odyssey* himself, with that Odysseus who continues to be the central and irreplaceable motive force in his own very much ongoing narrative. Faced by such a presence, Telemachus moves seamlessly from being a consumer of those stories (to whose accumulation he has devoted much of the earlier part of the poem) to becoming an actor in their sequel, in the poem's present time, with all of that frame narrative's notoriously *Iliad*-recapitulating intrigue and violence as Odysseus and his allies slay Penelope's suitors and take back the hereditary hall. For much of *The Sender*, by contrast, Ganzfried's Georg clings tenaciously to the accounts of the Holocaust, to its causes and its aftermath as evoked in the account he has been hearing, even in the face of his flesh-and-blood father. He does this in part because this particular man happens to be leading a life of no special distinction or urgency in the novel's present time, and in part, in a related sense that is famously true of survivors' accounts of the Holocaust in general, because the Holocaust did not -- indeed does not -- allow distinctive characters to emerge out of it (as do the

Iliad, the *Odyssey*, and the lost *Nostoi*), and thus to take on heroic characteristics that might enable them to transcend their story's narrative world.

Georg's recognition of the sameness of the accounts of concentration camp survival comes early on in the novel, as he is about to happen upon the tape cassette containing what sounds like his father's voice but which bears, intriguingly, no return address. In a striking image, Georg is lulled by the series of identical testimonies he must hear and transcribe:

The more cassettes Georg had listened to since starting the job, the more often he had heard repeated years, places, countries, and the names of the concentration camps entered on the forms; for some time, in fact, he had had the impression, nearly dozing between the headphones, that he was listening over and over again to one and the same story of survival of one and the same camp. When details did nevertheless stand out, which was seldom the case, they would stir about on the stew of voices like leaves torn from a tree that float downstream while one watches for a while, until the next branch comes and they are forgotten. The fifteen-minute breaks he took between sessions at his listening post had recently been getting more frequent, without his noticing it, in proportion to the extra effort it took him to get the headphones on again in his windowless, soundproof studio.⁵

This is indeed the tape cassette that will provide the motive for the quest that comprises the rest of the novel. And here, in what might indeed be called a Homeric simile (relying as it does on a pastoral miniature to convey something workaday or unbeautiful), is

⁵ Ganzfried, *The Sender*, p. 23. All subsequent references to the novel will be provided parenthetically in the text. All passages cited in English are from Rafaël Newman's unpublished translation, excerpts of which are forthcoming in his *Jewish Writing in the Contemporary World: Switzerland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

evidence of what Dan Diner has called the “statistics, but not the narrative,” of the Holocaust. For “the million-fold molding of life histories into one single fatal destiny, which was carried out in a factory-like way, deprives the event in the consciousness of posterity of any story-telling structure.”⁶ What the Holocaust was meant famously to achieve, after all, was the elimination not only of the Jews but also of their retailable, inheritable memory; and insofar as memory is one of the phenomena most closely associated with the Jewish tradition, it has even been suggested that memory itself formed a substantive target for the architects of the “Final Solution.”⁷

This non-narrativity of the Holocaust is more pointedly foregrounded in *The Sender* when Georg considers one of those people who lived through the camps, a wealthy New York real estate developer who is now contributing money and prestige to the burgeoning museum project:

He was one of the “Survivors,” as those who had lived through the concentration camps were familiarly known here. They made up their own species, one referred to them with pride and gave them special privileges. This was especially crucial in New York, where all the other communities, after all, could only by stressing their alleged uniqueness avoid dissolving unnoticed into their surroundings. Some of them shrilly, others with an elegant aloofness, each according to the share of authenticity reserved to that uniqueness. On the other hand, no one was exactly sure what was to be done with these “Survivors;” their own silence about their

⁶ Dan Diner, *Kreisläufe: Nationalsozialismus und Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1995), pp. 126 and 127 respectively; our translation.

⁷ See Gunnar Heinsohn, *Warum Auschwitz?: Hitlers Plan und die Ratlosigkeit der Nachwelt* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995). In his short essay “Gedächtnis und Institutionen,” in *Kreisläufe*, pp. 113-121, an implicit dialogue with Ernest Renan, Diner effectively lays the groundwork for such an idea in his identification of Germany’s nineteenth-century anti-Napoleonic patriotism as that nation-to-be’s opting for an *ethnic* collective memory over the *political* collective memory represented by the French Revolution: that is, for a national identity founded upon a rejection of the history of universal values and institutions, the very history that would in a later period come to be associated with “the Jews.”

history set them too distinctly apart from the rest of the family, which was concerned with nothing so zealously as the attempt to bear witness to the rest of the world. (22)

What Georg is confronted with, then, is the singularly vexing problem of a history so ethically privileged that it submerges its very actors within its need to tell itself -- to tell itself, in fact, through others who are less ethically entailed in their own narrative than the sufferers of the events they relate. And the Holocaust's ethically privileged history is of course so aesthetically impoverished that it would in any case hardly afford the material for any one of its actors to emerge from its grinding sameness as a distinct character. Between the Holocaust's narrative unsuitability and its perverse compulsion to be narrated, then, there remains very little ground for meaningful speech.

Ganzfried's solution to this conundrum, in the face of the survivor father who stands before him upon the observation deck of the Empire State Building throughout the novel's entire framing narrative, will be in fact to free his protagonist gradually from the grip of the Holocaust testimony to which he has been attending, and to construct for him instead a lovingly detailed and perhaps entirely fictional account of his father's life before and after the period of his internment in various of the Nazis' concentration camps. For the reader will in fact never be allowed even to "hear" the voice on the cassette recordings, but will only hear about it at the double remove of Ganzfried's third-person account of Georg's listening. At most the elusive phonic messenger or "sender" is sensually described: he is a "hoarse tenor" with an "eastern accent," and is "probably a smoker" (31). The voice's effect on Georg is evident on every page of his strand of this polyphonous novel, but the first-person narrative that takes over from Georg's third-

person sections during roughly half of the book's considerable length, and which even the careful reader may be forgiven for believing is equivalent to the taped testimony, spends very little of its time recounting life in the camps.⁸ Much more of Ganzfried's care and attention is lavished on evoking, through that anonymous narrator's voice, the quality of the small-town Eastern Jewish experience before and during the Nazi occupation of Hungary in 1944, on recounting without pathos the trials of rehabilitation in a British army field-hospital established on the site of Bergen-Belsen following the Nazi defeat, and on detailing the poverty and continuing injustices to be encountered in Palestine and Israel from the immediate postwar period and on into the 1950s.

This other narrative strand of the book will eventually dovetail, if only ambiguously, with the novel's present, set in 1991 at the height of the Gulf War and the imminent return of soldiers from a distant campaign. The martial background serves further to underline the Telemachean echoes of the novel's third strand. In the weeks leading up to the Allied attack on the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, during which period Georg searches for evidence to link the anonymous tape-recorded concentration camp testimony with his father, he consults veterans of the Hungarian-Jewish world, just as Telemachus visits his father's aging comrade Nestor to learn of his whereabouts; and he has recourse to the amazing if limited technological advances in memory-storage, as at the Mormon Family History Center, with its genealogical data banks (248), in a wry inversion of

⁸ The notion of strands of narrative, with its attractively Penelopean connotation of a woven text, is owed to an essay treating Ganzfried among other young German-language Jewish writers in Sander L. Gilman, *Love + Marriage = Death* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 184-202; there, however, the suggestion seems in fact to be that Ganzfried's first-person account is tantamount to the taped testimony, an imputation that clearly obscures the epistemological import of the novel. Other readers who have made this erroneous connection include some of Ganzfried's earliest Swiss reviewers: see Sandra Leis, "Ueberlebensmaske des Schweigens," *Die Weltwoche* 5 October 1995; Konrad Tobler, "Das Erinnern als Wissen um die Leerstellen," *Berner Zeitung* 25 November 1995; and Beda Hanimann, "Kindheit und Vergangenheit," *Der Kleine Bund* 9 December 1995.

Telemachus' experience of memory-altering magic at the home of Menelaus and Helen. But in the course of his researches Georg, like Telemachus once again, will be frustrated, for final confirmation of his father's identity will lie always just beyond his grasp, as indeed all guarantees of the ultimate return of the hero Odysseus will elude his son until that man stands before him and reveals himself. And as he tries once more to reconstruct the period following March 19, 1944, the date of the Nazi take-over in Hungary, the beginning of the transports of Hungarian Jews to the death camps, and the occasion for the taped reminiscences, and thus to reserve for his father some connection with the master non-narrative epic of their time, Georg grows to suspect that his own task may be doomed, and that his father may have to remain "without history, merely a left-behind" (128). As he attempts to recall his own early memories of his father, a vision of his restless eyes, he begins accordingly to doubt the possibility of retrieving what that man had witnessed, and indeed, of shaping from any such retrieved testimony an adequate or true narrative: for "no reality would arise from facts alone, since his sender was now threatening, if the facts did not add up, to disintegrate into an insubstantial trick of the mind" (128).

It is against such a threat of his father's evanescence, of his deterioration into a mere ahistorical chimera, that Georg -- or rather, Ganzfried's novel, for the ultimate responsibility for the first-person portion of the story is never made clear -- will construct the elaborate and yet unpathetically narrated history of a life, from its origins in pre-war provincial Hungary through a most delicate and elliptical treatment of its concentration camp experiences, and thence to its Diaspora settlement in postwar Switzerland (although that destination is never explicitly named, but only cryptically suggested). In a parallel movement, however, Georg will for the entire duration of the novel's present-time frame

narrative attempt to read upon his father's forearm the ultimate and most tangible proof of that man's identity with the privileged anonymous speaker of the Holocaust testimony: the tattoo Georg knows from childhood experience to be there. But the son is forced into a game of oblique scrutiny of his father's person since he cannot himself recall the number from past viewings, his father's physical presence in his life having been too brief and too early. It would be a simple enough matter to check his father's tattoo against the number recited clearly in the tape recording: only his father does not oblige, oblivious as he is to Georg's design.

This ongoing furtive struggle to glimpse the tattooed number signals Georg's unwillingness to relinquish the hope that some redemptive reality, some palpable history may indeed arise from "the facts," from a discovered correspondence between the material testimony of the tape cassette and the material object of the writing on his father's body. This hope persists despite the novel's empirically attested option for another sort of truth, for a (re)constructed history that will in fact elide the privileged moment of the camps only to seek its wisdom in the quotidian of pre- and post-Holocaust experience. Indeed, Georg's attempts to glimpse his father's tattoo recall in one notable juxtaposition the pre-Holocaust marking of Jewish bodies in fascist Hungary by means of yellow armbands, only thereby to render suspect and illegitimate this even more indelible means of determining identity.⁹

And the novel will indeed ultimately equivocate upon the issue of this factual identity. For there will come no Eurycleian moment for Georg, no recognition by means

⁹ At *The Sender* 75, during a discussion of military drill in 1940s Hungary, the first-person narrator describes his teacher's instructions always to wear the yellow armband on the left arm, and to keep it at all times visible: "He showed us the place on the left upper arm -- 'Never on the right!' -- and explained that it had to be visible at all times." On page 81, despite his father's having rolled up his sleeves, Georg is foiled

of the tokens and shibboleths of which Homer's epic makes use. The revelation of his father's tattoo will not have a chance to bring forth out of itself in vivid plastic detail the original scene of its inscription. In any case, the first-person account of the camp survivor and putative bearer of that tattoo notably leaves out much of its subject's camp experiences and avoids touching down in Auschwitz altogether.¹⁰ For, as Erich Auerbach in "Odysseus' Scar," his foundational reading of the representation of reality in Greek epic and the Old Testament, famously noted of the Euryclea scene in the *Odyssey*, the full-blown realism of the retelling of Odysseus' wounding by the wild boar in his youth, the cause of the scar that at a critical moment in his adventures threatens to reveal him, has the power to hold up Homer's frame narrative and suspend the impetus of his story's suspense.¹¹ In a related yet opposed fashion, Ganzfried's novel avoids such a realistic retelling of Auschwitz and a confrontation with the origins of the wound on the body of its survivor precisely because it knows that such a retelling, such a confrontation would threaten to suspend the frame narrative that is underway.

Here then Ganzfried's novel reverses Georg's initial priorities, his privileging of the story -- the Auschwitz testimony -- over the man; or at least it substitutes now a new story for the one that had first caught the protagonist's attention by means of its generally-acknowledged powers of ethical compulsion. For in place of the inevitably

in his attempt to see the tattoo on his left forearm: "Now he would have been near enough to him to be able to see more, but he found himself on the wrong side."

¹⁰ Ganzfried has in fact remarked that he "closed the doors of the cattlecar in Hungary and opened them again in Bergen-Belsen," the site of the last of his subject's three internments, soon to become a British army field hospital (personal interview). Auschwitz is of course remarkable in *The Sender* for its absence. At least one reviewer with a clear taste for exactly the sort of pathetic witness-bearing the novel decries has gone so far as to lament the absence of echoes of Auschwitz, while forgiving the omission of the camp itself: "The story drifts more and more into banality; one simply cannot accept the thoughtless lust for life of a young man who has survived Auschwitz. Mustn't he have nightmares?" Lilian Leuenberger, "Beklemmende Suche nach der Geschichte eines Vaters," *Zürcher Unterländer* 17 February 1996; our translation.

foregrounded and overshadowing style of the narration of Auschwitz, of the branding of his father's body, and of that landmark's discovery within the present-time of the frame narrative -- the style of those numbing tape recordings Georg has been listening to, what in the context of Homer's epic technique Auerbach refers to as the sort of style that "causes what is momentarily being narrated to give the impression that it is the only present, pure and without perspective"¹² -- Ganzfried's novel substitutes a lower-profile, less insistent, substantively subtler narrative. *The Sender* is in fact a special hybrid of past and present, vivid and less vivid, a veritable pastiche or cinematic montage of at least two different voices or perspectives in whose mingling revelation occurs, if at all, only at the margins of the story, without significant or leading recognition by any of its characters: for the connection between the two or three different story-strands is never made explicit, nor, if it is implied (in for instance the appearance of similar minor characters in the first- and third-person sections), is its significance emphasized.¹³

The novel effects thus a very artful blending of styles. It may indeed relinquish its right to revelation and the absolute vividness of an identification through explicit shibboleths and the recognition of a wound. It does not, however, in those sections of the book in which the anonymous Hungarian Jew speaks in the first person about his life, wholly abandon elements of the vivid, plastic style that renders Homer so pleasurable to read, even as it supplements those sections with the flatter, more monochromatic scenes

¹¹ See "Odysseus' Scar" in Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1974, fourth edition), pp. 3-23.

¹² Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 12.

¹³ Note that Auerbach (7) speaks of the lack of "perspectivistic connection" between scenes of past and present in Homer's *Odyssey* as well, in which all is famously said to be foreground with no possibility of characters' remaining in the narrative's consciousness when not actually present. The difference of this disconnection from that of *The Sender* is that, in Homer, there is no question that the scenes so juxtaposed in fact do indisputably feature the same characters, while the point of Ganzfried's text is to cast doubt on precisely this sameness.

set in present-day New York.¹⁴ Thus Ganzfried's novel is able to skirt the overwhelming narrative abyss of Auschwitz, yet must surrender neither its project of a vindicating recreation of the father's world disrupted by the Holocaust (and now likely to be overshadowed by the contemporary insistence upon narrating precisely and uniquely that event), nor its ethical commitment to a meaningful confrontation with the recognized survivor of the Holocaust (in contradistinction to the cynical professionalism with which his colleagues treat such witnesses¹⁵).

But the scenes in which father and son do in fact draw closer to one another, the stage for the fulfilment of this stern ethical imperative, are not, for all that, entirely devoid of literary antecedent or allusion. Indeed, they draw their power from a celebrated episode of another venerable tradition, an episode equally concerned with the estrangement and reunion of father and son, and it is in the admixture of this alternative style that *The Sender* will in the end find its oblique reconciliation with the difficult claims of Holocaust testimony. For in reading the sections of *The Sender* in which Georg researches his father's past, and especially those sections in which father and son spend an afternoon and evening atop the Empire State Building, one recalls Auerbach's parallel description, in that same essay in which he discusses the *Odyssey*, of "an equally ancient

¹⁴ Ganzfried has in fact spoken of his will to disrupt the reader's pleasure, or consumption of the "ice cream" of the Hungarian Jew's detailed quotidian memoirs, by intercutting them with the more challenging passages set in New York (personal conversation). Compare Auerbach's account of scenes of description in Homer, in which "we may see the heroes in their ordinary life, and seeing them so, may take pleasure in their manner of enjoying their savory present, a present which sends strong roots down into social usages, landscape, and daily life. And thus they bewitch us and ingratiate themselves to us until we live with them in the reality of their lives; so long as we are reading or hearing the poems, it does not matter whether we know that all this is only legend, 'make-believe'" (13). Ganzfried's novel will not determine which of its strands is make-believe and which is truth, but neither will it allow us to be lulled into the security of a pleasurable indifference to this question.

¹⁵ See the scene (23-4) in which Georg's superior, Ben, conducts a disingenuous, fawning telephone conversation with an elderly lady whose estate he hopes to acquire for the museum, and then announces to his colleagues in mock encouragement: "'Have fun! And think about this: he who survives the Survivors has also survived the Holocaust!'"

and equally epic style from a different world of forms,” that of the Elohist author of Genesis as he relates Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac.¹⁶ There Auerbach speaks of a barren verbal landscape, one unadorned with epithets and externalized description, yet with an implied profundity of psychology and an unrelievedness of suspense in inverse proportion to such narrative austerity: all of this serving to provide the most extreme possible contrast with the genial foregroundedness of Homer’s epic technique.¹⁷ And indeed, the scenes atop the Empire State Building are remarkable for their dryness, their inarticulateness at the level of dialogue, their mystery regarding motivations and history, quite without thereby surrendering anything in the way of hinted psychological depth or narrative tension.

But the biblical episode, of course, is not evoked here in the context of the New York passages only as a marker of stylistic contrast with Ganzfried’s Homeric world of the anonymous Hungarian Jew. What Georg and his father enact on the Empire State Building resembles the events of Genesis 22 thematically as well as stylistically. In both stories a journey has been undertaken following a mysterious command (God addresses Abraham abruptly and without apparent location¹⁸; Georg receives an anonymous tape recording, and his father is perplexed and startled when he is unexpectedly given his son’s number to call [9]); the journey takes the characters to a high place (God commands Abraham to take Isaac to one of the mountains in the land of Moriah, which Abraham will then call Jehovah-jireh, or “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,” Genesis 22.14, while Georg and his father ascend to the observation deck of the equally

¹⁶ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 11-12.

portentously-named Empire State Building¹⁹); in both stories a father and son are united by the necessity of a difficult and painful task (the imposed sacrifice, featuring the use of a knife and fire; the need for certainty regarding a wound inflicted by means of heated steel); and in both stories the original goal is foiled or supplanted (the sacrifice is in the end not required, Abraham's faith having been proven without it; the tattoo is not inspected and the camp is not discussed, Georg having decided to accept his father as unknowably connected with the experience of the camps, and nevertheless unique for having lived a certain life before and after).

In place of the original goal of the biblical episode, of course, which is the immediate physicality of access to blessedness in the present through human sacrifice, there will be born a new conception of religious (and indeed cultural) identity through God's promise to Abraham of future blessedness²⁰; while in place of the original goal of the novel, a reckoning with the indelible truth of the tattoo and Auschwitz, there is born a new kind of truth, a recognition that wisdom arises not from the facts, but from introspection, from an imaginative and perhaps fictionalizing encounter with memory, from a literary construction of one's own origins, and indeed of one's own father.

¹⁸ “. . . God, in order to speak to Abraham, must come from somewhere, must enter the earthly realm from some unknown heights or depths. Whence does he come, whence does he call to Abraham? We are not told.” Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 8.

¹⁹ Ganzfried has said that he chose to set his novel on the top of the Empire State Building, rather than anywhere in the land to which his family had emigrated from Israel, because “there is no place high enough in Switzerland from which to look down on the Holocaust with the right distance” (personal conversation). The key to interpreting this remarkable claim about a country within whose borders rise some of the world's tallest peaks is perhaps then to be sought in precisely this biblical paratext, which demands an artificial, urban counterpart to its natural setting so as to underscore the novel's parallel but different implications.

²⁰ “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thy only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:16-18.

In both narratives, in Genesis 22 and in *The Sender*, there is thus a strongly redemptive strain. The Genesis episode will re-privilege, and thus redeem, Abraham's relation to his son. For Abraham's holiness had led him to a willingness to negate that relationship in favor of fealty to a spiritual father or Lord of his own, while at the episode's conclusion he is rewarded by that same Lord with a vision of limitless, felicitous, unscathed progeny ("I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven"). Ganzfried's Georg, meanwhile, sees his father redeemed as a significant and valuable store of idiosyncratic memories quite apart from his involvement in the heretofore overprivileged world of the Holocaust, a world of monolithic narrative that had threatened to subsume his father in the all-important project of its own telling. What is ultimately redeemed in Ganzfried's *The Sender* -- without however undoing or banishing either the specter of Jehovah's initial grim demand for human sacrifice, which informs the novel structurally, or that sacrifice's modern avatar, the Holocaust, which drives it at the level of its plot -- what is ultimately redeemed is a fantasy of reunion with the world of the father, one that in turn privileges over his physical presence an imaginative and literary encounter with his memory.²¹

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When Benjamin Wilkomirski's memoir *Fragments* first appeared in the summer of 1995, only a few months before Daniel Ganzfried's *The Sender*, it was widely received as one

²¹ Lest this conclusion seem to ascribe to Ganzfried a Gnostic disdain for the physical, like that suggested by Stanley Corngold of Kafka in "Nietzsche, Kafka and Literary Paternity," in Jacob Golomb, ed., *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture* (Routledge: London, 1997), pp. 137-57, observe that *The Sender* ends in fact on a decidedly physical (and surprisingly tender) note, as Georg and his father step into the elevator that will take them back down to the less than sublime streets of New York. The father unwittingly preempts his son's ultimate attempt to examine his tattoo by begging Georg "for my sake," or, more literally, "out of love for me," to close his jacket and protect himself against the cold: which service the son wordlessly performs, in the novel's final line (368), and with a gesture of implicit respect for the loving imperative of the man whose past Georg may or may not have called back into literary life.

of the most important new works of Holocaust testimony, comparable in some estimations to the writings of Primo Levi and Paul Celan. Published by the Jewish Press of Suhrkamp Verlag in Frankfurt, it has since been translated into thirteen languages, made into two films and one theatre piece, and has received among others the National Jewish Book Award, the Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize, and the Prix de la Mémoire de la Shoah. Wilkomirski himself has toured countless schools and universities in Switzerland as well as other parts of Europe, the United States and Israel to speak of his experiences in the camps and in postwar Switzerland as a child survivor of the Holocaust. *Fragments* is by all accounts the best-known book to have come out of Switzerland in the nineteen-nineties, and Wilkomirski himself has become the most visible Jew living in Switzerland today.

The slim volume²² is a record of the visions and affects of a Polish-Jewish child from Riga who survives Majdanek and a further unidentified camp (assumed by most critics to be Auschwitz), and is subsequently sent to Switzerland where he is given the brand-new identity of a Swiss citizen and is adopted by a well-to-do couple in Zurich. His early childhood experiences, writes Wilkomirski in the opening pages of *Fragments*, “are based in the first instance on the exact images of my photographic memory and the images that have been stored up along with them -- bodily ones, too. Then comes auditory memory and the memory of what has been heard, also of what has been thought and at the very end the memory of what I have myself said. . . . If I want to write about it, I must renounce the organizing logic, the perspective of the adult” (8). Like partly

²² *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995). (Published in English as *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Schocken Books, [1996]) All references subsequently marked in the text; Wilkomirski's book will hereafter be referred to as *Fragments*. We have chosen to produce our own English versions of the passages here cited,

recovered reels of old documentary film, these memories are marshalled into loosely ordered tableaux that resist the adult's will to an ordered chronology: Wilkomirski's father's skull crushed against a wall by the Latvian militia; his own body hurled into concrete by a camp guard; two dead children, their frozen fingers gnawed to the bone. This suggests a memory wholly unedited by the ordering principles of the adult self, and untouched by the enormity of Holocaust knowledge crowding the imagination of the millennial mind. It is a form of memory, then, that for all of its fragmentedness is unadulterated and pure. A memory for which fragmentedness is, the book implies, the very symptom of purity and, by extension, the proof of authenticity.

As if to underscore further the authenticity of the book, Wilkomirski differentiates between the activity of a poet or an author and his own work in the opening pages of his *Fragments*: "I am not a poet, not a writer. I can only try to set down in words experience and event as exactly as possible -- as precisely, indeed, as my childhood memory has stored it up: without any knowledge yet of perspective and vanishing point" (8). More than anything else this seemingly modest disclaimer for the literary quality of his autobiography is a further claim for its value as truth, a status that is of course elemental to the act of witnessing the Holocaust. The reader is led to believe that it is not Wilkomirski himself who is responsible for the particular structure and the particular memories of the book, but rather that the memories manifest themselves through the author, who is then left to trace their contours as a child would trace those of a picture under glass.

rather than to follow Janeway, as her translation has become controversial: see Philip Gourevitch, "The Memory Thief," *The New Yorker* (14 June, 1999): 48-68.

Given this relinquishing of authorial responsibility, the artful, indeed literary structuring of the book comes as something of a surprise: interwoven with Wilkomirski's earliest childhood memories in Riga and in Majdanek are those of his arrival and painful integration first in the Swiss town of Adelboden, and then in Zurich. What makes this structure most remarkable is that each strand of the narrative underscores the varying shades of memory the protagonist's former selves were capable of having. In the first distinct strand, the earliest flashes of horror glint against the faded and confused background of time and place: a boy bids his dying mother farewell in a desolate camp barracks; he gasps for air under crushed bodies in a train with an unknown destination; he finds himself yanked along by disembodied hands on endless marches to nowhere. In the second strand, that boy's impressions in Switzerland during the first few years are related by Wilkomirski as a sort of double memory. That is, the adult remembers the older child's memory for whom the non-camp environment could only be interpreted according to the remembered "normalcy" of the camps: in this view the adoptive parents' gas furnace appears to be just the right size for cremating a child; the Wilhelm Tell myth, as studied in school, is rejected as implausible because ammunition, after all, even for the crossbow, is much too precious to be wasted on children; and a ski-lift on a school outing becomes a conveyor belt feeding children into the crematorium at the top of the slope.

The readers, in the meantime, are taken in completely by both strands of the memoir. While they busy themselves in the first half with supplying the missing contexts and details of the camps that the child Benjamin cannot understand or articulate, the second half of the book compels them to translate the most mundane events of everyday life into the stuff of nightmares. That is, the book's readers are called upon to "remember," and to apply their own Holocaust "experiences" in order to understand the

book: to be, in Susan Suleiman's terms, both a referential reader, who asks what camp, what train, what city, and a universalizing reader, who interprets common objects and activities as icons for universalized suffering.²³ *Fragments* can only be read the way it is because of writers like Primo Levi, or Jean Améry, or Paul Celan, all survivors who report with mature and astute intelligence what occurred around them. And not only because of these last, of course, but more recently because of the numerous research centers, narratives, films, documentaries, and extravagantly outfitted Holocaust museums that have turned the Holocaust into a cultural reference point, a store of shared knowledge that unites a broad readership. It is this inundation that accounts for our growing competence in the Holocaust and that makes us greet eagerly any new perspective on the stories we've heard so many times before. *Fragments* itself is, in other words, at once a product and confirmation of our collective imagination. No wonder it has found such an echo around the world.

No wonder, too, that the suggestion that this book might be written by an imposter who took advantage of our eagerness has come as a shock. In the fall of 1998, three years after *Fragments* was first published, Daniel Ganzfried's research, published in a series of articles in the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche*, suggested that Benjamin Wilkomirski was really Bruno Doessekker, a Swiss musician with a penchant for the history of the Holocaust who had made up his "memoir" from whole cloth.²⁴ Ganzfried had not set out to prove this on his own initiative. Having been asked by the Swiss

²³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Monuments in a Foreign Tongue: On Reading Holocaust Memoirs by Emigrants," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (winter 1996) 638-657. Suleiman is in turn influenced by Barbie Zelizer.

²⁴ See the series of articles by Ganzfried, "Die geliehene Holocaust-Biographie," *Die Weltwoche*, August 27, 1998, "Fakten gegen Erinnerung," *Die Weltwoche*, September 3, 1998, and "Bruchstücke und Scherbenhaufen," *Die Weltwoche*, September 24, 1998, forthcoming in English translation in Newman (ed.), *Jewish Writing in the Contemporary World: Switzerland*.

cultural foundation Pro Helvetia to write an article on Benjamin Wilkomirski and the phenomenon of children without identities for their house organ, Ganzfried stumbled across biographical inconsistencies that were hard to reconcile with the story told in *Fragments*. Bruno Doessekker, who only assumed the name Benjamin Wilkomirski when he began to write, had, according to the official registry of the city of Biel, been born there in 1941 as Bruno Grosjean, the illegitimate offspring of one Yvonne Berthe Grosjean. Rather than spending time in an orphanage in Cracow after the war, as *Fragments'* protagonist is supposed to have done, Bruno was given up for adoption by his birth mother and assigned to an orphanage in Adelboden, whence he was placed in 1945 with the Doessekkers of Zurich, who would become his foster parents. His still living biological uncle, by this account, the brother of Berthe Grosjean, confirms this information. In 1947 Bruno Doessekker, previously known as Grosjean, entered the public school system at the age of six bearing the name of his foster parents. Bruno's biological father continued to support his son until the Doessekkers officially adopted him in 1957. When his birth mother Yvonne Grosjean died in 1981 he accepted her modest inheritance.

Wilkomirski's first, and to date only, public response to Ganzfried's revelations came in the form of an interview in the Zurich daily *Der Tagesanzeiger*.²⁵ In this interview he points out that the seamless identity Ganzfried has unearthed is nothing new, but rather the driving force for writing the memoir in the first place. His biography, he maintains, is marked precisely by this tension between officially constructed identity and memories that could not be made to conform to the official story, a tension he had

²⁵ Wilkomirski, "Niemand muss mir Glauben schenken," interview by Peer Teuwsen, *Der Tagesanzeiger*, August 31, 1998.

already thematized in the postscript to his book. There, in *Fragments*, he wrote: “I too received a new identity while I was still a child, another name, another birthdate, another birthplace. . . . But this date corresponds neither with my life history nor with my memory. . . . The legally notarized truth is one thing, that of a life is another” (143). This tidy explanation, however, still leaves room for skepticism: if Wilkomirski was born in 1939, as is claimed in *Fragments*, instead of in 1941, as his birth certificate claims, then why was the age difference of two years neither noted upon school entry nor at any later date? If Berthe Grosjean is not his mother, then why did Bruno Doessekker accept an inheritance from her estate in 1981? And perhaps most curious of all: why had not Wilkomirski himself investigated the circumstances of his allegedly fabricated official dossier? Why had he not insisted upon revealing the fact that the Swiss officials had switched his identity, and with it his entire background, by falsifying documents after the war in an effort to integrate Jewish children who had survived the camps?

One of the unique aspects of *Fragments*, after all, is the attention it trains on the fates of children who survived the war either in camps or in hiding, and who were then allegedly given false histories and identities by a number of European governments in the largely well-meant effort to prepare for them a life in societies in which anti-Semitism was still rampant. For the various organizations that attempt to help people recover their true identities -- Amcha, the Children without Identity section at Yad le Yeled in Israel, the Children of Holocaust Society, the Contact Center for Children of Survivors of Nazi Persecution in Switzerland -- the authenticity of *Fragments*, along with its legitimizing effect, had been as important as its potential fictitiousness is now shattering. Not surprisingly, it has been these organizations that have been most adamant in defending

Wilkomirski.²⁶ His is indeed one of the few works that has thematized the problems that children without identities must confront: their often scanty memory; the absence in most cases of documents pertaining to their real pasts, even their names; and the psychological problems and insecurities arising from traumatic memories incommensurate with their assumed identity. Naturally a life-history whose essential characteristic is that it consists of memories which are often impossible to trace would offer equally compelling material for someone whose intent it was to forge a Holocaust memoir, and for someone whose aim it was simply to excavate his past.

The verdict on whether the memoir is fictitious or not is still out, and it is not clear when or indeed if we will ever learn the whole truth in this matter.²⁷ While Ganzfried has suggested that Wilkomirski alias Doessekker take a DNA test to establish, or rule out, kinship with his only supposed living relative, the brother of Berthe Grosjean, Wilkomirski himself has appealed unsuccessfully to the Bergier Commission, the federal body investigating Swiss involvement in the Holocaust, to investigate his dossier. Since neither of these suggestions has to date been taken up, we are left with four basic scenarios: Wilkomirski is an imposter who has consciously constructed a survivor's memoir; Wilkomirski is an imposter but genuinely believes that he survived the camps; Wilkomirski survived the camps and his memories are inauthentic (that is, he was too

²⁶ Siegfried Unseld, who heads the Jüdischer Verlag at Suhrkamp, had received hints even before the book went to press that it might be fictitious. He accordingly sent the manuscript to Lea Balint, who heads the Children without Identity section at the Ghetto Fighters' House of Yad le Yeled in Jerusalem, for examination and approval.

²⁷ See, however, the report aired on February 7, 1999 on CBS's "60 Minutes," with its presentation of evidence showing that Doessekker was in Zurich in 1945 in contradiction of his claim that he was at that time in a Cracow orphanage following his liberation from the concentration camp, as well as the testimony of Raul Hilberg, who maintains that it would have been virtually impossible for a small child alone to survive the camps. See also the long essays by Gourevitch, "The Memory Thief," and Elena Lappin, "The Man with Two Heads," *Granta* Nr. 66 (summer 1999): 7-65, for sustained (if not uncontroversial) reflections on Wilkomirski's history and motives. Lappin in particular, although ultimately skeptical of

young to have direct memories of his experiences, and his memories have therefore been constructed) ; or Wilkomirski survived the camps and his memories are authentic (that is, he has, as he claims in the book, direct memories of the camps). While many of the participants in the lively discussions sparked by the Wilkomirski affair have subscribed to and defended one or the other of these possible versions, we would like to focus on two generalizable questions, which, while emphasized by the current scandal, do not depend on its definitive resolution. The first is, what precisely changes in the function of the text within the larger sphere of cultural memory if it is revealed to be fictitious? The second is, what sort of investment in a text's authenticity warrants the kind of outrage the revelations have generally elicited in readers?²⁸

If *Fragments* is in fact invented, if Wilkomirski is, as Ganzfried believes, a born Swiss who saw the camps only as a tourist, the book, as well as Wilkomirski's oral testimony, now stored at the oral history archives at Yale and in the Spielberg archives, lose their testimonial value. This sudden change in testimonial status can also be seen to threaten other testimonies: Holocaust deniers have already begun to use the apparent effectiveness with which the story of the Holocaust was made up by Wilkomirski as evidence that the camps, and other survivor narratives, have been similarly invented. Even if Wilkomirski is indeed a child-survivor from Riga, but the memory fragments he claims to have recovered from the time he was two to three years of age were constructed to such a degree as to render indistinguishable the line between authentic and inauthentic memory, his testimony would still prove of little help. The author's own description, in

Wilkomirski, still cannot entirely suppress her former friendship with him, which perhaps leads her to one-sidedness in her assessment of actors such as Ganzfried.

²⁸ In this context we have benefitted from Birgit S. Erdle's presentation as part of the round-table discussion at the Theater Neumarkt in Zurich on December 7, 1998.

Fragments, of how he managed to recover the past is instructive in this respect: “Years of research work, many trips back to the presumed sites of the events, and countless conversations with specialists and historians helped me to interpret many inexplicable shreds of memory, to identify and rediscover places and people, and to produce a possible historical context as well as a possible, halfway logical chronology” (143).²⁹ Memories reconstructed under such circumstances, and with the retroactive input from so many sources (including a highly controversial psychoanalytic technique often used with adult victims of early childhood abuse to recover “deep” memory) are a testimony not so much to the Holocaust itself as to its proliferation as a cultural icon and system of reference in the late twentieth century.

While there is no doubt that the book’s status as Holocaust testimony would change if it turned out to be fictitious, one might argue -- and many have -- that the book’s literary and didactic merit remain the same whatever the outcome of the accusations. It would still be a vivid and moving story of the Holocaust, one which grippingly renders the horrors of the camps. Indeed, as Jurek Becker’s novel *Jacob the Liar* amply demonstrates, books needn’t be historically true in order to render an essential truth about the Holocaust.³⁰ Had *Fragments* been introduced as a novel from the beginning it could have been received as a valuable contribution to Holocaust literature, a thematization of the fate of child survivors. The uproar about the text’s authenticity has however shifted attention away from the subject of child survivors and onto other

²⁹ While he doesn’t here specify the nature of the specialists, we know that he underwent psychoanalytic treatment using a controversial technique developed in the early nineteen-nineties to help adult victims of child abuse recover repressed memories. Elaine Showalter has collected and analyzed some of these “recovered memory” phenomena in her *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

³⁰ Jurek Becker, *Jacob the Liar*, tr. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Schocken, 1990), orig. *Jakob der Lügner* (Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1969).

contemporary issues thereby changing the text's cultural function, and deflecting from its original context. Why, for instance, was the fraud made public when it was? In what way does the author's psychopathology, if he turns out to believe he is a survivor when he is not, block out the psychopathology of the two societies that have allegedly persecuted the novel's protagonist? And why, finally, did its readership make the "mistake" of receiving it with so much admiration and praise?

The book's initial reception and the dismay at the recent revelations bear some investigation, with particular reference to readers' investments in Holocaust accounts and the seeming double standard by which such accounts are judged. In the case of narratives that claim to tell the truth, there comes into being a tacit pact between author and reader. For Wilkomirski, who wrote to reclaim an identity, to reconstruct a memory, and to hold up a mirror to a cruel and insensitive society, it is essential that someone confirm, legitimize, and record this real identity and the memory that proves it. This is a role thousands of people have willingly played, reading the book, awarding it prizes, recording it as testimony, listening and watching raptly as Wilkomirski has told his story in auditoria, on television, and on radio. The pay-back for readers in the meantime consists in the opportunity to line up on the right side of the many ideological divides engendered by the Holocaust. For the way one positions oneself with regard to the Holocaust, that is, whether one believes it to have been unique, or that it should be historicized within the broader sweep of history, whether it has been remembered enough, as Martin Walser would have it, or whether its memory should be eternal, is a powerful determinant, at least in German-speaking countries, of one's political and ideological positioning within the general culture. This tacit pact, then, for the reader as

well as for the author, in the case of a narrative that purports to tell the truth about the Holocaust, is crucial for the fashioning of a particular kind of identity.

The pact of course, can only work as long as both sides hold to their respective obligations: if Wilkomirski is writing in an attempt to reclaim his lost identity, there must be a historical identity to reclaim; if he wants to reconstruct a life from the shards of memory, those shards had better be real. The uniqueness of the novel, namely that it is the account of one of the rare child survivors, rests with the authenticity of its author's claim. The reader's obligation, in the meantime, consists in believing and following the basic premisses the author sets up. Contained in the sentence "I am not a poet, not a writer" is a disclaimer with regard to the literariness of the book, one which disallows criticisms on that score. In his postscript Wilkomirski makes clear his expectations to the reader. He writes, "I grew up in a time and within a society that wouldn't or couldn't listen. . . . It was only seldom that I tried with timidity to share even a fraction of my memory with anyone, but such attempts constantly went awry. A finger tapped on the forehead or aggressive questions proffered in return would make me shut up in a hurry, and take back again what I had revealed. I wanted my security back, and I didn't want to be silent any longer. That's how I began to write" (142). To question the author's memories is to be aligned squarely with the boy's monstrous teacher and his ignorant adoptive parents, who stand for an entire society that wanted to hear nothing of the Holocaust or of a small child who had been in its camps. It would also mean denying him a security that can supposedly only come from the readers' acceptance and belief. But Wilkomirski ignores this pact in his single public response to Ganzfried's accusation when he says: "The reader was entirely at liberty to take my book as literature or as

personal document. . . . Nobody must grant me belief.”³¹ Of course, once the claim of authenticity has been made, once readers have committed themselves to reading and participating in a true story of the Holocaust, there can be no backing out on the part of the author without breaching a trust, without breaking that pact.

If *Fragments* were conclusively revealed to be fictitious, however, all of Wilkomirski’s faithful followers, the many schoolchildren who listened with awe, the many critics who wrote with enthusiasm, and the many readers who were haunted by the gnawed-off fingers, would be unmasked as dupes. If the horrific images were invented, then the emotions they elicited from their readers would take on the awful aspect of prurience, even pornographic pleasure, and turn commendable sympathy into disgraceful lechery.

When Daniel Ganzfried decided to make public the results of his research in August of 1998, he did so for numerous reasons, the three most important having to do with reader reception, with preserving the capacity for judgement even in the face of the Holocaust, and with the constitution of the memory we hand over as a legacy to the next generation. It is not surprising that Ganzfried, who in his novel *The Sender* resisted the impulse to dwell on the Holocaust proper in an effort to privilege Georg’s father post-war history, would insist in this non-fictional case that the person who embodies the position his ficitonal -- and factual -- father does in history be held to the stringent standards of testimony. The second-generation memory Ganzfried emplots through his protagonist Georg is beholden to various postmodern phenomenological positions with special bearing on narrative: the blurring of the boundaries between truth and fiction, the acknowledgment of the constructedness of memory and the corrolary constructedness of

³¹ Wilkomirski, “Niemand muss mir Glauben schenken”; our translation.

identity, and the contingent nature of the subject. In the case of Ganzfried's handling of *Fragments*, however, in the clearly marked non-fictional space of Wilkomirski's memoirs, the testing of the body of the witness that is so delicately avoided in the clearly marked fictional space of *The Sender* can and must be carried out. For in the case of *Fragments*, what has been posited is not only the trope or figure of the Holocaust as the hideous progenitor of scarred biographies, a rhetorical gesture to which all members of the postwar generation might lay equal claim. What Wilkomirski did with his memoir, if Ganzfried is right, was actually to elect the Holocaust as the archetype for his own undistinguished suffering. By the terms of the inverted Odyssean process adhered to and then abandoned by Ganzfried's protagonist Georg, Wilkomirski must have expected to have to undergo the scrutiny he has endured, having proposed the adequation of his particular self to that centrally privileged and grotesquely paternal body of history.