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Inhalt

German Postmemory Literature of the Holocaust: Koeppen, Wilkomirski, Sebald[1]

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Abstract: This essay shows literary modifications of Holocaust survivor memoirs in German postmemory literature. In a comparative analysis of three texts, Wolfgang Koeppen's 1992 Holocaust book *Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch,* Binjamin Wilkomirski's 1995 *Bruchstücke,* and W. G. Sebald's 2001 *Austerlitz*, the gradual establishment of a postmemory Holocaust literature in Germany is shown to serve as a generational bridge between the WWII and the post-Holocaust generation. By shifting the emphasis from accusations of plagiarism (Koeppen), of counterfeiting the text (Wilkomirski) and of appropriating a Jewish biography (Sebald), the essay proposes a reader-centered perspective to establish the base for a creative post-Holocaust literature in Germany.

Keywords: postmemory, Holocaust, Koeppen, Sebald, Wilkomirski

> You'd think that by 1992 it would have been axiomatic not to alter a Holocaust memoir. This is sacred ground. Every detail, nuance, memory—no matter how terrible, or banal—is precious. (McCombs 2000)

The number of post-WWII Holocaust narratives written by German authors has remained small, among them Heinrich Böll's 1951 popular novel *Wo warst du, Adam?* and Alfred Andersch's 1957 equally popular *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund.* As Ernestine Schlant described in her 1999 book *The Language of Silence,* writing about the Holocaust was difficult for German authors in the repressive atmosphere of the 1950s. The experience of the Holocaust survivor Aharon Appelfeld illustrates that even in Israel remembrance was not part of the national identity: "When I came to Israel, the slogan was 'Forget.' Until the

late sixties—'Forget.' And if you talk about the Holocaust, then, only the heroic part—partisans, not the camps" (Gourevitch).

In the decades following WWII memorializing Holocaust events was confined to various groups of survivors for whom they had been privatized within families—this is the explanation of Aleida Assmann who became a major voice in the evolution of German Holocaust education in the 1990s. It was not until the event was identified by name in 1979 with the German broadcast of the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* that "a discourse evolved on the unprecedented magnitude of the trauma and crime" (Assmann 97). Subsequently, Assmann's work on cultural memory became the driving force behind her concept that history is composed of memory, and that memory is embodied in physical objects and images. Assmann extended Maurice Halbwachs' definition of "collective memory as continuous social interaction" to include newspapers, television and monuments to aid with memory recollection (Halbwachs 52—54). In Germany, Berlin's Holocaust Memorial and the Jewish Museum became major representations of physical memory. Assmann describes how social memory studies and the emerging collective identities discourse resulted in Holocaust remembrance as a key element to define Western identity. Through the internationalization of Germany's "shared memory," the country was changing into a different and more open society (103).

The literary historian Marianne Hirsch has described how postmemory as a "generational structure of transmission (…) in the collective imaginary" was mediated through literature (35). Similarly, Ruth Franklin regards acts of memory as an act of narrative transmission that "distills and pounds the chaos of life into something resembling a coherent shape," a position she developed to counter those purists who tolerate only authentic material as appropriate for capturing the Holocaust. Authentic memoirs and diaries are often too attached to the moment and miss essential parts needed to comprehend the complexity of the events. Franklin states that "from the very moment we begin the activity of remembering, we place some kind of editorial framework, some principle of selection (…) around the events of the past," and therefore, she maintains that any kind of writing involves a degree of recreation from memory ("Writer" 38).

While the intergenerational link that Hirsch explored began to develop between victims and their children in the United States, a similar connection was also developing in Germany between perpetrators and their children, but with a major difference. While sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors were proud of their parents, Germans were not proud of theirs. The so-called Greatest Generation in America did not have an equivalent in Germany's war generation that had survived Hitler. Many Germans had been collaborators and were helpless in the face of their own children whose accusations were often more vicious

than those of former enemies. For a long time, survivor stories of bombing raids on German cities, tales of the cruelty German soldiers endured on the Eastern front, stories of the forced expulsion of Germans from former territories of Eastern Europe, and stories of surviving the hunger epidemic after WWII received a simple shoulder shrug from their children. They were not proud of their parents' self-inflicted political tragedy; they did not want to be seen as children of suspicious Nazi collaborators who had brought shame to their own country and almost caused its annihilation.

Bernhard Schlink's 1995 novel *Der Vorleser* is a case in point for the guilt that perpetrators tried to pass on to the second generation. The story takes place after WWII and centers on a former female concentration camp guard who seduces a male teenager. The novel is written from the perspective of the teenager as a young adult who examines his memory and seems unable to distinguish between his own sexual guilt and the political guilt of his seducer. Schlink "mismatched legal terminology like 'condemn,' 'sentence' and 'charge' with the non-legal term 'shame'," Emily Miller Budick writes. With the confusion that the book exerts on the reader by wrapping the Holocaust into a Freudian scheme it could mean anything or nothing (198).

Ernestine Schlant's 1999 study *The Language of Silence* was one of the first books to address Germany's "Holocaust angst," the guilt and shame Germans felt as perpetrator nation and the need to address their "coming to terms" with this guilt in their own literature, written in German from a German perspective. The novels presented in this essay—Wolfgang Koeppen's *Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch*, Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Bruchstücke*, and W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*—follow Schlant's examination. However, by shifting the emphasis from accusations against Koeppen for plagiarism, against Wilkomirski for forging his memoir, and against Sebald for appropriating a Jewish biography, this essay proposes a reader-centered perspective to provide a foundation for a German post-Holocaust literature that addresses the needs of the current generation in Germany.

My interest in Holocaust studies began in 1995 when I discovered Wolfgang Koeppen's 1992 novel *Jakob Littners Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch* at a conference in Greifswald, Germany; I was immediately fascinated by the book. Here was a slim 140-page Holocaust memoir, ostensibly written by a survivor, in the stark style of Dostoyevsky's enigmatic *Notes from Underground*. These 140 pages seemed to contain the essence of the Holocaust experience that had been received with universal acclaim by a German audience eager to explore the Holocaust in more detail. The author was a German Gentile, Wolfgang Koeppen, who in the 1950 s had been a household name with novels like *Tauben im Grass*

(1951) and *Tod in Rom* (1954) in which he, like Heinrich Böll, had addressed the country's painful past. But by 1992, Böll was dead and Koeppen had been silent for more than thirty years; the critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki called Koeppen's silence "Der Fall Koeppen," while West Germans were beginning to acknowledge their responsibility for the Holocaust (Reich-Ranicki, "Der Fall Koeppen").

Aufzeichnungen narrated the Holocaust in the relatable story of a Hungarian-born Jew, Jakob Littner, who co-owned a flourishing philately business in Munich when he was arrested in 1938 and expelled to his father's native Poland. However, after his entry to Poland was denied, Littner returned to Munich where on November 9 his business was devastated. He then escaped to Prague and Zbaracz, a small Galician town near Tarnopol in Western Ukraine. After the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, Littner, his companion Janina Korngold, and their son Richard were gathered with five thousand other Jews in the Zbaracz ghetto from where they managed to escape to the house of a Polish landowner who hid them in his basement until the arrival of the Red Army in March, 1944. After their liberation, Littner and Janina returned to Munich after the end of WWII to live initially with Christine Hintermeier, the co-owner of Littner's business, who had supported them by sending food and money to the ghetto and then to the Polish landowner.

Koeppen's book was the first volume in Suhrkamp's Jüdischer Verlag that began operations in 1992. Koeppen, who labelled his book a novel, claimed to have based his story on notes his original publisher received from Littner. Published in 1948 with Littner identified as its author, *Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch* was largely ignored, until it was republished as a novel in 1992 without textual changes, with a new foreword added by Koeppen who now appeared as the book's author. Koeppen indicated his connection with the events in an ambiguous manner: "Der Verleger berichtete mir das Unglaubliche. Ich hatte es geträumt. Der Verleger fragte mich: 'Willst du es schreiben?' … Ich aß amerikanische Konserven und schrieb die Leidensgeschichte eines deutschen Juden. Da wurde es meine Geschichte" (Koeppen 6).[2]

The reaction was overwhelming; however, critics began to question how Koeppen, who was not Jewish, could write a Holocaust novel about a Jewish survivor that revealed such intricate knowledge of life in Western Ukraine. Dagmar Lorenz called the publisher's replacement of the victim's name exploitation that resembled the exploitation Polish Jews had suffered through SS atrocities and regarded the controversy as a ploy by Suhrkamp. "Holocaust Literature by Jewish authors" Lorenz wrote, "was unpopular with the German public who preferred texts by Christian authors (…) over the documentaries by Jews" (237). Lorenz asks the crucial question: "how could Koeppen, a German non-Jew whose 'sufferings' during the war were obviously on a different

scale than those of his protagonist, feel that Littner's story was his own?" (237). Where did his obsession of identifying with the Jewish victim originate?

After it was uncovered that there had been a real Jakob Littner who lived in Munich after WWII, I decided to investigate this matter further and searched for records about Littner, who supposedly had emigrated to the United States (Görtz 1992). By consulting immigration files at the National Archives, I learned that Jakob and Janina Littner had indeed arrived in the United States in 1947, and that Jakob Littner had died in 1950. A further search led me to Littner's relatives in the United States, who had tried to sue Suhrkamp over the publication of the book. I discovered that Koeppen had indeed based his book on a manuscript by Littner that he then altered, and published under Littner's name in 1948. I found the original typed manuscript in the possession of Littner's nephew Kurt Grübler in Silver Springs, Maryland, where he had kept it under his bed for the last forty years, along with an English translation he had completed. As Grübler told me, from August to November 1945 his uncle had written down his experience in Munich under the title "Mein Weg durch die Nacht. Ein Dokument des Rassenhasses. Erlebnisbericht." A few chapters of Littner's original text were published in *Colloquia Germanica* in 1999, and in 2002 Berlin's Metropol Verlag released the complete text as part of Wolfgang Benz's "Bibliothek der Erinnerung," a work I edited with Roland Ulrich.[3]

Now that both texts were available for comparison, the debate took on a more academic tone and focused on two issues: was Koeppen legitimized to take Littner's text and publish it under his own name and was it legitimate to change a Holocaust text. In a two-page article *The Washington Post*'s editor Phil McCombs stated the first position: "You'd think by 1992 it would have been axiomatic not to alter a Holocaust memoir. This is sacred ground. Every detail, nuance, memory—no matter how terrible or banal—is precious" (McCombs). This judgment was echoed by Ruth Klüger who wrote that Koeppen's expropriation exhibited the ultimate "Aryan chutzpah" (Klüger, "Dichter" 141). She concurs that only the authentic document should survive, whereas any poetic interpretation would render the account of Jewish suffering untruthful: "Littner schrieb in der Sprache unserer von den Nazis ermordeten Väter mit ihrer feinen Mischung aus Pietät und Ironie, die ich in seinem Bildungsidiom wiedererkenne, auch und gerade dort, wo es den Enormitäten des Erlebten nicht gewachsen scheint" (141).[4] Klüger claims that a story of survival in a concentration camp will be read in a completely different way once we discover that the author is not reporting personal experiences but has written a fictional novel in the first person: "Hier hat einer aus der Tätergesellschaft, mochte er auch noch so einfühlsam sein und noch so gut schreiben können, dem Opfer das letzte genommen, was ihm geblieben war, nämlich das gelebte Leben und das Recht, seine Erinnerungen in

seinen eigenen Worten zu gestalten, so dass eine letzte Enteignung und Erniedrigung über das Grab hinaus stattfand" (141—42).[5]

Writing six years earlier as the editor of the *New Republic*, Ruth Franklin did not share Klüger's stern division between authentic material and literature. Franklin considers a hands-off approach to Holocaust literature as dangerous because it suppresses critical questions and adds that Koeppen "said only—and honestly—that he had fictionalized events that had happened to Littner" (Franklin, "Writer" 35). The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* in effect offered a compromise in a review that appeared before the original manuscript had been discovered: "Ein Hauch von Unredlichkeit liegt über der Entstehungsgeschichte dieses Romans. Und dennoch verfügt er über eine andere, vielleicht höhere Authentizität: Denn Koeppen ist es gelungen, das Grauenvolle, das tausendfach dokumentiert—und doch so schwer zu beschreiben ist, mit der dürren Vita Littners zu verschmelzen. Somit besitzt sein Buch zwar keine individuelle, wohl aber eine historische Wahrhaftigkeit" (Anonymous, *Der Spiegel* 1992, 232).[6] And therefore, the article concludes, Koeppen can tell us as much--and as little--about the Holocaust as Jakob Littner or anybody else.

Why did Koeppen change the text? The debate zeroed in on Koeppen's claim it had become "seine Geschichte" [his story] with supporters now seeing his approach in line with the author's existential writing and world view (Denneler 579). His statement "Ich hatte es geträumt" [I had dreamed it] (6) indicated his tendency to assume the identity of fictional characters, with the result of assuming the character's identity; Koeppen is indeed appropriating a Jewish existence. In the atmosphere of the 1990s when Germans were beginning to develop feelings of empathy for the ordeal Jews had gone through, Koeppen's remarks resonated with his audience.

For a comparative discussion of changes between authentic and fictional Holocaust texts *Aufzeichnungen* constitutes a unique entry point as its publication history covers 44 years from 1948 to 1992. Koeppen wanted to turn Littner's text into the kind of avantgarde text he had admired in Weimar Germany's literary scene and rejected Littner's intention to publish his experience as a traditional life story that he needed to reestablish his status as a businessman in Munich, as he himself wrote (Costazza 2006, 285—89). Beyond that, he wanted to become a role model to help survivors who came to Germany, as a quarter million Jews lived there after WW II, many of them in Munich, most of them as survivors from Eastern Europe (Grossman 131). The artist in Koeppen rejected Littner's "bourgeois" leadership aspirations and instead emphasized existential elements in the text that Koeppen himself had experienced when he left Nazi Germany for a number of years.

A key passage, Littner's arrest in his Munich apartment in 1938, provides crucial information about the changes Koeppen made to Litttner's text: "Es wurde mir lediglich gestattet, meine Geschäftsteilhaberin, Christine H., anzurufen. Diese erschien bald darauf mit ihrer Schwester, und ich konnte ihr die Schlüssel und die Kasse übergeben. Dann wurde ich zum Polizeirevier geführt" (Littner 4).[7] The text is very matter of fact and describes the events in diary form: there is no attempt to use artistic language and no attempt to delve into the feelings of the characters. It reads like a police report. In his version, Koeppen expands the passage greatly:

> Es war noch dunkel, als es an meiner Tür läutete. Ich wachte auf und sah, dass es erst fünf Uhr war. Ich wusste sofort, dass etwas Furchtbares auf mich zukam. Es gibt ein altes Gerücht, nach dem man um diese Zeit 'abgeholt' wird. Ich habe dem Gerücht nicht geglaubt. Ich habe es nicht beachtet. Aber als jetzt im schlafenden Haus meine alte Türglocke so merkwürdig schrill und fremd zu hören war, da wusste ich, es ist wahr, es ist so, sie sind da! (…) Meine nackten Füße liefen über den Teppich wie über brechendes Eis. Ich klammerte mich an den Türgriff, und sah mich zufällig im Spiegel der Flurgarderobe: einen keuchenden Mann in einem zu kurzen Hemd. (…) Meine Wohnung, ein Symbol meiner bürgerlichen Existenz, zerplatzte gleichsam vor meinem Auge, und ein Sturm wehte mich hinaus in das ungeschützte, vielleicht in das wahre Leben (…) Ich erwartete Schläge, Fußtritte, Schreie. (…) Vor der Wohnungstür im menschenleeren Treppenhaus stand aber nur der gemütliche Wachtmeister vom Revier. Wir waren alte Bekannte sozusagen, bis gestern hatten wir uns gegrüßt, wenn wir einander auf der Straße begegneten. Seine Stimme klang leise und mitleidig, als er sagte: 'Ich muss Sie verhaften, Herr Littner!' Dann maß er mich mit einem allmählich strenger werdenden Blick, als ob es ihn ärgerte, mich im Hemd zu sehen, und schrie barsch: "Ziehen Sie sich an!" (11—13).[8]

While Littner focuses only on the encounter between himself and the policeman, Koeppen expanded the scene to explore the emotions of both, Littner's feelings and his sense of loneliness and the policeman's confusion. To achieve this effect, Koeppen leaves out the contact with Littner's business partner, Christine, that Littner mentions, to focus on the exchange with the policeman who pities Littner and is obviously irritated by his task. In omitting Christine's character Littner appears more isolated in the existentialist context Koeppen intended to create. Setting and style seem familiar—this passage looks like a text from Kafka, such as the beginning of Joseph K's arrest in *Der Prozess*: "Jemand musste, Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne dass er etwas Böses getan hatte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet" (9).[9]

While Koeppen expands this scene in Littner's text to add more depth to the characters, there are other passages in Littner's text, such as his last summer

in his underground hideaway, that Koeppen treats very briefly: "Es ist Hochsommer oben in der Welt. Wir merken nichts davon. In unser Loch fällt kein Sonnenstrahl" (132).[10] Littner's original description includes a lot more detail:

> Der Sommer zog ins Land. Wir merkten nichts davon, wir lebten ja unter der Erde. Es wurde Juli, draußen musste nun die höchste Pracht der Natur entfaltet sein, gewiss brannte die Sonne mit verschwendeter Glut auf die Erdoberfläche. Wir aber kauerten fröstelnd, ewig feucht in der unterirdischen Verbannung. Droben herrschte Licht und Schönheit, hier unten Nacht. Nie war ich früher achtlos am Schönen vorbeigegangen, das uns der Schöpfer schenkte. Dankbar war ich stets, selbst für das Kleinste. (…) Auf einer glühenden Geige, singt nun der Sommer sein Lied. Erdwärts sich biegen die Zweige, sinken die Gräser ins Ried. Durst haben Wurzeln und Sprossen, Durst hat mein Herz, Durst, wie sie. Oft hat es Schönheit genossen, satt aber trank es sich nie. Wenn einst hinunter ich steige, Lethe zu trinken, dann zieht über die glühende Geige oben der Sommer sein Lied. (147—48).[11]

This is Littner's most poetic passage. His sources are obvious: German Romantic poets he had read in school, poems that Littner's entire generation had been exposed to. Romantic poetry was what literature meant for them, as it reflected their bourgeois background. Had Littner published his book in its intended form as a biographical narrative in 1948, he would have found his audience among his contemporaries more easily than Koeppen's modernist adaptation that was largely ignored. The failure of Littner's book was not only due to the cultural and social clash between Koeppen and Littner, between the middle-class citizen attempting to reclaim his social status in post-Holocaust Germany and the artist who chose to separate himself. Above all, the scene illustrates the dilemma German Holocaust Studies has faced from its very beginning: As Steiner has discussed, the continuation of traditional literary modes was not possible as it implied a continuation of Germany's literary traditions that neither of them wanted to see. In the Romantic passage in which Littner tried to show the "abyss" the Holocaust meant to him, Koeppen remained silent as he disliked Littner's cliché. Koeppen's text however is not without clichés either, such as the image of the apartment in the first example, the symbol of Littner's bourgeois existence that "zerplatzte gleichsam vor meinem Auge, und ein Sturm wehte mich hinaus in das Ungeschützte" (12).[12] But for today's reader Koeppen seems to have found the appropriate form as readers identify more with Koeppen than with Littner's attempt to relativize the reality of the Holocaust by thinking of the natural world in the terms of German Romanticism.

The biggest change however is Koeppen's editing of Littner's relationship with religion. For his novel, Koeppen constructed a man who had not been concerned with religious issues, an assimilated Jew who finds his way back to

God only in the Holocaust hell, in the dirty hole in the ground, that turns into a true conversion story. The real Littner however had been a pious man whose faith had been strengthened by his Holocaust experience, a fact that Heiko Döring established by comparing the arrest scenes where Munich's Jews wait for their expulsion to Poland: "Draußen ging ein kalter Herbstregen nieder und langsam, langsam nur reihte sich eine Stunde an die andere. Etwas abseits hatte sich eine Gruppe Juden—der ich mich anschloss, zum Gebet versammelt" (8).[13] Koeppen alters this scene:

> Wir waren uns keiner Schuld bewusst; wir wurden wie vom Regen getroffen und beschuldigt, weil uns der Zufall der Geburt zu Juden und der Lauf der Welt zu Polen gemacht hatte. Ich bin kein frommer Mann gewesen, aber in dieser Nacht der Not beschäftigte mich der Gedanke an Gott. Er beunruhigte und beruhigte mich in einem, und da ich an ihn dachte, wusste ich, dass ein Gott ist und dass er mich behüten wird. Ich gehörte nicht zu dem Kreis der Juden, die im Hintergrund des Ganges sich gegen die Wand lehnten und beteten. Ich hatte seit den Tagen meiner Kindheit keinen Juden öffentlich beten sehen. Ich hätte vor kurzer Zeit noch dazu geneigt, die Betenden mit einem Lächeln überlegener Skepsis zu betrachten. (16)[14]

What stands out in Koeppen's text is the introduction of guilt, a guilt that his Littner does not feel because he does not understand the reason for being persecuted. In Koeppen's passage Littner examines his life like an anthropologist who contemplates the question whether Jewish assimilation had been a total failure that is the cause of the disaster. Koeppen rejects Littner's belief in predestination that will steer him through the experience, and changes his experience to one of question and eventual rediscovery of his belief. That explains why Koeppen leaves out some of the later dramatic events in Littner's account, such as the SS raid where almost everyone was either recaptured or killed except for Littner and his family who felt God had protected them. For Littner, these events were signs from God that confirmed his belief.

Littner's description is more prosaic and matter of fact: God has sent him underground with Janina to test his faith. Koeppen rejected this attitude and changed it to a personal encounter with Judaism by reconfiguring Littner as a character in danger of losing his faith that he miraculously regained in the moment of his greatest danger, the underground hideout (Costazza, "Verarbeitung" 291—94). This alteration is Koeppen's most radical transformation of Littner's authentic text and explains the latter's comment to his nephew Kurt Grübler that Koeppen mispresented his life: "Das ist nicht mein Buch" (qtd. by Estermann 154).

Towards the end of the book, Koeppen begins to invent an entire passage that is only concerned with the misery Germans had to endure—he seems no longer

concerned with the Jewish experience. Döring calls this Koeppen's "simplistic analysis of fascism," and his own "conquering of the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), in which he highlights his ethical intentions for rewriting the text (329). The authentic Littner is now ready to forgive all Germans: "Möchten sich die Herzen doch alle, gleich welcher Rasse und Religion, versöhnen!" (13),[15] a goal that as a devout religious man he hopes he can help to accomplish, while Koeppen's Littner cannot and will not forgive, as Koeppen's experience of the Nuremberg trials made this conclusion impossible (134).

Koeppen's motivation for these modifications becomes more evident in a two-page summary at the end of the text. Koeppen's Littner is beginning to wonder what to do with the functionaries of murder. There can be no punishment which would restore the murder victims to life and thereby nullify the injustice. Since justice has ceased to exist in this world one must at last stop the killing, since sentencing SS members to death would only be an act of vengeance, but not justice. For Koeppen, the question of guilt and justice played a central role in his writing and could have been the prime motive for editing Littner's text.

The analysis reveals how Littner's conservative middle-class Judaism was anchored in a solid belief in religion that did not change through the experience of the Holocaust. In fact, it was confirmed. Where Littner saw continuation, Koeppen saw a fundamental break that manifested itself in his reworking of Littner's experience from an assimilated secular Jewish identity to a newly found belief in religion. Koeppen also saw Littner as a citizen who was so shaken by the experience that he had to change and begin a new life. As a result, Koeppen's story appears more realistic, since Littner was not able to restart his former life in Munich, as planned, but emigrated to the United States where he set up a new life.

In 1995, the Swiss musician Binjamin Wilkomirski wrote a memoir that he called *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948.* Like Koeppen's, Wilkomirski's book was published by Suhrkamp's Jüdischer Verlag and became another popular German-language Holocaust text. In the United States, it was published as *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood.* When the Swiss journalist and novelist Daniel Ganzfried watched Wilkomirski at a public presentation of his book he felt uneasy and, after fact-checking some details of the book, found inconsistencies. On the basis of further research he published his findings in an article entitled "Die geliehene Holocaust-Biographie" in the Swiss weekly *Die Weltwoche* on 28 August 1998.[16] In 1999, at the request of Wilkomirski's Swiss literary agent, the Swiss historian Stefan Maechler researched Ganzfried's claim that Wilkomirski had produced a fake survivor story and falsely claimed a Jewish life for himself. His study corroborated the facts that Ganzfried had

presented in his initial article in *Die Weltwoche*. Wilkomirski was in fact a Swiss Protestant who was born to an unwed mother named Yvonne Grosjean in Biel, Switzerland, on 12 February 1941. After being placed in a children's home in the Alpine village of Adelboden, he was put up for adoption in 1945 and initially assigned to a childless upper middle-class couple resident in Zurich, the Dössekkers, as foster parents. By the time he entered school in Zurich in 1947, he had become their adopted son and was now called Dössekker rather than Grosjean. Just why he invented a Jewish survivor story remains unclear. Ganzfried has subsequently argued that Wilkomirski's book, along with the effort of reliving the Holocaust, was a scheme to fill the moral vacuum that the disappearance of communism had left. He further argued that Wilkomirski's "pornography of brutality" was a ploy to satisfy an audience and a market greedy for more Holocaust books. In his charge, Ganzfried echoes Norman Finkelstein's complicity scheme in his 2000 book *The Holocaust Industry*. What Finkelstein calls manipulated industry, Ganzfried calls "Holocaust-Travestie" ("Die Auschwitz-Travestie" 231).[17]

Wilkomirski's book presents a survivor experience as a first-person narrative by using simple language from the point of view of a young child who seems overwhelmed. The first memory that is presented is that of a man being crushed by uniformed guards against the wall of a house; the narrator is clearly too young for a more precise recollection, but the reader is led to infer that it is his father who is crushed. Later on, the narrator and his brother hide in a farmhouse in Poland before being arrested and interned in a Nazi concentration camp, where they watch their mother die. After his liberation, the narrator is brought to an orphanage in Cracow and then to Switzerland.

As Wilkomirski's psychologist revealed, *Bruchstücke* was the product of unsuccessful therapy, and Wilkomirski believed that his memory had become extended through his therapeutic "journaling" (Maechler 76). In her defense of Wilkomirski's approach, Renata Salecl reasons that trauma survivors tend to have trouble reporting their experience that often results in a split identity, with parts of them related to their present lives, and others to the past; similarly, Holocaust survivors tend to see their current lives as separate from their past traumatic experience. Although Wilkomirski had ostensibly learned from his treatment that his own early childhood memory consisted of disconnected time and place fragments, the narrator in his book appears unusually confident about the accuracy of his memory. When trauma specialists analyzed his text, they did not detect a split identity in the protagonist, nor did the text reveal any alienation from the "self" (Salecl). On the contrary, the author seemed to have complete control over his writing and describes how trauma elicits a strong

empathetic reaction in the reader; Wilkomirski acts as a knowledgeable manipulator of his readers' response (Maechler 78).

Calling Wilkomirski's book manipulation is justified since at the core of the narrative lies his appeal for empathy and a connection with the Holocaust victim, as the enthusiastic reception revealed. I am not criticizing the outrage over Wilkomirski's text but, although I agree with Ganzfried's claim that the publishing industry may have been overly interested in a potential Holocaust bestseller and accepted Wilkomirski's fantasy without checking, I would not go as far as Ganzfried and describe the entire affair as a complicity to promote Holocaust empathy. The empathy was not fabricated but created by political developments in Germany during the 1990 s that German-language speakers in Switzerland wanted to connect with for their own reasons: a financial settlement in 1998 which covered claimants to dormant Swiss accounts, refugees denied Swiss asylum, and victims of slave labor. Anne Whitehead argues that "Wilkomirski's Holocaust text provides a powerful voice against the claims of conservatives and traditionalists, in insisting that Switzerland is not a beautiful country, and that it was implicated in ways which it would prefer not to acknowledge in the Nazi persecution of the Jews" (136).

Wilkomirski's text found its defenders, who believe that it helps in connecting with the Holocaust to unveil truths about its effects on the contemporary imagination. As in Koeppen's version of Littner's story, *Bruchstücke* departs from testimony and enters the realm of fiction, most notably in Wilkomirski's deliberate use of a child's perspective. *Bruchstücke* also reveals the power of the Holocaust as a story, not only as it connects the individual imagination with the political and cultural discourse (Whitehead 135). James Young argues that "to remove the Holocaust from the realm of the imagination (…) is to risk excluding it altogether from public consciousness. Better abused memory in this case, which might then be critically qualified, than no memory at all" (133). And Blake Eskin reminds us that Wilkomirski's impulse to accept a fake identity is shared by many who need a story to identify with, and "in doing so we gave him substance, we made him real" (241).

Among earlier fake Holocaust memoirs that Wilkomirski may have incorporated into his book was Jerzy Kosinski's 1965 *The Painted Bird*, translated into German in the same year as *Der bemalte Vogel*, and Jona Oberski's 1978 *Kinderjaren*, translated into English in 1983 as *Childhood* but not into German as *Kinderjahre* until 2016. It is the memoir of a Dutch boy who was deported to Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen and lacked an adult narrator's commentary as well:

> "Don't be afraid. Everything's all right. I'm right here." The hand on my cheek was my mother's. Her face was close to mine. I could hardly see her. She whispered and stroked my hair. It was dark. The walls were wood. There was a funny smell. It sounded like there were other people there. My mother lifted my head up and pushed her arm under it. She hugged me and kissed me on the cheek. I asked her where my father was. (1)

Bruchstücke opens with an implicit pact, in which, albeit fake, the author vouches that his book is based on accurate and truthful childhood memories. He states that he is not a poet, but that he can only remember "shards" (Bruchstücke) of memory that resemble a "Trümmerfeld" (rubble field), and are "Brocken des Erinnerns, die sich immer wieder beharrlich dem Ordnungswillen des erwachsen Gewordenen widersetzen und den Gesetzen der Logik entgleiten" (8—9).[18] He decides to give up this logical order and write down whatever he can remember. The difference between Oberski's child perspective that he never abandons to tell his story from a child's view and Wilkomirski's self-consciously juvenile text, narrated from an adult perspective, is the result of self-reflective reconstruction of memory. Alessandro Costazza called this text a conscious manipulation of the reader and, although he refrains from criminalizing the author, he labels the text "shoah kitsch" (219), a verdict that sums up Germans' sense of abuse and betrayal by Wilkomirski for his deliberate manipulation of their empathy.

Benjamin Stein, who grew up in East Berlin, rewrote Wilkomirski's story into the thriller novel *Die Leinwand*, published in 2010, in which the characters were renamed; Wilkomirski became Minsky, Ganzfried became Wechsler, and Minsky's psychiatrist became Zichroni. Stein's novel does not focus on the Holocaust story but on the effect it has had on the perception of the Holocaust, and he questions the reliability of memory. In his story, Wechsler exposes Minsky's fraud and, by doing so, discredits both Minsky and Zichroni, the psychiatrist, while Wechsler (Ganzfried) realizes how unreliable his own memory is. With this question, we have moved beyond the authenticity debate and, at the same time, the intention of the author and closer to answering what the purpose of Holocaust literature for the current generation is. The focus moves toward readers and how to educate the current readership to communicate information and emotions and ask what constitutes a reliable voice to express the feelings these texts will invariably evoke.

Stein's motivation for rewriting the story originates in his belief that the human brain is incapable of producing reliable memories. In a review of *Bruchstücke*, Stein described a meeting with Wilkomirski and how he was impressed with his story and his sensitive personality (Bruchstücke). The premise of Stein's

story is Minsky's unreliable memory, but above all, Wechsler's (Ganzfried's) attitude towards the ostensible Holocaust victim. The Wechsler part of the book is a tale of amnesia as he, Wechsler, first presents himself as a contented German citizen, born in East Berlin to Jewish parents, but soon finds out that there is another Wechsler, a Swiss citizen, celebrated for having exposed the Minsky hoax. In the confusion that he shares with his reader, Wechsler eventually admits that he is as much a fraud as the accused Minsky. By turning Wechsler (Ganzfried), the German/Swiss witness and judge of the Holocaust story, into an unreliable witness, Stein reassesses the Wilkomirski affair, in which the author had been the sole culprit, and shifts the blame to the accuser.

The overwhelmingly positive response to this book indicates that Stein hit a nerve with the current generation. The idea of turning the story into a thriller played a significant role, as did the open end and Stein's admission that he had no answers to what happened to any of the characters. Silke Horstkotte interprets the book as strong evidence that German-language authors were moving away from authenticity to the more important question of identity. Who is a Jew, who is a German, who is a Swiss Jew and, most importantly, who has the right to ask questions about the past? As Stein's book argues, the lack of a commonly accepted reality dissolves the ambiguity between fictional and authentic Holocaust stories and opens the field to literary experimentation (Horstkotte 131).

In 2001 German-British writer and academic W. G. Sebald published his last novel, *Austerlitz*, which will be discussed as a powerful response to Koeppen's and Wilkomirski's attempts to adjust the Holocaust narrative for a German audience. Sebald's fiction is a response to Germany's failed postwar literary attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past. Sebald often cited the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard as his model, with his long-winded sentences, his hyperbolic style, "his repetition mechanism and his self-exploitation machine" (Falcke), all of which can be found in Sebald's books. Bernhard's most political novel is his 1986 *Auslöschung*, the last book before his death. The self-destructive energy of the novel's protagonist, Murau, originates in Austria's collaboration with the Nazi occupiers whose memory needs to be extinguished, and with it his own identity, that of his family and lastly the family estate of Wolfsegg that he bequeaths to the Jewish community of Vienna. Sebald imitates Bernhard's writing style and his obsession with the Nazi past but overcomes Bernhard's self-destructive attitude with his more inclusive and forgiving style.

Jacques Austerlitz, the main character in Sebald's book, is an architectural historian who encounters and befriends the narrator during the 1960 s to whom he then tells his story. Austerlitz had come to Britain in 1939 as a Jewish refugee

on a *Kindertransport* and was adopted by a Welsh preacher. Only after his foster parents had died, does he find out about his Jewish background. Travelling to Prague, he meets Vera, a friend of his lost parents, and hears about his mother, an opera singer who was deported to the Theresienstadt (or Terezín) camp. At the center of the book is a video copy of the Nazi propaganda film *Theresienstadt: Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet* about the ghetto in which he believes he recognizes his mother. Vera confirms the identity of Austerlitz's mother in a photograph of an actress that Austerlitz finds in a Prague archive.

Sebald's novel is an experiment in fusing the fictional Austerlitz figure, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, with that of the narrator, who is not Jewish. The frequent meetings of the two middle-aged men focus on their mutual interest in Austerlitz' life. Austerlitz needs a person to hear his story, and the narrator develops an increasing curiosity about his life as a Holocaust survivor. Sebald's technique of using complex sentences is important for combining various sources in the text: the narrator who introduces Austerlitz's story in indirect discourse, Austerlitz who relates his own experiences, and conversations with Vera that are also recounted in indirect discourse. Sebald's most important source is the description of Theresienstadt by H. G. Adler, a Holocaust survivor, writer, and intellectual, who was imprisoned in Terezín for two and one-half years before being deported to Auschwitz. Adler's study of the ghetto, *Theresienstadt 1941—1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*, was published in 1955 as the first scholarly monograph devoted to a single camp and became a foundational work for Holocaust Studies. Adler wrote to a friend in 1947 about his plans for the volume, "The subject is approached in a strictly scientific manner, thanks to the vast amount of documentary material that I have collected. At the same time, it is readable and vivid, a Kafka novel in reverse, in that it evokes a real world. Anyone who makes the effort to read its … pages will really have been in the camp" (Atze 136).

Sebald included in *Austerlitz* Adler's copy of the plan of the camp, the reproduction of a page from the section entitled "Soziologie" consisting of a list of fifty-two different places in the camp where the prisoners had to work with the original page number 434 from Adler's book (340). *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm* plays a major role in his book. It is a black-and-white film shot in the concentration camp that Adler relates in his book through still images. In Sebald's book, Austerlitz explains what he learned from Adler's work in an almost ten-page-long sentence, as the narrator reports to the fictitious Austerlitz what he found in Adler's book. The effect this passage has on the reader with its many embedded layers of reporting is that nobody seems to have first-hand knowledge, certainly not Sebald or his fictional narrator, nor the fictional Austerlitz, nor the real author Adler who had only listened to the sound track of the

Nazi movie, but had not seen it himself. It seems obvious that Sebald wants his reader to be involved in the exploration of this complex web.

Austerlitz' quest provides the central structure for the book that serves as an artistic example for exploring memory through fiction, or rather, a combination of real and fictional elements. Therefore the fictional exploration of the material provides the book's tension, as the narrator's and Austerlitz's explorations begin with their personal experiences that are gradually expanded to include the Holocaust and its meaning for Austerlitz. Sebald's unique method of incorporating images that may or may not be authentic helps to anchor the narrative in the real world, as objects become a memory anchor. However, the ambiguity of whether these objects or images are real or not is part of the strategy, as Sebald's narrative creates its own space between fiction and reality.

A comparison between two passages about the Nazi propaganda film, one from Adler's *Theresienstadt* and the other from Sebald's *Austerlitz*, clarifies the relationship between these two books:

> Der neue Film (…) sollte das exaltierte Theresienstadt so übertrieben darstellen, dass ja deutlich werde, wie gut es den Juden ginge, dass sie keine Sorgen hätten, nach wie vor die bekannten Parasiten wären, die für nichts anderes Zeit hätten als für Unfug, Kaffeehaus und ein Leben in Vergnügen und Luxus, während die braven "Arier" verbluteten oder sich wenigstens zu Tode arbeiteten. (…) Dafür sah man Wohlleben und Lustbarkeiten, wie sie ein maskiertes "Paradiesghetto" nur zu bieten hatte. Ausgesprochen 'jüdische Typen' wurden ausgewählt, und jeder sollte vor Gesundheit strotzen. (Adler 179—80)[19]

Adler comments on Nazi propaganda in his restrained scientific style as he saw himself as a sociologist and captured the Nazis' intentions and the effect the propaganda movie was supposed to have.

Sebald does not follow Adler's description, but interprets the scene with different metaphors:

> ein potemkinsches, möglicherweise sogar manche seiner Insassen betörendes oder doch mit gewissen Hoffnungen erfüllendes Eldorado, (…) ein alles in allem beruhigendes Schauspiel, das die Deutschen nach Beendigung der "Visite," sei es zu Propagandazwecken, sei es zur Legitimierung ihres ganzen Vorgehens vor sich selber, in einem Film festhalten ließen. (Sebald 344—45).[20]

Sebald does not comment but instead uses Adler's descriptions without many changes. His comments on the event's fictionality stand out, such as Potemkin, Eldorado, spectacle, and are used to recreate the propaganda goal of the event that overshadows the description. Adler on the other hand, emphasized the

difference in the lives of the two groups, Aryans and Jews, and the fakeness of their coexistence that the sociologist recognized as propagandistic intention.

In his constructed character Austerlitz, Sebald uses a fictitious survivor "to come to terms with the narrator's own internal landscape" (Budick 212). Or, as Kirstin Gwyer writes, "Sebald's attempt to draw Adler into an intertextual dialogue suggests a view of their relationship as one of equals" (122). Sebald seems to attribute to Adler a methodology in which "individual memory" is subordinated to "collective memory" to accurately and objectively recall as many "real details" through the latter as possible (Wolff 29). Or, more simply put, Sebald's narrator needs Austerlitz' story to become part of the collective memory in an irrational way that contradicts traditional ways of reasoning. The academic Sebald had stated that academic writing always felt false to him as it assumed a certain kind of "nineteenth-century" rationality that was hard to justify for writing about the Holocaust.

Austerlitz' search for his mother reinforces his experience of operating in a surreal space. In order to find a picture of his lost mother, he looks at the Nazi propaganda film and initially finds nothing. Only in a slow-motion copy of the movie does a face appear in a corner of the picture for a short time, in which he believes he recognizes his mother. However, the person is unknown and Austerlitz finds the real face of his mother only on an old theater photo. He still cannot be certain if what he sees is true. This uncertainty of finding proof in the old images establishes the constituting element of the text in which objects are not anchors, but approximations that help in restructuring our memories. Austerlitz's or Adler's method helps the narrator (or Sebald) to get closer to the memory experience that can be shared with the reader. Although we cannot be certain of either the space or location of memory, the search itself is the crucial element to fill the void for those who are searching.

After Adler had completed the first volume of his *Theresienstadt* monograph in 1948 he continued to explore his Holocaust experience with his own novel, in the experimental *Eine Reise* written in 1951. In his afterword to the 1999 German edition of the novel, Adler's son Jeremy claims that when Peter Suhrkamp, head of the rising Suhrkamp Verlag, was offered the manuscript, he reacted with a "Wutanfall: 'Solange ich lebe,' sagte er, 'wird dieses Buch in Deutschland nicht gedruckt'" (310). Ruth Franklin includes this quote in her essay on Adler's novel and speculates that Suhrkamp's reaction originates in the hybrid nature of the book between fiction and reportage, which was asking a lot of his German readers (Franklin, "Master" 2011). Whether or not this fierce rejection actually took place, it would take over ten years for the book to appear in 1962.

When compared to the immediate and eager acceptance of Adler's study *Theresienstadt*, the reasons for the German aversion to fictionalized Holocaust books becomes clearer. After WWII, when Germans were just beginning to comprehend the magnitude of the events that had happened, writing fictionalized accounts of the atrocities seemed irresponsible as they could easily misrepresent facts that could be used by ex-Nazis for their own agenda. From this discussion, it is evident that the willingness to engage with the Holocaust in a fictional form needed to wait. This also explains why the 1992 Littner-Koeppen debate was necessary to expose the fundamental rift between the two sides, represented by two Jewish intellectuals, Ruth Klüger and Ruth Franklin. While Klüger is a Holocaust survivor and Austrian academic who has lived and worked in the United States most of her adult life, Franklin, younger than Klüger and writing in English, has a very different approach. As a member of the survivor generation Klüger reflects on the fact that her entire life was based on misrepresenting her age during the selection process at Auschwitz. Of course, every detail about Littner's experience in his book mattered to her since "Littner schrieb in der Sprache unserer von den Nazis ermordeten Väter" (2006, 141),[21] a language that she was afraid would, when changed, also be expropriated like Jewish property had been by the Nazis. Franklin, as a member of the postmemory generation, expresses contemporary needs when she states that "there can be no […] authentic document, because all written texts are in some way mediated. To consider any text 'pure testimony,' completely free from aestheticizing influences and narrative conventions, is naïve" (2013, 11). Both positions were and are justified, in their time and for their audience. Klüger's need to preserve Holocaust testimonies does not exclude that both can coexist, the authentic text and the literary adaption, modified for a current audience. Literarization is often the only way to reach younger readers.

The intense debate about Koeppen's Littner book was necessary to reveal not only the need for literature, but also to sanction the freedom German authors like Koeppen took to serve as a bridge for our generation. While the original edition of Koeppen's book, attributed at the time to an unknown Jakob Littner, did not have a large reception in Germany in 1948 since readers had to deal with more immediate issues in the post-WWII chaos, the situation was very different in 1992 when the book, now with the renowned Koeppen as author, was read as an authentic glimpse into post-WWII mentality. As German audiences were ready to engage in a thorough Holocaust discussion, they needed Koeppen's book as a tool to clarify their opinions. It contained the entire forty-year-long post-Holocaust debate like a time capsule: Koeppen's outdated perception of Jews as idealistic people, not as the middle-class citizens they had been, and his idea of an idealized self-reflective Jew whose experience as a Holocaust survi-

vor changed his life and who, in Koeppen's view, should also change Germany. While Germany was not ready for such a transformative experience in 1948, it would take more than forty years for this debate to take place.

Similarly, Wilkomirski's book was without doubt conceived as a transformative experience for an audience that wanted to learn about the Holocaust. Wilkomirski was able to connect with readers who sympathized with his psychological problems that were similar to those of Holocaust survivors. *Bruchstücke* was troubling, but also comforting, with its child-like perspective that could have provided a German foundational text in its postmemory literature similar to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in the United States. Both, Koeppen's transformed story and Wilkomirski's child fantasies, were second-hand memory adaptations, or postmemory literature. Benjamin Stein's experiment with the text is a powerful argument for fictionalizing the Holocaust with his claim that no memory is truly authentic. Therefore, the answer to Silke Horstkotte's question "Who owns the Holocaust?" should be: The survivors and the perpetrators or, as I would argue, all of us, historians, literary scholars and the readers of the texts. We all need to find a responsible way to treat survivor memories that are the basis for literary transformations. How far can such literary adaptation go? Can it include fictional or satirical elements? Is a complete fabrication like *Bruchstücke* acceptable, as more of these stories will certainly come forward? A redirection of Holocaust literature away from its producer and the author towards the reader and the reception will become increasingly important.

Sebald's *Austerlitz* has been praised as an outstanding example of blending fact and fiction. By linking Austerlitz's personal trauma to Sebald's quest the book explores personal memory as a link to social memory. As in Koeppen's and Wilkomirski's story, we discover a German imposter in Sebald's story. A photograph ostensibly taken by Austerlitz of himself and given to the narrator shows someone looking a lot like Sebald reflected in a shopping window in Terezín that the photograph records. Here we witness a first indication that the author and the narrator might be the same person. Once we acknowledge this fact, it would be easy to assume that even the novel character Austerlitz might have the characteristics of a real person, perhaps Adler, or perhaps someone else, a composite of Austerlitz and Adler. But Sebald's suspended belief in the real makes this kind of storytelling possible, especially if we remember the author's intention of writing for his own generation, a post-Holocaust German. We, the readers or the viewers of the photograph, have now also become part of the story.

Sebald's exploratory "postmodern" style (Zilcosky 681) addresses our current need to understand the Holocaust beyond basic factual information. Katrin Kohl has explored how Sebald constructed his narrative as a fairy tale that gives the

imagination "free rein" to transcend time (105). Similarly, Martin Modlinger showed that Sebald, like Adler, had returned to Kafka's style to explore "the darkness of history" (221). With its open and flexible style Sebald's book can address multiple audiences of Jews and Gentiles, Germans and Americans, of any generation, who are united in their attempt to understand and become part of the Holocaust memory. With his style Sebald seems to have found a path towards a narrative that opens the Holocaust for a universal application. As fewer and fewer Holocaust memoirs will appear, we will focus more on fictionalizing the trauma and on the limitations writers need in experimenting with this sensitive topic.

Notes

1 I want to thank Ted Fiedler for editing this essay that appears twenty years after Ted first presented the Koeppen/Littner case in *Colloquia Germanica* 32. 2 (1999).

2 The publisher reported the unbelievable facts. I had dreamed it. The publisher asked me: "Do you want to write it?" […] I ate American canned food and wrote the story of the suffering of a German Jew. And so it became my own story.

3 Ruth Franklin also discovered that Kurt Grübler, the author of the American translation of Littner's book under the title *Journey Through the Night*, took some liberties with the text although he "goes out of his way to convince the reader that the book is an authentic representation of Littner's manuscript" (Franklin, *Darknesses* 168—78). Iris Denneler claims that Grübler's changes affected the text more than Koeppen's editing (593). However, unlike Koeppen, Grübler never hid his authorship and was proud of his translation, which he did not want to see altered.

4 Littner wrote in the language of our fathers murdered by the Nazis, with their fine mixture of piety and irony, which I recognize in his writing, especially where it does not seem to match the enormity of the experience

5 Here, one of the perpetrators, no matter how sensitive and able he writes, took away from the victim the last thing he had left, his own life and the right to shape his memories in his own words with the result that the expropriation and humiliation will continue beyond his grave.

6 An air of dishonesty hangs over the story of the genesis of this novel. Nevertheless, the novel commands a different, perhaps higher authenticity. For Koeppen has succeeded in combining the terrible things that happened, that have been documented a thousand times and yet are so difficult to describe,

with the dry vita of Littner. Thus, his book has no singular, but a historical truthfulness.

7 I was only allowed to call my business partner, Christine H. She appeared soon with her sister, and I could give her the keys and the cash register. Then I was taken to the police station.

8 It was still dark when my doorbell rang. I woke up and saw that it was 5:00. I knew immediately that something terrible was looming. A rumor says they pick you up at that time. I did not believe the rumor. But now, when my old doorbell sounded so strange and shrill in the silent house, I knew it is true, it's so, they are there (…) My naked feet ran over the carpet as if it were breaking ice. I hung on to the door knob and happened to see myself in the hall mirror: a fat wheezing man in a nightshirt that was too short. (…) My apartment, the symbol of my bourgeois existence, virtually exploded in front of my eyes, and a storm blew me away into the unprotected, perhaps true, life. (..) I expected being hit, by boots, to be screamed at. (…) In front of the door in the empty stairwell was our nice district policeman. We were old acquaintances; until yesterday we had greeted each other in the street. His voice sounded quiet and pitying when he said: "I have to arrest you, Herr Littner!" Then his demeanor became more judgmental as if my nightshirt irritated him and he screamed: "Put some clothes on!" This is my own translation since, due to complications with the German publication, Koeppen's book was never translated into English.

9 Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested.

10 In the world above it is midsummer. We see nothing of that. No ray of sun reaches our hole.

11 The summer moved into the country. We did not notice, we lived underground. It was July, outside the highest splendor of nature had by now appeared; the sun was surely burning the earth's surface with intense glow. But we crouched, eternally damp in the subterranean banishment. Above there was light and beauty, down here night. Never before had I passed carelessly by the beauty the creator gave us. I was always thankful, even for the smallest things. (…) On a glowing violin summer sings its song. Branches are bending downwards; leaves are dropping unto the field. Roots and sprouts are thirsty, my heart is thirsty too as they are. It often indulged in beauty, but never got enough. When I will descend to drink from Lethe, then summer sings its song on the glowing violin above.

12 … exploded in front of my eyes, and a storm blew me away into the unprotected …

13 Outside, a cold autumn rain set in slowly, very slowly, hour after hour passes. Off to the side a group of Jews whom I joined had gathered for prayer.

14 We were not aware of any guilt; we were hit as if we were pelted by rain and accused because we happened to be Jews by birth and Poles through our life experience. I have not been a pious man, but in this night of need the thought of God occupied me. It unsettled and calmed me at the same time, and when I thought of him I knew that there is a God and that he will protect me. I did not belong to the circle of Jews who leaned against the wall in the back and prayed. Since the days of my childhood I had not seen a Jew praying publicly. Until recently I would have been inclined to look at the praying with a skeptical smile of superiority.

15 … all hearts be reconciled, no matter what race and religion!

16 Ganzfried includes his initial article in *Die Weltwoche* in his narrative "Die Holocaust-Travestie" that appeared in the volume … *alias Wilkomirski. Die Holocaust-Travestie* (110—18).

17 Ganzfried's article is based on a presentation at a symposium at the *Literarisches Colloquium* in Berlin (26—29 November 2000) and precedes his longer narrative of 2002 in … a*lias Wilkomirski.*

18 "Shards of memory … that keep surfacing against the orderly grain of grown-up life and escaping the laws of logic."

19 The new film was supposed to exaggerate the exalted Theresienstadt in such an exaggerated way that it would become clear how well the Jews were doing, that they had no worries, were still the known parasites who had time for nothing but mischief, coffeehouses, and a life of pleasure and luxury, while the good 'Aryans' bled to death or at least worked themselves to death. (….) On the other hand, one saw the well-being and enjoyment that a masked "paradise ghetto" had to offer … pronounced 'Jewish types' were selected, and everyone should be bursting with health.

20 A Potemkin village or sham Eldorado, which may have dazzled even some of the inhabitants themselves, its inmates beguiling or perhaps fulfilling with some hopes of Eldorado, (…) a most reassuring spectacle, all things considered, which the Germans, whether for propaganda purposes, or in order to justify their actions and conduct to themselves, thought fit after the end of the Red Cross visit to record in a film.

21 … wrote in the language of our parents murdered by the Nazis.

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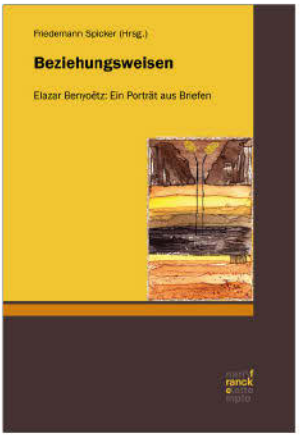

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