Repentance for the Holocaust

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In May 1988 the Jewish community in Germany was shaken to its core by a scandal that no one seemed to have had the least inkling of: it was discovered that Werner Nachmann, the former president of the Zentralrat who had passed away in January that year, had embezzled millions from German reparation payments, or the so-called Wiedergutmachung funds, dedicated to persecuted Jewish survivors.¹ Heinz Galinski, Nachmann’s forerunner and...
successor, called the development “the gravest crisis since 1945.”

Indeed, only a few months before, Galinski had spoken about the need for more “transparency” in Jewish life in order to fight prejudice. Now his words were put to the severest of tests. It was feared that the scandal would spark a new wave of antisemitism and that even well-justified reparation measures would be indiscriminately affected in the future.

None of this came to be, however. The German press, with neither coordination nor external pressure, exercised remarkable moderation in treating this explosive and otherwise ruinous development. The major weekly from Hamburg, Die Zeit, ran at first only minimal coverage of the scandal, warning German readers—as if taking a page straight from the Diem-Thielicke book (P8)—that such an example of “human weakness” should not divert Germans from their own guilt: “The Jewish community must do all it can to clean up the table. . . . We, the others, however, have to watch out for self-righteous pharisaism. Nachmann has probably brought guilt upon himself. That does not lessen the guilt of the Germans.”

Antisemitism did flare up here and there on the margins, including the unsubstantiated accusation that Galinski might have embezzled more than Nachmann had. But, by and large, as international observers noted, “the German press was extraordinarily restrained” in its handling of the Nachmann affair, which should have elicited a huge response in the media. The sharpest critiques of the wrongdoer and the postwar German-Jewish establishment


came, in fact, from Jewish and Israeli authors, with the voices of Henryk M. Broder and Maxim Biller among the most critical to be heard in this period concerning Jewish and Israeli issues related to the Nachmann scandal.7

In a wide-ranging article built on this theme that was published in Die Zeit in 1989, Broder called attention to a problem that he called “the victims of the victims.” “Without Hitler,” began his article, “Berlin would still be the capital of the German Reich . . . and Werner Nachmann would never have [had] the chance to embezzle millions from the reparation funds.”8 The son of Jewish Holocaust survivors himself, Broder first rebelled against the survivor generation for making unbearable demands on their children. Already before Martin Walser, Broder complained about the “Holocaust club” (P7): “It pissed me off that I could not lead a life like my non-Jewish friends, whose parents were entirely normal in their unbearability and not so burdened like mine, who dragged out the concentration camp club (KZ-Keule) even on the most trivial occasions.”9 Broder lamented the “continuation of the victim role,” which was, according to him, implicit in the uncritical use of the “second generation” label for the children of Holocaust survivors.

Like Broder, Biller used the Nachmann affair to call on his fellow “second generation” Jews to engender a new, critical attitude toward their own “victimhood” and the other’s “perpetratorship.” He went even further—or too far—coining the term “Nachmann-Jews” (Nachmann-Juden), which he used to attack postwar German Jews, whom he accused of being self-centered and minding their own business while living in cozy but suffocating ghettos: “Not without reason are they called Nachmann-Jews. They speculate—crafty and circumspect and opportunistic—with the bad conscience of the Germans, exploiting it intellectually and

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9. Ibid.
materially. Unscrupulously they milk the Holocaust cow.”10 The author derided his fellow Jews for wielding the “Auschwitz hammer” even against their own rebellious children who wanted a life away from the “ghetto-and-money insipidity.”11

While one can rightfully object to Biller’s and Broder’s unsavory language and sweeping generalizations, an important contribution of these young and iconoclastic Jewish writers was their insistence that the absolution of guilt can neither be bought nor sold. For long before the Nachmann affair erupted, Broder, together with Michel R. Lang, had already called attention to this problematic German-Jewish “exchange” or “symbiosis.” They condemned the practice of Jewish representatives in Germany, whom they attacked as “alibi-Jews” (Broder) or “functions-Jews” (Lang). “They consider themselves as simultaneously an entourage of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and a mouthpiece of German interests. . . . It is symptomatic of the intellectual and political disintegration of the Jewry in the Federal Republic that [Werner Nachmann] and his colleagues can go on speaking in the name of the Jews.”12 These Jewish speakers, according to Broder, were so “busy maintaining contacts with their German patrons” that they neglected the duty of speaking out against them when there was a real cause to do so.13 Likewise, Biller disparaged their “appeasement policy,” which allegedly found an enthusiastic reception among the German Christian parties.14 “The Germans,” said Broder provocatively, “have gotten the Jews that they need and deserve.”15

Of course, whether the Jewish presence and engagement in postwar Germany was a genuine exercise of mutual-turning or, as

11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 96 (emphasis in the original).
Broder, Biller, Lang & Co. had charged, some sort of magnanimity for sale, was seldom clearly differentiated. The Nachmann affair was the rare instance in which the two were plainly distinguished. We now know there is a difference, but that is only with the benefit of hindsight. What is more apparent is that there have been self-critical Jewish voices against real or suspected abuses, and such voices have helped Germans deal with the challenge of their own turning efforts: rather than doubting or even reversing their own turning (“Why pay reparations to scoundrels?”), they could go further with the reassurance that the necessary turning from abuse on the side of the victims has already been taken care of (though not necessarily accomplished).¹⁶ One can only imagine a different outcome of the Nachmann affair, had German Jews been less forthcoming or more self-defensive than self-critical, so that a scaling back in repentant vulnerability (R3) would have become inevitable on the side of the perpetrators.

If absolution cannot be purchased with money, then neither can guilt be released by another guilt. The idea that injustice is not “evened out” by another injustice, or that the perpetrator’s guilt is not canceled out by the victim’s guilt, also found expression in the discourse about another abuse of the “perpetrators”—the crimes of the Red Army against defeated Germans, especially German women.¹⁷ In Lev Kopelev’s “confession,” published in 1977 (see P7), the former Red Army soldier tried to relate the crimes of the “Hitler State” and the revenge that even “innocent Germans” in the East were not spared. His point, however, was not that since both had done wrong to each other, each should therefore shake each other’s hand, and “forget and forgive.” To the contrary, for “the reasons and causes can only explain the blind rage and cruelty of this pogrom, not justify it. Much less can it wipe out or

¹⁶. This can be seen in the German press coverage of the Nachmann affair cited above, which generally focused on the factual details of the case and on how Germans should and should not react to it, while leaving the more critical comments to Jewish voices themselves as a sign of reassurance.

even lessen the guilt of those who had taken part in the far more cruel acts of retaliation.”

By that Kopelev meant the Germans and Nazis who were responsible for the massacres and destruction in Lidice and Oradour-sur-Glane (P3). It was with this “relatively late realization” that the Russian-Jewish writer came to the conclusion that neither Hitler’s guilt could justify Stalin’s, nor could Stalin’s guilt justify his own. He spoke of “my co-perpetratorship” (Mittäterschaft), having been a convinced follower of Stalin, and of “my guilt [that] remains inextricably bound with me.” In short, the mutual cancellation of national guilt thesis was for Kopelev as antithetical to the spirit of confession as the rejection of one’s own guilt because of the guilt of the others.

In his book Aufbewahren für alle Zeit (To Be Preserved Forever), which was hailed by Marion Dönhoff as “the first work appearing in the West presenting the view of a Russian going through the Russian victory in East Prussia,” Kopelev reflected on the abuse of the Germans by the Russians, and asked how it was possible at all that “so many of our soldiers turn out to be base bandits.” In the spirit of “representative repentance” (P11), Kopelev sought an explanation for this “possibility” in his own guilt, although he had actually tried to stop the atrocities and been convicted of “bourgeois humanism” as a result (P7):

Have we not educated them that way, we, the political workers (Politlarbeiter), the journalists, the writers . . . industrious, ambitious, but also gifted agitators, teachers, educators, earnest preachers of “holy vengeance”? We taught them to hate, convinced them that the German is evil just because he is German; we glorified death in poetry, in prose, and in paintings. . . . There was a time when I almost felt ashamed of not having a “personal ledger” of murdered Germans. . . . All these must be contemplated. Where did it come from, and where does it lead?

19. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
Fast-forward one generation, and another Jewish turner would follow in Kopelev’s footsteps in contemplating the “coming and going” of victim and perpetrator roles in a context entirely different from that of the Soviet confessor’s, contexts that were linked only by the Nazi past and the idea of victim-turning-perpetrator. The occasion was the 2006 Lebanon War. Rolf Verleger, a professor of psychology at the University of Lübeck and son of Holocaust survivors, went public to question the allegedly unquestioning allegiance of ZdJ to Israeli policies. While German-Jewish critics of Israel and Israeli politics were not lacking, Verleger’s charge was particularly embarrassing for the ZdJ because he was at the time a member of its directorate. In his original, internal letter dated 23 July 2006 to the top leadership of the Central Council, which would be published on 8 August, the then chairman of the Jewish community in Lübeck expressed that he “cannot and will not remain silent” about the Central Council’s open support for the “military measures of the Israeli government against Lebanon.”

He affirmed the need for solidarity with Israel, but interpreted it as a duty to criticize the “misguided path” the nation was purportedly following. Like the late Yosef Burg, Verleger saw the postwar convalescence of the German-Jewish relationship as hope and a road map for contemporary conflicts between Israel and its neighbors. Further, in the same letter, the religiously active Jewish intellectual admonished his colleagues in the Central Council for forgetting the perennial conflict between Jewish religion and nationalism, between “our prophets and the kings of Judah and Israel,” resulting in the one-sided support for the political establishment.

In a book following his “unsuccessful” attempt to turn fellow Jews and Germans away from what he perceived to be the misguided path of Israeli politics, Verleger drew support from the

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23. Verleger would eventually lose his official positions.
biblical idea of triangulation: that victim and perpetrator do not stand only in a bilateral relationship, but each must also give an account of his deeds and treatment of the other before his God:

“Know whence you have come. And where you go. And before whom you have to give an account in the future.” This motto was given by a teacher by the name of Akabia ben Mahalalel.27

Verleger sought to offer his personal answer to the question of being Jewish and pro-Israel to “other Germans” confused by their own attitudes toward Israeli policies and toward the Jewish people.28 Yet his words also carried weight because of his family history and family connections in contemporary Israel. Therefore, when he criticized Israeli policies, he was not doing so as an uninterested or even indifferent observer with nothing to lose. In response to disapproval of his critiques of Israel, he would often bring his family history to bear on his claim. In late 2006, for instance, Verleger started a publicity campaign in Germany for ending Israeli injustice against the Palestinians, which drew some support from Jewish and Israeli circles there.29 A German-Protestant theologian engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue, however, was “angered” by the presentation of Middle East conflicts with Israel shouldering all the guilt.30 Verleger responded to this critic by recounting how the injustice his own great-grandfather had suffered in Nazi Germany (i.e., from the “Aryanization” of Jewish property) was successfully dealt with when (East) German authorities owned up to their guilt. In the same way, Verleger claimed, “one could make peace in Palestine: recognition of the dignity of the Palestinians, admission of the immense injustice of expulsion, indemnification of the loss of property.”31

27. Ibid., 4.
28. Ibid.
31. Verleger, Israels Irrweg, 158.
In his most direct attack on the **nationalistic transference of victimhood** to date, Verleger took issue with another Jewish “functionary,” Ronald S. Lauder, president of the Jewish World Congress. Lauder had written an op-ed in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in which he tried to connect the duty toward Holocaust victims to the responsibility toward a threatened Israel, and criticized the “self-fashioned good people in Europe,” who had rejected the Zionist state and used “much more stringent standards” than usual in evaluating Israeli policies.\(^{32}\) Verleger penned a passionate rebuttal, entitled “Haben Opfer das Recht, Unrecht zu tun?” (Do Victims Have the Right to Do Wrong?), questioning the very foundation of this self-victimizing nationalism. First, he reiterated the triangular vision of accountability as the “ethics of Jewish religion,” which he contrasted with the “alternative ethics” allegedly propagated by Lauder in his essay, in which purported national victimhood takes center stage.\(^{33}\) He then turned to his own family history to refute the transference of victimhood and the justification of wrongdoing through it:

I would like to ask Mr. Lauder: The fact that none of my grandparents had survived the Third Reich—did it give the Jewish militia and the Israeli army the right to expel in 1947/48 hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Israel?

The Aryanization of my great-grandfather’s land in Berlin—did it give the State of Israel the right to confiscate in the 1950s the land and property of the Arab expellees?

The murder of my uncles and aunts by the SS—does it give the State of Israel the right to exercise dictatorship as a regime of occupation for the past forty years?

The shooting of my grandmother Hanna for going to the hairdresser in Berlin without wearing the yellow star—does it give the State of Israel the right at present to starve the population of Gaza?

Generally speaking: Does the fact that we European Jews became victims of an immense injustice give the right to the Jewish state **before God and before man** to do injustice to the others now?\(^{34}\)

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To be fair, Lauder did not identify himself and fellow living Jews (except survivors) as victims in his essay. Rather, he always spoke of “our debts” toward the victims of the Shoah, thus distancing himself and his audience from them. But the critical distance between the real victims and the State of Israel demanded by Verleger was indeed missing.

Verleger’s central contention—that injustice suffered does not justify injustice done by the “victims”—was also the outcry of another group of victims who felt that their plight had long been neglected in postwar Germany. The German refugees and expellees from the former eastern territories (P4) were the veritable embodiment of the identity-boundary-overlapping “perpetrator-victim.” Culturally and politically, their name was bound to a “perpetrator-nation” whose “political guilt”—to follow Jaspers (P2)—was beyond doubt. But personally, each of these expellees (especially German women and children) had experienced wrongdoing at the hands of the “victims” or victors that were—to follow Verleger—nowhere near justified or proportionate. Their struggle for justice and truth as the “abused perpetrator” would thus illustrate yet another aspect of the complex phenomenon of shifting victim/perpetrator roles.

In August 1950 the elected representatives of the German expellees produced a charter that exemplified certain elements of the seventh Bußpsalm, or the psalm of the abused sinner.35 “Conscious of their responsibility before God and man,” began the charter, following the preamble of the new German constitution (1949), “the elected representatives of the millions of expellees (Heimatvertriebener) have decided to make this solemn declaration that lays down the duties and rights that the German expellees consider as their basic law and indispensable prerequisite for the creation of a free and unified Europe.”36 The first article of the charter dealt with the renunciation

35. Psalm 143.
of “revenge and retaliation.” It hinted at the wrongfulness of all by referring to the “endless suffering that was visited upon humanity especially in the last decade.” While committing themselves to peace and reconstruction, the expellees also demanded what they perceived to be divine justice: “We have lost our homeland. . . . God has placed man in his homeland. To separate him by force from his homeland is to kill him in spirit. We . . . demand that the right of homeland (Recht auf die Heimat) be recognized and realized as one of the fundamental rights granted by God.”

While the “right of homeland” and its purportedly divine origins were greatly contested by fellow Germans, no one could deny the suffering that these expellees had experienced, which was not even mentioned in the charter. The massive sexual abuse by Red Army soldiers described by Kopelev was only part of the ordeal; the summary killings, torture, and humiliation of ethnic German populations by Polish and Czech “neighbors” were so shocking that even the Russians were alarmed. On top of these was the unbearable—if any of these actions were bearable—hypocrisy that the “new perpetrators” sometimes displayed. As the expulsion took place in Brno (Brünn) in May 1945, a Czech remarked to the persecuted Germans, “That’s how you have done it to the Jews,” only to receive a retort from a German neighbor who asked which of them had taken pleasure from it. By the end of the expulsion

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37. Ibid., 30.
38. The EKD Ostdenkschrift of 1965, for example, concluded, after attacking the “pseudo-religious character” sometimes given to “homeland” (Heimat), that “God is not bound to the gift of homeland that he has once granted. . . . A relationship with the homeland based on faith in God should make Christians ready to renounce it (Verzicht) just as they have to be obedient in the use of its resources.” The Bensberger Memorandum of 1968 reinforced this by proposing that through proactively making such a decision, “we are demonstrating not our powerlessness, but our sovereignty.” See Ostdenkschrift, 33–34; and Bensberger Kreis, Memorandum, 20.
40. Lieberman, Terrible Fate, 237. In this sense, it is perhaps not even appropriate to speak of the “victim turning into perpetrator,” but rather, the “new
process, which lasted roughly from 1944 to 1950, an estimated 12 million ethnic Germans had been displaced.\(^{41}\)

Though the outside world was not unaware of or unconcerned about these abuses,\(^{42}\) the wounds that these expellees carried with them from the East could last decades, or even a lifetime. A young German girl named Hannelore Renner living in Döbeln, who was born just after the Nazis had risen to power, was fleeing to Leipzig with her mother in May 1945 when she was waylaid by some Russian soldiers, who raped and injured her. She was only twelve. She kept her pain to herself, shunned contact in school, and worked hard for her own and her family’s existence. Decades later, her husband, Helmut Kohl, chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (1982–98), signed the “Treaty of Good Neighborliness” with the Soviet Union, which sought to “settle with the past for good,” and in which the German side promised to “respect and protect . . . the monuments on German soil that are dedicated to the Soviet victims of war and of tyranny.”\(^{43}\) As first lady, Hannelore Kohl had to perform a variety of semiofficial duties; these included commemorating the fallen Red Army soldiers together with the wife of Mikhail Gorbachev in Stukenbrock in 1989. According to her biographer, this “program” was a huge burden for the chancellor’s wife:

She kept her composure and let none notice what went on in her inner being. . . . A change in the ladies’ program would be possible but very difficult, and would only have led to irritation. No one could have any idea what kind of memories would come up for the wife of the perpetrator.” Naimark also found the Polish behavior against the Germans more understandable than that of the Czechs, who “did not suffer terribly at the hands of the Germans, certainly not in comparison to the Poles.” See Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 14, 122.

41. See the contested nature of the estimates in Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte*. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 657–78.

42. Ibid., 361–62.

the chancellor. . . . The visit to the cemetery revived old trauma, the memory of powerlessness and of being at the mercy of others. . . . The strength that Hannelore had to call up in order to keep going and to finish the rest of the program was enormous. . . . She allowed herself—as always—to betray nothing, she had to hide, to repress, and to exercise the utmost discipline.44

The first lady chose to keep everything to herself and her few confidants. It was only after her death that German citizens learned about her ordeal.45 The tragedy of Hannelore Kohl’s life was only one of the better-known cases in which the problem of guilt and atonement assumed intellectually insurmountable dimensions. Hence it was not insignificant that part of the German expellees’ charter of 1950 was expressly directed at the problem of disproportionate allocation of atonement in (West) Germany. “We demand . . . the same rights as citizens, not only before the law, but also in the reality of daily life. . . . [as well as] the just and reasonable distribution of the burden of the last war to the entire German people.”46 While the internal guilt that the nonexpellee Germans bore in comparison to that borne by the German expellees was a major theme of the EKD’s Ostdenkschrift of 1965 (P4), concern for the expellees’ plight in the “reality of daily life” found expression in the early 1950s in a German-Jewish author’s short stories. Anna Seghers, an active member of the exiled German resistance during the Nazi years who was best known for her wartime novel, The Seventh Cross (1942), published a series of “peace stories” (Friedensgeschichten) in 1952–53 in Berlin, which portrayed ordinary individuals in postwar Germany. One of Seghers’s characters was Anna Nieth, the “repatriate” (Umsiedlerin), a German

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45. According to Schwan, Hannelore Kohl had never publicly spoken about her own trauma of rape. It was only after years of confidence earned as a trusted friend and trustworthy journalist that the biographer was able to confirm this rumored tragedy with her. Schwan, Die Frau an seiner Seite, 7–10, 56.

46. “Charta der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen,” 30 (emphasis added).
widow with two children who had to leave her province because of the entry of the Poles. She ended up in a small village called Los- sen (possibly the village of that name in Göhren, Thuringia, then part of East Germany), where “after three years she felt as bad as on the first day.”

Her involuntary caretaker was as uncaring as he was embittered (he had lost his son in the war); the house dog was the only one that was good to her children. The villagers appeared no better. Though living standards had improved for most, Nieth “withered” in a joyless life in her new “home”—a storeroom with her kids, separated like the other repatriates from the locals, especially the rich farmers and the mayor. It was only at the invitation of a district administrator of the working class that Nieth, who was otherwise resigned to her fate, was able to voice her complaints before all the villagers, and thus changed her fate. “When I arrived here, I was crammed into a dump hole with my kids, and I have lived as if in a stall for pigs, and I still live as if in a stall for pigs. I have nothing more to say.”

Seghers’s *Umsiedlerin* marked the beginning of a literary tradition in East Germany dealing with the problems of integration faced by the German expellees. Although the more gruesome wrongdoings that the expellees had experienced at the hands of the Red Army soldiers were not mentioned (for obvious reasons in the case of someone like Seghers, who was writing and publishing in the DDR), the fact that a German Jew who had herself suffered in escaping the Nazis chose to write on this of all themes made her story particularly poignant. Indeed, as a contemporary literary critic put it, “When it is an embarrassment for Eastern interpreters that Anna Seghers always makes the persecuted and the victims her main characters . . . it is in fact the strength of this author: she writes best when she is indignant.”

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50. Hahn and Hahn, *Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 578.
not at all self-explanatory—even through the prism of the usual left-right political schema.

While fiction can at times lead its readers to see the real problems around them, arouse concern where it is lacking, and frame perspectives of turning where they are hidden, as Seghers’s does, it can at other times undermine the weight of reality and turn concerned readers away. And, indeed, a Nachmann-like scandal broke out in the German-reading world of the mid-1990s that threatened to undo the goodwill of Germans and German-speaking nationals toward the survivors of the Shoah. In August 1995, the German publishing house Jüdischer Verlag (a division of Suhrkamp) rolled out a book by an unknown Swiss author, “Binjamin Wilkomirski,” that would become a publicity sensation in the three years that followed. The title of the book was _Bruchstücke_ (Fragments), and its author presented it as a first-person narrative of a Jewish child who had survived the Nazi concentration camps. “I wrote these fragments of memory to explore both myself and my earliest childhood,” said the author in the afterword. The book would go on to receive distinguished awards (including the National Jewish Book Award in New York), and the author himself would earn a great deal of sympathy from a global readership. All went exceptionally well for the debut of an amateur author except for one thing—the book was anything but a memoir, and the author anyone but a Holocaust survivor.

Although even before the book’s publication the authenticity of Wilkomirski’s identity had been questioned _internally_ within the publishing house, it took the courage and persistent investigation

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54. The Swiss journalist Hanno Helbling was the first to bring the suspicion to the attention of the publisher at Suhrkamp. See his letter dated 9 Feb. 1995 to Siegfried Unseld, documented in Maechler, _Wilkomirski Affair_, 94–95.
of a real survivor’s son to bring the exposé to the German-reading public. In August 1998, Daniel Ganzfried, a Swiss-Jewish author, made the bold accusation in Die Weltwoche, a Zurich-based weekly, that “Binjamin Wilkomirski’s ‘Fragments,’ which is currently the most successful Swiss book, is a fiction,” a “borrowed Holocaust biography.” Based on documents and photos in the Zurich archive, which contradicted Wilkomirski’s assertion that he had “arrived” in Switzerland only in 1948, Ganzfried declared that “Binjamin Wilkomirski is a pseudonym, its bearer was never in a concentration camp as an inmate,” and his book was but a work of “fictitious biography.” For the whistle-blower, the worst damage of such a lie was not pecuniary, but moral—the Swiss students who had heard the author discuss his life and had believed in him as someone who had come back from hell alive would now believe in nothing anymore. Or worse, they would be inclined to believe Holocaust deniers.

Yet it was clear from even this first attack that Ganzfried was not so much after the “feigned victim” as after those who had made such a fiasco possible. For him, the act of faking an identity deserved no more reflection than the fact of its social veneration, “as if [the book] were some original handwritten copy of the Old Testament.” One problem, according to him, lay in the blind sympathy with the “victim.” “Thoughtlessly sympathetic, we find the hero in the victim, with whom we can fraternize ourselves on the side of morals: Binjamin Wilkomirski. Whoever makes that possible for us does not need any further achievement than showing himself before the entrance of Auschwitz: ‘I’m one of those who got out of it!’” Another, greater problem was the opportunism of the “culture business” (Kulturbetrieb), which had allegedly con-

56. Ibid.
57. Contrary to expectation, Fragments did not generate as much sales as mere publicity. See Maechler, Wilkomirski Affair, 119, 333.
58. Ganzfried, “Geliehene Holocaust-Biographie.”
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
tributed to rendering Auschwitz a “source of self-deception” (*Funden des Lebenslüge*), a kind of “sausage-making” (*Verwurstung*). 

Indeed, Ganzfried should count as one of the earliest of the “second generation” of Shoah survivors to point to the problem of procuring benefits from the victimhood of others. In September 1995, that is, at almost the same time that “Wilkomirski” appeared (and five years ahead of Norman Finkelstein), Ganzfried published a novel, *Der Absender*, in which the theme of profiteering from Holocaust remembrance was already apparent. “Perhaps,” he wrote, in describing the work of his main character, Georg, as a volunteer at a planned Holocaust museum in New York, “the only outcome of his hectic search in the past was in fact that it lent him justification for a couple of weeks of his present time [to remain in New York].” The author could hardly have anticipated better the role that he would play in the Wilkomirski affair.

Ganzfried’s *social* critique aside, however, it must be stated that the success of the Wilkomirski memoir was insufficient to gauge whether a sympathetic German (or German-speaking) audience was in fact guilty of moral profiteering through “fraternizing with the victim,” as Ganzfried claimed, or was only fulfilling an essential facet of repentance through “turning to the victim” (*R1*). For there are other, less inconvenient means of “achieving” victimhood without turning to the “other,” the victim. It is even doubtful whether a “thoughtful or critical sympathy,” which Ganzfried demanded, is compatible, in terms of attitude, with the willed vulnerability

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61. Ibid.
62. In 2000 Norman G. Finkelstein, son of Shoah survivors, published his controversial book, *The Holocaust Industry*, which was translated into German and published by Piper in 2001. It aroused intense debates in Germany, so much so that within the same year, no less than three compendia of responses were published. The essential difference between Ganzfried and Finkelstein, of course, is that whereas the former exposed a concrete case of fraud with concrete evidence, the latter erected a hypothetical enemy, the “Holocaust industry” through theoretical—some critics would even say, “conspiratory”—reasoning, in which the entire system of reparation is under attack. See relevant debates in Petra Steinberger, ed., *Die Finkelstein-Debatte* (Munich: Piper, 2001). See Ganzfried’s own critique of Finkelstein’s book in the Steinberger volume.
(R3) demanded of the repentant perpetrator. On the other hand, within the “culture business” of which Ganzfried was most critical, the publisher of Fragments and Wilkomirski’s literary agent did seem—at least judging from the report of the historian they commissioned—to have taken reasonably cautious verification steps before Ganzfried’s exposé or even before the publication of the book itself.64 Yet precisely because there would be no returning and restoring to begin with if every German audience should demand or be required to demand that the victim first prove his victimhood beyond doubt before granting him audience, or that a fraud-proof reparation system be in place before such payments will be made, turners like Ganzfried and Verleger, who perform the thankless task of “victims watching over victims” (real or fake), are indeed providing an indispensable service to the work of turning—for the perpetrators are not in a position to do it, and without it the continual and ever-renewing process of turning will be choked by abuse. Although abuse or the possibility of abuse is by no means eliminated, with the insider-watcher the repentant perpetrator can at least count on the delivery of “truth and justice” somehow, and that their goodwill is not met with or only with bad faith. While Eugen Kogon counseled his fellow Germans in 1946 to watch out for the self-righteousness of the tax collector vis-à-vis the unjust servant (P4), it was the persistent self-watchfulness of these turners that went a long way to keeping that conviction alive.

64. See the chapter “The Origins of Fragments” in Maechler, Wilkomirski Affair. They also retracted the book before the case was definitively settled with the DNA test proving that the biological father of Doessekker/Wilkomirski was indeed a Swiss national living in Switzerland. See “Suhrkamp zieht Bruchstücke zurück,” Berner Zeitung, 13 Oct. 1999; and Julian Schütt, “Wilkomirski: Alles vergisst,” Die Weltwoche, 4 Apr. 2002.