



The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth

Stefan Maechler

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This is the definitive report on *Fragments*, Benjamin Wilkomirski's invented "memoir" of a childhood spent in concentration camps, which created international turmoil.

In 1995 *Fragments*, a memoir by a Swiss musician named Benjamin Wilkomirski, was published in Germany. Hailed by critics, who compared it with the masterpieces of Primo Levi and Anne Frank, the book received major prizes and was translated into nine languages. The English-language edition was published by Schocken in 1996. In *Fragments*, Wilkomirski described in heart-wrenching detail how as a small child he survived internment in Majdanek and Birkenau and was eventually smuggled into Switzerland at the war's end.

But three years after the book was first published, articles began to appear that questioned its authenticity and the author's claim that he was a Holocaust survivor. Stefan Maechler, a Swiss historian and expert on anti-Semitism and Switzerland's treatment of refugees during and after World War II, was commissioned on behalf of the publishers of *Fragments* to conduct a full investigation into Wilkomirski's life. Maechler was given unrestricted access to hundreds of government and personal documents, interviewed eyewitnesses and family members in seven countries, and discovered facts that completely refute Wilkomirski's book.

The Maechler report has implications far beyond the tragic story of one individual's deluded life. It explores our feelings about survivor literature and the impact these works can have on our remembrance of the Holocaust.

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