Contemporary Female Holocaust Representations: Memory in Anne Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank some people, because without them, it would not have been possible to write this thesis. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Philippe Codde who offered me constructive feedback on my paper and who fed my interest on the topic of Holocaust literature. Furthermore, I also wish to thank my fellow student and friend Marieke Bentein for reading my thesis and providing me with helpful comments. I am also very grateful to my parents, because they allowed me to study at the University of Ghent and they have supported me throughout the years. Also special thanks to my friends and family who were responsible for the much needed entertainment during the writing process of this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my roommates for the offered support and the distraction when I most needed it.
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1. Introduction

Michael Rothberg states that “memory is the past made present” (2009: 3). For most, their memory is the most important source for remembering joyful events of the past. Yet, for others, memory is as painful as an injury because it recalls horrific events of the past which one would rather not remember. According to Dominick LaCapra, “the problem of memory has recently become a preoccupation of historians and critical theorists” (1998: 1). Many investigate memory in relation to traumatic experiences. The traumatic event that is at stake in this thesis, is the Holocaust, a series of traumatic experiences that still live on to this present day. It is remarkable that these events still have such an effect today and that they are remembered all over the world. To give just one obvious example, “[a]mong Jewish Americans whose community was spared the horror of what happened in Europe, the Holocaust is fervently studied and memorialized” (Said 2000: 206). This may seem evident, as Jewish Americans will of course identify with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, but “it is noteworthy […] that Washington is the site of an extremely lavish Holocaust Museum and not the place where the extermination of Native Americans or the slavery of millions of Africans is commemorated” (Said 2000: 206). This means that in America the memory of the Holocaust even displaces the commemoration of the carnages – on Native Americans and slaves – for which they are themselves responsible. Hence, the memory of the Holocaust still plays a prominent role these days. This comes as no surprise to Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, who suggest that “shared memories of the Holocaust […] provide the foundations for a new cosmopolitan memory, a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries” (2000: 89). Similarly, LaCapra declares that “[i]n other countries as well, the aftereffects and aftershocks of the Holocaust have not dissipated, and the events marking it have still to be worked through” (1998: 9). In this context, LaCapra wonders whether some events “present moral […] issues even for groups not directly involved in them” (1998: 1). These other
groups refer not only to other nationalities, but also to other generations. The Holocaust indeed takes a significant place in public memory. While actual survivors of the Holocaust turn their memories into survivor diaries and testimonies, and while their children turn their parents’ memories and their own into movies and novels, public memory turns the Holocaust into “memorial images and spaces” (Young 1993: 1). There is thus an obvious need to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. It is important to note that the first memorials of the Holocaust came about in the form of a narrative (Young 1993: 7). Young refers to the “Yizkor Bikher” (1993: 7), memorial books that “remembered both the lives and destruction of European Jewish communities” (7). One could say that this tradition has been carried on by other generations and nationalities: until this day, writers are concerned with the memory of traumatic events. In this context, LaCapra asks another important question: “[d]oes art itself have a special responsibility with respect to traumatic events that remain invested with value and emotion?” (1998: 1). Consequently, this thesis will deal with a contemporary Holocaust novel, *Fugitive Pieces* (1998), written by the Canadian author Anne Michaels. This work is fictional in nature and it is written by an author who has no experience or recollection of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the novel primarily focuses on the aspect of memory and the way memory resonances in all sorts of images and contexts. When LaCapra says that “one may ask how precisely memory carries lived experience into the present” (1998: 24), the novel *Fugitive Pieces* tries to answer that. This novel deals with the ways in which the experience and the memory of the Holocaust have an impact on one’s whole existence and on the following generations.

*Fugitive Pieces* is a piece of fiction on the subject of the Holocaust. Many scholars protest against the fictional use of the Holocaust, convinced that it cannot be adequately represented in any way by someone who has not experienced it. Still, many will also argue
that even if one did experience those atrocities, that does not mean that one can represent it. By contrast, others claim that it is precisely the fictional nature of these novels that will bring some truth. The first part of this thesis will look into some of these oppositions and will discuss the genre of contemporary Holocaust narratives to which the novel *Fugitive Pieces* belongs. This thesis will especially focus on the aspect of memory in relation to other fundamental motifs in the novel, such as trauma, place, geology and archaeology, nature, and finally language. Afterwards, I will also examine to what extent the novel is a female representation of the Holocaust. I will investigate whether there is a difference between male and female Holocaust experiences and hence representations. In that respect, something exceptional occurs in *Fugitive Pieces*. The novel is a female representation of male Holocaust experiences. Nevertheless, the female characters will prove to be the central, strong characters of the novel in the sense that they have a significant influence on the processes of memory and mourning. It will be obvious that the male characters require women to understand their experiences and to work through their traumas. This thesis will thus also investigate the relationship between women and memory.

This thesis aims to show that an author who has no personal recollection of the Holocaust is still capable of creating an imaginative and acceptable account of the Holocaust. It is noteworthy the way Michaels employs memory in such a self-conscious and self-reflexive way, which enables her to create a truthful account of a Holocaust experience.
2. The Representation of the Holocaust

Over sixty years since the end of World War II, prose narratives, and other art forms as well, continue to be written about this traumatic event of the middle of the twentieth century. Representing the Holocaust is not only one of the biggest challenges a writer can take on, but it is also still a controversial topic for many scholars. Since writers are struggling with a major temporal gap between the present and the traumatic events of sixty years ago, one can question if the Holocaust is actually an event that can still be represented. Can an event so dreadful be comprehended or grasped at any level? This section of the thesis aims at presenting an overview of the main ideas about the representation of the Holocaust. Some commentators claim that a representation is possible, while others argue against that idea.

Lewis Ward claims that “[t]he Holocaust has been considered inherently unrepresentable unless by those who witnessed it, leading to a false opposition between genres of “testimony” and “fiction”” (2008: 2). Ward implies that people mistakenly believe in a major difference between the genre of “testimony” and the genre of “fiction”. While a Holocaust testimony is considered to be accurate and written by someone who has actually experienced the dreadful events of the Holocaust, a fictional work is usually seen as an interpretation instead of an accurate representation of reality. Yet, many writers these days continue to write about the Holocaust, even though they have not experienced it and have – at best - only heard about it through their relatives. Consequently, within literature about the Holocaust, there is a strong focus on what is called “contemporary Holocaust narratives” (Ward 2008: 5). According to Ward, these texts “often acknowledge their temporal and generational distance from the event by thematizing memory in a self-reflexive manner” (2008: 5). The novel *Fugitive Pieces* can be considered an example of these “contemporary Holocaust narratives” due to its emphasis on memory. Authors of such narratives focus on
other aspects as well. First of all, trauma theory also has an important influence on these contemporary Holocaust novels (Ward 2008: 6). Anne Whitehead discusses this phenomenon in her work *Trauma Fiction*, as will be discussed later on in this thesis. It will be possible to apply some trauma theory to Anne Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*. Secondly, LaCaprian empathy can also play a role in these writings (Ward 2008: 7). LaCapra has emphasized the importance of empathy “as a response to the traumatic experiences of others”, while not appropriating their experience (2001: 41). In this context, he coined the term of “empathic unsettlement” (2001: 41). This means that you are affected by the story of the Holocaust via the empathy you feel for the victim, “which both limits objectification and exposes the self to involvement or implication in the past, its actors, and victims” (Lacapra 2001: 102). Ward explains that “LaCaprian empathy in prose narratives can be usefully defined as a simultaneous gesture of proximity and distance” (2008: 6). On the one hand, one tries to approach the Holocaust as directly as possible, but on the other hand one shows the impossibility of such an approach by creating distance. Consequently, Ward likes to add the word “transgenerational” to this LaCaprian empathy since he wants to emphasize the dimensions of time and memory that are associated with these contemporary novels (2008: 6). “Empathic unsettlement” will also prove important for *Fugitive Pieces*, more specifically in the way Michaels, as a woman, writes about male experiences of the Holocaust and the way the female characters in the novel deal with the experiences of their husbands.

2.1. Controversial Debate

2.1.1. Against Holocaust Representation

Before trying to grasp the complexities of this genre of contemporary Holocaust narratives, one should bear in mind that there is much controversy about Holocaust representation. When discussing this controversial subject, critics usually start with Theodor Adorno’s famous
statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno 1951: 34). Many since have followed his lead. Ever since this statement, numerous people have questioned the use of art when treating the subject of the Holocaust. Adorno’s proclamation has been picked up by various writers in all sorts of academic fields (Rothberg 2000: 25). Susan Gubar notes, by contrast, that “*Fugitive Pieces* proposes that after the Holocaust it is barbaric not to write and read literature, [since] [v]irtually every character in Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* is a writer of one sort or another, and most become devoted readers of each others’ works” (2002: 251, original emphasis). Michael Rothberg declares “that most commentary on this theme has de- and recontextualized the words, often taking them far from whatever meaning Adorno might have intended” (2000: 26). Most assume that his pronouncement should be understood as a total ban on Holocaust literature or art, while it should actually be interpreted as a warning to be careful with aestheticizing an event such as the Holocaust (Codde “Postmemory”). Nevertheless, many scholars proclaim that they have a problem with Holocaust representations. George Steiner is one of them. Steiner himself argues that “[t]he disasters of World War, the sober recognition that the finalities of lunacy and barbarism which occurred during 1914-18 and the Nazi Holocaust could neither be adequately grasped nor described in words […] reinforced the temptations of silence” (1998: 193-194). Steiner probably means that it is better not to say anything at all instead of trying to understand an event which is beyond human comprehension. Ward connects this to the view that the Holocaust is “a limit event” (2008: 12) in itself, “one that stretches or even exceeds our ability to understand or know it” (12). One could say that it is unique, since it is one of the biggest atrocities in human history, which makes it hard to comprehend for many people. So, why would anybody be able to write about this? Rothberg adequately warns us for this “uniqueness discourse”, because one would create “a hierarchy of suffering” claiming that the Holocaust, because of its supposed uniqueness, would be worse than other historical atrocities (2009: 9). Similarly to
Steiner, Jean-François Lyotard also declares that the Holocaust cannot be represented in any way, seeing as “it cannot be represented without being missed, being forgotten anew, since it defies images and words” (1997: 26). Because the Holocaust cannot be imagined, one should not try to represent it.

While previous scholars commented on all Holocaust representations, including fictional ones, others only react against the fictional representations of the Holocaust. Berel Lang, for example, is opposed to those fictional representations of the Holocaust. He argues that the atrocity of the Nazi genocide against Jews is evidently widely recognized, but “[b]ecause of this, it cannot be represented by the usual poetic or fictional devices that would […] exhibit features by which the reader might more fully imagine or realize it” (2003: 105). The writer can do no more than simply stating the obvious: it was horrible. Moreover, a writer of a fictional work gives his own representation, his own viewpoint on what happened. Lang fights against that, because “[an] imaginative representation would personalize even events that are impersonal and corporate; it would dehistoricize and generalize events that occur specifically and contingently” (2003: 144). I believe that this does not only count for fictional representations, but for all presentations in general. Witness accounts equally personalize an event and have proven to be not always very reliable when it comes to accurate historical information.

2.1.2. In Favour of Holocaust Representation

It will become clear that in theories about Holocaust representation, there exists an opposition between two groups. The previous group strongly reacts against Holocaust representation since it is not in any way understandable, while the group in this section favours representation. This binary is also apparent in other theoretical works, such as Michael
Rothberg’s *Traumatic Realism*, which will also be discussed further on. Rothberg makes a distinction between “realist” and “antirealist” approaches, the first meaning that the Holocaust can be translated in an understandable and knowable work of art, while the second denotes that the Holocaust cannot be represented in any traditional way (2000: 3-4).

Michael Rothberg declares in his *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* that “asserting the uniqueness of the Holocaust served to counter the relative public silence about the specificity of the Nazi genocide of Jews in the early post-war period […]” (2009: 8). This means that many writers did feel the need to write about this event. These people feel that writings can help explain that we, as human beings, are capable of committing such atrocities. Gillian Rose is one of those who favour Holocaust representation. According to Rose, these previous claims of inexpressibility all lead to “Holocaust pity”, since we are afraid that such atrocities might become comprehensible and reasonable and that this would be associated with what we are: human beings. Rose says that “to argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge, in short, the witness of ‘ineffability’, that is, non-representability, is to mystify something we dare not understand, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human (1998: 243-244, original emphasis). So by writing about it, we would admit the comprehensibility of the event.

Some in favour of the representation take the debate even further by making important recommendations for writing about the subject of the Holocaust. James Young starts his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* by stating that “[w]hat is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form. Instead of
isolating events from their representations, this approach recognizes that literary and historical truths of the Holocaust may not be entirely separable” (1988: 1). So Young adds a great importance to the texts which give form to the Holocaust. This would suggest that, for Young, it is not the sole purpose of a text to be an accurate historical representation. One should take both representation and history into account. Some scholars go further than Young and emphasize specific narrative strategies. Michael André Bernstein has his own theory regarding Holocaust representation. Bernstein favours a particular narrative strategy called “sideshadowing”, which is a narrative strategy of “gesturing to the side, to a present dense with multiple, and mutually exclusive, possibilities for what is to come” (1994: 1). When applied to a narrative context, this implies that “sideshadowing stresses the significance of random, haphazard, and unassimilable contingencies […] [and] it expresses the ever-changing nature of that truth and the absence of any predictive certainties in human history” (1994: 4). What Bernstein seems to be saying is that authors should illustrate how much depends on small, individual decisions – and hence contingencies – rather than on huge, general historical movements.

Another approach has been put forward by the famous historian Saul Friedländer. He chose the words “allusive or distanced realism” (1992: 17) to define his narrative strategy. This is obtained by perception through a filter: “that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid” (1992: 17). Ward believes that “[o]nce again this strategy maintains a decorous distance that “leaves the unsayable unsaid” by only alluding to the lost memories of victims rather than trying to imagine what these memories might have been” (2008: 138). This means that Friedländer uses some sort of strategy that emphasizes “the exclusion of straight, documentary realism” (1992: 17). Accordingly, it is important to create a distance. In his book *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe*, Friedländer similarly
critiques “closure, totalization, and simplistic, self-assured narration” (LaCapra 1998: 27). Friedländer maintains a “simultaneous acceptance of two contradictory moves: the search for ever closer historical linkages and the avoidance of a naive historical positivism leading to simplistic and self-assured historical narrations and closures” (qtd. in LaCapra 1998: 27). This means that Friedländer avoids simplicity in his writing. He wants to reach closure, create a total story of what happened, but at the same time he realises the impossibility of that without it becoming too simplistic. Friedländer pins his hopes on art – especially literature – to do what historiography cannot do. Geoffrey Hartman shows that “though historians generally do not let feelings color their research, in this case the topic [of the Holocaust] is approached with a transferential complexity that makes the task of description shakier” (1994: 5). That is why Friedländer refers to literary fiction which could serve “as a surrogate” (1994: 255). LaCapra correctly argues that Friedländer searches “for more comprehensive articulations and forms of understanding that nonetheless remain self-critical and open to contestatory voices, in particular the disturbing voices of victims themselves” (1998: 27). Nevertheless, Friedländer also emphasizes the importance of a critical voice accompanying those victim’s voices (Lacapra 1998: 107). This echoes Hayden White’s concept of the “middle voice” (2000: 38). White does not want to “suggest that we will give up the effort to represent the Holocaust realistically but, rather, that our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take account of experiences that are unique to our century […]” (2000: 41-42). To do this, one must write in a middle voice, a voice which must be present throughout the story, a voice that must emphasize that you are at work with a recreation of the past. The concept of “middle voice” is the approach of “a kind of writing that denies the possibility of real interlocution by parodying it” (2010: 258).

Sue Vice specifically recommends fictional approaches in her work Holocaust Fiction (2000). Fiction can help us understand what has happened there; otherwise, the Holocaust
remains an event of which we will never be able to grasp the truth. She reacts against the way writers over-rely on other – mainly historical - sources (2000: 2). Moreover, Vice defends the use of fictional accounts and comments on the preference for testimonies over fiction (2000: 6). She urges to reconsider this preference, since “it is important to understand the view which values testimony over all fictional genres for what it is – an estimate based on non-literary criteria, and it is precisely those criteria with which I am concerned here” (2000: 7). Furthermore, the narrative strategy is somewhat different when looking at fictional Holocaust novels. Vice declares that “the same features as in any fictional work are present in Holocaust novels […] but because of the subject matter, all these standard features are brought to their limit, taken literally, defamiliarized or used self-consciously” (2000: 4). Vice continues her defence of Holocaust fiction: “we cannot dismiss or outlaw Holocaust fiction, since it is simply a different genre from survivor testimony. It approaches the subject in its own way, rather than aiming to ‘add’ to or ‘go beyond’ the survivor record” (2000: 8).

While Sue Vice argues for a clear distinction between survivor testimonies and fictional representations of the Holocaust, there are others who do not want to maintain such a difference between fiction and non-fiction. James Young addresses this issue when he says that “[i]f there is a line between fact and fiction, it may by necessity be a winding border that tends to bind these two categories as much as it separates them, allowing each side to dissolve occasionally into the other” (1988: 52). Consider Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*; this novel also deals with the Holocaust, but it is very difficult applying the term fiction or non-fiction to this work. Lewis Ward shares this view:

Instead, it may be more productive to acknowledge that the supposed boundaries between testimony and fiction, historical and figurative discourse, referentiality and
imaginative construction, (auto)biography and invention, have been routinely breached throughout the history of prose narrative […] [T]he concerns of those who disapprove of certain forms of Holocaust representation need not remain outside the narrative but may be usefully integrated within the text itself. In doing so they also answer the ethical concern about crossing the boundary between testimony and fiction by foregrounding their use of elements from both genres (2008: 18).

This brings us back to the genre of contemporary Holocaust narratives. If one has not experienced the Holocaust, how does one represent it then; how does one remember it?

2.2. Contemporary Fictional Holocaust Representations

In “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory”, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider argue that “[n]otwithstanding the fact that this turned out to be spectacularly wrong, the perception that representations are substitutes for ‘authentic’ experiences persists” (2002: 89, my emphasis). This means that they start their discussion by claiming that representing something does not mean testifying about it. They continue by stating that there is nothing wrong with representations by writers who have not themselves experienced the Holocaust. These representations are also “connected to our real emotions and real identities” (Levy and Sznaider 2002: 90). To explain this with regard to the Holocaust, Levy and Sznaider make a distinction between what they call “social memory” and “historical memory”:

To take the Holocaust as an example, the social memory of it is limited to the generation that lived through the war. Historical memory, on the other hand, is memory that has been mediated, by films and books and schools and holidays. […] In
the case of the Holocaust, only a small minority who experienced Nazis first hand is alive. For all the rest of us, it is an experience mediated by representations (2002: 91).

This brings us to our genre of contemporary fictional Holocaust representations. These stories could be part of what Levy and Sznaider call “historical memory”. The Holocaust is an event that we all remember in some way. Those fictional works try to put that memory to paper. Although many disagree about the value of fictional Holocaust accounts, there are some who attach great importance to them. Recently, there is a growing interest in the Holocaust from all generations and “the recent fascination with [it] means exploring a more general contemporary fascination with trauma, catastrophe, the fragility of memory, and the persistence of ethnic identity” (Rothberg 2000: 3). Since later generations have no experience or recollection of the atrocities, they have to look for an adequate means of representation. For Michael Rothberg such extreme events bring forth difficulties and dilemmas for everyone ranging from historians to literary artists and their public (2000: 7). Rothberg links the later generations to “postmemory”, a term by Marianne Hirsch (2000: 186). Hirsch has coined the term to indicate the way the generation after the victims who have been through traumatic experiences “remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (2008: 106). Rothberg applies this term, but broadens its use. The term “postmemory” for Rothberg describes the way “people [are] haunted not by their own memories but by the memories they have inherited from their families, or (in my extension of the concept) from the culture at large” (2000: 186). This means that “postmemory” can also be applied to other people besides relatives of Holocaust survivors. Anne Michaels should thus be able to write an adequate account of the Holocaust, since she is also affected by the larger “postmemory” of the Holocaust.
Michael Rothberg’s book *Traumatic Realism* (2000) discusses recent works that focus on traumas such as the Holocaust. Rothberg explains that “[b]y focusing attention on the intersection of the everyday and the extreme in the experience and writing of Holocaust survivors, traumatic realism provides an aesthetic and cognitive solution to the conflicting demands inherent in representing and understanding genocide” (2000: 9). This means that despite the controversy that surrounds the representation of the Holocaust, there are means of adequately capturing the effects of the event. In this work, Rothberg tries to mediate between previously mentioned “realist and antirealist positions in Holocaust studies” (2000: 9). He tries to find a consensus between the ones who claim that the Holocaust is not to be represented and the ones who argue against that. Although his work is called *Traumatic Realism*, Rothberg asserts that there is an important intersection between realism, modernism and postmodernism, since it is in their relationship that “historical particularity” can be grasped (2000: 10). He further elaborates the distinction between these three modes of representation:

The realist aims at the mimesis of a certain spatial world, but in confronting the structural problem of the relationship between the extreme and the everyday finds herself caught in a traumatic temporality. The modernist, on the other hand, confronts a particular form of progressive time consciousness, but finds his attempt to establish a before and after frustrated as he is pulled back again and again toward the site of a genocidal crime. Finally, the postmodernist interrogates the reign of the pure image or simulacrum and attempts to negotiate between the demands of memory and the omnipresence of mediation and commodification. (2000: 13)
This is important when considering *Fugitive Pieces*, since I believe it is a commixture of these three artistic techniques. The novel tries to capture the reality of the situation, but Michaels realises she cannot do that by using a normal form. Thus, she applies both modernist and postmodernist techniques. The character Jacob will be pulled back from present to past and his entire life will be influenced by what happened, which can be considered a modernist aspect. But at the same time the omnipresence of the aspect of memory which will be there in all sorts of images and mediations will prove to be a postmodernist technique. Hayden White also questions why so much importance is attached to representing the reality of the Holocaust: “[T]his value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (qtd. in Rothberg 2000: 101). If the coherence and closure that people are craving for is imaginary and you cannot find this in real events, then why would a fictional account trying to imagine what has happened, not be an appropriate medium? Rothberg further explains that the Holocaust is such an extreme traumatic event that it can sometimes only abolish realistic representation (2000: 106). Moreover, “the historical trauma of the Nazi genocide also de-realizes human experience and thus creates a need for fiction” (2000: 206).

In this context, the term “traumatic realism” could thus be transformed to “traumatic fiction”. This is where Anne Whitehead joins the discussion. Her work *Trauma Fiction* specifically focuses on fictional representations of traumatic events. Anne whitehead starts her introduction by posing a striking question: “[t]he term ‘trauma fiction’ represents a paradox or contradiction: if trauma comprises an event or experience which overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation, how then can it be narrativised in fiction?” (2004: 3). She further elaborates that fiction does create certain possibilities for representing
trauma. This will be very apparent in *Fugitive Pieces*. Like Rothberg, Whitehead links trauma fiction with postmodernism and even with postcolonial fiction, more specifically “in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection and critique” (2004: 3). That may be no coincidence, since the rise of the genre of trauma fiction goes hand in hand with an interest in memory in both literary and historical studies (Whitehead 2004: 81). It is self-evident that trauma fiction primarily deals with the representation of trauma. This implies that trauma theory may have an important influence on these novels. Whitehead explains that in those novels, one will see “a resonance between theory and literature in which each speaks to and addresses the other” (2004: 4). That trauma theory has such strong impact on those fictional novels, will also be apparent in Michaels’ novel. The novel deals both with a child survivor of the Holocaust and a second generation survivor. Michaels will prove to be aware of trauma theory and this will resonate through her novel and through her characters. Moreover, *Fugitive Pieces* can be seen as an example of a witnessing process (Whitehead 2004: 8). Whitehead quotes Nicola King’s assertion that “the novel is structured around different layers or levels of witnessing: Athos listens to or receives Jakob’s testimony; this enables Jakob to write his memoirs which are found and read by Ben, who in turn shares them with the reader” (2004: 8). This means that the witnessing process implies the reader as well. Since memory and the process of witnessing are closely tied together, it is no coincidence that these are both present in the novel. Whitehead states that “[i]n the face of mounting amnesia, there is an urgent need to consciously establish meaningful connections with the past” (2004: 82). She means that there is an unwillingness to remember, a conscious amnesia. The need to remember seems to be her major concern. Yet, this is where postmodernist fiction comes in and this plays an important role in this “memory project” (2004: 82). Trauma fiction is born out of postmodernist fiction and “seeks to foreground the nature and limitations of narrative and to convey the damaging and distorting impact of the traumatic event” (2004: 82). In other
words, it helps to remember the traumatic event. Trauma fiction, Whitehead explains, is especially concerned with portraying war and its effects; above all, particularly the Second World War and the Holocaust dominate these imaginative accounts (2004: 83). In *Fugitive Pieces*, indeed, “[g]hosts of murdered Jews haunt the succeeding generation” (Whitehead 2004: 83). Although Whitehead seems to be concerned about this “mounting amnesia”, she still believes that “the Holocaust is not knowable through traditional frameworks of knowledge and that it cannot be represented by conventional historical, cultural and autobiographical narratives” (2004: 83). She thus attaches a great importance to trauma fiction, which seems to be the best way to represent the Holocaust. According to Whitehead, Rothberg coined the term “traumatic realism” to denote the technical innovations that contemporary writers use to portray the reality of an unimaginable traumatic experience (2004: 84). Nevertheless, this does not mean that she believes that trauma fiction is not historically accurate. It is precisely these experimental techniques which “offer the contemporary novelist a promising vehicle for communicating the unreality of trauma, while still remaining faithful to the facts of history” (2004: 87). To prove that a fictional work is indeed capable of representing traumatic experience in an accurate way, this thesis will give a detailed discussion of Anne Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*. 
3. Memory in Anne Michaels’ Fugitive Pieces

3.1. Introduction

When introducing the novel *Fugitive Pieces*, many scholars immediately refer to the growing impact and popularity of trauma fiction. Patty Kelly summarizes: “[r]ecently, categories of post-Holocaust literature have expanded to include fictional texts from second-generation witnesses, proxy witnesses, and witnesses by adoption who contribute to the growing body of creative and imaginative narratives with a new generic category known as trauma fiction” (1). This may come as no surprise, because there are few first-generation survivors left of the events of the middle of the 20th century. Yet, it is still important to keep the memory of those experiences alive and to preserve them for the generations that are to come. Contemporary writers of trauma fiction may want to “preserve, for future generations, the stories of an aging population of survivors” (Kelly: 1). Levy and Sznider explain that “[h]alf a century after the Holocaust, it is no longer the atrocities themselves that are at the centre of attention, but how the heirs of the victims, the perpetrators and bystanders are coping with these stories and the evolving memories. […] What remains is the memory of a shared past” (2002: 103). Yet, not only the heirs are coping with this history; these traumatic events have to be processed by others as well. Anne Michaels is not related to any survivors of the Holocaust, nor does she belong to a nationality that was directly involved in the Holocaust. Yet, she addressed this traumatic experience in her first novel, *Fugitive Pieces*. Like historical testimony itself, the novel only attempts to represent the reality of a traumatic past, and both kinds of narrative face the problem of reliability. Michael Bernard-Donals clarifies that “[t]estimonies involve both remembering and forgetting – the suppression of the event and its articulations as narrative; a bloting out and a writing down – and the authentication of testimonies of events like the Shoah becomes difficult at best, at least in part because corroborating testimonies and other evidence have been lost” (2003: 198). It will be obvious throughout the discussion that
Michaels gives a realistic account of traumatic experiences, because “[l]ike the traumatic realism described by Rothberg, the traumatic […] that Michaels invents in *Fugitive Pieces* represents trauma through disruptions of time and space” (Coffey 2007: 33). Those disruptions of space and time will have a constant interrelation with the aspect of memory. Nevertheless, Michaels is acutely aware of the controversial nature of fictional Holocaust accounts and she explicitly indicates that her work should be seen as a work of fiction: “this is a work of fiction, and the characters in it are solely the creation of the author. Any resemblance to actual persons – with the exception of historical figures – is entirely coincidental. When historical figures consort with fictional characters, the results are, necessarily, fiction. Similarly, some events have been created to serve fictional purposes” (qtd. in Estrin 2002: 276). So, although she does not claim that her work is historically accurate, her work does come across as realistic because of “one theme [that] is ever-present: memory – its meanings, uses, and metaphorical utility” (Ward 2008: 108). Traumatic experiences often involve memory problems. Hence, many traumatic narratives focus on the aspect of memory. Michaels’ use of memory transcends every aspect of the novel. It is combined with every important theme and that is why it is often used metaphorically. This self-conscious use of memory creates a realistic representation of traumatic experiences.

3.1.1. Memory

It is clear by now that *Fugitive Pieces* is “a fictional account [that] attempts to speak of devastating historical events and to offer a means of remembering ineffable acts that must never be forgotten” (Kelly: 1). But the novel does more than that. Michaels not only draws special attention to the aspect of memory, but also connects that memory to history and the truth, while at the same time investigating the relationship between personal memory, cultural memory and history (Kelly: 1). Kelly correctly argues that Michaels “resists an integrated,
cohesive account of the Holocaust” (1). This is also due to memory which causes a disruption of time. Events happening in the present trigger memories of the past, which causes the lack of chronology and cohesion. Gradually, the reader is confronted with the history of the characters Ben and Jakob Beer. This means that memory not only figures as a theme in *Fugitive Pieces*, but that it also determines the structure of the novel. Ward summarizes the structure of the novel, which is heavily determined by the act of remembrance, as follows:

[T]his structure firmly embeds memory into the narrative and plot. Ben keeps Jakob’s memory alive through the retrieval and publication of his writings. Ben’s parents, Holocaust survivors who kept largely silent about their experiences, are memorialized in their son’s account. Meanwhile, Jakob preserves the memory of his adoptive father, the archaeologist Athos Roussos, by completing and publishing his unfinished works. Jakob also memorializes his sister, Bella, from whom he was irrevocably separated during the Nazi raid that killed his parents, but who remains as a ghostly presence in his journal. Finally, Athos himself, in his book “Bearing False Witness”, seeks to preserve the memory of Biskupin, the archaeological site desecrated by the Nazis because it contradicted their account of “Aryan” history (2008: 109).

It will become clear after a detailed discussion of the novel that the aspect of memory is embedded in the structure of the story and in its various images and themes.

### 3.1.2. The Title *Fugitive Pieces*

The novel’s remarkable title is extremely significant for the content of the book. The main characters Jakob and Ben both have trouble figuring out their past. Jakob does not completely remember or understand the events of his childhood, while Ben tries to figure out what has
happened to his parents during the Holocaust. They are confronted with pieces of their past; it is up to them to create the whole puzzle. *Fugitive Pieces* indeed shows their struggle “to pick up the pieces” (Estrin 2002: 287). The search for the missing pieces of their life directly relates to the important theme of recollection and memory. According to Meredith Criglington, that aspect of recollection parallels the way historic approaches try to reconstruct history without paying attention to the “vagaries” and “moral obligations” of human memory (2006: 87). The fact that “fugitive” precedes the word “pieces” can be explained by the story itself. Both Jakob and Ben are fugitives from the Nazi genocide. Jakob has narrowly escaped the fate of his parents and sister and runs away from city to city. Ben of course also escapes, because he is part of the second generation. Yet, he also runs away from his hometown in order to process what has happened to his parents and to investigate Jacob’s history, Jakob’s pieces, as well. Since the pieces are the fragmentary and incomplete memories, these memories can also be called fugitive because they are so elusive and volatile. Donna Coffey skilfully shows how the title brings to mind several of the themes in the novel. According to Coffey, the “pieces” also refer to the novel’s fragmented structure (2007: 29). Moreover, “pieces” can also stand for musical pieces, which are prominent in the case of Bella, Ben’s father and Naomi (2007: 29). In addition, “pieces” also suggest the pieces of archaeology and “the discovery of fragments of a people or a culture” (2007: 30). Archaeology and geology will be very important in this novel, because all characters engage themselves in these areas that are intimately related to memory. At the end, Coffey makes another suggestion: “the word “pieces” in Michaels’s title could be a translation of “stücke” and could symbolize the ways in which Jakob and other fugitives from Nazi genocide were dehumanized” (2007: 42). Instead of fugitive people, they are called fugitive pieces.
3.2. Memory as a Theme in Fugitive Pieces

3.2.1. Memory and Trauma

The essence of trauma is the denial of what has happened and the trouble of processing and experiencing the traumatic events. Cathy Caruth correctly argues that “[t]he traumatized […] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (2004: 5). Traumatized people do not completely understand what has happened to them. Fugitive Pieces is influenced by that aspect of trauma. Kelly talks about “the survivors’ inability to witness the event in its entirety as it occurs” (2): the protagonist Jakob Beer is the embodiment of such a traumatized survivor. While Jakob was in hiding, both Jakob’s parents were murdered by the Nazis and his sister Bella disappeared. Moreover, not only is Jakob unable to grasp what has happened, he has also not witnessed anything. Several times, he utters: “I did not witness the most important events of my life” (Michaels 1998: 17). Young argues that “the rhetorical trope of eyewitness” is very prominent in Holocaust fiction (1988: 53). The only assurance for Jakob that something had happened is sound: “I couldn’t keep out the sounds: the door breaking open, the spit of buttons. My mother, my father. But worse than those sounds was that I couldn’t remember hearing Bella at all” (1998: 10). It is clear that a traumatic experience has a decisive influence on one’s memory. It can be so overwhelming that any recollection of the experience is gone. According to Susan Gubar, the non-witnessing of his parents’ murder and the unknown fate of his sister take Jakob to the root of trauma: his inability to grasp the traumatic experience as it occurs and its return in flashbacks and nightmares (2002: 254). In the novel, Jakob has several nightmares: “[t]hey waited until I was asleep, then roused themselves, exhausted as swimmers […] Daydreams of sickening repetition – a trivial gesture remembered endlessly” (1998: 24). Every time Jakob falls asleep, he is confronted with recurrent nightmares about the past. This repetitive return to scenes of the past can be seen as a form of acting out. LaCapra explains
that post-traumatic acting out occurs when “one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked” (2001: 21). Acting out may be a good thing to start with, since it “may be a necessary condition of working-through, at least for victims and in certain ways, for all those directly involved in events” (LaCapra 1998: 45). Present events even trigger flashbacks from the past, which cause Jakob’s memory to return: “‘[w]e closed the drapes to the sun and Kostas and I sat at the table in the dark. We heard sirens, anti-aircraft guns, yet the church bells kept ringing for early Mass’ … When they pushed my father, he was still sitting in his chair, I could tell afterwards, by the way he fell” (1998: 63). A scene at the table immediately triggers Jakob’s memory of his father sitting in a chair right before the Nazis came inside. Dominick LaCapra explains this:

the memory lapses of trauma are conjoined with the tendency compulsively to repeat, relive, be possessed by, or act out traumatic scenes of the past, whether in more or less controlled artistic procedures or in uncontrolled existential experiences of hallucination, flashback, dream, and retraumatizing breakdown triggered by incidents that more or less obliquely recall the past (1998: 10).

Flashbacks occur because the traumatic experience is not fully integrated into one’s consciousness (Caruth 2004: 152). When Jakob is still young, his nightmares and memories never bring him to the incident; he does not register what happens at the time:

My mother, after the decrees, turned away by a storekeeper, then dropping her scarf in the doorway, bending down to pick it up. In my mind, her whole life telescoped into that single moment, stooping again and again in her heavy blue coat. My father
standing at the door, waiting for me to tie my laces, looking at his watch [...]. Bella turning the pages of a book. [...] But in nightmares the real picture wouldn’t hold still long enough for me to look, everything melting (1998: 24-25).

Michaels shows how a “traumatic event is repressed or denied and registers only belatedly (nachträglich) after the passage of a period of latency” (LaCapra 1998: 9). That period of latency can be understood as an in-between period when the effects of the traumatic experience are not yet evident (Caruth 2004: 7). This belatedness, which is a crucial characteristic of a traumatic event, influences the characters’ psychological condition. This is definitely the case for Jakob who at the beginning sometimes denies that his sister Bella has disappeared: “Athos didn’t understand, as I hesitated in the doorway, that I was letting Bella enter ahead of me, making sure she was not left behind” (1998: 31). Consequently, Jakob starts mixing up past and present. Because present events trigger those of the past, he starts getting confused. The novel starts by stating that “time is a blind guide” (1998: 5), meaning that trauma takes place outside time and even place. Temporal information cannot be trusted in case of traumatic experiences. As Kelly explains: “the wounded psyche, the traumatic experience resides in the past and the present” (2). A crucial expression that symbolizes the confusion of past and present is Jakob’s saying that “[e]very moment is two moments” (1998: 140). Coffey clarifies that “[t]ime becomes layered because the traumatic moment persists into the present” (2007: 32). Because of its belatedness, the traumatic experience influences both the past and the present. Molly Rauch explains that Jakob is always confusing past and present because, like all other traumatized people, he is afraid that now will become then again (1997: 36). This confusion of now and then also signals that Jakob suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Kelly, PTSD goes along with amnesia, the incapacity to remember the traumatic experience and sometimes even the loss of one’s own
identity (6). Jakob is confronted with an event that is so traumatic – his sister’s disappearance – that his experience “cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge […]” (Caruth 2004: 153). This can be linked to Friedländer’s distinction between “common memory” and “deep memory” (1994: 253). While common memory embodies coherence and closure, deep memory is a repressed memory which ultimately recurs (1994: 254). Jakob’s traumatic experience is part of his deep memory, a memory which he cannot grasp. He even tries to flee from this traumatic event: not only does he depart psychologically - by denying his sister’s disappearance and suppressing his memories about the event - he also literally moves away from the site of the traumatic event (Kelly 6). The different settings will also prove to have their effect on Jakob’s memory, but this will be dealt with later on in this thesis. Nevertheless, despite his “fugitive state,” his own experiences, and especially the memory of his sister Bella, will continue to haunt him. Not only does Jakob have the previously mentioned nightmares and flashbacks, but Bella is also portrayed as a haunting ghost: “[a]wake at night, I’d hear her breathing or singing next to me in the dark, half comforted, half terrified […]. I felt her presence everywhere, in daylight, in rooms I knew weren’t empty. I felt her touch on my back, my shoulders, my hair” (Michaels 1998: 31). Anne Whitehead argues that “[t]he ghost represents an appropriate embodiment of the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present” (2004: 6). This means that his sister Bella is Jakob’s link between past and present. The haunting often embodies an element of the past that has been silenced or repressed (Whitehead 2004: 7). During his dreams, it is Bella who is Jakob’s guide back to the location of his traumatic experience: “Night after night, I endlessly follow Bella’s path from the front door of my parent’s house. In order to give death a place. This becomes my task. I collect facts, trying to reconstruct events in minute detail” (1998: 139). It seems that Jakob realises that he is stuck in this deep memory and that he does not understand what has happened exactly. It is a ghost of the past who must help him to put the pieces together again.
Rothberg argues that “[r]ememberance and imagination are material forces as well as fundamentally human ones” (2009: 19). So, Bella helps Jakob at the stage of working through his trauma: “one works through trauma […], one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (2001: 22).

The belatedness and the confusion of past and present does not only inform the character’s psychological conditions, but also the temporal structure of the novel. Rauch declares that also the chronology of the novel depends on this mixture of past and present: “Jakob tells you when a love affair will end before announcing its beginning; he tells you of a death before mentioning the illness” (1997: 36). The novel’s temporal structure shows that Jakob is temporally confused, because cause and effect – in this case for example illness and death – are mixed up chronologically. The reader is already made aware what will happen, because Jakob has difficulties to distinguish between past events and present events. Overall, Jakob – as well as Ben – has the constant tendency to narrate later events first, while only afterwards coming back to events of the past.

Dori Laub once declared that “trauma and its working through are multigenerational events” (Rothberg 2000: 167). That a traumatic experience needs to be processed not only by the traumatized themselves, but also by the following generations is also apparent in Fugitive Pieces within the story of Ben, a second-generation survivor of the Holocaust. Ben is the son of Holocaust survivors, who have lost two children during the horrific events. In a sense, this means that Ben has a “secondary memory” of his parents’ traumatic experience. LaCapra explains that secondary memory refers to “others who have not themselves lived through the experience or events in question” (1998: 21). Although LaCapra explains that this secondary
memory only involves a reduced transmission of the trauma and not a full acting out of it (1998: 21), Ben seems to be retraumatized by growing up in this traumatized environment. As an adult, memories of his dysfunctional family come to his mind:

The memories we elude catch up to us, overtake us like a shadow. A truth appears suddenly in the middle of a thought, a hair on a lens. My father found the apple in the garbage. It was rotten and I’d thrown it out – I was eight or nine. He fished it from the bin, sought me in my room, grabbed me tight by the shoulder, and pushed the apple to my face (Michaels 1998: 213-214).

As a child, Ben did not understand why his father was so obsessed with food, but as an adult these memories can be put into perspective. His memories make sense to him now. It was only later in life that Ben is made aware of the loss of his siblings when he discovers a picture: “[o]n the back floats a spidery date, June 1941, and two names. Hannah. Paul. I stared at both sides of the photograph a long time before I understood that there had been a daughter; and a son born just before the action” (1998: 252). This means that, like Jakob, Ben has lost siblings, although he only knows this belatedly (Gubar 2002: 268). Estrin argues that “[i]n the face of irreparable loss, [...] [Ben] feels [like] a replacement for what the parents could not protect, a child fostered as a substitute for the real children [...]” (2002: 293). Ben feels confused, because he does not know whether he was just born in order to make his parents forget about his brother and sister. Moreover, Ben feels misunderstood, because his wife had learned about this loss directly from his parents, while Ben had to find out indirectly through pictures. For Gubar, _Fugitive Pieces_ thematizes the second generation’s bafflement when discovering a horrific trauma that they were not aware of (2002: 268). Like all second-generation survivors, Ben is obsessed with this absence of the pre-war world. He says:
“[m]ost discover absence for themselves […]. But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots” (1998: 233). In this passage, Ben is annoyed because his parents left him with no history of their past. Therefore, Dina Wardi likes to refer to those second-generation survivors as “memorial candles” (1992: 30): “[n]ot only must they fill an enormous emotional void, but they must also construct the continuation of the entire family history all by themselves, and thus create a hidden connection with the objects that perished in the Holocaust” (30). Ben feels lost, because he has no memories of his parent’s life, while realising that “[m]y parent’s past is mine molecularly” (1998: 280). LaCapra explains that it is normal that the memory of a traumatic experience is passed on and assimilated by “both participants in events and those born later” (1998: 45).

In a sense, one could argue that Jakob Beer is also part of the second generation. Through his experiences with his parents and sister, he is a member of the first generation, but from a very young age, he was adopted by the Greek geologist Athos Roussos. From then on, Roussos is the real father figure in Jakob’s life. While growing up with his own trauma, Jakob later learns of Athos’ trauma as well, but not by Athos himself. Athos’ friend Kostas reveals to Jakob that Athos was once married to a woman named Helen, whom he lost during the First World War. Jakob feels sad because Athos did not tell him himself: “I felt ashamed, I felt I had betrayed Athos, that somehow I had not been worthy enough for him to have revealed this secret” (1998: 78). So, like Ben, Jakob is confronted with a loss experienced by the parent figure. Moreover, Jakob is aware of their connection and the way they share their traumatic memories: “We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me” (1998: 14).

Michaels is aware of this passing on of trauma from the first generation to the following generations. The novel already presents us with a look at the third generation as well. Jakob is reflecting on the idea of once having children of his own. If he has a son, he
would like to call him Bela; if he has a daughter, he would like to name her Bella. In this case, Wardi’s term “memorial candles” can be applied again. Although “[s]urvivor parents generally tell their children very little about what happened to them because of the great pain involved”, their children often get “the task of infusing content into the emptiness of their hearts and rearranging the broken and hidden pieces of the mosaic within it” (1992: 31). This already indicates that the trauma of Jakob’s sister’s death may be passed on to his children. Nevertheless, Jakob expresses the hope that this will not be the case: “Child I long for: if we conceive you, if you are born, if you reach the age I am now, sixty, I say this to you: Light the lamps but do not look for us” (1998: 194). It is as if Jakob wants them to live their own lives and not one in the shadow of their parents’. Jakob is conscious about the effect that trauma can have on the following generations:

The event is meaningful only if the coordination of time and place is witnessed. Witnessed by those who lived near the incinerators, within the radius of smell. By those who lived outside the camp fence, or stood outside the chamber doors. By those who stepped a few feet to the right on the station platform. By those who were born a generation after (1998: 162, my emphasis).

Jakob mentions the victims, perpetrators and bystanders. But he ends by mentioning the following generation whom he puts at the same level as actual survivors. The following generation could also entail writers like Michaels. According to Ward, this is “an implied claim that the author of fiction about the Holocaust has the same status as one who gives testimony first-hand” (2008: 110).
As to the relationship between memory and trauma in this novel, it is also noteworthy that *Fugitive Pieces* pays attention to the testifying process as well. Kelly correctly argues that trauma work is also memory work, and the testimony of the survivor does not, in its articulation, determine meaning, and thus close a familial, cultural, or historical chapter. Rather, the speaking of the trauma opens meaning, is productive of meaning, and necessitates a willingness on the part of the listener to bear witness to the catastrophic event, to untangle the narrative knots, and to listen through the gaps and ruptures, which takes precedence over any desire for finality (9).

The act of testifying about the traumatic experience to someone else in order to work through the trauma is clearly present in this novel, especially in Jakob’s case. Testifying is trying to turn “traumatic memory” into “narrative memory” (Leys 2000: 105). There is a difference between “traumatic memory,” which “merely and unconsciously repeats the past” and “narrative memory,” which “narrates the past as past” (Leys 2000: 105). It is especially important here that Jakob’s – as well as Ben’s – testifying process involves women. Trying to work through their trauma, is trying to tell and grasp it by opening their hearts to their wives. That is why I will not go into detail about the act of testifying in this chapter, but discuss it in the chapter on women and memory.

3.2.2. Memory and Place

As previously mentioned, trauma is experienced only belatedly and not when it occurs. Moreover, it is only “fully evident […] in connection with another place and in another time” (Caruth 2004: 6). Cathy Caruth argues that a trauma is experienced “as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment. The trauma is a repeated
suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site” (2004: 10, my emphasis). This means that besides confusion of time, trauma is also inherently linked with its place and its memory. This is especially clear when considering *Fugitive Pieces*, where place is one of the major features that Michaels engages herself with. Dalia Kandiyoti thinks it is necessary to consider some important questions: “[w]hat is the meaning of place in the context of the Holocaust and its aftermath?” and “[h]ow is the perception and experience of place represented in the writing of the Holocaust?” (2004: 300). Kandiyoti continues by stating that the most prominent interpretation of post-war European sites is looking upon them as vacant death sites, places that appear “vacated and haunted” (2004: 306). This dominant understanding of these traumatic sites is also acknowledged by Dori Laub and Marjorie Allard. They state that

> [e]ven the physical places bear the contamination of this genocide, of a verdict still in operation. Europe today, and in particular Eastern Europe, remains a site of massive death. Among the empty fields and the desecrated synagogues and Jewish homes are the traces of a crime intended to destroy the very principle of life […]. *They are empty, they reveal nothing of what has occurred in their midst* […]. *The presence* of Jews in Europe is marked mostly by an *absence*, by a *lack of place* (1998: 801).

They all agree on the same idea: the post-war sites are predominantly depicted as voids and death sites (Kandiyoti 2004: 307). Anne Michaels, however, brings a change of perception. She gradually moves away from this predominant interpretation and she even moves beyond Europe. The main character Jakob Beer - together with his adoptive father Athos Roussos - moves from city to city. In this novel, every city is presented as “a site of power and resistance and of history and memory” (Criglington 2006: 129). As the title indicates, Jakob
can be looked upon as a fugitive. He runs away from the place of his traumatic experience. That was the place where Jakob grew up and thus his home which he now looses. Consequently, he moves from city to city and tries to recreate a home for himself and his family. Kandiyoti states that it is exactly this “differential perspective of the younger child, whose strongest awareness of place might be not that of home but of exile” which is at stake in *Fugitive Pieces*. Michaels thus follows the path that a hidden child survivor of the Holocaust takes in his search for a new home. From this perspective, she already moves away from the predominant interpretation “of representing place, of origin or exile, as primarily alienating, terrorizing, or deathlike” (Kandiyoti 2004: 309). Moreover, by moving outside of Europe as well, Michaels links different spaces of loss and histories with each other: both the Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as the ancient and recent (Kandiyoti 2004: 309). Jakob moves from his hometown Biskupin in Poland to Zakynthos in Greece and eventually ends up in the Canadian city Toronto. Hence, he moves from a country which was very involved in the Holocaust to other countries which were less involved. To LaCapra, “a memory site is generally also a site of trauma, and the extent to which it remains invested with trauma marks the extent to which memory has not been effective in coming to terms with it, notably through modes of mourning” (1998:10). For Jakob, all the cities are memory sites. He has not come to terms with his trauma and tries to work through it by linking his memory with other sites of loss, sites less directly involved with the Holocaust. In this way, Michaels “both extends Holocaust consciousness to places not usually associated with the event and affirms the survivor’s need for continued place-based experience” (Kandiyoti 2004: 301). Although Jakob links his trauma with these new places of loss, he is also in search for a place where he belongs again. That is why both Kandiyoti (2004: 301) and Criglington (2006: 93) assert that the places in *Fugitive Pieces* are both characterized by exile as well as a desire for belonging. Jakob feels lost after leaving his home town and losing his family, but it is in his connection
with these new places of loss that he can make sense of that loss and hence feel at home again. He can grieve while looking at a landscape:

The landscape of the Peloponnesus had been injured and healed so many times, sorrow darkened the sunlit ground. All sorrow feels ancient. Wars, occupations, earthquakes; fire and drought. I stood in the valleys and imagined the grief of the hills. I felt my own grief expressed there. It would be almost fifty years and in another country before I would again experience this intense empathy with a landscape (1998: 60).

It is because of his “reflection on place” that “he is able to connect his own loss with that of others” (Kandiyoti 2004: 317). Kandiyoti concludes that Michaels’ places may not be seen as “non-lieux” or non-places, but preferably as places that continue “to contain and produce history and memory” (2004: 316). Marc Augé defines these “non-places” as “places which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity […]” (1995: 76-77). This is clearly no reference to the places that are mentioned in *Fugitive Pieces*. These places are important historical sites that have a fundamental relationship to each other: these are places of loss where Jakob can find his lost identity. As opposed to these “non-places”, Augé refers to “places of memory” (1995: 78). The word speaks for itself: places of memory are sites that carry memory within them. These are the places that are at the heart of this novel. Similarly, Criglington discusses the modern idea of space and claims that “space is no longer considered a passive setting for objects and their interactions but rather a social, historical, and political dimension” (2004: 130). When Michaels turns to the different cities, she does not depict them as mere locations, but as “supreme cultural artefact[s]” that carry memory of the past within them (Criglington: 2006: 86). That past is mostly inhabited by the experiences of the Holocaust. By focusing on a buried or destroyed city, Michaels tries to capture the
voices of those experiences that are lost or destroyed, and hence tries to represent the Holocaust without aestheticizing it (Criglington 2004: 141). She is indeed very much aware of the controversy around the representation of the Holocaust and thus tries to capture it in a less straightforward way. She shows how her main characters mourn and work through their trauma by accommodating themselves in a city which is populated by ghosts from the past (Criglington 2006: 87). Hence, they process their own past and the city’s past in order to create a future for themselves.

3.2.2.1. Biskupin

The novel starts in the Polish city Biskupin where Jakob spent his first years with his parents and sister. He refers to it as “the drowned city” (1998: 5), because it was once flooded. It is no coincidence that Michaels starts her novel with this particular city. Coffey points out that “Buskupin was an archaeological site in Poland that the Nazis overran and destroyed in order to eradicate evidence that contradicted the theory concocted by the German Ahnenerbe that the town was the site of an ancient Germanic culture and hence proof of Germany’s claim to Poland” (2007: 39). From a drowned city, Biskupin transforms to a destroyed or buried city. This event is also mentioned in the novel: “[w]hen the soldiers arrived they examined the perfectly preserved clay bowls; they held the glass beads, the bronze and amber bracelets, before smashing them on the floor. With delighted strides, they roamed the magnificent timber city, once home to a hundred families. Then the soldiers buried Biskupin in sand” (1998: 6). This city challenged German history and for this reason it had to be destroyed. The destruction of Biskupin characterises “the idea of the Holocaust as a profound crisis in Western history and in its mode of representation” (Criglington 2004: 142). Criglington means that Michaels wants to criticise the unconditional belief in historiography. Biskupin was destroyed in order to cover up a lie and this is clearly mentioned in the novel, while
others tend to dismiss the underlying truth of certain events. Historiography can not always be believed and this is staged here. One can conclude that “Biskupin is a symbolically loaded site in the novel and one that testifies to the violence done to memory in the name of official history” (Criglington 2004: 142).

When German soldiers came into Jakob Beer’s house, he was the only one able to hide in the cupboard. Inside his hiding spot, he could hear the murder of his parents. After this horrific experience, Jakob runs through Biskupin’s forests and hides himself in a bog, a wetland covered by thick mat and dead plants. This means that after hiding himself in his own house, Jakob again returns to a hiding place outside his house. Jakob seems to have a preference for silent, invisible places. Kandiyoti explains that “[t]he survivor spatializes his storytelling situation in terms of invisibility and points us under the ground, and within the bog, so that we pay attention to unseen traces and sediments, which reveal not necessarily “truth” but the “deep” stories of the survivor” (2004: 312-313). Michaels tends to thematize these hiding places as places which are important for passing on stories, places that carry memory:

All across Europe there’s such buried treasure. A scrap of lace, a bowl. Ghetto diaries that have never been found. […] In their cramped hiding places, parents tell their children what they can, a hurriedly packed suitcase of family stories, the names of relatives. Fathers give their five-year-old sons advice for married life. Mothers pass down recipes not only for the haroseth on the Seder plate but for mezedhes, for cholent as well as ahladhi sto fourno – baked quince, for poppyseed cake and ladhera (1998: 40).
Biskupin is a representation of these lost narratives and stories that are buried in the ground and it is the site where Jakob has a similar experience. According to Kandiyoti, his days in the bog symbolise the experience of a concentration camp (2004: 310). Although Jakob hides himself, he expresses the feeling of being imprisoned: “[i]n the last possible moment before I have to run, light coming fast, I discover I’ve been held prisoner half the night by a tree, its dead, dense bole carved by moonlight. Even in daylight, in the cold drizzle, the tree’s fait expression is familiar. The face above a uniform” (1998: 12). Jakob compares a tree with a Nazi soldier in uniform. Moreover, the bog is also a key site: “it is the place of Jakob’s death (as a seven-year-old boy living with his family) and rebirth (as hidden child, refugee, and survivor) […]” (Kandiyoti 2004: 310). The bog is the meeting place of Jakob and the Greek geologist Athos Roussos. When Athos takes Jakob with him, Jakob becomes a refugee: “[f]rom out of his trousers he plucked the seven-year-old refugee Jakob Beer” (1998: 14). It seems that Jakob and Athos had left Biskupin just in time:

Soon after Athos made the decision to take me home with him, Biskupin was overrun by soldiers. We learned this after the war. They burned records and relics. They demolished the ancient fortifications and houses that had withstood millennia. Then they shot five of Athos’s colleagues in the surrounding forest. The others were sent to Dachau. And that is one of the reasons Athos believed we saved each other (1998: 51).

Athos becomes obsessed with the German’s destruction and abuse of archaeology and he starts documenting this in his book *Bearing False Witness* (Criglington 2004: 143). He wrote this in order to commemorate his colleagues. Unfortunately, it was never finished before his death.
Bearing False Witness plagues Athos. It was his conscience; his record of how the Nazis abused archaeology to fabricate the past. […] But Biskupin was proof of an advanced culture that wasn’t German; Himmler ordered its obliteration. It wasn’t enough to own the future. The job of Himmler’s SS-Ahnenerbe – the Bureau of Ancestral Inheritance – was to conquer history (1998: 104).

Athos’ manuscript will be discussed further on when I link memory and archaeology, but it is noteworthy to consider its title. This is again a reference to false testimonies that history sometimes passes on.

3.2.2.2. Greece

When Jakob and Athos leave Biskupin, they head to Athos’ native country, Greece. Michaels’ choice for Greece has several reasons. One of the reasons is that Greece “is known as a landscape of ruins, ancient and contemporary, which speaks well to a survivor’s sense of place and time” (Kandiyoti 2004: 317). Kandiyoti elaborates that Jakob can link his pain of his Jewish history with the suffering of other victims (2004: 317). This echoes Michael Rothberg’s term of “multidirectional memory” (2009: 3). Rothberg clarifies that “[t]he model of multidirectional memory […] acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites” (2009: 11). This means that by linking his pain with the suffering of others, Jakob can remember and make sense of his past. By looking at Greece, he remembers scenes from the past:

With my forehead against the glass, I watched and was in my own village, winter evenings, my teacher lighting the wicks of our lanterns and releasing us into the street like toy boats bobbing down a flooded gutter. Wire handles clinked against the hot
gloves. The rising smells of our damp coats. Mones swinging his arms, his lamp skimming the ground, his white breath glowing from below. I watched the Easter procession and placed this parallel image, like other ghostly double exposures, carefully into orbit. On an inner shelf too high to reach. Even now, half a century later, writing this on a different Greek island, I look down to the remote lights of town and feel the heat of a lamp spreading up my sleeve (1998: 18).

Not only does he see real ghosts of the past, like his sister Bella, but he also talks about “ghostly double exposures”. His traumatic past, those “[l]ost moments and lost places reappear, however ghostly, in the present” (Kandiyoti 2004: 315). When Jakob says that “every moment is two moments” (1998: 140), this can also mean that every place is two places (Kandiyoti 2004: 315). Not only does the present reflect his traumatic past, but different locations also bring about a return of his suffering. Another important reason to opt for Greece, is that Michaels moves away from the Eastern European countries which are very prominent in other Holocaust novels (Kandiyoti 2004: 318). It is well known that more than 80% of the Greek Jewish population was murdered during World War II. Despite this massive loss of so many Greek Jews, it is no coincidence that Jakob survives on the Greek island Zakynthos. Kandiyoti has noted that this was an island where most of the Jewish community survived (2004: 318). There were only 275 Jews on this island, but they all managed to stay alive because of the island people’s help. Despite Coffey’s claim that “no site is immune from violence and harm” (2007: 45), it is particularly interesting that Jakob survives on this island where no real harm was done. He becomes part of this survivor community who has to face a tremendous loss, but who are also the ones that have to work through this collective, but at the same time very personal, loss.
Ben follows the footsteps of Jakob and decides to visit Greece as well. Ben has a strong connection with Jakob which is made obvious in the novel. First of all, their story is separated into two parts, but some of those parts carry the same title. Both first chapters, for example, are called “The Drowned City” (1998: 4 and 1998: 199). Secondly, Ben was in a sense – like Jakob – a hidden child as well, since he grows up in a post-war hiding place which is dominated by his parent’s fear (Kandiyoti 2004: 325):

But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen. I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief (1998: 233).

He is also hidden in the sense that he is left out of his parent’s history and consequently experiences a loss of his own: the loss of his siblings. That loss is also something which he has to process. Thirdly, Kandiyoti has also shown that “as a boy, [Ben] is fascinated with twisters and with bog people, which explains, of course, his absorption in the person and life of Jakob” (2004: 325). In a phenomenon like a tornado, Ben is confronted with a reflection on his parent’s past:

Sometimes I read to my mother while she made dinner. I read to her about the effects of a Texan tornado, gathering up personal possessions until in the desert it had collected mounds of apples, onions, jewellery, eyeglasses, clothing – “the camp.” Enough smashed glass to cover seventeen football fields – “Kristallnacht.” I read to her about lightning – “the sign of the Ess Ess, Ben, on their collars.” (1998: 225)
It seems that his mother has given him the example of seeing the past in other objects or places. As a grown up man, Ben does the same by investigating the life of Jakob. In Greece, he wants to reconstruct Jakob’s life, because he understands that Greece had a decisive influence on Jakob. Ben even stays in Jakob’s last house on the island of Idhra. The fact that he goes back to Jakob’s house is because that house is again a repository of memory where stories of the dead – in this case Jakob’s – are left behind (Kandiyoti 2004: 325).

3.2.2.3. Toronto

When the war is over, Athos and Jakob decide to immigrate to Toronto in Canada in the hope of starting a new life there. Here, their journey of connecting their own loss with another country’s loss continues. Yet, while in Greece, they connected with the country in a similar context of the Holocaust, Toronto has a different history that is more hidden to Jakob and Athos. They set themselves to investigate this country’s history and again link their own past with Toronto’s past. Since Toronto’s past is partly hidden, Jakob and Athos consider it “their task to remember the forgotten, attend to the abandoned, and discover the secrets” (Kandiyoti 2004: 321). When only just arrived there, Jakob already sees that obscured past, that hidden memory: “[f]orgotten rivers, abandoned quarries, the remains of an Iroquois fortress. Public parks hazy with subtropical memory, a city built in the bowl of a prehistoric lake” (1998: 89). Especially the rivers of Toronto are of particular interest. Criglington asserts that these rivers offer an appropriate metaphor for memory, since rivers – like memory – “can long flow underground before rising to the surface again” (2006: 94). She explains that these Canadian waterways were buried in order to create an industrial infrastructure, while these were so important for the “First Nations” (2006: 94). The memory and cultural value of a nation had to make way for improvement and civilization. This echoes the destruction of Biskupin which caused many forgotten stories and cultures. More generally, this can be linked to Germany’s
“attempts to consign all voices that contested their vision of human destiny to oblivion” (Criglington 2006: 94). I applied the term of “multidirectional memory” to Greece, but this may even better suit Toronto, since here a different atrocity took place. Rothberg states that “memory and identity […] [are] open to dialogues with other memories and identities […]” (2009: 11). In this case, Jakob and Athos link “the Holocaust with the genocidal treatment of Canada’s aboriginals” (Criglington 2006: 94). During their time in Toronto, they imagine what has happened there and try to figure out the city’s history. For example, they try to imagine the Iroquois fortress that once stood there:

We stood on the sidewalk and imagined the Iroquois fortress. We imagined an Iroquois attack on the affluent neighbourhood, flaming arrows soaring above patio furniture, through picture windows into living rooms, landing on coffee tables that instantly ignited. I stood on the darkening sidewalk and transformed the smells of car wax and mown lawns into curing leather and salted fish. […] The afternoon heat was thick with burning flesh. I saw the smoke rising in whorls into the dark sky. Ambushed, memory cracking open. The bitter residue flying up into my face like ash (1998: 105).

By imagining history, Jakob links his imagination with his own past. Estrin correctly states that “in Fugitive Pieces, imagining the loss is all” (2002: 289). Suddenly, Jakob’s memory cracks open and he sees links with the smoke and the burning smell. These imagined attacks trigger his memory of the Holocaust. Kandiyoti puts it accurately when she claims that “survivors can make sense of their own history as well as relate it to the history and destruction of others” (2004: 323). This is again proof that Michaels does something special with the places in her novel. They cannot be seen as mere places of exile, but more as places
that carry an important meaning for the memory and mourning process. Toronto can actually be seen as Jakob’s storehouse of memory (Criglington 2006: 94). Moreover, Criglington inserts the aspect of counter-memory in this case (2004: 131). In the words of George Lipsitz, “counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But […] counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past” (1990: 213). Toronto can be considered an example of counter-memory: “the protagonists attempt to make sense of their pasts in order to locate themselves in the present” (Criglington 2004: 131). Jakob and Athos thus make sense of their past by “juxtaposing past and present” (Criglington 2004: 133), like the previous example has shown. They are seen as immigrants who are on their way of finding their identity in a new city through empathy with previous generations of Canadians. LaCapra declares that “[e]specially for victims, trauma brings about a lapse or rupture in memory that breaks continuity with the past, thereby placing identity in question to the point of shattering it” (1998: 9). So, in order to remember what has happened, Jakob needs to find his identity again. That is exactly what he is doing in these foreign countries.

Ben was born in Toronto, so this city also carries significance for him. Like Jakob, Ben becomes obsessed with discovering the city’s lost history in order to come clean with his own loss. When he was still a child, the city already made an impact on him:

From then on I began to extend my boundaries, to make detours on my way home from school. I began to learn about the city. The ravines, the coal elevators, the brickyard. Although I wouldn’t have been able to put it into words then, aftermath fascinated me. The silent drama of abandonment of the empty factories and storage bins, the decaying freighters and industrial ruins (1998: 228).
His fascinations turns into a reflection on his own second generation past when he learns about his parent’s history during his investigation of the city. At first, the story of his brother and sister, Paul and Hannah, falls “through the crack of history and memory: their story is overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of public history, yet it is too painful to be accommodated within family history” (Criglington 2004: 146). Criglington points out that it is of course no coincidence that Ben learns about his brother and sister when he is exploring the Humber river (2004: 148). As previously mentioned, rivers serve as a good metaphor for memory in this novel. This river, however, has other significance, since it was also the one that flooded their house in Toronto. Ben’s parents refused to leave the house, because they were reminded about the ghetto round-ups (Criglington 2004: 148). Ben asked about this to his mother:

When I was a teenager I asked my mother why we hadn’t left the house sooner. “They banged at the door and shouted at us to leave. For your father, that was the worst.” She peered from the kitchen into the hallway to see where my father was, and then, with her hands cupped around my ear, whispered: “Who dares to believe he will be saved twice?” (1998: 247)

The flood and the Holocaust are thus closely linked to each other. It is because of this river that Ben finds out a lot about his parent’s history. He starts realizing that “his family’s history is one of the many buried, fragmented narratives that make up the history of the Holocaust” (Criglington 2004: 148).
Kandiyotı summarizes correctly what places mean in *Fugitive Pieces*: “the production of place has everything to do with the destruction of place: through consciousness of the destroyed, whose traces are in invisible corners, cracks, and depths, the displaced may produce a new sense of place for themselves” (2004: 327).

3.2.3. Memory, Archaeology and Geology

In the chapter on memory and place, it has been mentioned several times that the main characters in *Fugitive Pieces* are interested in exploring the geological and archaeological aspects of the city. Not only are geology and archaeology important to the content of the novel, Kandiyotı notices that “*Fugitive Pieces* reveals itself to be a geological structure, with the two men’s narratives nesting in one text as interlocking strata of survivors’ lives and passions” (2004: 324). So, geology and archaeology also inform the structure of the novel, since the two narratives are both first generation and second generation, as well as two narratives which have similar motives and themes. That is why Kandiyotı refers to them as “interlocking strata” (324). Michaels declares that “geological and human memory meet” in this novel (Criglington 2006: 90). Criglington explains that every circumstance, whether it involves a trauma or the condition of falling in love, is shown through geological processes (2006: 88). Coffey agrees with her and stresses that *Fugitive Pieces* uses archaeological excavations as a metaphor (2007: 33). When Jakob was little, Athos already learned him the importance of the memory of the earth, more specifically the way it resonances human memory: “Because Athos’s love was paleobotany, because his heroes were rock and wood as well as human, I learned not only the history of men but the history of earth. I learned the power we give to stones to hold human time” (1998: 32). Criglington clarifies why Michaels is interested in geological processes: “[a]s part of the generation born after WWII, she is particularly concerned with understanding how those who come after can commemorate the
catastrophes that have indirectly yet profoundly affected them” (2006: 88). One way to commemorate those catastrophes is trying to hold on to the memories of the victims and collecting them. Michaels demonstrates that the only way of commemorating is collectively investigating those landscapes of memory where those atrocities and mass murders took place (Whitehead 2004: 11). Athos emphasises the importance of being commemorated and realises that the ground plays a particular role in that. He says to Jakob: “Jakob, try to be buried in ground that will remember you” (1998: 76). Jakob’s story is also one of those that need to be remembered, that need to be processed. Hence, “[b]oth Athos and Jakob devote their lives to collecting the shattered remnants of the past, rescuing and redeeming the stories of the conquered and the dispossessed” (Whitehead 2004: 10). Similarly, when Ben describes his father’s past during the Holocaust, he also mentions that the ground carries memories. In this case, he refers to the mass graves, where the lost stories of the dead are buried:

Shortly before the war, my parents moved there from Warsaw. Nearby was a peaceful old forest. My parents used to go there for weekend picnics. In 1941, the Nazis removed the name of the forest from the map. Then, over three years, they killed in that little grove. Afterwards, the remaining Jews and Soviet prisoners were forced to reopen the seeping pits and cremate the eighty thousand dead. They dug the bodies out of the ground. They put their bare hands not only into death, not only into the syrups and bacteria of the body, but into emotions, beliefs, confessions. One man’s memories then another’s, thousands whose lives it was their duty to imagine…(1998: 279).

The fact that these last lines are in italics shows the value of these words.
During their journey, Jakob starts realising that these processes of collecting help him to work through his own trauma as well. Athos helps Jakob “toward the understanding that geologic processes mirror psychological ones, grief and memory resembling the stratigraphy of a rocky landscape” (Rauch 1997: 36). Athos tells Jakob the story of Captain Scott and his expedition to the South Pole. They went there to explore the soil, but froze to death. On several occasions, Athos’ story is reminiscent of the situation of camp inmates. He talks, for example about their starvation and hunger: “In their howling tent, the exhausted men ate hallucinatory meals. They smelled roast beef in the frozen darkness and savoured each bite in their imaginations as they swallowed their dried rations. At night, rigid in their sleeping bags, they discussed chocolate” (1998: 33). At times, Jakob links this story with camp survivors himself (Rauch 1997: 36). Athos tells him that the explorers “barely able to drag themselves, continued to haul back thirty-five pounds of fossils from the Beardmore” (1998: 35). Later, Jakob talks about the stone-carriers who “were forced to haul huge blocks of limestone endlessly, from one mound to another and back again. During their torture, they carried their lives in their hands” (1998: 53). Rauch claims that “Jakob himself is a stone-carrier, and the weight of his life is almost enough to drag him to his death” (1997: 36). This means that he really identifies with the camp survivors. When the story is being told by Athos, Jakob imagines the situation when the Jews were rounded up. As he is imagining the last hours of the geologists many centuries ago, he is also imagining and identifying with the Jews who were hiding – not coincidentally “into the hills, where they wait like coral; half flesh, half stone” (1998: 40). Athos’ stories of fossils and expeditions make Jakob realise that he has to work through his trauma. As Athos tells Jakob about the history of several islands and what has happened to their ground, Jakob realises that “[e]ach island represented a victory and a defeat: it had either pulled itself free or pulled too hard and found itself alone. Later, as these islands grew older, they turned misfortune into virtue, learned to accept their cragginess, their
misshapen coasts, ragged where they’d been torn” (1998: 30). Jakob identifies with island soil and realises that he has to overcome his trauma and work through it. Whitehead declares that the landscape “can help to absorb the shock of trauma” (2004: 10). This is not the only case where a person identifies with the earth. Coffey has emphasised that the earth itself “is a traumatized body, and bodies are described as being made of earth” (2007: 45). Michaels describes many comparisons between land and the human body: “rivers following the inconsistencies of land like tears following the imperfections on skin (1998: 51) or the size of a heart which is like the “heaviness of a handful of earth” (1998: 113). Like the earth, “it is my body that remembers […]” (1998: 170).

It is also important to notice that Michaels’ novel “is dominated by imagery of soil” (Coffey 2007: 44). She employs this as a Nazi image and turns it around as to “undercut its nationalistic significance and align it with victimization and suffering” (Coffey 2007: 44). Coffey asserts that Michaels does so by mixing the images of soil and blood in order to redefine Nazi glory into Holocaust horror (2007: 44). When Jakob talks about his stay on Zakynthos, his description of the solid rock is immediately linked with the taste of blood. Consequently, the images of his past come up:

On Zakynthos we lived on solid rock, in a high and windy place full of light. I learned to tolerate images rising in me like bruises. But in my continuous expectation of the burst door, the taste of blood that filled my moth suddenly, many times a day, I couldn’t conceive of any feeling stronger than fear. What is stronger than fear; Athos, who is stronger than fear? (1998: 19).
Jakob also follows Athos’ footsteps concerning the manuscript *Bearing False Witness*. As mentioned before, Athos is unable to finish it and Jakob takes it upon himself to finish the book and to publish it. He even translates it into Greek. Of course, Jakob wants to preserve the memory of Athos after his death. Athos was interested in displaying the German’s abuse of archaeology and Jakob’s interest is also similar. Moreover, he wants to let the ground speak. Hence, Jakob decides to publish a series of poems titled *Groundwork*. This title is of course a reflection of his interest to preserve the memories that are buried in the ground. He is particularly interested in those mass graves. One can elicit that because of what Ben says: “[w]hen you turned your attention to your own poems, in your *Groundwork*, and you recount the geology of the mass graves, it’s as if we hear the earth speak” (1998: 209). Clearly, Ben is blown away by Jakob’s work. Kelly calls *Groundwork* “a testament to the metaphors of earth and excavation, memory and retrieval that pervade *Fugitive Pieces*” (3). Criglington concludes that Jakob’s interest in preserving those memories is both a desire and a responsibility “to bear witness” (2006: 88).

### 3.2.4. Memory and Nature

Coffey compares *Fugitive Pieces* with a sort of pastoral elegy (2007: 28). This is due to the numerous natural elements that can be discovered in the novel. She explains that Michaels “creates a traumatic pastoral in which both nature and humans are victims and witnesses of catastrophe. She also seeks to redefine the terms of elegy, expanding it to the scope of a novel and altering it to accommodate the trauma of the Holocaust” (2007: 28). Generally, a pastoral elegy is a sort of poem in which the nature grieves in similar terms as the mourner grieves.

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1 According to Susan Gubar, the finishing of the book “hints at the crucial role of post-Holocaust proxy-witnessing” (2002: 260)
Coffey makes a good point, since the traumatic experiences in this novel are largely linked to natural phenomena.

Jakob has the preference to describe his experiences in relation to water. This tendency already emerges when he describes his traumatic youth. While running away from his family’s house, he expresses his incapacity to remember what has happened: “[t]he river was the same blackness that was inside me; only the thin membrane of my skin kept me floating” (1998: 7). He compares his emptiness inside with the blackness of a river. This may seem strange at first, but Jakob later explains that “[h]uman memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment” (1998: 53). Moreover, almost every time when Jakob recalls his parents, he makes an association with the waves of the sea. It is as if the waves help him to imagine his parents: “I heard in my head their cries and imagined in the waves their shiny, almost human skin, their brine-soaked hair. And, as in my nightmares, I placed my parents under the waves where it was clear and blue” (1998: 76). But the sea and waves also wash away the past. A wave can take something into the sea, but also has the power to bring it back again. That is the same with a traumatic past: it can be pushed out, but sometimes it is brought back to memory by some trigger. The moment Jakob finds Athos’ corpse, he compares Athos’ death with the sea: “His death was quiet; rain on the sea” (1998: 114). The sea remembers the dead, because “[t]hroughout the novel, nature records its own memory traces” (Whitehead 2004: 10). Ben even expresses this idea of nature remembering: “[w]e think of weather as transient, changeable, and above all, ephemeral; but everywhere nature remembers” (1998: 211).

While the sea helps to imagine the past for Jakob, Ben has the urge to compare everything with wind. Wind, however, has in his case the negative connotation that it eludes memory. Estrin states the wind that “dries up memory in the Ben story” (2002: 293). Ben
starts his account by comparing the lack of communication in his parent’s household with wind: “[t]here was no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering into a strong wind” (1998: 204). This suggests the incapacity of his parents to pass on their story to their son and hence they elude his secondary memory. However, when that strong wind turns into a tornado, memories of the Holocaust are passed on:

Sometimes I read to my mother while she made dinner. I read to her about the effects of a Texan tornado, gathering up personal possessions until in the desert it had collected mounds of apples, onions, jewellery, eyeglasses, clothing – “the camp.” Enough smashed glass to cover seventeen football fields – “Kristallnacht.” I read to her about lightning – “the sign of the Ess Ess, Ben, on their collars.” (1998: 225)

Estrin explains that “the storm revives memories of the broken glass of Kristallnacht. The bizarre mayhem of twisters is the same as the twisted violence of the Nazis, but the sound of forced torment in its arbitrary design – the “Ess Ess” – evokes, for the child of Holocaust-victims, the memory of force-feeding as inverse response to food deprivation during the war” (2002: 286). Indeed, the mentioning of the apples which were collected by the tornado echoes the previously mentioned apple scene with Ben’s father. He was so angry that Ben had thrown away an apple, which was rotten for Ben, but which was still food that had to be eaten for Ben’s father. Ben very consciously connects his memory and wind, or more generally the weather. For his thesis, he writes about “the real-life objective correlative – weather and biography” (1998: 211). According to Estrin, this is “a topic that fleshes out a connection he had already made as a child when he described a tornado in terms of the SS” (2002: 295).
3.2.5. Memory and Language

Because the novel plays around with the boundaries between poetry and fiction, some scholars state that Michaels may aestheticize the Holocaust (Coffey 2007: 28). I disagree with this remark, because Michaels is simply showing the connection between language and memory, and more specifically also the effect trauma has on language. Dominick LaCapra points out that “in seeking an acceptable way of representing and responding to the Holocaust, one may well recognize the special demands placed on language [...]” (1994: 110). In my opinion, Michaels responds to this statement by effectively paying close attention to language and memory. Kelly emphasises that the novel’s attention to poetry and language “sensitively portray[s] the fraught relationship between history, truth, and memory [...]” (8). The relationship between memory and language has also been noticed by Michael Rothberg. He declares that “the frameworks of memory function something like language – they provide a shared medium within which alone individuals can remember or articulate themselves” (2009: 15). That is why the attention that the characters give to language is always very specific and important to investigate, since it corresponds to the articulation and memory of their traumatic past. Estrin also brings up the link between language and memory, because “we also need to acknowledge that, in bell hooks’s terms, language ‘take[s] root in our memory against will’” (2002: 276).

3.2.5.1. Silence

When the Germans burst into Jakob’s house, killed his parents and took away his sister Bella, Jakob was surrounded by silence. That silence is a reflection on the fact that he did not witness anything, that he did not quite grasp and remember what had actually occurred. Moreover, Jakob becomes afraid of this silence, because his sister had disappeared in that full silence: “[b]ut worse than those sounds was that I couldn’t remember hearing Bella at all.
Filled with her silence, I had no choice but to imagine her face” (1998: 10). That is why – for Jakob – silence often goes hand in hand with imagination. He cannot remember her disappearance, because he did not hear it. In the beginning, every connection with Bella has a connection with silence: “[a]nd suddenly I realized, my throat aching without sound – Bella” (1998: 9). That is why Jakob becomes obsessed with listening instead of speaking in the hope of hearing a sound, in the hope of remembering what happened to his sister: “I wait to close myself up inside. In the hot silence I can’t read or think past listening. I listen until I sleep, until I wake again, listening” (1998: 40). Accordingly, Criglington claims that silences can emerge because of the realisation that memory is only partial (2004: 130).

Furthermore, silence also reflects the loss of Jakob’s culture. At a particular moment, Jakob says: “I screamed into the silence the only phrase I knew in more than one language, I screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping my fists on my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew” (1998: 13). According to Gubar, Michaels uses this scene to demonstrate that language is also one of the casualties of Jakob’s disaster, because “his self-definition proves that the sole terms at his disposal have been poisoned by the lethal culture that classified and thereby attempted to eradicate him” (2002: 256). He has forgotten his real identity, his own culture because of this disaster. When he leaves his hometown, this disruption becomes worse. In this sense, Michaels “examines the themes of miscommunication and dislocation in relation to the trauma of separation from one’s native land and culture” (Criglington 2006: 92). When Jakob arrives in Toronto for example, he literally links this new culture with the end of a language: “[a] city of forsaken worlds; language a kind of farewell” (1998: 89). Yet, while living in another country, Jakob realises that his living in silence is maybe the only way: “[t]hat my life could not be stored in any language but only in silence; the moment I looked into the room and took in only what was
visible, not vanished. The moment I failed to see Bella had disappeared” (1998: 111).
Criglington points out that this silence cannot be seen as an emptiness, but more as “a presence of an absence” (2006: 92), because for Jakob silence is “the response to both emptiness and fullness” (Michaels 1998: 194). Jakob says something similar in the novel, when he wants to point out that it is not because he cannot remember the disappearance of his sister, that he has no memory of it. Jakob says that [t]here’s no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence” (1998: 193). Due to this other country, Jakob can accept this silence. By accepting it, he can try to change that silence and restore it by writing poetry. Yet, at the same time, Jakob realises that silence is not always a bad thing, because “language cannot express or represent ‘everything’” (Kandiyoti 2004: 327).

Ben also has a relationship with silence. One can argue that Ben grew up in silence, since his parents left out important information about their past, that is he loss of their children. Hence, for a long time, Ben did not know about the death of his siblings. From Ben’s narrative, it is obvious that his parents had trouble to communicate anything at all concerning their Holocaust past.

My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking. It soaked into the furniture, into my father’s dank armchair, a mildew in the walls. We communicated by slight gestures, surgeons in an operating theatre. When my parents died, I realized I’d expected sound suddenly to enter the apartment, to rush into the place so long prohibited. But no sound came into the apartment (1998: 204).

When his parents die, Ben expects that the silence will disappear. Like Rauch says, “Ben seeks to put language into that silence” (1997: 37). He does not understand that this will not
happen because of his parent’s death. He has to look for another way. Similar to Jakob, he will find his way into poetry.

3.2.5.2. Poetry

Jakob is afraid of silence, and Athos and his friend Kostas try to teach him the importance of poetry: “I already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate. But poetry, the power of language to restore: this was what both Athos and Kostas were trying to teach me” (1998: 79). Rauch notices that at first Jakob is still “obsessed with silence” (1997: 36); Jakob tries to “identify the invisible, what’s between the lines, the mysterious implications” (Michaels 1998: 109). But at last, he is able to go back to the past by writing poetry about it: “I in poems I returned to Biskupin, to the house on Zakynthos, to the river, to the burst door, to the minutes in the wall” (1998: 111-112). To write poetry is again closely linked to the loss of his sister Bella. Instead of remaining silent, Jakob starts imagining what happened to his sister: “I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining” (1998: 167). According to Rauch, “[b]y imagining what really happened to Bella, [Jakob] puts the unspeakable into language and, in a chilling series of interjections, posits what Bella herself was thinking while lying on her bunk in the death camp, or scrambling toward the last pocket of air in the gas chamber. This blasphemy of imagination is the act that frees him” (1997: 36). Jakob will always have trouble to make sense of his sister’s and his own experiences; “they are always to some degree fragmented from him, fragments to him – foreign pieces of experience to which he can return to remake the pattern in which he understands them, while they enlarge him” (Gubar 2002: 260). By imagining what happens to his sister, Jakob can process his own past as well. Therefore, he has to put it into words, “restore order by naming” (1998: 111). One could argue that Jakob’s experiences that are turned into poetry are the same as him testifying about his traumatic past. At the same time, writing poetry is an act of
preserving the memory of those who were lost during the Holocaust (Gubar 2002: 273). The fact that Michaels turns Jakob into a poet may be a direct reply to Adorno’s claim that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Adorno 1951: 34). By adding such importance to this aspect in the novel, Michaels goes against that idea.

Jakob’s poems do not only help him to process his trauma; they also help the following generation – in this case Ben. Ben starts reading Jakob’s poems and they help him to understand and grasp history. When Ben was a child, he too had nightmares that he did not understand. Yet, when he reads Jakob’s poems, everything starts making sense: “I finally understood the meaning […], Jakob Beer, when I read your poems” (1998: 205-206). Rauch correctly argues that Jakob’s poems are responsible for “Ben’s growing ability to understand the Holocaust […]” (1997: 37). Ben repeatedly makes links between Jakob’s poems – or language in general – and the Holocaust:

I know that the more one loves a man’s words, the more one can assume he’s put everything into his work that he couldn’t put into his life. The relation between a man’s behaviour and his words is usually that of gristle and fat on the bone of meaning. But, in your case, there seemed to be no gap between the poems and the man. How could it be otherwise, for a man who claimed to believe so completely in language? Who knew that even one letter – like the “J” stamped on a passport – could have the power of life or death (1998: 207).

It is also remarkable that Ben keeps addressing Jakob in person as if he is standing right in front of him, as if he defends Jakob’s poetry in front of Jakob himself. Rauch claims that Ben is almost writing a narrative of his own, a sort of memoir (1997: 37). This memoir is a
dedication to Jakob, who has had an influence on Ben’s life. Jakob himself was aware of the
effects that a man’s work can have on others. The preface of the book announces Jakob’s
death and mentions that “[s]hortly before his death, [Jakob] Beer had begun to write his
memoirs. ‘A man’s experience of war,’ he once wrote, ‘never ends with the war. A man’s
work, like his life, is never completed…” (1998: xiv).

3.2.7. Memory and Women

3.2.7.1. Female Representations of the Holocaust

The discussion of the representation of the Holocaust also points at two different kinds of
representation: from the male and the female perspective. Many scholars claim that there is a
tremendous difference between Holocaust representations written by men or by women. This
subject, however, is a very controversial one. Although Fugitive Pieces is not a representation
of a female experience, it is a female representation of the Holocaust. It will become clear that
Michaels also pays close attention to the presence of women in her novel and to the way they
are presented as strong feminist characters who have a direct influence on the mourning and
memory of the male characters in the novel.

Recently, many scholars have complained about the absence of female voices in
Holocaust stories and studies (Copeland: 1). But then the following questions arise: is there
actually a difference in the way women experienced the horror of the Holocaust and the way
men did? Or are there significant distinctions between female and male authors who write
about this subject?

Saul Friedländer was one of the first to state that the “master narrative” from the many
available Holocaust stories is the male voice (Pécsi). In similar terms, Goldenberg declares
that despite the large number of Holocaust stories that have already emerged and have been
explored, “most of it has focused on the historical events, whether from German, American, or Russian sources, and most of it has assumed a male-centered perspective” (1996: 79). She further typifies this “male-centered perspective” as “the experiences of Jewish men [that] have been documented and generalized as if they were as true for women as they were for men” (79). In a way, Goldenberg claims that there must have been a difference between female and male experiences during the Holocaust. She is not the only one with this opinion. Katalin Pécsi, the director of education at the Holocaust Memorial and Documentation Center in Budapest, emphasises the importance of paying special attention to these female narratives in order to investigate the different way women tell their stories (Pécsi). Like Goldenberg, she also complains about the absence of these female voices and the main focus on the male versions, which are “independent of gender and considered as universal for all victims”. In her thesis about women as “double victims” of the Holocaust, Shauna Copeland takes this reasoning even further when she states that women’s voices were often “muted” and that the male voices have come to be known as important sources (2). All these scholars agree on the same idea: there is a need for a further study of female stories and there is a difference between the voices of men and women.

Of course, there are some female experiences and memories that have been written down. This resulted in all sorts of genres, going from memoirs to poetry to even fictional work. Sara Horowitz claims that “their writing is often at odds with literature written by men” (Horowitz). In male stories, women tend to play only “passive or peripheral roles” (Horowitz). Of course, men and women were always separated during their time in the camps, which could explain this absence of women in male accounts. Yet, in addition, women were often portrayed as “powerless victims” (Pécsi). The traditional war stories “depict women as relegated to domestic space, while men go off to battle. Women are depicted as passive, either
victimized or rescued by men” (Horowitz). But this is the case in male Holocaust stories as well (Horowitz).

I have suggested that female literature about the Holocaust differs extensively from male literature. But still the question remains: what are those main differences? Horowitz claims that some stories “characterize the Holocaust in general,” while other stories have recurrent themes which are “gender specific” (Horowitz). In these female gendered stories, new topics appear which have not yet been addressed in male stories. Pécsi claims that “besides the themes of physical and psychological defencelessness and the dread of terror, new narratives have been born about solidarity and friendship between women” (Pécsi). There were several other experiences that women also had to deal with in the camps: pregnancy, abortion, rape, the responsibility for their children who stayed with their mothers. Horowitz emphasises the presence of these children as an important “burden” on those mothers, who desperately tried to keep their family together, while constantly experiencing the terror of being taken away or killed. In this context, she gives the example of Ilona Karmel’s book *An Estate of Memory*. This novel revolves around four women who build up a friendship in the concentration camps and try to hide a pregnancy of one of their own. Horowitz claims that Karmel uses this secret pregnancy as “a symbol of the women’s inner resistance to the forces of atrocity and the crucible by which they evaluate themselves as ethical beings”, but that she also uses this to symbolise the female Holocaust experience (Horowitz). Such themes are the main reasons why Copeland (2), as well as Goldenberg (1996: 78) call the women in concentration camps “double victims”. Similarly, Joy Miller argues that these women faced a “double jeopardy” of being Jewish, but also Jewish women (Copeland: 2). Sexual abuse was probably very common in concentration camps. Therefore, Horowitz notices that many women explicitly link sexual exploitation with power in their work (Horowitz). Nazi ideology
indeed does not only denote the superiority of the Aryan race, but more generally the superiority of men as well. Likewise, Pécsi mentions that their ideology is not only racist, but also sexist (Pécsi).

What we also see in the female canon is a reversal of the female role as it is portrayed in the traditional war stories and the male Holocaust stories. As discussed earlier, the women were often shown as mere victims who were particularly characterized by the domestic sphere. In the female Holocaust stories, many writers react against this representation. Now, women become the main characters. Pécsi says they have “particular, specific features” now: “they respond to oppression, they resist, they fight” (Pécsi). Horowitz further elaborates on this role reversal. In the camps, women were faced with a world outside the domestic. They had to work in order to keep themselves and their children alive by depending especially on their own or on other women (Horowitz).

The question why some scholars claim that there is an absence in female Holocaust stories is answered by dr. Katalin Pécsi. She claims that many women refused to talk or write after their horrific experiences. They did not want to talk about their humiliation, rape or other experiences. Therefore, Pécsi says that their traumas are “culturally not represented” (Pécsi). Nevertheless, there were of course women who did write about what happened to them. In this context, Pécsi says we cannot ignore the specifics of these writings, since the aspect of memory plays a prominent role in the stories:

Their memories are so tormenting and painful that many of them stopped writing. In other cases, the writers of recollections were not satisfied with their work, as they felt they were unable to render what they had gone through, the things they meant to share with the readers. Many authors rewrote their memoirs years or decades later; and there
are always irreconcilable differences between what the two (or sometimes more) versions emphasize (Pécsi).

On top of that, Pécsi also directs our attention to the lack of stories by female capos (Pécsi), which again demonstrates that female Holocaust stories are less present in the canon than male Holocaust stories.

No matter what arguments certain scholars make about the difference between female and male writing about the Holocaust, it still is very dangerous to make any strong claims about this subject. All survivors of the concentration camps are victims. One should be careful when making a distinction between them. The controversial nature of such distinctions has been emphasised by numerous scholars. Although Pécsi makes very strong arguments about the subject, she is still careful by stating that “a gender-focused examination does not aim at measuring who suffered more: a mother or a father who lost a child. And it does not intend to ‘divide’ victims either, when it treats the experiences and the memoirs of men and women separately” (Pécsi). Goldenberg also emphasises the controversy surrounding the subject, as she is aware that some scholars, and even some survivors, have their doubts about such comparisons between female and male work. Such comparisons would be “inappropriate, divisive, or politically motivated” (1996: 79). Copeland pays special attention to some scholars who either agree with this comparison and those who do not. On the one hand, there is Joy Miller who believes that these women had profoundly different experiences and that these “distinctively feminine issues” should be further elaborated (Copeland: 2). On the other hand, there is Lawrence Langer who “disputes the importance of gender during the Holocaust” (Copeland: 2). Scholars, like Miller, who favour the importance of gendered studies, try to gain a better look at “the complex phenomenon of victimization”. Langer reacts
especially against this point by arguing that the “ultimate sense of loss unites former victims in a violated world beyond gender” (qtd. in Copeland: 3). For the victims, the difference between male and female did not make any difference at the time. So, why should it now? Cynthia Ozick, the writer of many female Holocaust works, partly agrees with Langer, since she underlines the fact that during the Holocaust, those victims were not looked upon as men, women or children, but only as Jews (Copeland: 3). Langer goes even further by explaining that gender should not be at stake in those studies, since the victims were “unable to fulfil their traditionally gendered roles” (Copeland: 3) during their time at the camps. They were too overwhelmed by the experience and they had no control over what could happen. Joan Ringelheim, however, does not share Langer’s opinion. Ringelheim conducted several interviews with survivors, and according to her, women were definitely able to act out their gendered roles due to the fact that several of them testified about sharing recipes, important friendships and co-operation with other women (Copeland: 4). Nevertheless, even Ringelheim is very cautious about asserting that an actual difference between male and female experiences existed. She argues that “rape, abortion, sexual exploitation, and pregnancy are always a potential part of women’s lives, and that the ubiquitous nature of these experiences causes them to be irrelevant within the context of such a cataclysmic event” (Copeland: 3). By paying too much attention to rape, pregnancy and abortion, one could argue that men experienced profoundly less than women. So, one should be very wary when making such allegations. In addition, focusing too hard on these aspects of female victimization might lead to a marginalisation of the women. Copeland states that by paying too much attention to these aspects, one could say that these women’s experiences were unique and exceptional, while male experiences are more normal (Copeland: 4). As Sara Horowitz writes: “[l]imiting our discussion in this way would – ironically – serve to reinscribe male experiences as normative
for the development of a master narrative, and would relegate women to the category of the mother, or the victim of sexual abuse” (qtd. in Copeland: 3).

Despite the controversy, several studies of female experiences during the Holocaust have been written recently. Copeland concludes that especially “female authors can contribute greatly to a better understanding of this victimization, revealing new insights and interesting comparisons to Holocaust experiences that have been so widely documented by men” (Copeland: 36).

By now, it has become clear that the topic of the differences between female and male Holocaust experiences and/or representations is controversial. Because of the controversy, I will not make any explicit arguments about the victimization of either male or female survivors, especially since this thesis deals with a fictional work. What is remarkable in this case, however, is the fact that we are dealing with a female author who primarily writes about male characters. This means that Michaels takes this discussion to a higher level by focusing, as a female author, on male characters this time. Moreover, the few women portrayed in the book have some remarkable feminist characteristics which suggests that Anne Michaels is aware of the tension between male and female roles. She consciously plays with the traditional distinctions that other authors make by reversing the roles. Her male protagonists are victimized, while the female roles – at the same time merely supporting characters - are the strong ones in this novel.

3.2.7.2. Women in *Fugitive Pieces*

Gubar’s discussion of *Fugitive Pieces* has pointed out that Michael’s use of gender meets with some opposition, because one may not forget that the Nazis saw to it to exterminate all of Europe’s Jews (2002: 249-250). She continues by stating that Michaels brings feminism,
gender and its relation into her novel in a clever way, by keeping the men at the centre of the story (2002: 250). On the one hand, one could argue that at first sight Fugitive Pieces is very similar to the previously mentioned traditional war stories. The novel presents male victims at the centre, while the female characters are only supporting characters in the periphery who help their loved ones to process and remember their trauma. Yet, on the other hand, Michaels consciously portrays the men at the centre “to consider the virtues of empathy women have been traditionally acculturated to develop and to suggest they can be learned by men […]” (Gubar 2002: 254). Although the novel deals with male victims, the female characters always listen to the men’s stories and they empathise in such way that it helps the male figures to work through their trauma. Gubar links the empathy of the women with LaCapra’s “empathic unsettlement” (2002: 253). Moreover, Michaels may also have decided to work with male protagonists to “underscore her attempt to imagine suffering [she] never experienced firsthand” (Gubar 2002: 253). This means that – like her characters – Michaels also attains empathy for the victims of the Holocaust, in this case male survivors. By creating more distance – because of her femininity – she argues that one with no experience of the Holocaust can empathise and identify with survivors. Hence, one can try to imagine their stories and reflect on them in a fictional novel. Michaels also pays attention to the body of the female characters. Throughout the novel, female bodies often serve as an important link with the past. Criglington refers to it as the concept of “embodied memory” that “relies on the female body as its metaphorical vehicle” (2006: 89). She correctly claims that “the female sexual body is […] spatially “mapped out” to serve as a physical link between past and present” (2006: 95). Jakob says that “at any moment, our bodies are ready to remember us” (1998: 181). When Jakob, for example has explored Michaela’s body, Michaela is immediately linked with Bella: “Michaela’s hands above her head; I stroke the fragile place on the back of her smooth, soft upper arms. She is sobbing. She has heard everything – her
heart an ear, her skin an ear. Michaela is crying for Bella” (1998: 182). This passage also indicates the empathy that a woman like Michaela has for Jakob and especially for his lost sister Bella. According to Criglington, there are three sorts of female roles: “the woman may represent the ostensible goal of the quest, someone who needs to be found or rescued; she may be a beguiler, someone who poses as an obstacle or threat to the hero; or she may be a guide, sage, or mediator for the hero” (2006: 95). I believe that in this novel, one can find all three types. First of all, Bella can be looked upon as the goal of Jakob’s quest. His quest entails the mourning and acceptance of Bella’s probable death. In this process, Jakob looks everywhere to catch a glimpse of her presence. In everything he does, he reflects on Bella. That is why she can be considered a goal in his life. Secondly, women who form an obstacle – not really a threat – are also present in *Fugitive Pieces*. Jakob’s first wife Alexandra and Ben’s mistress Petra form obstacles in both their healing process. They are often said to block the male character’s memory of the past and help them to forget rather than work through. Finally, Jakob’s second wife Michaela and Ben’s wife Naomi represent the guides and mediators for the male protagonists. They enable the men to talk about their traumatic experience and to reflect on the memories of their past. They are the women Jakob and Ben bear witness to; Michaela and Naomi are responsible for the gradual acceptance of their trauma.

The discussion of Jakob’s relationship with the female characters must naturally start with Bella. Criglington declares that “Jakob’s romantic idealisation of her memory, his obsession with her unknown fate at the hands of the German soldiers who killed their parents, and his endless melancholia all govern his subsequent relationships with women” (2006: 95). The previously mentioned illustration of Jakob’s reflection on Bella while exploring Michaela’s body is only one of the many occasions. For Jakob, a suitable woman has to have
an instant connection with the past, with Bella. That is why his marriage with Alexandra eventually strands. Jakob soon realises that Alexandra “hinder[s] his connection with Bella” (Criglington 2006: 95):

> Everything is wrong: the bedroom with its white furniture, the woman asleep beside me, my panic. For when I wake I know it’s not Bella who has vanished, but me. Bella, who is nowhere to be found, is looking for me. How will she ever find me here, beside this strange woman? Speaking this language, eating strange food, wearing these clothes? (1998: 126)

It is a sudden awareness that “she is brainwashing him, trying to make him forget the Holocaust by immersing him in her unfamiliar Canadian ways” (Criglington 2006: 95).

> I begin to feel Alex is brainwashing me. Her Gerrard Street scene, her jazz at the Tick Tock, […]. The length of her, the edgy sexuality of which she’s now fully in control – all of it is making me forget. Athos replaced parts of me slowly, as if he were preserving wood. But Alex – Alex wants to explode me, set fire to everything. She wants me to begin again.

He is afraid that if Alexandra changes him too much, he will not remember his origins. Hence, he will forget about his past and especially Bella. He utters his need to remember. Jakob compares himself with a piece of wood. While Athos sees the positive side of that – wood can be preserved and used – Alex immediately wants to start over and erase his past, burn the wood. That is not the way for Jakob to make amends with his trauma. Gubar concludes that “his wife’s insistence that he “begin again” feels like “brainwashing” that would make him
forget what he urgently needs to remember” (2002: 261). Alex stands in complete opposition with Michaela. It is very remarkable that this name resembles the author’s name. This may be coincidental, but it can also indicate that Michaela, like Anne Michaels, is able to empathise with Jakob. According to Criglington, Michaela represents the healing of the past and the present (2006: 96). As part of his trauma, Jakob was not able to distinguish between the past and the present. Now, Michaela “enables him to integrate Bella’s memory into his everyday reality” (Criglington 2006: 96). Michaela is able to insert every historic aspect into the present: “[h]er mind is a place. She moves through history with the fluency of a spirit, mourns the burning of the library at Alexandria as if it happened yesterday. She discusses the influence of trade routes on European architecture, while still noticing the pattern of light across a table…” (176). In contrast with Alex, who wanted Jakob to start over in Toronto, Michaela also shares a past of her own: “Michaela offers her ancestors to me. I’m shocked at my hunger for her memories” (179). In this way, “Michaela facilitates memory and mourning by offering her own personal […] history to Jakob” (Criglington 2006: 96). Jakob is able to imagine her memories and he sees how Michaela is able to incorporate them in her present. At first, he crosses “over the boundary of skin into Michaela’s memories, into her childhood” (Michaels 1998: 185). Eventually, he is able to do that for his own memories as well by transmitting Bella’s memories to his wife (Criglington 2006: 97). This culminates in the passage where Michaela mourns for Bella: “[s]he is sobbing. She has heard everything – her heart an ear, her skin an ear. Michaela is crying for Bella” (182). Estrin asserts that Michaela recognizes Jakob’s guilt for not being able to rescue his sister and by nourishing him, Michaela is able to fill up that hole of guilt (2002: 291). Michaela is the woman who is responsible for Jakob’s healing. Dori Laub explains that
[t]he survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life (2004: 63).

The survival and healing of Jakob involves telling his story. Fortunately, he was able to do that with Michaela. In that sense, Michaela becomes the secondary witness, “the role and the responsibility of the listener” and the “empathic and responsive witness whom the survivor so desperately searches for” (Laub and Allard 2002: 809). Michaela is the one who can respond to Jakob appropriately while Alex could not do that. Michaela understands Jakob and brings him back to the present without undoing his memories. She is the best secondary witness, because Michaela “undergoes a transferential relation, and must work out an acceptable subject-position with respect to the witness and his or her testimony” (LaCapra 1998: 11). It is clear that Michaela represents a significant stage in Jakob’s working through process and that he “can only find access to his past through […] female characters” (Gubar 2002: 265). So, Michaela has a decisive influence on Jakob’s memory as well.

It is very noteworthy that Jakob’s different relationship with his two wives is mirrored in Ben’s relationship with his wife Naomi and the American woman Petra with whom Ben has a brief affair. Just like Alex, Petra “represents the erasure or betrayal of memory” (Criglington 2006: 97). Petra joins Ben in his journey to discover the last hours of Jakob Beer. They even stay in his house on the island of Idhra. When Petra unknowingly inspects Jakob’s office, Ben becomes furious, because she had rearranged everything. She had “desecrated what had been for years so lovingly preserved” (Michaels 1998: 281). Ben is angry because
Petra messed with his memory of Jakob’s study. Not only does she have a bad influence on the memory of Jakob, but also on Ben’s memory of the Holocaust. While they are making love, “Ben is seized by the violent impulse to obliterate himself and the spectre of the Holocaust in her body” (Criglington 2006: 97). This means that Petra does not affect Ben’s secondary memory of the Holocaust in a positive way, since he seems to forget. Moreover, although Petra tries to share her memories with Ben, he does not even listen: “I confess I didn’t listen too closely. As she talked I slipped stones under the bands of her underwear or her bathing suit until they were salty and dark. I retrieved them, put them in my mouth. Lost parts” (277). Like his own memories, Petra’s memories are lost to him and do not connect them with his own second generation past. Ben’s relationship with Naomi also has a rough start. Ben has difficulties accepting the loss of two siblings. Yet, what makes it more difficult is that he had to find out on his own, while Naomi was told by his mother:

My parents, experts in secrets, kept the most important one from me to their last breath. Yet, in a masterful stroke, my mother decided to tell Naomi. The daughter she longed for. My mother guessed that my wife wouldn’t readily mention something so painful, but she knew that if she confided in Naomi, the truth would eventually be passed on. Naomi knew how much her intimacy with my parents upset me. But Naomi didn’t know she was keeping a secret. Still, I blamed her (252-253).

Ben had so much difficulty understanding his parents when he was a child. Why was his father so aggressive and why did he care about food so much? Why was his mother so overprotective? Realising that his wife had a better relationship with his parents and learning that even his mother confided in her instead of him is painful for Ben. Gubar claims that Ben is jealous of the empathic relationship that Naomi has with his parents, which is “at odds with
his own embarrassment at their overprotectiveness and paranoia” (2002: 267). Yet, unlike Jakob and Alex, Ben is able to go beyond that and he also starts testifying to Naomi. Criglington states that Naomi “becomes a proxy for the lost sister” (2006: 97). That is the case for Ben’s mother, for whom Naomi is like the daughter she lost, but also for Ben himself. Like Michaela, Naomi becomes a secondary witness to whom Ben is able to testify. He is amazed by her capacity to listen: “Naomi could listen closely […]” (234). The fact that his parents also confided in her, proves her capacity as a true listener. Like Michaela, Naomi’s memories also help Ben to come to terms with his own memories: “I know what she makes of her memories. I know what she remembers. I know her memories” (285). Unlike Petra, he actually listens to Naomi. She helps him to recover his “sense of history and willingness to confront the past” (Criglington 2006: 98). Naomi is thus another example of “the motif of the woman who embodies memory and initiates consciousness or “awakening” in the male subject” (Criglington 2006: 98).

Gubar calls the women in Fugitive Pieces “repositories of memory” (2002: 267), because they take care of the posttraumatic mourning, help the men heal by the process of witnessing and nurture and care for the male characters. Moreover, Michaels brings the aspect of feminism inside the Holocaust novel in a very specific way (Gubar 2002: 270). Gender is brought inside Fugitive Pieces to denote the necessity of female nurturing in a situation – in this case the survival of the Holocaust - where it is essential to keep the memory of the trauma alive (Gubar 2002: 270). The women help the men to process their trauma while they have experienced a “crisis of masculinity” (Gubar 2002: 270) because of the Holocaust. One could thus argue that there is a feminist streak in Fugitive Pieces.
4. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to show that a fictional novel about the Holocaust is capable of portraying an imaginable account of the events. *Fugitive Pieces* succeeded in that effort because of its self-reflexive appliance of the aspect of memory. The discussion of the representation of the Holocaust has shown that many scholars agree on the idea that fictional accounts of the Holocaust can be the adequate means to represent the atrocities of the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Although many who dispute this statement have argued that one cannot imagine the Holocaust in any way, “Michael’s narrative shows the opposite: that we \textit{must} try to imagine the unimaginable. There is an important difference between being willing to confront the horrors of the past in a general way, and over-identifying with the perceived suffering of victims to the extent that emotions overwhelm rational thought (Ward 2008: 114). That is what Michaels has shown through her focus on memory.

The aspect of memory is so prominent in *Fugitive Pieces* that it can almost be linked with every theme in the novel. Michaels has adequately portrayed the way a trauma affects memory and the way that every detail in one’s life influences one’s memory. The main characters Jakob and Ben are shown to be traumatized. Both protagonists suffer from memory loss and are trying to grasp what has happened in their own past as well as in the past of their relatives. In the search for their memory and consequently their identity as well, they travel to different cities. Jakob has been influenced by Biskupin - his hometown that has been destroyed by the Nazis – in a sense that he has lost the ground that remembered his roots. Hence, his adoptive father Athos and Jakob himself travel to Greece as well as to Canada in order to investigate the grounds and to rediscover Jakob’s memory. Ben is born in Toronto, but also visits Greece to rediscover Jakob’s life. Since Jakob has such a tremendous influence on Ben, several themes are echoed in both parts of the novel. The different cities also show
that archaeology and geology are very significant themes in the novel which can obviously be linked to memory as well. The importance of preserving history’s lost narratives is constantly emphasized. Moreover, natural phenomena like twisters bring back memories of the past and the characters seem very eager to connect certain events in their life with nature. Nature carries its own memory which cannot be forgotten. Michaels shows that the stories and lives that are lost during the Holocaust have to be equally commemorated. Consequently, several of her characters decide to record stories of their past. Athos Roussos, with his interest in archaeology, decides to write *Bearing False Witness* in order to remember the grounds that were abused by the Nazis. Jakob follows Athos’ footsteps and finishes his work to commemorate Athos as well. His own work, *Groundwork*, is a representation of his working through process and his way of trying to come to terms with his traumatized past. Ben’s part of the novel can be considered as a memoir on its own where he links the present with the past of his parents. His story builds up to his trauma of the loss of his siblings and the way he tries to commemorate and process their deaths. Michaels’ focus on these stories inevitably leads to a focus on language as well. When the characters have difficulties with their memory, the novel focuses on silence and sound. Sound is a representation of the trauma, since Jakob has only heard what happened to his parents and sister. Ben, on his turn, is also confronted with silence, because his parents remain silent when it comes to the Holocaust and Ben’s dead brother and sister. Both Jakob and Ben keep the memory of the past alive through poetry. Jakob starts writing poetry and Ben starts reading Jakob’s poetry. Consequently, this is the start of Jakob’s influence on the rest of Ben’s life. From this thesis, it must be clear that memory is drenched in every detail of the novel.

This thesis has also focused on the female representation of the Holocaust. While numerous scholars discuss whether there is an actual difference between a male and a female
experience of the Holocaust and hence a difference in representation, Michaels consciously plays around with this idea. She puts male characters at the centre of the novel, while the female are only to be discovered at the periphery. Nevertheless, while the men are primarily victimized, the women are mostly strong feminist characters. Especially Michaela and Naomi have a considerable influence on the mourning process of the men and therefore on their memory as well. Michaels wants to show that everyone processes a trauma in his own way, but that the female nurturing can have a significant effect, since they are able to empathise with the male characters and help them to recover their memory. They are responsible for keeping memory alive and commemorating the Holocaust.

Actual testimonies give a harsh look on the reality of the Holocaust, but they are not always considered as very truthful. Fictional representations of the Holocaust like *Fugitive Pieces* are equally unreliable. Yet, by maintaining a distance between the fictional work and the reality of the Holocaust – in this case the self-conscious use of memory instead of approaching the Holocaust in a direct way – and because of the explicit claim that these works are not to be considered real, fiction proves to be valuable when it comes to representing the Holocaust. They prove that they are capable of presenting the reader with an imaginative and acceptable account of the Holocaust, because there is a general recognition that knowledge is not complete. Ruth Franklin puts it perfectly: “[w]e need literature about the Holocaust not only because testimony is inevitably incomplete, but because of what literature uniquely offers: an imaginative access to past events, together with new and different ways of understanding them that are unavailable to strictly factual forms of writing” (2011: 13).
**Works Cited**


Kandiyoti, Dalia. “"Our Foothold in Buried Worlds": Place in Holocaust Consciousness and Anne Michaels's Fugitive Pieces”. *Contemporary Literature* vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 300-330.


