

Chapter 2

Michaels's figurative language – applying the theory

*The enigma of metaphorical discourse
is that it invents in both senses of the word:
what it creates, it discovers; and what it finds, it invents.*
(Ricoeur 1977: 239)

The theoretical foundation on which this doctoral thesis mainly, but not exclusively, rests is provided by the work of the three French theorists Certeau (1984), Ricoeur (1977; 1992) and Bourdieu (1991), and the German philologist Klemperer (2000), which we have explored in the previous chapter. We examine the latter in relation to Michaels's portrayal of the Nazis' use of the German language in Chapter 3. In the present chapter, we apply the ideas of the former three theorists to Michaels and her texts,¹ in conjunction with four other topics – the ongoing Holocaust literary debate, the notion of empathic identification, the concept of the corpse poem and the idea of Michaels as an author and poet standing in for her real-life subjects – themselves supported, or challenged, by critics and theorists.

Certeau – the practices of writing and reading

With regard to the writing–reading relationship, in Certeau's view the author is a producer of a product.² The product is the text. The readers are consumers of the product, the text. The author dominates; the readers are dominated but not defeated. Michaels is the wilful and powerful subject producing her product for her targets or consumers. As readers we are her targets – we are neither the competition nor the enemy, although in cases such as the critics Henighan (2002), and to a lesser extent Cook (2000), as we see below, in their negative criticism of Michaels's novel *Fugitive Pieces* the target serves as a threat.

Through exercising strategies of domination, Michaels is able to differentiate her position – that of author – and thus attain the quality of the 'proper'. Occupying the 'proper', she can enjoy its three effects: First, she is independent of the circumstances that she is writing about; she can create or destroy them at will. However, this independence is not complete. It is subject to the results of the research she carries out before and during the writing process. Michaels was born in Toronto in 1958. Although *Fugitive Pieces*, for example, is based on facts pertaining to the Holocaust and post-war Toronto, Michaels did not begin writing the novel with the intention of portraying something she knows. Her two narrators in the novel are Jakob and Ben. Jakob is born into a Jewish family in Poland. As a child, he loses his parents and his sister, Bella, to the Germans at the start of the Second World War through certain murder and probable capture, respectively, but he escapes that fate himself. Thus Jakob is a Holocaust survivor. Ben is born in Canada four years after the war, and is the only (living) child of Polish Jews who survived the concentration camps. Michaels reached the conclusions that she provides in the novel in the

¹ The discussions in the present chapter often directly refer to ideas and phrases that are quoted in Chapter 1. In order for ease of reading to be facilitated and cluttering of the text to be avoided, quotation marks and full references are not used here. The originator of the phrase is named the first time each phrase or idea is used, and subsequently it is assumed, within reason, that the originator's identity remains evident and acknowledged.

² See Chapter 1, pages 17–18.

form of Jakob and Ben's personal, historical and philosophical realisations as she progressed through the writing process.

Furthermore, Michaels can exercise mastery over time, suggesting as she does in her poem 'What the Light Teaches' that while vast protracted continental shifts occur in nature – 'everywhere the past juts into the present;/ mountains .../ ... crumple up millennia, time joining at its ends' – we humans can also 'pleat time' (both from What the Light Teaches 120), gathering moments from the past and the present in a process of memory-making that supplements our future, as we see in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Second, she can transform the foreign force embodied in past events into an object – a story or a poem – that she can observe and measure against her own thoughts and experiences, and thus control and include in her scope of vision. To a large extent, she is able to predict what will happen to her characters and poetic subjects, and thus again assert power over time. Third, by differentiating her position as author and her product as the story or the poem, she is exercising the particular power that helps her to obtain knowledge – in this case, the information that comes to light in the factual research with which she supports her creative effort. As we know, Certeau proposes that the place-designating power not only makes such knowledge possible, but also determines the characteristics of that knowledge. By choosing the topic of her subject matter and by researching all the related aspects of the topic, Michaels is determining the characteristics of the information that she gathers. In other words, while researching the life of Captain Watson and the details of the Krakatoa eruption, for example, she learns about Watson's first-hand experience of the event and about the great damage that the eruption caused.

As readers, we are the apparently biddable and weak subjects. We have tactics, ways of making use of the production, the text. We cannot benefit from the 'proper' as we cannot distinguish any place as our own. Our place is the text, and we must insinuate ourselves into it and – there – use our tactics, our methods of recognising, seizing and manipulating the opportunity offered, in this case, by the process of interpretation. This doctoral thesis is an extended instance of that process. As a reader, my world slips into Michaels's place (Certeau), and I interpret and discuss her prose and poetry. My views, supported by the views of critics and theorists with whom I agree, lead me to make the statements and conclusions that become evident as this thesis progresses, while the similarly supported views of another PhD student, Lewis Ward (2008: 2), for example, lead him to state that in 'over-emphasis[ing] ... memory', Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, among other novels, is 'a narrative that [is] merely identificatory' rather than empathic across the generations. Ward (2008) elaborates on this general conclusion in his thesis 'Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Narratives: Towards a Theory of Transgenerational Empathy'.

Lacking the benefit of the 'proper', we do not enjoy the three effects of the 'proper': First, like Michaels, we may be independent of the circumstances of which she writes, but we are not independent of those of our own lives. In performing the process of interpretation we are also using our habitus (Bourdieu). The interpretation that each of us makes – the interpretation that I make of Michaels's individual works and present here – is informed by our individual dispositions, from which, Bourdieu implies, we are inseparable.³ One of the essential things about reading, in Certeau's view, is that it allows readers to make that which they read similar to themselves, rather than readers-consumers becoming similar to the product, to that which they read. This seems logical, bearing in mind the habitus that influences our interpretive capability. Our explanation of the plot, of the author's possible intentions, of the characters' behaviour and so on can only be one that we understand and can provide to ourselves or others. Furthermore,

³ See Chapter 1, pages 36–7.

we are slaves and not masters of time. Our tactics depend on, rather than are independent of, time.

We also do not profit from the second effect of the ‘proper’: Because we cannot differentiate between one position and another, because to us all space is one and the same, our place is the space of the text, we can neither control time nor make predictions. And we must forego the third effect of the ‘proper’ because we do not gain knowledge through exercising our tactics. We can simply receive the knowledge that Michaels extends to us, without the power she has as a producer. Our only power is to be found in our tricks and games – through our interpretive capacities, we can shed a different light on the language of a place, in this case the language, in the broad sense, of the text. Moreover, while the producer enacts a triumph of place over time – creates a space, a text, that is not subject to temporal restrictions – as consumers, making the best use of the reading time by interpreting what we are reading, we will win, however briefly.

We have discussed Certeau’s explanation of the writing–reading relationship in Chapter 1; the intention is not to repeat the discussion here. In the opening statements above, we have applied the explanation to Michaels and ourselves – identifying her as author-producer and ourselves as readers-consumers. Two aspects of Certeau’s explanation, however, can further be explored. First, in terms of the writer-producer, Certeau (1984: 135) tells us that through the “‘meaning” of scriptural play’,⁴ she intends to affect society. Reality is the exteriority from which the author distinguishes the text – as we have learned in Chapter 1,⁵ by its nature the text, the space of formalization, is detached from actual social practices – and a change in that reality occurs within the text. Certeau is speaking in broad terms, but the idea may be extended, and has indeed been extended in a slightly different way by Elaine Scarry (1985), to encompass fiction and poetry. Clearly, a tailor makes a coat not for the sake of making the coat but to help the wearer to keep warm (Scarry 1985). Similarly, so a poet writes a poem not for the sake of writing it but for the poem to be read and for what the poem says to be absorbed and comprehended by the reader – in other words, ‘to remake human sentience’, explains Scarry (1985: 307).

In a discussion that we explore further in Chapter 3,⁶ Scarry (1985: 307) reasons as follows: ‘The poet projects the private acuties of sentience into the sharable ... poem, ...: its power now moves back from the object realm [the poem] to the human realm [the reader] where sentience itself is remade’. This is not to say that in giving us *Fugitive Pieces* and poetry that stands in for real-life people Michaels wishes to change the world, to prevent the Holocaust from happening again, nor that she wishes to change public opinion of her poetic subjects or persuade us of their authenticity in her hands.⁷ Instead, through her fiction and poetry she provides an alternative to the existing reality. ‘By means of the poem[s]’ and the novels, as poet and novelist she ‘enters into and in some way alters the alive percipience’ of her readers (Scarry 1985: 307). She provides an other view of historical events and real people. This idea is echoed by Ricoeur’s beliefs, as we see below, in metaphorical language telling in a new way something that has already been told, and in authors interpreting human lives and thereby rendering them more readable.

⁴ As Certeau (1984: 135) explains, ‘scriptural play’ is the written form of the ‘play’ that, ‘in every society’, is ‘a stage on which the formality of practices is represented’.

⁵ See Chapter 1, page 18.

⁶ See Chapter 3, pages 141–3.

⁷ Only ‘in very exceptional instances’, Elaine Scarry (1985: 369 fn 26) points out, is a work of literature ‘intended to bring about actual social action’. Interestingly, she believes that ‘the more a literary work’ has this intention, ‘the more closely it will approximate a trial’ (Scarry 1985: 369 fn 26). For example, because the German poet, playwright and theatrical reformer Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) ‘wanted his plays to have concrete social effects’, he ‘repeatedly described them as trials, their themes as court pleas, and their audiences as juries’ (Scarry 1985: 369 fn 26).

Second, with regard to readers-consumers, Certeau appears to view the reading process as serving a memory-utilising function and a memory-making function. While these functions quite possibly occur simultaneously, the former is *brought* to the text by the reader and the latter is *received* by the reader from the text. In terms of the memory-utilising function, the perceptive reader brings to the reading process personal memories and collective memories that she then applies in making an opportunity out of an occasion presented by the skilful writer, and in thereby enhancing both her understanding of the story she is reading and the story itself. This doctoral thesis again serves as an extended instance of this function. Owing to the nature of the study, it is necessary that I strive to be as perceptive as possible in reading – and interpreting and discussing – Michaels’s texts.⁸ It would not be constructive for me to provide an example of the memory-utilising function that I carry out in this reading practice. Rather, the discussions of Michaels’s first novel and poems below and in the next chapters should reveal whether and to what degree I succeed in the endeavour.

In terms of the memory-making function, Certeau has little faith in most readers remembering what they have read, which may be a well-founded doubt – few people have a photographic memory, and even the clearest minded readers may forget details now and then, not only of the words they have read but also of the interpretation they gave to those words at the time. Thus he feels that, in reading, readers are also storing memories of the experience. Scents, sounds and sights that we may experience while reading can be stored in our minds as triggers, which can later generate a recollection in us not only of ourselves but also of what we were reading and feeling at the time. Like the scent of cut grass triggering the memory of a childhood party, the sound of an airport intercom announcement mingled with the scent of coffee may trigger a reader’s memory of waiting for an aeroplane to land while reading Michaels’s *The Winter Vault*, for example. There is another example of this function below in connection with Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces*.

Narrowing our focus somewhat, we can apply the principles that we have mentioned above and have discussed in Chapter 1 to the products, the texts, as well. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob is both reader and writer. The many hours that he spends listening to his guardian and saviour, Athos, reading, while they hide out on the island of Zakynthos during the war, constitute for Jakob the processes of learning-to-decipher⁹ Greek and English and reading Greek and English for meaning.¹⁰ Arriving in Greece for the first time Jakob sees ‘signs in a fluid script that from a distance looked like Hebrew’; as they draw closer he sees that ‘the words were strange’ – he has ‘never seen Greek letters before’ (FP 16). But he becomes familiar with them. Athos’s stories and textual readings form the cultural memory through which Jakob gains the strategies of semantic questioning of which the expectations are clarified by the deciphering of a written text (Certeau). Athos’s great friend Kostas Mitsialis gives Jakob his own ‘cherished copy’ of a slim volume of Greek poetry, thereby ‘planting rows of words in [Jakob] that would grow for the rest of [his] life’ (FP 85). Jakob’s early years in Canada are spent partly at school learning more practical Greek and English – the education he has gained from Athos equips him to hold his own in

⁸ As we have seen in Chapter 1 (page 20), Certeau provides textual examples from the genres of humour, religion and crime. Michaels’s work does not fall into any of these categories, but Certeau’s ideas concerning the functioning of the reader’s memory during the reading process can be applied to it nevertheless.

⁹ See Chapter 1, page 22.

¹⁰ Jakob is seven when he and the Greek archaeologist Athos Roussos meet in the Polish forest of Biskupin and the man smuggles him into Greece (FP 14), where they remain on the island of Zakynthos until the war is over and Jakob is 13 (FP 60). Presumably, by the time he and Athos arrive in Greece, he has already learned to read, in other words, has already carried out the parallel processes of learning-to-read and learning-to-decipher (Certeau), in Polish at least, if not also in Yiddish.

conversations about the earth sciences, but leaves him mystified by some everyday vocabulary, as we see in Chapter 3.¹¹

In adulthood, however, Jakob is fluent in both languages, and he becomes a producer. He compiles Athos's notes on the SS-Ahnenerbe (*FP* 119) and eventually achieves the 'seemingly unending task of completing Athos's book, *Bearing False Witness*' (*FP* 120), his guardian's first-hand account of the Nazis' destruction of the town of Biskupin.¹² He also makes a modest living translating 'the work of poets banned in Greece' into English (*FP* 108), engineering documents (*FP* 120) and Athos's book into Greek (*FP* 173). He compiles two books of Athos's essays for publication (*FP* 173) and, significantly, sets about writing his own poetry, for which he becomes known (see *FP* 206, 213, 255). 'Write to save yourself,' Athos once tells Jakob, 'and someday you'll write because you've been saved' (*FP* 165). Jakob follows this as he follows all advice Athos gives him; he begins by writing to save himself literally and figuratively, in terms of familiarising himself with the new languages he learns from Athos, of needing to earn a living and of attempting to find a way of dealing with his sister's unknown fate, and finally writes his story – in the notebooks that Ben finds in the Roussos family house on the island of Idhra and brings home to Toronto, from where it reaches us – because he has been saved (*FP* 165). The precise ways in which this occurs become evident below and in subsequent chapters.

Ben is also a reader and a writer. As a teenager he 'wrenched money from [his] mother in order to collect the illustrated versions of literary masterpieces. ... edifying essays on a variety of topics ... brief biographies ... the plots of famous operas' and 'arcana' (both from *FP* 226) that he never forgets. As a student of literature, following the suggestion of Jakob's close friend, Maurice Salman, a former student of Athos's who becomes a lecturer himself,¹³ Ben manages to combine his interests in weather and biography by writing a thesis on Dostoyevsky¹⁴ that he later turns into a book (*FP* 211). And thus his reading act is a form of what Ricoeur calls subjective appropriation:¹⁵ His interests are fuelled or perhaps inspired by

The Tempest, the blasted heath in *King Lear*. Camus's¹⁶ sunstroke in *The Stranger*. Tolstoy's¹⁷ snowstorm in "Master and Man." [Jakob's] *Hotel Rain* poems. ... The snowstorm that detained Pasternak¹⁸ in a dacha, ... Madame Curie refusing to come out of the rain when she heard the news of her husband's death. The Greek summer heat while the war boiled out of [Jakob] like a fever. Dostoyevsky's] ... brutal convict march to Siberia (*FP* 213)

Quite possibly, other than Jakob's second and beloved wife, Michaela, perhaps, Ben is the first reader of Jakob's notebooks.¹⁹ A different world, his world, slips into the author's, Jakob's, place.

¹¹ See Chapter 3, page 130.

¹² For several years before the war, archaeologists had been carefully excavating the town of Biskupin, the 'rich community, supremely organized' (*FP* 50), which had been submerged by the Gasawka River for two thousand years and had thus become known as 'the "Polish Pompeii"' (*FP* 104). The 'Bureau of Ancestral Inheritance', headed by Nazi politician, police administrator and military commander Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), obliterated Biskupin in order to conceal the proof it gave of 'an advanced culture that wasn't German' (both from *FP* 104); the soldiers also shot some of the archaeologists and sent the rest to Dachau (*FP* 51). Athos had joined the team in 1937 and escapes their fate in taking Jakob to Greece (*FP* 51).

¹³ It is also Salman who introduces Ben to Jakob's poetry (*FP* 206).

¹⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881), Russian novelist and short story writer.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, page 26.

¹⁶ Albert Camus (1913–1960), French novelist, essayist and playwright.

¹⁷ Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Russian author.

¹⁸ Boris (Leonidovich) Pasternak (1890–1960), Russian poet and author.

¹⁹ A few years after Jakob and Athos have moved to Canada, Athos's 'little house' (*FP* 83) on Zakynthos is destroyed, along with the rest of the town, by an earthquake. From then on, Jakob's Greek home is Athos's family house on the island of Idhra, which he inherits at Athos's death. Ben's wife Naomi remains in Toronto when, following the death of Jakob and Michaela, Ben goes to Idhra to look for Jakob's notebooks. During his months on

Searching for the notebooks in the house on Idhra, Ben not only literally occupies Jakob's home, and wishes 'that the bad weather would lure back [Jakob's] spirit and Michaela's, ... that [he] could lure [Jakob] back with one of [his wife] Naomi's songs ...' (FP 283), he also slips into Jakob's place by narrating his own story and its link with that of the older, now no longer living, man.

Michaels herself can be seen as a reader slipping into various authors' places (and of course in her role as author she takes her interpretive act – her making of meaning, according to Certeau – further than other readers). It is almost certain that she has read Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, as her poem about the writer is titled 'Blue Vigour', a phrase Blixen (1954: 13) uses in her memoir to describe the African sky. Louisa Young, granddaughter of Kathleen Scott, documented her grandmother's life in *A Great Task of Happiness* (1995). So too one of Marie Curie's daughters, Eve Curie, wrote a biography of her mother. Michaels (2001: 191) acknowledges these two texts in reference to the literature informing her writing of 'Ice House' and 'The Second Search', respectively. And as we know, Michaels also based 'Pillar of Fire' on the log entries of Captain Watson of the HMS *Charles Bal*.

It seems that Paula Modersohn-Becker – subject of Michaels's poem of the same name – was famous, at least at first, more for her writing than for her paintings (gseart.com).²⁰ Perhaps Michaels has read the artist's journals and letters, as perhaps she has read the memoirs of Lunia Czechowska, the narrator of 'Stone'. And the poems 'The Day of Jack Chambers', 'January', 'Sublimation', 'A Lesson from the Earth', 'On the Terrace' and 'What the Light Teaches' were no doubt supported by Michaels's reference to the literature on and texts written by these people. We return to these poetic subjects in the discussion on Michaels's process of metaphoric-empathic autobiography below.

Certeau – the practice of walking

As we have learned in Chapter 1,²¹ as well as applying the principles of the producer–consumer relationship to the writer–reader relationship, Certeau dedicates a chapter of *Practice* to the spatial practice of walking, in which he likens the act of writing to the act of walking. As before, I suggest that walking can rather be likened to the act of reading. In *Fugitive Pieces*, by the time Athos dies in Toronto, he and Jakob have become seasoned walkers. After the war, they traverse part of Greece on foot, and their first years in Toronto are characterised by weekly walks through the city. But they never truly become ordinary practitioners – they were not born in that city and they do not live in it for so long that they feel it is theirs – and they read the urban 'text' as they walk.

Athos translates the text for Jakob, teaching him Toronto's 'ragged geological past' evident in the spaces they move through – the 'fossils in the limestone ledges of the Park Plaza Hotel', 'the distinctive mottled Zumbro stone in the train station' – portraying 'the humid amphitheatre of a Mesozoic swamp' with 'massive fronds and ferns tall as houses' that once existed behind what is now 'the billboard next to Tamblyn's Drugstore' (FP 98). Like 'Time', the 'blind guide' (FP 5)

the island Ben has an affair with a young American tourist called Petra, and it is Petra's prying 'rampage' (FP 283) through the house that uncovers the two notebooks. She does not appear to have read them; Ben relates that 'it was when [he] was replacing the books in the room next to [Jakob's] study that [he] found them. Not in a stack abandoned by Petra, but merely revealed by the space on the shelf beside them' (FP 283–4).

²⁰ Indeed, according to Sara Friedrichsmeyer (1991: 489), while more contemporary audiences seem to have been taking notice of Modersohn-Becker's many letters and diary entries only since the early 1990s, these texts 'caused something of a sensation when they were first published ten years after her death', and thus 'to several generations she was known primarily as a writer'.

²¹ See Chapter 1, pages 22–4.

with which Jakob begins his narrative, Athos is Jakob's 'own private guide and companion, not only through geologic time, but through adolescence and into adulthood' (FP 97). Unlike Time, and unlike Certeau's complacent walkers,²² Athos is not blind. He sees the spaces that he and Jakob inhabit and the traces people have left on those spaces – as the narrator of Michaels's poem 'Phantom Limbs' (92) puts it, 'so much of the city/ is their bodies'.

Athos also instructs Jakob on 'the power [people] give to stones to hold human time ... temples ... gravestones, standing stones', and describes how 'bored citizens ... waiting for a bus' could read the inscriptions, at their feet, of 'tombstones smashed in Hebrew cemeteries and plundered for Polish sidewalks' (FP 32). For his part, Jakob is blind, not because he is eventually so familiar with the city that is his home for many years, but because he 'did not witness the most important events of [his] life' and must tell his 'deepest story' as 'a blind man' (FP 17). He grapples through much of his life with what Certeau (1984: 93) describes in another context as 'an opaque past and an uncertain future'.

Walking, Jakob and Athos experience first-hand Certeau's (1984: 108) notion that 'the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences' – 'what can be seen designates what is no longer there'. As they travel long distances 'me ta podhia – on foot' (FP 60) across Greece just after the war, they pass through what used to be the village of Kalavrita. Having lost all its male inhabitants over the age of 15 to German massacre and been set on fire, the place is now 'charred ruins, blackened stone', a 'place so empty it was not even haunted' (FP 61). Soon after, staying with Kostas and Daphne Mitsialis in Athens on his and Jakob's journey to Canada, Athos confirms Daphne's sister's description, in a letter she sends from Hania and related by Kostas, of the sites of former Greek villages – 'in the middle of a field of freshly ploughed earth, nothing anywhere, you'll find someone has put up a sign: "This was Kandanos." "This was Skinos"' – by commenting that he and Jakob had also seen signs marking where villages had been, 'all across the Peloponnesus' (FP 70). Only a symbol remains, a sign – the visible object that points to an invisible thing whose existence is identified as 'this' – that ironically designates absence, something that was (recently) an inhabited place, a community entire. 'Like phantom limbs', we learn in 'Phantom Limbs' (92), these are 'places that no longer exist but [still] are full of feeling'.

On a last walk with Jakob in Toronto just before his death, Athos is amazed to find 'emptiness' in place of one of their oft-visited destinations, Chorley Park,²³ 'as though an eraser had rubbed out [the building's] place against the sky' (FP 106–7). He is so surprised and disappointed that he wonders whether they are in the right place, and Jakob assures him that they are, exactly because the beautiful building is gone (FP 108). In this way *Fugitive Pieces* provides an example of the abovementioned memory-making that Certeau highlights as a function of reading, and thus walking. Athos and Jakob's memory and its object must be altered; their memory receives its form from the external circumstance of their 'emerging from the scrub of the ravine into the garden' (FP 107), while the object, the building, is now simply a gaping hole and is indeed lost. In writing of this experience many years later, Jakob enhances his memory of the existence of Chorley Park itself, and of his walks there with Athos. He also formulates a memory of the Park within us. His description of the scene would trigger a memory of the Park in those readers who knew of its existence before reading *Fugitive Pieces*. His description of the scene would formulate

²² See Chapter 1, page 23. If we remember, the knowledge that Certeau's (1984: 93) complacent walkers have of the space in which they walk is 'as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms'. In the poem 'Modersohn-Becker' (both from 84), Michaels both confirms and contradicts this notion: Modersohn-Becker holds her husband 'until [she] felt his face inside [her] own,/ until [her] skin was blind with attention', though she also believes that it is 'only love [that] sees the familiar for the first time'.

²³ Built between 1911 and 1915, Chorley Park was originally the official residence of the lieutenant-governor of Ontario (Sullivan n.d.). Owing to its high maintenance costs, the building was closed down in 1937; subsequently used as a military hospital and a shelter for refugees, it was demolished in 1960 (Sullivan n.d.).

knowledge of the Park in those readers who were unaware of its existence before reading the novel, and this knowledge will become a memory in each instance that the readers encounter mention of the Park in future.

The former Greek villages and Chorley Park illustrate respectively Michaels's conception of place in the novel 'both as a site of loss and as a ground of belonging', as Dalia Kandiyoti (2004: 301) suggests. 'These sites are "sites of knowledge" key to *Fugitive Pieces*', and because they 'run counter to the notions of absence-of-place and place-as-absence most frequently invoked in Holocaust thought', they 'open up possibilities for meaning and belonging in place, however partial and contingent' (Kandiyoti 2004: 302). Through his numerous walks and geological explorations with Athos, and then alone, Jakob may become more familiar with Toronto's geological, geographical and cultural structure than many natives of the city, but he himself will never be native to Toronto.

Even as an adult, in the company of the naively poised Alex, his first wife, Jakob is 'maggoty with insecurities' and has 'European circuitry'; his 'voltage [is] wrong for the [Canadian] socket' (FP 132). His cultural capital, in Bourdieu's terms, would be valuable in Europe – he has no Canadian cultural capital.²⁴ After his divorce from Alex Jakob moves back to the house on Idhra, but despite feeling unusually at home he realises he will 'always be a stranger in Greece, no matter how long [he] lived there' (FP 164). Thus, while Jakob may be trained by Athos and then by himself to 'anchor' (FP 164) himself in the details of Toronto and the island, wherever he lives he never achieves a full sense of belonging, he never becomes an ordinary practitioner. As Kandiyoti (2004: 301) proposes, Jakob's 'strongest awareness of place' is very likely 'not that of home but of exile'. He is 'at home in no nation or religion', Gubar (2003: 247) concurs.

One of Ben's significant emotional childhood experiences is also related to walking. At the age of 11, learning from his mother of his father's agonising enforced treks back to the concentration camp through 'the forest and fields of Heiligenstadt' (FP 216), Ben challenges himself to the closest simulation he can devise: a quarter-mile walk in the 'absolute darkness' (FP 219) of the night from their rented summer cottage through the woods to the road. It is a pitiable attempt by the boy to be like, and thus to draw himself closer to, his emotionally remote father. He finds it a terrifying experience, and it is ultimately unsuccessful: 'I was certain that the ordeal had purged my fear. But I woke again that night in the same state, my bones cold as steel', he recalls (FP 221). He makes himself repeat the journey twice more, but afterwards he still cannot bear 'the darkness of [his] own room' (FP 221).

At this stage of his life, Ben is both reader and infrequent walker. He must read – not only look at, but also absorb the full horror of – the photos in Holocaust-related books and magazines that his father thrusts at him. And his father is the purposefully dominant producer, silently telling Ben exactly what he is (Bourdieu), pointing a finger at the images and thereby teaching him that he is 'not too young' (FP 218) to suffer a similar fate. This is the deeper fear, along with the fear of the dark and of the strange woods, of which Ben had hoped to purge himself. He is a consumer, tactically weaker than most – he cannot really poach on his producer; his only ruse is imitation and it proves a failure.

Later, as a schoolboy, Ben walks more often. He begins 'to extend [his] boundaries, to make detours on [his] way home from school' (FP 228). In this way, like Jakob and Athos, he learns about the city – 'the ravines, the coal elevators, the brickyard' (FP 228). For the two men, the city is a place of development and activity. Their flat has 'electricity, running water' and a 'screened

²⁴ See Chapter 1, page 36.

window' (both from *FP* 90), none of which they had on Zakynthos, and they find the city to be, 'like Athens, an active port' (*FP* 89). Such an atmosphere mirrors the improvement of their personal situation: Having survived chronic hunger, concealment and the threat of death during the war, Athos is helping Jakob gradually to rebuild his life.

Ben, by contrast, is 'fascinated' by elements of 'aftermath' in Toronto, by 'the silent drama of abandonment of the empty factories and storage bins, the decaying freighters and industrial ruins' (*FP* 228). It is not possible for him to have experienced direct trauma as the result of the war, but he is emotionally wounded by his parents' suffering. His negative view of Toronto is characteristic of his role as a child of survivors for whom ordinary life had been invalidated by their camp experiences to such an extent that it is doubtful that they can ever re-adjust. It seems that the 'potency' of mundane objects, such as a 'fork', a 'mattress', 'meat and vegetables', as well as 'their own flesh', that pervades post-war life for them will never dissipate – it will always be 'blinding' (*FP* 205).

Ben's adulthood is occupied with walking, and reading, too. In his second year at university, having recently moved out of his parents' home, 'on weekends [he] took long self-pitying walks across the city and back again; at night, ascending into books' (*FP* 231). Unlike Jakob and Athos, Ben is native to the city and in this he is an ordinary practitioner. Yet he is also not an ordinary practitioner, because he is not blind – like Athos, he too sees the spaces that he inhabits and the traces people and the weather leave on those spaces. Aided by Hurricane Hazel, the Humber River, which flows across the city, flooded in 1954 (see *FP* 201, 246). Boroughs such as Weston, Ben's childhood residence, were subsumed in water. Their 'entire street disappeared', but 'within days, the river [was] again calm [and] carried on peacefully as if nothing had happened', oblivious to the dogs and cats 'tangled in the trees' in the flood's wake, and to the neighbours wandering along 'looking for remnants of personal possessions' in the new bank formed by the flood (*FP* 246).

Years later, Ben describes Weston as made up of 'deserted plains', 'gentle parkland' (both from *FP* 201); he sees buried in the riverbank chairs, dinner plates, silver spoons, 'tables and shelves, lamps, dishes, and rugs' (*FP* 202). In our explorations of 'What the Light Teaches' in Chapter 4,²⁵ we encounter evidence of human remains that the earth reveals years after corpses have been buried in it, as vast numbers of them were buried, often hastily, during the war. Michaels carries through the image of the earth as a repository and guardian of such remains here in her novel in the form of implements and furniture used by people in their everyday post-war lives.

Ricoeur – metaphor at work

In Michaels's texts, we can trace both broad and more particular examples of the aspects of Ricoeur's theory that we have explored in Chapter 1. We now do so in reverse, starting with a focus on the details, using one of Michaels's poems and, briefly, her first novel, and then shifting outwards to a more distant perspective on the topic of the use of figurative language in Holocaust literature, with *Fugitive Pieces* serving as a controversial example. Certain of Michaels's poems feature Holocaust references as well, and thus we also briefly examine them.

²⁵ See Chapter 4, pages 174, 175 and 182.

Michaels's 'Wild Horses' – applying Ricoeur's ideas in a close reading

Part of Ricoeur's linguistic theory, as we have learned in Chapter 1, is that metaphor has the quality of a form, then of a sense and finally of a reference.²⁶ In 'Wild Horses', a poem of 21 lines, we find many ordinary words.²⁷ Some of these words, such as *burdock*, *wicks*, *furrows*, *travertine*, *ochre* and *resin*, may not be as familiar as *grapes*, *frozen*, *shadow*, *skies*, *horses*, *stampeding*, *cave*, *wet* and *river*. These comprise the form of the poem, but even without a dictionary, we can also discern some sense. We can see the broad strokes of the picture Michaels is presenting to us: 'Grapes'/ frozen skins' (2–3), 'winter trees' (4) and 'cold November skies' (10) portray a cold setting; 'ochre/ horses of Dordogne, stampeding into lamplight' (15–16) suggests horses galloping from a place of darkness to a place of a certain amount of light; 'under the pulling moon, the strap of river/ digs into the flesh of field' (20–1) brings to mind a river flowing through a field in the moonlight. Then, to complete the picture, to perceive the reference of the discourse of the poem as a whole, we interpret – we suspend our belief in the first-level denotation of the words and set free the effect and meaning of the second-level denotation – and we see perhaps less, perhaps more of the multi-layered picture Michaels paints.

For instance, the most significant clue in the text is 'ochre horses of Dordogne'.²⁸ The term *ochre*, being a pigment,²⁹ tells us that the horses are not necessarily real horses. The phrase *of Dordogne* tells us they come from a place by that name. A little further research reveals that on the walls of the caves of Lascaux in the Dordogne region of France there are many horses, among other animals, depicted in oranges, browns and reds. These are the wild horses of the poem's title; these are the images that have survived on the cave walls for over 17 000 years (donsmaps.com). They embody the 'time' of 'one direction' (6), the 'hair's/ breadth of the intimate/ infinite' (12–14) – primitive dwellers painted them on the walls of the caves that were 'pungent/ with wet hides' (18–19), the flickering light from 'torches of resin' (19) gave them shape. They continued to exist undisturbed in the darkness for thousands of years. Then they re-emerged in the 'lamplight' (16), brought to light in 1940 by four boys who were investigating a hole in the ground made by a fallen tree and made accessible to the public for a few years thereafter, with much resulting damage, by the archaeologists, scientists and owners of the land who followed (donsmaps.com).

This is what Michaels could be referring to, what her poem says about the world: A river 'digs' into a field like a leather 'strap' or whip cuts into 'flesh' (20–1), forming a cave. Thousands of years later, modern man rediscovers the cave and pumps the river water out so as to gain further access to the ancient rock art. And with his presence comes destruction – the carbon dioxide that the wartime and post-war visitors exhaled and the warmth their bodies gave off in the relatively close space 'altered the cave's climate to the point where calcite deposits and lichen were threatening the paintings' (donsmaps.com).

Ricoeur evidently favours ordinary language, and suggests that the metaphors it can generate have instructional and evocative functions. The first two lines of 'Wild Horses' may puzzle us initially; they contain a few of what Aristotle calls strange words: 'Minarets of burdock/ clang in the copper marsh' (1–2). If we did not know this already, with the aid of a dictionary, we find

²⁶ See Chapter 1, page 24.

²⁷ The interpretation that follows is not intended as a comprehensive discussion of the poem; it merely addresses certain aspects of the poem. For the purposes of this discussion and because the poem does not extend over one page, only the line numbers are provided as reference. A transcript of the poem is given in Appendix 1.

²⁸ This interpretation is supported by Michaels's reference to Lascaux in *Fugitive Pieces* (143), in *The Winter Vault* (prologue, 199–202), and in her poem 'Fontanelles' (179, 186).

²⁹ Ochre is a pigment in the yellow-red range that contains ferric oxide (COED 2004).

that *burdock* is a herbaceous plant of the daisy family and that a *minaret* is a slender tower, usually of a mosque, from which a muezzin, or prayer-caller, calls Muslims to prayer (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary (COED)* 2004). They *clang*, which could mean that they collide, possibly in a breeze or in the wind. But the dictionary also tells us that the plant has prickly flowers that cling to fur or clothing (*COED* 2004). Michaels could be making a play on the words ‘cling’ and ‘clang’, and the flowers of the plant may be sticking to the boys’ clothes as they ramble through the Dordogne. The plants clang *in the copper marsh*. Michaels could simply be using the word ‘copper’ to imply an orange-gold colour; however, as relevant images in *Fugitive Pieces* and certain other poems suggest, she has a fair amount of geological knowledge and thus the term may well indicate the geological structure of the marsh to which she refers.

These lines indeed have an instructional function. We find out what the words ‘minaret’ and ‘burdock’ mean, and we are encouraged to picture a plant as the diminutive version of a tall, slender tower, from which comes a ‘sound’, a flower that can stick to cloth. The minaret also implies a call to prayer, which in this case could be interpreted as the plant’s call to the exploring boys to find what is of importance here, that is, the Lascaux caves and their historically significant artwork.

In discussing the evocative function of metaphor – which adds, Ricoeur believes, to the way in which we perceive at the level of feelings – it is deceptively easy, but incorrect, to look for words that indicate a feeling within the text. There is only one such word in ‘Wild Horses’: ‘longing’ (5). While we should not interpret the term as implying that the entire poem’s theme or feeling is longing, the word still means something, it cannot be altogether discounted. But it must be included as part of the poem as a whole. It begins the second stanza: ‘Harnessed, longing cuts/ with every turn. Time has one direction,/ to divide. ...’ (5–6). *Harnessed* brings to mind the horses, but in the form of a contrast – wild horses are *not* harnessed. The implication of *longing* may be illuminated by a suggestion of Jakob’s in *Fugitive Pieces*: ‘We long for place; but place itself longs. Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment’ (*FP* 53). Time, too, is portrayed as cutting or incising: It ‘casts shadow/ *canyons*’ (7–8), that is, incisions into the earth; it ‘tools *furrows*’ (8), or troughs or channels, into fields; it ‘*carves* oxbow rivers of birds/ into cold November skies’ (9–10) (all emphases added). In this last example there is a multi-layered metaphor, referents that are split more than once: Time is personified as performing the action of carving, and the appearance of the flight pattern of birds is represented in the U-shape that oxbow rivers naturally make as they wend their way across land.

These images seem to serve as an example of Ricoeur’s index of a manner of being. They have an extra-linguistic quality and they are our way of sensing ourselves in the midst of reality. The wild horses do exist; they have existed for centuries as representations of the real animals that the cave-dwellers must have seen in the fields outside.³⁰

More accurately, we should be looking for words that evoke or elicit an emotional response in us. A sense of comfort or affirmation that we may receive from the ‘sweetness’ (3) of the grapes’ skins is tempered by their frozenness and the stark image of the ‘burned’ ‘winter trees’ (both from 4) that comes next. The rest of the poem seems to reflect a fairly contemplative and detached mood, neither cheerful nor depressed, suggested by the images of time casting, furrowing, carving; of birds appearing against the cold sky; of an ‘iron-oxide sun’ staining ‘a travertine sky’ (both from 14); and of a strap-river that digs into a flesh-field (20–1) – at first a slightly ominous image, but after some thought, and a recognition that the word *digs* rather than

³⁰ Interestingly, it seems the cave-dwellers did not depict their prey on the walls: ‘Archaeological evidence is strong that while humans were painting in Lascaux, they could count for sustenance on massive herds of reindeer, an animal that [they] only rarely depicted’ (donsmaps.com).

cuts or *tears* is used, is perhaps simply a representation of a natural event that brings about geological change rather than damage.

One of metaphor's primary characteristics, Ricoeur feels, is its dual nature.³¹ When interpreting, we must see that each metaphor contains the possibility and impossibility of being, the 'is' and 'is not'. Burdock is a plant; it is not the tower of a mosque. The difference is evident. But the plant has a stem, a tangible support that helps it to stand up straight out of the ground, as does a tower. That is the similarity. Trees are plants; they are not the strip of porous material up which fuel in the form of wax is drawn to the flame in a candle (COED 2004). But in winter, when some trees are bare of leaves, and we can see only their branches, against the sky these branches can indeed resemble 'black [candle] wicks' (4). The sky is the sky, made of oxygen and other chemical elements; it is not white or light-coloured calcareous rock (COED 2004) (14). The sun is a star; it is not made of iron oxide (14). Yet iron oxide can stain something, can tinge it red-orange-yellow³² – and that something could be a winter sky, light-coloured as travertine. At 'twilight' (18), the sun often stains a cloudless sky these hues. According to Ricoeur, we need to apply this principle of duality to each metaphor if we wish to perceive metaphorical truth.

Fugitive Pieces demonstrates Ricoeur's notion of the hermeneutical arch

Metaphorical truth, as we have seen in Chapter 1,³³ is not based on or does not enact a redescription of reality. Ricoeur makes that clear. But the breakthrough of metaphorical language always takes place, he explains, against the background of ordinary language – of description. Relatives and/or biographers, or the real-life people themselves who serve as narrators in some of Michaels's poems, have told the stories of their lives – we can learn of Karen Blixen's life through *Out of Africa* and of Kathleen Scott's life through *A Great Task of Happiness*. This is the ordinary-language background against which the metaphorical language breaks through in 'Blue Vigour' and 'Ice House' respectively. Michaels 'retell[s] in a new way what has been told already in a certain way' (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 106). This hints at a relationship with the past, with what was and is created anew in the present. The future is also perceived: 'There is a horizon of experience which is not exhausted by the things and people and so on which are depicted or represented in one way or the other' (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 107).³⁴

This horizon, too, serves 'always as a background'; 'in each situation there is something which is not chosen' (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 107). As David Lodge³⁵ (2002: 13–14) confirms, 'historiography can give us selective accounts of events in selected human lives, but ... the more

³¹ See Chapter 1, page 32.

³² 'Colour pigments act by absorbing certain wavelengths of visible light and transmitting or scattering the other wavelengths. Some commonly used colour pigments are ... iron oxide red, iron oxide yellow, ...' (EB 2008).

³³ See Chapter 1, pages 32–3.

³⁴ There is an echo of this idea in Berger (2001: 452):

Every poem that works as a poem is original. And *original* has two meanings: it means a return to the origin, the first which engendered everything that followed; and it means that which has never occurred before. In poetry, and in poetry alone, the two senses are united in such a way that they are no longer contradictory.

As we see below (pages 82–3), Scarry (1999) would likely concur, not so much with Berger's insistence on poetry's omnipotence in this regard as with his presentation of the un-paradoxical combination of the first thing with the next thing (of its kind). To her, apparently, the aspect of combination is especially relevant in relation to our urge to reproduce that which we perceive as beautiful – beauty 'seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication' (Scarry 1999: 3) – and in relation to the need for us to extend our attention from the original beautiful thing to others of its kind. Further afield, one nevertheless cannot help recalling Berger's words in relation to Klemperer's (2000: 69–70) suggestion that 'in every revolution, be it political, social, artistic or literary in nature, there are always two principles at work: on the one hand the appetite for the new, ... and on the other the need to connect with the past'.

³⁵ David Lodge (1935–), English novelist, literary critic and editor.

scrupulous it is in basing all its assertions on evidence ... the less able it is to represent the density of those events as consciously experienced'. The background cannot be included in its entirety – whether Michaels is looking backwards or forwards, she must always leave something out.

Ricoeur's (in Reagan 1996: 108) readers belong to two worlds: 'the fictional world displayed by the work, and the one in which [they] live'.³⁶ Moreover, reading is not 'an innocent act', it is the 'decisive intersection' between these two worlds (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 108). He feels it is the task of hermeneutics

to reinsert the world of literature between what precedes it, ... a kind of naive experience, and what succeeds it, ... a learned experience. ... the act of reading has this wonderful quality of interpolating the world of literature between the stage of unlearned experience to a stage of learned experience [and thus results] the hermeneutical arch through which the work of art is a mediation between man and the world, between man and another man, and between man and himself. ... it is a mediating stage in a process of communication, man and man; referentiality, or man and the world; but also of self-understanding, man and himself. (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 108)

Certeau proposes that the acts of writing and reading are in relationship with each other. By contrast, Ricoeur seems to take the act of writing as a given. He does not locate it within his linguistic discipline–linguistic entity–metaphor triplet. I suggest, however, that we can apply the principles of the hermeneutical arch to the act of writing. Like readers, the author also belongs to two worlds: the fictional world displayed by the work (which is not necessarily the one apprehended or addressed by the reader) and the one in which she lives. Her authorial act, too, is decisive rather than innocent, her experience is at first naive and then learned, and, writing, she places the world of literature between these stages.

This situation is exemplified in *Fugitive Pieces*. As we have briefly seen at the start of the present chapter, the conclusions or realisations arrived at by the two narrators, Jakob and Ben, are not foregone. Michaels's faith – both spiritual and more practical – was intensely tested while she wrote the novel. She felt it necessary to try to 'earn a faith' or discover the possibility of faith following the horrific events of the Second World War, instead of assuming that faith simply exists and allowing the assumption to influence her research of the events (Michaels, in Watson 1996). In response to the Holocaust, Michaels's faith in humanity *could* have been destroyed. She was mindful of the possibility as she wrote, knowing that she could have 'come out the other side with[out] any belief at all' (Michaels, in Watson 1996). This was her naive experience; this was the world in which she lived.

Through the act of writing, she interpolated here the world of literature. What she created–discovered, and found–invented, reaches us on her behalf through Jakob, who perceives 'the bare autonomic faith of the body' in a post-war photograph that he acquired of a 'pyramid of flesh' (both from *FP* 168), which is the concise and powerful metaphor for the bodies of the people who climbed upon one another to reach the layer of fresher air at the top of the gas chamber and thus survive one or two moments longer. Michaels summarises this situation in a two-word phrase – 'still hope' (*FP* 168) – that we must take literally and figuratively, like so much else of her writing. The bodies are stationary because the people have died, yet, moving or still, the

³⁶ See also Chapter 1, page 27. Moreover, the world that we live in is the 'material world', Scarry (1999: 48) proposes, which 'constrains us, often with great beneficence, to see each person and thing in its time and place, its historical context'. Our 'mental life', by contrast, in which authors can exercise their imaginations and in which we can address the world displayed by their works, 'doesn't so constrain us' – it 'is porous, open to the air and light, [and] swings forward while swaying back', elaborates Scarry (1999: 48).

bodies also represent the people's hope of survival. Also, although the people have died, their hope lives on. Their 'faith in man' has (been forced to) become 'faith' itself (*FP* 168).

There are several such significant moments of realisation in *Fugitive Pieces*. Photographs like the 'pyramid' photograph, and survivor testimony of the gas chambers, lead Jakob to conclude that people have an intense desire to live, as well as an intense faith in the possibility of life. Many victims did not die quietly; 'we know they cried out', Jakob writes (*FP* 168). In their experience of the 'utmost degradation', he also finds evidence of 'grace', and thus challenges the conventional belief in 'the difference between the sounds of those who are in despair and the sounds of those who want desperately to believe' (*FP* 168). This is Michaels's learned experience; this is the fictional world displayed by the work. The hermeneutical arch becomes the creatively referential arch; *Fugitive Pieces* serves as a mediating stage in a process of communication (Michaels and us), of referentiality (Michaels and world) and of self-understanding (Michaels and herself).

Fugitive Pieces as an example of Holocaust literature

When Theodor Adorno³⁷ expressed the opinion, in the late 1950s or early 60s, concerning the barbaric nature of poetry after Auschwitz, he planted the seed of a literary debate that continues into the 21st century.³⁸ The questions posed in the debate include the following: Was the Holocaust so horrific that it should be responded to with complete silence, and not be aggrandised or aestheticised in creative writing? Would literary portrayal of it inevitably misrepresent the events and thus disrespect all those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, or is there a legitimate, respectful way of writing Holocaust fiction and poetry? If there is, what is that method?

Michaels's response is respectful and her timing is carefully considered. She believes both that the statement was 'perhaps appropriate for the time' at which it was pronounced as it seemed to advocate the 'very good idea' of 'a historical moment's silence', and also that when she began to write her novel, some two decades later, it was no longer appropriate (Michaels 2005). In *Fugitive Pieces*, which can in a limited sense be categorised as a Holocaust novel, neither Jakob nor Ben is prepared to entertain the notion of remaining silent. While sensing as a young adult that his life 'could not be stored in any language', Jakob also admits not knowing 'how to seek by way of silence' and turns to writing as a means of finding his 'truth' (*FP* 111). He uses poetry to explore his past, returning 'to Biskupin, to the house on Zakyntos, to the forest, ... to the burst door, [and] the minutes in the wall' (*FP* 111–12) where he escapes his parents' fate, and in his notebooks he records his story for the people he loves (*FP* 191).

Michaels (in Turbide 1997) furthermore infuses Ben's story with the belief that 'silence is a painful and corrosive thing'. She seems to imply precisely that Ben struggles to 'come to terms with [his parents'] past' because for many years he does not 'know what the past is' (Michaels, in Turbide 1997).³⁹ He knows that his parents are concentration camp survivors; he grows up learning that afterwards their fear of loss, their fear in general, never diminishes (*FP* 223). But while the experience causes his mother to take pleasure in pleasure seriously, almost obsessively – she 'celebrated the aroma ... [of] instant coffee, ... inhaled each fragrant fold of ... freshly washed linens. ... fondled [each rare, new item of clothing] like the First Blouse or the First Pair

³⁷ Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), German philosopher, who also wrote on sociology, psychology and musicology.

³⁸ Adorno and this literary debate are discussed in detail in Ristić (2005).

³⁹ As Michaels's (in Turbide 1997) rhetorically questions: 'How can you come to terms with the past if you don't know what the past is?'

of Stockings' (*FP* 229–30) – it causes his father to retreat, not incomprehensibly, into silence, emotional dislocation and paranoia.

Arriving in post-war Toronto, for example, Ben's parents 'saw that most of their fellow immigrants settled in the same downtown district: a rough square of streets' (*FP* 243). His father refuses to 'make the same mistake', perhaps reasoning that in the event of another war the Nazis "wouldn't even have the trouble of rounding [them] up" (*FP* 243). And when their home on the banks of the Humber River is destroyed by the storm of hurricane proportions, Ben's father moves his small family into an apartment block primarily because "all the front doors look alike" (*FP* 247) and presumably therefore the Jewish occupants cannot be easily distinguished.

Without openly refuting his injunction, Adorno (in Arato & Gebhardt 1978: 312) later comments that 'the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting'. Michaels may concur with this and Adorno's (in Arato & Gebhardt 1978: 312) concomitant suggestion about art being almost the only medium in which 'suffering can still find its own voice ... without immediately being betrayed by it'. Later still, Adorno (in Schlant 1999: 9; paraphrased in Horn 1998) makes a final point on the subject that calls his injunction into question: 'The enduring suffering has as much right to expression as does the tortured man to scream; therefore it may have been wrong that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written'.⁴⁰ This does not bring the debate to an end – there are still relevant ethical aspects that call for exploration – but as Lawrence Langer (1995: 4) suggests, the existing vast body of Holocaust literature negates the question of remaining silent and emphasises the far more pertinent issue of precisely 'how words help us to imagine what reason rejects'.

There are those who believe that the danger lies in the Holocaust being represented specifically in fiction. Their argument is that because fiction comprises figurative language, language that is neither literal nor factual, it cannot do justice to the events; it cannot show the necessary respect to those who survived and to the memory of those who died. 'The problem of writing *after* is also the problem of how to represent the impossible event faithfully while avoiding a betrayal both of history and of the victim' (Cook 2000: 12). These critics and theorists seem to feel that the Holocaust is most truthfully (and therefore respectfully) represented in eyewitness and/or second-hand testimony, stripped of literary devices such as metaphor. They wish Holocaust fiction writers to avoid 'making a fiction out of the Holocaust' (Vice 2000: 1). As we see shortly, Stephen Henighan (2002) and Méira Cook (2000) take exception to *Fugitive Pieces* itself in this regard.⁴¹ Their views seem to rest on the assumption that an event that occurred in the past, one becoming increasingly distant from us today as time goes by, can indeed be represented to us in language that is free of literary embellishment – language, in other words, that has remained in the arena of description and has not moved from sense to split-reference (Ricoeur).

But many philosophers, writers and critics would argue that this is not possible. Ricoeur (1992: 115) believes that 'there is no ethically neutral narrative' – 'literature is a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgments of approval and condemnation through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic to ethics'. According to James E Young (1988), the only way in which all of us who read about the Holocaust these many years later can

⁴⁰ Ernestine Schlant (1999: 246 fn 21) acknowledges the source of this statement of Adorno's as follows: 'Quoted by Klaus Laermann, "Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch," in Manuel Köppen, ed., *Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz* (Berlin: Erich Schmid Verlag, 1993) 15'.

⁴¹ Méira Cook (2000: 18) appears to respond ambivalently towards Michaels's work: She thinks highly of what she sees as Michaels's use of metaphor 'as a device of memory', but her negative criticisms are rather severe. Nevertheless, she manages to maintain a professional distance in her attitude. By contrast, Stephen Henighan's (2002) criticisms have the tone of a personal vendetta. See Ristić (2005) for a detailed refutation of these critics' arguments against the author and her first novel.

learn about it is through the words of those who wrote and write about it, be they witnesses with first-hand experience or further removed. The event-representations will always, to a lesser or greater degree, be ‘figured’, that is, filtered through the subjective viewpoint of the teller – metaphors ‘are our only access to the facts’, Young (1988: 91) confirms. Some critics would argue further that the aspect of time is beside the point, and that all language, at any time, is metaphorical. Berger (2001: 452) refuses to see language as ‘only a means’, while for MH Abrams, whose *Glossary of Literary Terms*, compiled with Geoffrey G Harpham, is now in its ninth edition, metaphors are ‘essential to the functioning of language’ (Abrams & Harpham 2009: 120). Metaphors are even more essential to ‘the development of consciousness in human beings’, Iris Murdoch (1970: 77) suggests, as ‘they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition’.

Thus these critics may, and do, not only argue that by its nature Holocaust writing must be – is – figurative, they also uphold poetic, fictional, literary Holocaust representation as being able to shed valuable light on the events. Adrienne Rich⁴² (1993: 137–8, emphasis added), for instance, believes that survivor poet Irena Klepfisz⁴³ succeeds in the ‘considerable risk’ she takes ‘of trying to bear witness to ... her history without compromise and without melodrama’ because she is ‘a poet, *not only* a witness’. Terrence des Pres⁴⁴ (1977: 5), on whose text *The Survivor* Michaels partly relied for the factual background to *Fugitive Pieces* (Michaels 1996: acknowledgements), suggests that fiction ‘provides images whose formal purity brings some part, at least, of the world’s confusion into focus. ... Through fiction, ... some framework [can be] fixed which mediates the difference between [the world of the survivor] and ours’. Moreover, Young (1988: 91) explains that by making the mistake of leaving the Holocaust ‘out of metaphor’, we would leave it ‘out of language altogether’ and thereby mystify the Holocaust just as the Nazis mystified it.

Michaels, by contrast, seems to have ‘grasped how atrocity ... rotted the bond joining language to truth’, as Langer (1995: 272) claims with regard to the poet Paul Celan, whom we meet again in Chapter 4. In all her work, Michaels enacts her belief in metaphor as the mechanism for attempting to restore the bond and regain access to the facts (Young). ‘The fact is not always the truth’, Michaels (1994: 15) emphasises – “‘energy release’” is not the whole truth of the effect of an ‘exploding bomb’, a failure “‘to meet functioning criteria as per design requirements’” is not the whole truth of the consequences of ‘nuclear plant’ equipment breaking down. And “‘intelligence-gathering’” is neither the whole truth of the practice of torture, nor, as Scarry (1985: 278) points out, ‘an aimless piece of irony, but an indication of the angle of error ... that may separate a description of an event from the event itself’. Such euphemisms constitute an ‘abuse of language [that] is perpetuated ... to render the immoral, moral’; such euphemisms ‘use fact in order to mislead’, while metaphor ‘uses “fabrication” to get at a truth’, elaborates Michaels (1994: 15).⁴⁵ Murdoch (1970: 77–8) would give Michaels a round of applause, believing as she does that ‘metaphors often carry a moral charge, which analysis in simpler and plainer terms is designed to remove’.

Yet Henighan (2002: 149) reproaches Michaels for, among other things, using metaphors that are not ‘*earned*’ in that they ‘do not blossom from a mass of richly evoked experience’. While not

⁴² Adrienne Rich (1929–), American poet, scholar, teacher and critic.

⁴³ Irena Klepfisz (1941–), Polish Jewish lesbian author, poet, academic and activist (en.wikipedia ... Irena_Klepfisz). With its narrator speaking in the voice of a deceased woman – ‘when they turned on the gas [she] smelled/ it first’, ‘when they dragged [her] body into the oven [she] burned/ slowly at first’, ‘when [she] pressed through the chimney/ it was sunny’ – Klepfisz’s (in Rich 1993: 137) poem ‘death camp’ is a clear example of a corpse poem, a concept we encounter and discuss towards the end of the present chapter and in Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Terrence des Pres (1940–1987), American philosopher, critic and Holocaust scholar.

⁴⁵ From Scarry’s (1985: 279–80) point of view, ‘as in an earlier century the most searing questions of right and wrong were perceived to be bound up with questions of “truth,” so in the coming time these same, still-searing questions of right and wrong must be reperceived as centrally bound up with questions about “fictions”’.

actually stating that Michaels should not have written *Fugitive Pieces* because she did not live through the Holocaust, he ignores the many texts she acknowledges as useful research material, and seems unaware that her subsequent merging of fact and fiction generates exactly this mass of experience. Cook (2000: 16) similarly proposes that the novel's 'poetic narrative often falters upon misconstruals and evasions'. She rejects Michaels's simile of the Zakynthos Jews⁴⁶ hiding in the hills like coral – 'half flesh, half stone' (*FP* 40; in Cook 2000: 16) – because she feels that by 'metaphorizing their fate' Michaels 'conceals the decidedly unpoetic nature of genocide' (Cook 2000: 16).

However, there is no such concealment. Michaels relates the plight of the 'poor few' (*FP* 41) Jews who did not manage to evade the round-up; they suffer under the blazing sun of the Zakynthos harbour until, the boat they were to board having failed to dock, they are loaded into a truck and driven off. At the time their fate is unknown; looking back, we can surely guess at that fate and recognise it as an instance of genocide. Thus, contrary to Cook's view and in terms used by Rich (1993: 10), Michaels uses 'poetic language' precisely to exercise its property of 'engag[ing] with states that themselves would deprive us of language and reduce us to passive sufferers'. For Michaels (in Crown 2009), poetry is 'a way of holding experience'.⁴⁷

Cook (2000: 17) suggests that as readers we are in danger of failing to distinguish the 'relative importance' of the 'eyewitness account' from that of 'romantic experience' because Michaels uses metaphoric language 'indiscriminately' to represent both types of situation. Thus Michaels's solution to the 'problem of witnessing' is also erroneous in Cook's (2000: 29) view, bringing as she feels Michaels does 'to the prose of the traumatic narrative the unruly compulsions of poetry'. Cook appears to favour factual testimony over fictional representation, but she does not seem to recognise that Michaels links these types of accounts on purpose. To use different language – unsplit-reference for the eyewitness account, and split-reference for the romantic experience – to describe the events would be to imply that the events themselves have no common ground.

For Michaels, as for us in real life, horror and goodness operate in tandem. As a child Jakob hides from the Nazis like so many other Jews, yet he hides in Zakynthos's 'radiant light', while others 'suffocated in darkness' (both from *FP* 45); while Jakob gains a sophisticated education from Athos, Jews around Europe are being sold for liquor, shot in the throat and 'hanged from their thumbs in public squares' (*FP* 45, 46); whereas the German officer residing in the Mitsialis's home during the occupation thinks he is taunting Kostas by making Daphne share part of his meal while Kostas goes without, instead Kostas is simply, silently 'happy to see [that his wife has] enough for once' (*FP* 65).⁴⁸

Henighan (2002: 148) may well agree with Cook in these matters, as he claims that 'the most successful Holocaust writing of recent decades, that of Primo Levi, relies on a scientific precision

⁴⁶ The inhabitants of Zakynthos protected their Jewish community from Italian and German forces during the Second World War: Every one of the 275 Jews survived the war as a result of Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Carrer's refusal to divulge their names, while the villagers concealed them 'in the mountain villages' (e-zakynthos.com). Michaels retells the story in *Fugitive Pieces* with a touch of poetic licence (see *FP* 41–2). As we also learn from the novel (see above, page 68, footnote 19), an earthquake greatly damaged much of the island in 1953; 'the very first boat to arrive with aid was from Israel', with this message: "The Jews of Zakynthos have never forgotten their mayor or their beloved Bishop and what they did for us" (e-zakynthos.com).

⁴⁷ Michaels (in Crown 2009) is careful to clarify that she uses the word 'holding' here to imply poetry's ability to 'carry' or 'contain' experience, and that she does not mean 'holding on to'.

⁴⁸ Moreover, just as 'it is not given to man to enjoy uncontaminated happiness', so 'one always has the impression of being fortunate'; 'some chance happening [such as rain without wind, or the promise of an extra food ration] stops [the camp inmates] crossing the threshold of despair and allows [them] to live', Levi (1960: 137) recalls.

and an objectivity resistant to flights into poetic generalization'. He is incorrect, however, not only because subjectivity is inevitable in any writer's use of their viewpoint in their writing, but also because Levi's writing is not characterised by scientific precision or objectivity.⁴⁹ While his memoir *If This Is a Man* is not bitter or vengeful, his wholly personal, and thus wholly subjective, physical suffering and emotional anguish are clearly evident in it. Newly imprisoned, Levi (1960: 32) realised that he and those around him had 'reached the bottom'. They were without clothes, shoes or hair, without the ability to make themselves understood, without their own name (Levi 1960: 33). Their life or death could be 'lightly decided with no sense of human affinity', at best 'on the basis of a pure judgement of utility' – understandably, no human condition seemed to him 'more miserable' (Levi 1960: 32, 33).

Moreover, and exemplifying Young's (1988) abovementioned explanation of the automatically figurative nature of Holocaust writing, Levi relates his experience – factual because it happened to a real man in the real world, albeit in the form of a living nightmare in his case – in a figurative manner. The Lager was not simply the death camp, it was a 'machine to reduce [the inmates] to beasts' (Levi 1960: 47). Prisoners did not leave the camp by being killed and cremated – their 'only exit [was] by way of the Chimney' (Levi 1960: 35). Levi does not take the tone of a historian providing the 'bare facts' (my quotation marks) of life in the camps; he does not state: 'When the prisoners entered Auschwitz they had to give up their clothes and shoes. The wooden shoes they received in replacement gave them extreme discomfort, which sometimes even caused their death'. Instead, he tells us that 'death begins with the shoes' – they are

instruments of torture, which after a few hours of marching cause painful sores which become fatally infected. ... [they cause one's feet to] swell, and the more they swell the more the friction with the wood ... becomes insupportable. ... to enter the hospital with the diagnosis of '*dicke Füße*' (swollen feet) is extremely dangerous, because it is well known ... that here there is no cure for this complaint. (Levi 1960: 40–1)

Levi was *in* the camp; he experienced its atrocities first-hand. Yet even he does not portray them with 'photographic realism' (Murdoch 1970: 87). Henighan's (2002) error in this matter makes his views of Michaels's writing equally questionable.

In line with their apparent preference for factual, objective reports, Henighan (2002: 147) and Cook (2000: 16) accuse Michaels of using 'lush' metaphorical language⁵⁰ that is in disturbing juxtaposition with the shocking nature of her chosen topic. She is not alone in receiving such criticism⁵¹ – many other critics have accused many other Holocaust texts of aestheticising the events, making 'beautiful' and acceptable what is, in reality, morally 'ugly' and unacceptable. But here again their views can be refuted. In her portrayal of a group of slain people's 'lost lives'

⁴⁹ Levi's own explanation of his writing does not contradict this statement. In his Afterword to *If This Is a Man* and *The Truce*, he acknowledges having 'deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness' and avoided playing the role either of a victim or an avenger in his Auschwitz account (Levi 1965: 382). Precisely because he believes that hatred is a 'bestial' and 'crude' response to his oppressors, that his actions and thoughts should be based 'on reason' and that 'reason' and 'discussion' are the 'supreme instruments of progress', he purposefully aspired to objectivity, he explains, rather than using an 'overly emotional' tone, in order to make the account 'more credible and useful' for 'the judges', that is, his readers (Levi 1965: 382). The fact that he did not fully achieve such objectivity is to his credit rather than to his shame or error.

⁵⁰ By contrast, more than a decade after its publication Michaels (in Crown 2009) insists that her metaphorical language in *Fugitive Pieces* is 'plain' rather than 'heightened'.

⁵¹ Henighan, for example, does not focus entirely on *Fugitive Pieces* in this regard – Sri Lankan-born Canadian novelist and poet Michael Ondaatje's (1943–) *The English Patient* (1992) also comes under fire. Henighan (2002: 134) identifies the two novels as 'self-consciously artistic artifacts', leaders in a line of Canadian 'literary bestsellers' that are characterised by "beautiful" imagery, exotic settings, exquisite production and other features calculated to flatter [their] purchaser with evidence of his own aesthetic refinement'.

making ‘molecular passage’ (both from *FP* 52) into a group of living people’s hands, Michaels does not shy away from the facts. Jakob tells us, without preamble: ‘Prisoners were forced to dig up the mass graves’ and in so doing ‘their arms were into death up to the elbows’ (both from *FP* 52) – this is the literal truth.

Then Michaels exercises her empathic imagination, which we examine below, and helps us to consider the intangible, equally powerful consequences of such a process. As they touch the corpses, the prisoners are also touching and thereby absorbing the dead people’s memories – ‘of the way a husband or son leaned over his dinner; a wife’s expression as she watched her child in the bath’ – as well as their ‘beliefs ... [and] dreams’ (*FP* 52). Michaels furthermore highlights the accompanying ethical concern: The prisoners are forced to commit an act of desecration. By begging for forgiveness and by grasping the corpses ‘as if in a passion grasp’, the prisoners sanctify their action and become custodians of the ‘lost lives’ (both from *FP* 52), passing them through their own blood to the next generation as well. While we recognise poignancy in the examples of the specific memories that Michaels provides, we do not mistake the scene for one of beauty.

In her own defence, Michaels (in O’Neill 1997) explains that her ongoing battle with and sense of apology for the ‘intensity of language’ that characterises her novel is resolved in the end – she eventually realises that ‘it makes sense that the language of the book is intense because of the intensity of experience to be conveyed to the reader’ (Michaels, in O’Neill 1997).

Here the perspective of Scarry (1999) proves illuminating. One of the two arguments comprising ‘the political critique against beauty’, she explains, ‘urges that beauty, by preoccupying our attention, distracts attention from wrong social arrangements’ (Scarry 1999: 58). She names such distraction ‘the problem of lateral disregard’ (Scarry 1999: 65). This argument assumes that ‘if our “gaze” could just be ... made to latch onto a specific object (an injustice in need of remedy or repair), that object would benefit from our generous attention’ (Scarry 1999: 58–9). From this perspective, silence is also not the answer to the question of Holocaust representation – the answer is our (authors’ and readers’) beneficent gaze on the object, the Holocaust, in need of repair in the sense that we should confer on the survivors and victims the necessary respect and remembrance. In other words, as Cook (2000) would also have it, we should focus on the ‘real’ genocide of the Zakyntos Jews and not on the qualities of evocation and pathos – on the beauty – of the human-stone-coral image.⁵² Scarry seems to be in accord with Michaels, in that she (Scarry) does not agree with the distinction made by the problem of lateral disregard between the attention-deserving object and the distracting beautiful thing – as we have seen above, Michaels refuses to write about the Holocaust in two languages: the unsplit- and the split-reference.

Furthermore, Michaels’s use of metaphors is also *not* indiscriminate, as we have seen Cook (2000: 17) suggesting above. We do not distinguish between the relative importance given to eyewitness account and romantic experience because it is within the relationship between the two that Michaels assigns the overall importance. We would not see Jakob’s traumatic and pleasant experiences as authentic if we receive them in disparate literary styles. Michaels therefore may well concur with Scarry’s (1999: 60–1) proposal that ‘there is no way to be in a high state of alert

⁵² And as Henighan (2002: 147) would have it, we should be directed by Michaels to focus not on the Holocaust at all (though he admits it to be ‘undeniably an important subject’), but on the social ills of contemporary Toronto. He reproaches the novel for ‘divert[ing] the reader’s attention from Toronto society’ at a time ‘when Toronto’s streets are filling up with homeless people’ (Henighan 2002: 147).

towards injustices ... without simultaneously demanding of oneself precisely the level of perceptual acuity that will forever be opening one to the arrival of beautiful sights and sounds'.⁵³

Contrary to the 'political critique' argument that she highlights, Scarry (1999: 62) contends that rather than distracting us from injustice 'beauty ... actually assists us in the work of addressing injustice, not only by requiring of us constant perceptual acuity ... but by ... more direct forms of instruction'. We should engage, Scarry (1999) suggests, in a two-part action, the first part involuntary, the second voluntary. Perceiving something as beautiful, we involuntarily give it our attention. Then we should be able to, and should voluntarily, extend that 'quality of heightened attention' to other, similar things (Scarry 1999: 81), so that we do not see these, too, as beautiful, but as deserving of the special attention and care we have given the beautiful thing.⁵⁴ I would not go so far as to support Scarry's (1999: 67) deduction that 'it is not just the poet's best poem that should be published, but even the penultimate, nearly-as-beautiful draft', but perhaps we can apply her way of thinking to novels (and poems) that are similar to Michaels's, as well as to the 'beautiful' things that Michaels writes. In this way, the problem of lateral disregard is transformed into the solution of communal or international regard. Using such regard, we include authors like Ondaatje in the refutation of Henighan (2002) and Cook's (2000) accusations; we involuntarily picture the human-stone-coral image and extend our now-heightened attention to encompass the genuine 'flesh', the Zakyntos Jews.

Berger (2001) sees in poetry a similar 'caring' function. Although 'one can say anything to language', he feels, this 'openness often signifies indifference', such as the alienating and confusing language that tends to characterise not only 'bulletins, legal records, communiqués [and] files' (Berger 2001: 450), but also, by extension, the LTI as presented by Klemperer (2000). Through 'the work of the written poem' itself, poetry 'addresses language in such a way as to close this indifference and to incite a caring', Berger (2001: 450) suggests. In its use of metaphor, poetry discovers 'those correspondences of which the sum total would be proof of the indivisible totality of existence' (Berger 2001: 451). Poetry 'makes language care' – in other words, enacts the solution of communal or international regard – because 'it renders everything intimate', it rebuilds that which has been scattered and 'bring[s]-together-into-intimacy ... every act and noun and event and perspective to which the poem refers', Berger (2001: 450, 451) elaborates. Unlike Scarry, who uses several examples of things to which we can attribute beauty, Berger (2001: 451) puts such store by poetry that his conclusion is that this caring is often the only thing that we can 'place against the cruelty and indifference of the world'.

'When we speak about beauty', Scarry (1999: 95) observes, there are three aspects we may speak of: Attention falls sometimes on 'the beautiful object', sometimes on 'the perceiver's cognitive act of beholding the beautiful thing', and sometimes on 'the creative act that is prompted by one's being in the presence of what is beautiful'. We can apply the second aspect to Michaels. Beholding a beautiful thing, we experience 'an occasion of "unselfing"', as Murdoch (1970: 84; in

⁵³ 'How will one even notice, let alone be concerned,' Scarry (1999: 61) continues, about the inclusion in a political assembly of only one economic point of view unless one has also attended, with full acuity, to a debate that is itself a beautiful object, full of arguments, counterarguments, wit, spirit, ripostes, ironies, testing, contesting; and how in turn will one hear the nuances of even this debate unless one also makes oneself available to the songs of birds or poets?

⁵⁴ Scarry (1999: 81) does not claim this notion for herself; she acknowledges its source in, among others, Plato's 'requirement that we move from "eros", in which we are seized by the beauty of one person, to "caritas", in which our care is extended to all people'. Similarly, Jakob learns from Athos the following 'important lesson': 'Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful' (*FP* 44).

Scarry 1999: 113) calls it.⁵⁵ Resentfully preoccupied with a personal or professional slight, Murdoch (1970: 84) is gazing sightlessly out of a window when she notices a hovering kestrel; suddenly everything changes, ‘the brooding self ... has disappeared’, and when she returns to thinking of her ‘hurt vanity’ it seems less important. A kestrel is a (to Murdoch, beautiful) thing of nature; in her discussion she includes the ‘less accessible’ but ‘more edifying’ arts, of which literature is one (Murdoch 1970: 86).

The demise of the Jews during the Holocaust exemplifies some of ‘the great deaths’ that Murdoch (1970: 87) points out are taken as subject matter in literature.⁵⁶ Certain elements of Michaels’s work serve as examples of the way in which her ‘art invigorates us by a juxtaposition, almost an identification, of pointlessness and value’, in Murdoch’s (1970: 87) terms. In *Fugitive Pieces* (7), for instance, just before she is shot by the Nazis, Jakob’s mother had been sewing a button, taken from the ‘chipped saucer’ in which she kept them, on his shirt – from his hiding place while the execution is occurring, Jakob ‘heard the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor’; he ‘heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth’. The simple domestic task, once useful, is then useless. Moreover, the people in the gas chamber, in the ‘pyramid’ photograph that strikes Jakob so forcefully, attempted to reach the last layer of oxygen knowing the act’s futility, performing it just the same (*FP* 168). Perhaps they understood, as does Athos in continuing to search for Bella for many years on Jakob’s behalf, that ‘true hope is severed from expectation’ (*FP* 117).

And in Michaels’s poem ‘What the Light Teaches’ (124), ‘smuggl[ing] language/ from the mouths of the dying/ and the dead’, the ‘last words of the murdered mothers –/ Germany, Poland, Russia’,⁵⁷ amounts to a ‘suicide mission’. The act of saving for posterity diaries, poems, stories and memoirs is revealed to have been pointless (Murdoch) because the words were recorded during Nazi and Soviet rule; those words constitute, that is, the ‘language of a victim’, which bears the stamp of the oppressor – it ‘only reveals/ the one who named him’ (What the Light Teaches 124). However, a trace of value (Murdoch) is still to be found in the ‘alphabet’ (What the Light Teaches 124) from which these words were constructed, because the alphabet of the victim’s language is also the alphabet of the ‘old language’, untainted by the oppressors, that has the potential to ‘save’ (both from What the Light Teaches 121) the poem’s narrator and her sister. Michaels does what Murdoch (1970: 87) considers to be ‘the only thing ... of real importance’: She ‘see[s] it all clearly and respond[s] to it justly’. With her guidance, we can do the same. ‘In the enjoyment of art and nature we [can] discover value in our ability to forget self,⁵⁸ ... [and] to perceive justly’ (Murdoch 1970: 90).

Michaels removes herself

The belief in the idea of forgetting the self may seem to contradict Ricoeur’s (1992) emphasis on the self as a crucial element in narrative identity. Having thoroughly explored historical narrative and fictional narrative in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur ponders in *Oneself as Another* (1992: 114 fn 1)

⁵⁵ Iris Murdoch (1970: 99) believes that we are ‘slaves of relentlessly strong selfish forces’. ‘At best, as decent persons, we are usually very specialized’ – ‘we behave well in areas where this can be done fairly easily and let other areas of possible virtue remain undeveloped’ (Murdoch 1970: 99).

⁵⁶ Murdoch (1970: 87) is referring to fictional deaths – Patroclus (in Homer’s *Iliad*), Cordelia (in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*), Petya Rostov (in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*) – but her opinions can be extended to *Fugitive Pieces* and ‘What the Light Teaches’.

⁵⁷ With this formulation Michaels avoids indicating explicitly that the ‘murdered mothers’ are German, Polish and Russian, and thereby she could also be implying that ‘Germany, Poland, [and] Russia’ are victims of the war (What the Light Teaches 124).

⁵⁸ As Ricoeur (1992: 24 fn 31) tells us, by way of the French novelist and polemical writer Georges Bernanos (1888–1948), “‘grace means forgetting oneself. ... if all pride were dead in us, the grace of graces would be to love oneself humbly ...’”.

whether there exists ‘a structure of experience capable of integrating the two great classes of narratives’, and proposes that ‘narrative identity’ may be ‘the sought-after place of this chiasm between history and fiction’. In all of her work, Michaels seems to be embodying Ricoeur’s hypothesis. For example, through Ben in *Fugitive Pieces* she ‘stands in for’ – a term we explore in greater detail in reference to Bourdieu below – those of us who are children and grandchildren of survivors. ‘In a sense, anyone born after the war is in Ben’s position, ... philosophically ... I wanted to look at how events we don’t live through ourselves shape us and what that invisible connection is between history and personal life,’ she explains (Michaels, in Grossman 1998). Moreover, ‘for [her] it was quite essential to address that particular historical event and find a way to carry it within [her]self’ (Michaels 1996: 18).

From this perspective, the nature of Michaels’s authorial identity is narrative, not autobiographical. She ‘took a lot of pains to write [*Fugitive Pieces*] in a certain way’, and she did not ‘want that to be sidetracked by anyone saying, “Oh, well, it’s her story and nobody else’s”’ (Michaels, in Grossman 1998). Her audience is universal and her production, her words, hold universal relevance. ‘Because, you know, it’s not about me,’ she confirms a decade later (Michaels, in Crown 2009). ‘You spend your time when you’re writing erasing yourself. The idea is to get out of the way,’ she reasons (Michaels, in Crown 2009). Thus, she may agree with the suggestion of Antjie Krog⁵⁹ (2010) that the more writers *appear* to be telling a story that is unique and intimate, the less the story actually is so, because as soon as they *are* being unique and intimate they fail to provide elements with which their audience can identify, and thus they fail to engage their audience. ‘What is originally interior and private,’ Scarry (1985: 284) elucidates, is made ‘into something exterior and sharable’, and conversely ‘what is now exterior and sharable’ is reabsorbed ‘into the intimate recesses of individual consciousness’. In sum, the writer’s thoughts and perceptions are formed into a poem or a novel and are received and taken in by each reader.

Lodge (2002: 10) makes some points on this topic that at first take us away from Michaels, but soon return us to her. He suggests both that a novel ‘is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time’ and that lyric poetry ‘is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe qualia’ (Lodge 2002: 10). Qualia relate to ‘the specific nature of our subjective experience of the world’ (Lodge 2002: 8). A quale is a ‘quality or property as perceived by a person’ (*OECD*), and because each person is unique in their perceptions, the quale is unique during the perception. Literature reflects or ‘recapitulates’ this uniqueness – as Lodge (2002: 11) argues, the novel *Emma* ‘could not have been written by anybody’ other than Jane Austen ‘and never will be written by anyone else again’. Nevertheless, perhaps exactly or at least partly for the reason that is provided above by Krog, poets and prose writers use language in lyric poetry and prose in such a way that the description of qualia does not seem personal to them (Lodge 2002: 11). Authors do not speak for themselves alone, their presentation or description of qualia facilitate our own experience of those qualia as we read their work (Lodge 2002: 12).

‘One of the primary means by which literature renders qualia [is] through metaphor and simile’, Lodge (2002: 13, 12) elaborates, and uses a brief passage from *Fugitive Pieces* as one of the many ‘brilliant’ examples. Jakob meets Michaela, the young woman who becomes his second wife, at a party given by the Salmans – his friend Maurice and Maurice’s wife Irena. Stepping out into the street after the party, Jakob and Michaela encounter this:

⁵⁹ Antjie Krog (1952–), South African writer, poet and academic.

The winter street is a salt cave. The snow has stopped falling and it's very cold. The cold is spectacular, penetrating. The street has been silenced, a theatre of whiteness, drifts like frozen waves. Crystals glisten under the streetlights. (*FP* 177; in Lodge 2002: 12–13)

Lodge (2002: 13) points out that a writer cannot present such a scene in literal language if she wishes to avoid being tautological – ‘whiteness is white, coldness is cold’. Salt is white, and if necessary salt can be laid down on a street that has been snowed upon to make the surface less slippery for commuting vehicles. But such repetition in literature, by interweaving similarities and differences, by enacting the ‘is’ and ‘is not’ of metaphorical truth (Ricoeur), allows ‘the object and the experience of it’ to be ‘vividly simulated’ (Lodge 2002: 13). Thus in this description, and in all other such descriptions, Michaels seems to be saying, not ‘This is what I have experienced, and I want you to have my experience too’, but rather ‘This is what I have experienced, or this is what I imagine an experience such as this one entails, and I am giving you the opportunity to have your version of it’.

Some critics take autobiographical details in Michaels’s work as given. Fraser Sutherland (n.d.: 178) seems certain that the ‘other lives’ on which Michaels relies in ‘Miner’s Pond’ are those of her brothers, and Sarah Crown (2009) comments that in the same poem Michaels ‘cast[s] back ... to her own childhood’.⁶⁰ Carol Moldaw (n.d.) describes ‘Words for the Body’ as being ‘addressed to a childhood friend’ and ‘explor[ing] the nature of artistic apprenticeship, the friend’s to the piano, Michaels’ to writing’, and ‘Fontanelles’, the last poem in the volume *Skin Divers*, as being ‘addressed to the father of Michaels’ child’. Michaels does not seem to respond to such points specifically, but in general she denies these connections. Throughout the increasing acclaim she has received for her work and the corresponding public interest in the details of her life, she has deliberately kept a distance that relinquishes few personal facts. She does this not to be coy or to cultivate an air of mystery, but rather to prevent ‘the sanctity of the text’ from being influenced by ‘even the most banal facts’ of her life, which would cause readers, she believes, to read her work differently (Michaels, in Crown 2009).

‘Language casts a wide net,’ Michaels (1992: 98) suggests, ‘you capture something only by pulling up a lot of dross with it.’ Despite being essential to the creative writing process, as we see further in Chapter 4,⁶¹ the author’s ‘personal context’ also tends to ‘mire’ truths – the shells that are ‘still entangled with seaweed’ (Michaels 1992: 98). This view places Michaels more in line with the New Critics, who advocate a close reading of a text alone, without the taking into account of extraneous details such as the writer’s biography or the speculations as to her intentions. She realises, however, that ‘there’s no such thing as a pure reading’, but insists on keeping herself ‘as far out of it as [she] can’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009).

There is no incongruity in Michaels’s position. She seems comfortably to play the role of bringing together ‘the vast and the intimate’, reasoning that, ‘as humans, we don’t absorb large experiences as abstractions; we take them in personally’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009). In a circular movement, she deftly practises ‘the art of the poem’ (and by implication, of the novel): ‘taking the universal into the particular’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009). In other words, she begins with the ‘particular’, that is, her own life and the lives of those around her, views these particulars in relation to the ‘universal’, that is, a series of historically significant events such as the Second World War, acknowledging that it directly affected these lives and believing that it indirectly affects us all, then takes this universal and brings it back into the particular lives of real-life

⁶⁰ There seems to be a certain logic to their view, because ‘Miner’s Pond’ is dedicated to the memory of Elie David Michaels and the poem describes the narrator’s ‘brother’s son [who] lived/ [just] one fall, one spring’ (Miner’s Pond 62).

⁶¹ See Chapter 4, page 173.

people such as Alfred Doebelin and of those who could easily have been real, such as Jakob and Ben in *Fugitive Pieces* and the Polish artist Lucjan in *The Winter Vault*, and thereby offers us ‘a safe place’ in which to consider ‘things that aren’t safe’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009).

Nevertheless, while she may seek always ‘to sli[p] out the back door’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009) and leave her texts in the limelight by themselves, she cannot do so completely. There is always an element of her ‘self’ that remains with the texts, because an element of her ‘self’ plays a role in each text’s creation. Indeed, the ‘self’ element is the very reason for the creation of the text. For instance, Michaels (1992: 98) spent 12 years researching Kepler while also ‘waiting to understand fully [her] fascination’ with the mathematician, ‘waiting for the discovery of where their experience could cross paths’.⁶² Perhaps we can assume that similar understanding of her fascination with Brueghel, Modersohn-Becker, Watson, Blixen and the others supported her poems about these people in the same way. Her understanding is not a by-product of the research process, it is an essential factor. ‘A voice that reaches you over a great distance of time and space, calls to you for a reason. And only after that personal motive is discovered ... can the “universal” motive be discovered’ – ‘and only then can the poem emerge’, Michaels (1992: 98) elaborates. Her texts would not exist, in other words, without this fusion of the personal, or the particular, and the universal.

I have mentioned above how the belief in the idea of forgetting the self apparently contradicts Ricoeur’s (1992) emphasis on the self as a crucial element in narrative identity. The belief may also seem to contradict our application of Ricoeur’s (1992) ideas to Michaels as a narrative identity, but there is actually no contradiction. I suggest that in their own ways, Murdoch, Ricoeur and Michaels are all making the same case. Ricoeur (1992: 114) proposes that ‘self-understanding is an interpretation’, thereby implying both that the self is the starting point of the process of interpretation and that through interpretation we gain an understanding of ourselves. Through interpretation, as an author Michaels gains an understanding of herself. From knowing and understanding herself, Michaels can progress to writing a narrative about, of, others. In Murdoch’s (1970: 90) terms this process entails Michaels forgetting herself.

In the narrative, interpretation serves as ‘a privileged form of mediation’ (Ricoeur 1992: 114 fn 1) between history, fiction, biography and autobiography. By setting Jakob’s and Ben’s stories during and following the Second World War, by taking up the lives of Mandelstam and Doebelin, among her other real-life poetic subjects, Michaels indeed ‘borrows from history as well as from fiction’,⁶³ thereby making ‘a fictional history’ in ‘The Weight of Oranges’ and ‘Sublimation’ out of the ‘life stor[ies]’ of the poet and the writer (Ricoeur 1992: 114 fn 1). She indeed ‘interweaves the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies’ (Ricoeur 1992: 114 fn 1). In Murdoch’s (1970: 90) terms, by extension, this process entails Michaels perceiving others justly.

Ricoeur’s view of people acting and suffering

Finally, Ricoeur (1992: 145) acknowledges never forgetting ‘to speak of humans as acting and suffering’. There is ‘one who acts’,⁶⁴ and there is ‘one who undergoes’ the action,⁶⁵ a situation

⁶² Evidently, this kind of waiting, and the waiting ‘for every connecting image and metaphor to rise organically from the themes’, takes a long time – some 12 years with regard to Kepler, as we have seen above, and ‘an average of four years for [each] long poem to reveal itself’, acknowledges Michaels (1992: 97).

⁶³ In creating fiction, Michaels is relying on the existence of the genre of fiction, and in this way ‘borrows ... from fiction’ (Ricoeur 1992: 114 fn 1).

⁶⁴ In Bourdieu and Certeau’s terms, this is the producer-dominator.

⁶⁵ In Bourdieu and Certeau’s terms, this is the consumer-dominated.

‘culminating in the violence of the powerful agent’ (Ricoeur 1992: 145).⁶⁶ Michaels gives Jakob the role of ‘the sufferer’, a role governed by the ‘organizing principle’ of ‘being affected by a course of narrated events’ the consequence of which is ‘to make matters better or worse, to protect or to frustrate’ (Ricoeur 1992: 145). As a young man deeply engrossed both in dealing with his childhood trauma and in mourning the death of Athos, Jakob meets Alex. They ‘faste[n] on to each other in an instant’ (*FP* 131) and are married for five years.

At first Jakob experiences some relief from his emotional pain, ‘a finger of light ... flood[s] the clearing’, but gradually his depression and sense of isolation return, the finger ‘poked down, ... illuminating nothing’ (both from *FP* 139), and he finds himself again in a silent world, under water. At this stage he is both protected and frustrated, in Ricoeur’s (1992: 145) terms. Then, many years later, in his narratorial role he enters the ‘field of evaluations’, where he ‘appears as the beneficiary of esteem’, with Michaels serving as ‘an agent ... who distributes rewards’ (Ricoeur 1992: 145): Eighteen years after he had moved back to the house on Idhra, on one of his annual visits to Toronto, Jakob meets Michaela. Michaela empathically identifies with Jakob, his parents and Bella, and shares myriad details of her own childhood with him. Both actions serve as essential aids in Jakob’s emotional recovery, as we see in Chapter 3.⁶⁷ At this stage he is both protected and rewarded, in Ricoeur’s (1992: 145) terms.

Some few years on, as we learn before his narrative even begins, Jakob is hit by a car and killed (*FP* prologue). Michaela, who was standing next to him at the time, survives him by two days (*FP* prologue). He had not had the chance to find Michaela’s surprise note under the bedcover concerning her pregnancy, and thus dies unaware that he was to be father of the ‘child [he] long[ed] for’ (*FP* 194), the boy or the girl to whom he addresses the conclusion of his life notes. In the light of this ending, it is possible to argue that Jakob becomes a ‘victim of disesteem’, at the mercy of Michaels serving as ‘an agent who distributes ... punishments’ (Ricoeur 1992: 145).

But while our view of Michaels and Jakob may be illuminated by Ricoeur’s ideas in part, as we have seen just above, I would hesitate to apply this final idea of Ricoeur’s (1992) to them. It is highly doubtful that Michaels ‘kills’ *Fugitive Pieces*’s first narrator and leaves one of his dreams unfulfilled in order to punish him, or by extension to punish us, her readers. As Michaels (in O’Neill 1997) sees it, ‘Ben is, in a sense, Jakob’s heir’ and ‘there’s a kind of hope in that’ both for the ‘many who lost their families’ and for ‘those who have no one to remember them’. She includes Ben’s story as the second part of the novel so as not to leave the reader in the ‘dark place’ that constitutes the end of Jakob’s story (Michaels, in O’Neill 1997). Although Jakob does not have a real heir, there is Ben to bring his (Jakob’s) story to the public and to continue absorbing his philosophical realisations and putting them into practice in his own life.

Ben suffers too, in Michaels’s hands, as any child of camp survivors may suffer, and his pain is different from but not less intense than Jakob’s pain. Jakob suffers the immediate loss of his parents, sister and home, while Ben suffers, second-hand, the varied consequences of his parents’ trauma, such as the loss of their first two children and the apparently irretrievable loss of normal life following the war. While Jakob is one of the ones who ‘discover absence for themselves’, Ben is ‘born into [the] absence’ (both from *FP* 233) that had partly resulted from the death of his siblings. He himself feels the loss acutely and directly. He believes that ‘fear’ cannot be separated ‘from the body’ – not only is his ‘parents’ past’ his ‘molecularly’, he fears he will pass on their past to any child that *he* may have: In his imagination, he ‘can’t stop the writing

⁶⁶ ‘Enduring ... is keeping oneself, willingly or not, under the power of the other’s action; something is done to someone by someone; enduring becomes being subjected, and this borders on suffering,’ explains Ricoeur (1992: 157).

⁶⁷ See Chapter 3, pages 151, 152, 153 and 154.

on its forehead from growing as the child grows’, and ‘it’s not the sight of the number that scares [him] ... [but] that somehow [his] watching causes it to happen’ (*FP* 280).⁶⁸ In Michaels’s hands Ben is frustrated (Ricoeur) for much of his dysfunctional life, and it takes his meeting with Jakob and his reading of Jakob’s notebooks to make him aware of the protection (Ricoeur) that exists in the person of his wife, Naomi, whom he seems almost to lose. As we see below, *Fugitive Pieces* ends with Ben’s return to Naomi, but her acceptance of his return and the resumption of their life together is left, arguably, in question.

In contrast to Jakob and Ben as fictional sufferers at the hands of Michaels the authorial agent, in Ricoeur’s (1992) terms, we perhaps cannot see Michaels’s poetic narrators as sufferers in the same way. Michaels is not in total control of these people; they are to a lesser degree figments of her imagination than are Jakob and Ben and the other characters peopling *Fugitive Pieces* because they existed in real life. People *like* Jakob and Ben surely existed in real life as well, but the two men themselves did not once exist. Thus, while she may protect or frustrate (Ricoeur), and reward or punish (Ricoeur), Jakob and Ben as she reasonably sees fit, she cannot protect, frustrate, reward or punish her poetic narrators to the extent that their characters and experiences begin to differ from those of their real-life counterparts.

However, perhaps the distinction is negligible, because there is little difference in the way Michaels approaches writing about her fictional subjects and her poetic subjects. She uses extensive factual research to support Jakob and Ben’s stories and to support her poetic portrayals of the 11 real-life people. Her use of her own imagination, and her incitement of our imagination, is thus rooted in reality. This is in parallel with Murdoch’s (1970: 90) view that ‘we use our imagination not to escape from the world but to join it’. In each case, in Ricoeur’s (1992: 162) terms, ‘by narrating a life of which [she is] not the author as to existence’, Michaels ‘makes [her]self its co-author as to its meaning’.

For ‘do we not consider human lives [real or imagined] to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of the stories that people tell about them,’ Ricoeur (1992: 114 fn 1) muses, ‘and are not these life stories in turn made more intelligible when the narrative models of plots – borrowed from history or from fiction ... – are applied to them?’ Michaels responds to these questions in the affirmative. She seems to understand that ‘it is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or from history’ (Ricoeur 1992: 162). This seems to be a corollary of Scarry’s (1999: 61) idea of ‘perceptual acuity’, which we have encountered above, and an echo of Nussbaum’s (1985: 525) idea of the ‘fine Jamesian perceiver’, whom we discuss in Chapter 3 – we should be open not only ‘to the arrival of beautiful sights and sounds’ (Scarry) in the real world, but also to ‘any new feature’ (Nussbaum) that may arise in the scene, in the world of the text. If we *are* open in this way, Ricoeur seems to be saying, we can come to a deeper understanding of life – our own and others’.

⁶⁸ Hints such as this one of Michaels’s preoccupation with corporeality appear occasionally throughout this doctoral thesis while we pay attention to some of her other major themes and ideas. There is a Hebrew tradition, which we discuss further below, of referring to the forefathers as ‘we’, not ‘they’, in order to ‘encourag[e] empathy and a responsibility to the past’, and to ‘collaps[e] time’ (all from *FP* 159). Being cognisant of this tradition, Michaels is perhaps also aware of another Hebrew belief, that of ‘the resurrection of the dead *in their flesh*’, as pointed out by British philosopher and sociologist Gillian Rose (1947–1995) (1996: 66). Rose (1996: 66) elaborates that the Hebrews ‘could not conceive in Hebrew of the immortality of the Greek soul – *psyche* – separated from the Greek body – *soma*. [Thus] language to the Hebrews was physical: the idea of an eternity without body not bliss but unimaginable torture’. As a topic for discussion, however, ‘the body’ as it appears in Michaels’s work is too substantial to be addressed in this doctoral thesis.

Blixen suggests in 'Blue Vigour' (99) that

... if you have lived through a war,
or have made your home in a country
not your own, or if you've learned
to love one man,
then your life is a story.

Jakob, Ben's parents and countless others like them have lived through a war. Blixen was born and grew up in Denmark, but managed her coffee farm in Kenya for many years of her adult life. Whatever the origin of Lunia Czechowska's birth was, there is no indication that she was French, but she was one of Modigliani's models and possible mistresses, and since he lived in France she must have lived there too. Thus, she and Blixen, as well as Mandelstam and Doebelin, as we have seen above, all made their home in a country other than the place of their birth. Moreover, Finch Hatton was the 'one man' that Blixen seems to have loved during her time in Africa. Following Blixen's divorce Finch Hatton lived with her when he was not on safari, but they never married or made further commitments⁶⁹ – she had to 'learn' to love him, perhaps, because he seems to have been extremely independent and possibly accepted her love only by remaining unconventionally committed to the relationship. If we respond to Ricoeur's above-quoted questions in the affirmative as well, we are proclaiming with Michaels and Ricoeur (1992) the value and efficacy of fiction and poetry in presenting alternatives of human experience to and for ourselves.

Bourdieu – domination, and the bodily hexis

The dominators and the dominated

We can trace the above-discussed argument in favour of the inherently metaphorical nature of language back to an early, seminal work of language theory. Saussure (1959) proposed that language is not a nomenclature in which signs neutrally transcribe a pre-existing world of objects, but rather an artificial system in which the sign consists of a signifier and a signified, whose relationship is arbitrary and conventional. Language therefore is a social fact, and its meanings are a function of social consensus. Believing as he does in the social nature of language, Bourdieu would apparently concur. However, as we have seen in Chapter 1,⁷⁰ he rejects Saussure's radical separation between internal and external linguistics, and believes that words themselves are not powerful – their power comes from the people using them. Moreover, he sees language as an instrument, a tool, which places him in opposition to Berger and like-minded critics, who, as we have seen above, do not regard language simply as a means.

But perhaps the matter is reconcilable. Ricoeur says that language gains its metaphoricity when its first-level reference is suspended and its second-level reference is set free. This does not, cannot, happen without us, and without us using our imagination. In this way, we are exerting a certain kind of power over words. This power is external to the words, it comes from us. We have the author's text, the work, in front of us and we address the world displayed before the work by interpreting it. We do not look within words for their power, just as Bourdieu warns we should not. And as Thompson points out, the power is figurative, it has been transmuted into symbolic form. For these reasons, perhaps Ricoeur and Bourdieu's ideas are neither oppositional nor all that dissimilar, and thus both can usefully be applied to Michaels's work.

⁶⁹ Apparently Blixen believed, twice, that she was carrying Finch Hatton's child, but she miscarried both times (Donelson 1999a).

⁷⁰ See Chapter 1, page 34.

In *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob is the epitome of Bourdieu's dominator who has no intention of dominating yet whose mere presence tells Ben what he is, invokes in him a mixture of admiration and jealousy as well as the resentment that often accompanies these emotions. Ben admires what he calls Jakob's 'gift for making one feel clear, for making one feel – clean' (FP 209); he praises Jakob's poetry for making its readers feel as if they 'hear the earth speak' (FP 209). He is jealous of the wisdom and profound peace Jakob seems to have achieved by the time they meet. In his view, Jakob, 'long escaped from dusty rock, lay between the wet thighs of the river', while in stark contrast he himself 'stand[s] on the bank, watching' (FP 207).

Recollecting their meeting, he briefly accuses Jakob of having looked at him and placed him in his 'human zoo': 'another specimen with a beautiful wife; just another academicus dejecticus'; 'but it was you who were embalmed!' he rails at the now-dead Jakob, 'with your calmness, your expansive satiety' (FP 230). His more subdued, resentful and again jealous attitude is evident in his last word on the matter: 'The truth is you didn't acknowledge me at all that night. But I saw Naomi open like a flower' (FP 230). Thus we see that Naomi is also affected by Jakob. The benefit of the recognition and affirmation he provides when he approves of her frequent visits to Ben's parents' graves is evident in her grateful expression, in her 'flushed face' as Jakob shakes her hand goodnight – to Ben, Naomi's 'transformation was invisible yet obvious' (both from FP 208–9), wrought by Jakob's conversation and perceptive understanding. Her case is perhaps a rare example of a positive dominance.

By contrast, as we have seen above, Ben's father is more of an intentionally dominating person, and his primary tool is silence.⁷¹ His family lacks the 'energy of a narrative' (FP 204), their apartment is empty and silent, even with them in it; Naomi seems at first to Ben to elicit a conspiratorial response from him, a sharing of confidences, but later Ben sees that his father had simply been feeling 'the relief of a man who realizes he won't have to give up his silence' (FP 249). Even his humour was silent, revealing itself in the cartoons and caricatures he draws for Ben as a child rather than in recited jokes (FP 218).

Moreover, his power stretches further than he may realise. Ben's dreams are silent (FP 249). Learning details of his father's life from his mother (FP 222), Ben recalls mentioning only once, at the dinner table, a member of his 'vanished family' (FP 223). His father's gaze jolts up to meet his mother's, it is 'a terrifying look' (FP 223) that once again silences Ben. It compounds the 'code of silence' (FP 223) that exists between Ben and his mother, which serves to keep more and more things from his father – his mother's brothers' afternoon visits (FP 223), the bagful of samples and brochures Ben receives on a school outing to an annual fair that his mother is convinced cannot be for free and makes him hide in his room (FP 228), and, most importantly, his mother's intense espousal of pleasure (FP 223). His father's silence, a promise he must have made with Ben's mother (FP 253), about the existence and death of their first two children – along with the fact that Ben's mother reveals the secret to Naomi some time before Ben finds out about it (FP 252–3) – is the final blow Ben experiences with regard to his parents. It steeps him in 'the misery of bones that must be broken in order to be set straight' (FP 254).

Other examples of domination and the reactions of the dominated are also to be found in Michaels's work that indicate an overlap of Certeau and Bourdieu's ideas on the matter. We

⁷¹ There is one instance in which Ben's father's dominance is physical. He finds a rotten apple in the rubbish bin that the child Ben has thrown away, brings it to Ben and roughly pushes it into his mouth, forcing him to eat it, adding a mixed message of love and aversion – a sarcastic compliment, a claim of patriarchal ownership or relation and the sickening, highly distressing action – 'Well, my smart son, is an apple food? ... You – my son – you throw away food? ... Eat it!' (FP 214, 218). This mixed message is an example of the concept of the 'double bind', pertaining to some parents' behaviour towards their children, that we explore shortly below.

know, from Certeau, that consumers will try to invent ways of making their oppressive situation at least slightly more tolerable. Hitler and the Nazis exerted physical and linguistic forces of oppression that were unopposable, in many instances, yet as Levi tells us even in a camp as horrifyingly efficient in extermination as Auschwitz there were prisoners who sought to make what they could of life-in-the-face-of-death there.⁷² Stealing was rife, as we have seen above, bread became currency and blackly humorous jokes were played on new inmates by the veterans (Levi 1960: 39, 45, 34). After a week in the camp Levi lost the desire to keep himself clean and regarded the very impulse as a ‘dismal repetition of an extinct rite’; a fellow inmate taught him the vital lesson of the single power that remained to them as prisoners – ‘the power to refuse [their] consent’ to the deprivation, offence and imminent death that were forced upon them – which they had to exercise by washing in dirty water and walking painfully erect ‘for dignity and propriety’ and for ‘remain[ing] alive’ (Levi 1960: 46–7).

Like Levi, in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob also learns of acts of resistance in the camps: ‘In Birkenau,’ he elaborates, ‘a woman carried the faces of her husband and daughter, torn from a photograph, under her tongue so their images wouldn’t be taken from her’ (FP 139). During war, Jakob furthermore suggests, the ‘smallest act of kindness that is considered heroic’ is ‘an accurate measure of society’: European citizens need only ‘look away’ or ‘blink’ in order to help someone, indirectly, to escape the Germans by running across a field, and thereby to ‘be moral’ (FP 162). The actions of ‘those who gave bread or water’ are even more laudable; they risk their own lives, but ‘entered a realm higher than the angels’ simply by remaining in the human mire’ (FP 162). An action that seems insignificant in peacetime gains great value when it can be used by consumers to subvert the efforts of dominators in wartime. Moreover, the death-bringing oppressors can also be challenged by death. Some victims ‘asserted themselves by dying’ (FP 139), either by committing suicide or by dying before the torture they are undergoing is completed. And survivors can maintain or further the defiance of the dead; as Athos advises Jakob, he and other survivors can ‘help [their] moral progress’ by ‘do[ing] good on their behalf’ (FP 75). This is no simple platitude. Jakob tells us of the Hebrew tradition that ‘collapses time’ by using the pronoun ‘we’ rather than ‘they’ in reference to the forefathers (FP 159).⁷³ Such ethical instruction demonstrates that ‘if moral choices are eternal, individual actions take on immense significance, no matter how small’, because they are ‘not for this life only’ (FP 159–60).

*The characters’ bodily hexeis*⁷⁴ in *Fugitive Pieces*

As we have learned in Chapter 1,⁷⁵ the bodily hexis – the internal and external factors by which, respectively, we guide our behaviour and by which our behaviour is guided by other people and events – operates at various levels, two significant and clear levels being the physical and the linguistic. In relation to Michaels’s novel and poems, we explore the physical level in the present chapter, and the linguistic level in Chapter 3.

⁷² Such adaptation is a result, as Levi (1960: 62) sees it, of man’s ‘astonishing’ capacity to ‘dig himself in, to secrete a shell, to build around himself a tenuous barrier of defence, even in apparently desperate circumstances’.

⁷³ Strictly speaking, this pronoun usage seems to constitute a form of sympathetic identification and remembrance, which is a concept or process presented by Susan Gubar (2002) as being inferior to the process of empathic identification and remembrance. Below, we find that sympathetic identification entails a conflating of the identities of two interacting people, in contrast to empathic identification, which involves interaction between individuals who simultaneously maintain their sense of separate identity. However, by its very nature the Hebrew tradition does not apply only to one or two individuals. The tradition presumably encompasses all practising Jews, and thus the identification seems to be communal, in other words extending beyond the border of the sympathetic–empathic situation.

⁷⁴ The plural of the term ‘hexis’ is hexeis (Kraut 2010).

⁷⁵ See Chapter 1, pages 37–40.

We have seen, in Chapter 1,⁷⁶ that Levi was oppressed by the German dominators to the extent that his bodily hexis was intensely affected, partly at the physical level. I do not intend to suggest that Levi's bodily hexis attuned him to behave submissively, that it was natural for him to accede to the oppression. Rather, he serves as an example, as do some of Michaels's fictional and poetic narrators, of a person whose habitus and natural ways of behaving are radically altered, made *unnatural*, through external forces and internally directed responses to those forces, events or experiences. Levi entered Auschwitz as a young adult, in other words, at a time when his habitus was near fully formed. Yet his experiences there indicate that intense trauma can change that habitus. Some two weeks into his imprisonment, at the physical level Levi (1960: 43, 39) was familiar, for instance, with the 'chronic hunger unknown to free men', he had learnt that everything could be stolen because everything was useful and thus he knew that he had to wash his face with his meagre clothes 'held tightly between [his] knees'. His 'own body', damaged by overwork, exhaustion, pain, cold and moisture, quickly became 'no longer [his]' (Levi 1960: 43).

At the intellectual level Levi (1960: 39, 42) learnt, for example, 'never to ask questions [and] always to pretend to understand', to 'wipe out the past and the future' when the question he and other new inmates expressed as to how long this suffering would continue was met by the 'old ones' with grim laughter and silence. And at the emotional level, he found, for instance, that when he was ill or injured enough not to work and lay for a time in the infirmary, there were other threats: the re-awakening of the conscience (if it still existed), which caused him to consider 'what the [Germans] ha[d] made [the prisoners] become, how much they ha[d] taken away from [them]', the realisation that their personalities were in even more danger than their lives, and the particular pain that the Germans called '*Heimweh* ... "longing for one's home"' (Levi 1960: 61). Once he returned home and was able to gradually re-adapt to normal life, as we have seen in Chapter 1,⁷⁷ his pre-war habitus and bodily hexis was also at least partially restored.

By contrast, in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob's habitus and bodily hexis are damaged when he is at a particularly vulnerable stage, that is, when he is still a child. His body is 'organized' through the 'practical scheme' (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13) of murder and loss, and of survival as the only member of his immediate family. The external guiding factor of having been robbed of Bella's presence, for example, and the internal guiding factor of being unsure of her fate makes him behave as of course he would not have behaved had the war not taken place. He imagines that Bella has travelled with him and Athos to Greece, the trio like the wooden matryoshka dolls that fit inside one another, Bella concealed by Jakob, who is concealed by Athos (*FP* 14). In the house on Zakynthos Jakob stands aside to allow Bella to enter a room before him, he shares every other mouthful of food with her and he literally feels her touch (*FP* 31).

Ben's case is different from Jakob's case, but his habitus and bodily hexis are also powerfully, negatively influenced by the effects of the Holocaust. Ben's father cares for him too little while Ben's mother cares for him too much, and both ways of behaving are most likely the result of their camp experiences. Ben's body is organised through the practical schemes (Thompson) of neglect and overprotection. For example, the external guiding factor of being held by his father to an impossibly high standard in playing the piano, and the internal guiding factor of yearning for the man's approval, lead Ben to avoid practising when his father is at home and to perceive his piano lessons as 'a kind of futility' – 'all [his] sincere efforts only succeeded in displeasing [his father]' (*FP* 219). We can see this situation as an example in embryonic form of the concept of the 'double bind', which originated in the field of clinical psychology and is described by Chris Bohjalian⁷⁸ (2007) in his novel of the same name. In a double bind situation a parent 'consistently

⁷⁶ See Chapter 1, page 38.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 1, page 40.

⁷⁸ Christopher Aram Bohjalian (1960–), American novelist.

offered a child a series of contradictory messages: telling him you loved him while turning away in disgust[;] telling him he needed to go to sleep when it was clear you merely wanted him out of your hair', Bohjalian (2007: 200) explains.

The identifier of the concept, Gregory Bateson,⁷⁹ concluded that this kind of 'bad parenting could inadvertently spawn schizophrenia', by causing the child to 'develop an unreal [affirmative] world of his own' (Bohjalian 2007: 200). Though solitary, Ben does not go so far as to invent a new world for himself, but his relationship with his parents does display double bind characteristics, though they remain nascent rather than develop. Ben's father had studied to be a conductor before the war, but following the war becomes a 'diminished piano teacher' (*FP* 248). He is impatient and overly intense – his 'demand for perfection had the force of a moral imperative, each correct note setting order against [the moral] chaos' (*FP* 219) that he had met in the camp. He requires his son to be proficient and rejects him when it transpires that he is not (*FP* 219). Ben is trapped in this situation, which is more than simply a situation in which he cannot win whatever he does, because music is the one avenue that he feels he can use to reach his father: While they listen to music together, 'as long as the symphony lasted', Ben gains 'access' to his father, he can pretend his father's 'attention to the music' is 'attention to [him]' (*FP* 217).

The abovementioned 'code of silence' that Ben shares with his mother is perhaps also an ongoing double bind type of situation. Ben's mother is convinced that Ben took the annual fair treasures 'improperly' – albeit accidentally – and occasionally refers again, 'slyly' (*FP* 228), to the event. To her, the incident is Ben's 'fault', their 'secret' (*FP* 228). He is locked into her refusal to believe him, which makes a lie of his innocent collecting of the treasures, by his young age and by their pact to conceal such things from his father. Moreover, just as Ben's mother's 'love for the world' is 'painful' (*FP* 223), so her love for Ben is weighty. And like Jakob in connection with Yiddish (*FP* 101),⁸⁰ and the narrator and her family in 'What the Light Teaches' (129),⁸¹ this love is mixed with fear. When Ben starts to explore Toronto in the afternoons after school, for example, she 'waits for [him] by the window or on the balcony' (*FP* 229); when he and his father 'left the apartment in the morning, she never felt sure [they'd] return at all' (*FP* 229). The external guiding factor of being smothered by her, and the internal guiding factor of wishing to be free, lead Ben to cease regularly communicating with his parents once he has moved out of their home while in his second year of college – he lets his mother's phone calls 'ring into the dark' unanswered and leaves ever longer periods between contacting them, though he 'knew it made them ill with worry' (*FP* 231).

The post-Holocaust behaviour of Ben's parents, like that of Levi, is also dramatically informed by their camp experiences. As a result of their extreme hunger, for example, after their release they react by saving and eating food in an equally extreme manner. Ben's mother always 'kept food in her purse' (*FP* 214) and gives the adult Ben an 'absurd package' of food – 'enough for a single meal, to stop hunger for a second' (both from *FP* 230) – at the end of each of his visits. Ben's father eats often, in order to avoid even beginning to feel hungry, because he knows that those first pangs will drive him to eat until he is ill (*FP* 214). If this did happen, though, he would eat 'dutifully, methodically, tears streaming down his face', aware that 'he was degrading' both the 'animal' and the 'spirit' in himself (*FP* 214). Characteristically, Ben's mother 'delight[s] in ... a flavour' – 'something sweet, something fresh' (both from *FP* 223) – while for his father there is no associated pleasure and 'it was years before [Ben] realized this wasn't merely a psychological

⁷⁹ Gregory Bateson (1904–1980), British anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, visual anthropologist, semiotician and cyberneticist (en.wikipedia ... Gregory_Bateson).

⁸⁰ See also Chapter 3, page 133.

⁸¹ See also Chapter 4, page 193.

difficulty, but also a moral one, for who could answer [his] father's question: Knowing what he knew, should he stuff himself, or starve?' (FP 214).

Jakob spends the majority of his life attempting to come to terms with his childhood trauma and to discover, with reasonable accuracy, what happened to his sister. Every element of his behaviour rests on this foundation. Thus, when we speak of his habitus and bodily hexis it should be with the awareness that, like those of Levi during and subsequent to his imprisonment, they are something other than 'natural' (Thompson).⁸² They have been forced to become unnatural, different from what they were in both men's earlier years.

Ben's responses to his parents' behaviour are 'natural' responses informed by the habitus and bodily hexis of a person in Ben's position. His responses are unnatural, however, in that he does not feel at home or at ease for much of his story. He grows up in hyper-awareness of things that other people take for granted, seeing 'the aura of mortality' (FP 204) around every object and being 'thankful for every necessity' (FP 205). As an adult he grows 'sick of noticing' (FP 255) small details of the weather and the changes of the seasons. Ben's parents bring him into the world just a few years after they are liberated from the camps, and from them he learns that no thing is ordinary, 'every thing belonged to, had been retrieved from, impossibility' (FP 205). Their liberation does not free them; they pass on to Ben their incredulity at being free. Even at the age of five, while watching his mother gardening, he 'knew [he] would want for [the mundane] all [his] life' – '[his] mother stooping to pull up weeds, sunlight, an endless day' (FP 205).

Ben's parents' food 'habits' seem both unnatural and natural – unnatural in a world where everyone is well fed, natural given the starvation they have endured. Michaels lends particular significance to this aspect of the parents' suffering in bringing it up once more in the scene with which *Fugitive Pieces* ends. Here, their pain appears in a more positive light. Moreover, the scene symbolises the culmination of Ben's partial achievement of emotional stability. We see below the reason for my use of the word 'partial' in this case. For many years, and possibly even at the novel's end, the kind of peace that Jakob manages to achieve eludes Ben. But the discovery of the fact of his siblings, traumatic as it is, also initiates a process of healing in Ben that is symbolised in the image of broken bones being 'set straight' (FP 254). This process takes place mostly in silence too, though of a fruitful nature that is in great contrast to the 'mildew' (FP 204) of his family's silence.

For a few weeks before meeting Petra, Ben is alone and quiet as he searches for Jakob's notebooks in the house on Idhra that 'possess[es] the silence that is the wake of a monumental event' (FP 267). He begins 'to understand how here, alone, in the red and yellow of poppies and broom, [Jakob] had felt safe enough to begin *Groundwork*.⁸³ How [he] descended into horror slowly, ... with will and method. How, as [he] dropped deeper, the silence pounded' (FP 266). In this atmosphere, Ben feels 'the power of [Jakob's] place speaking to [his] body'; his 'envy dimmed', his 'legs grew stronger from the daily climb to [the] house, from the pure food [he] carried each day ... to eat in the shade of [the] garden', and 'one morning [his] bad dreams of the night before paused halfway up the hill and hesitantly turned around to float back down, as if they'd reached an invisible border' (FP 266). He drifts thus for days in the heat, until he is jolted by a shadow passing through the house, 'as brief as a thought' (FP 269), from which he gains the sense that Jakob and Michaela are alive and hiding, to enjoy their happiness in solitude. In this prescient moment 'an energy of intention ... never experienced before crackled through [Ben]' (FP 269) – soon after this he meets Petra, who inadvertently brings Jakob's notebooks to light.

⁸² See Chapter 1, page 38.

⁸³ *Groundwork* is Jakob's first volume of published poetry (FP 165).

Having found and read the notebooks, Ben prepares to leave the island the same evening. Packing up, he discovers a scarf that is and is not Naomi's scarf (*FP* 285). Michaels plays with plain statement, in this short passage, to give layered meanings. The passage reads as follows:

It was well into the evening by the time I leaned your journals, with Michaela's note tucked inside,⁸⁴ by the front door next to my jacket and shoes.

I started to drape the sheets over the furniture.

Science is full of stories of discoveries made when one error corrects another. After revealing two secrets in your house, Petra had uncovered one more. Lying on the floor beside the couch, Naomi's scarf.

You can't fall halfway. For the first second over the edge it feels as though you're ascending. But you will be destroyed by stillness.

In Hawaii, silence is an earthquake warning. It's a ghastly silence because you only notice the sound of the waves when they stop.

I pick up the scarf and examine it under the light. I smell it. The scent is not familiar. I try to recall when I last saw Naomi wearing it.

I remember the night you stole Naomi's heart. How tenderly you answered her. "It seems right to keep bringing them something beautiful now and then."

I know it isn't hers; I know she has one just like it. The scarf is a tiny square of silence. (*FP* 284–5)

If the scarf *is* Naomi's, and she has been in this house without Ben's prior knowledge, then she would have been having an affair with Jakob, just as in the reality of the story Ben has been having an affair with Petra. However, while suggesting this idea as a shocking possibility – Ben uses images of falling and an earthquake and 'ghastly silence' (*FP* 285) – Michaels also denies its possibility. Ben recalls the affinity that sprang up between Naomi and Jakob at their first meeting: Jakob 'stole Naomi's heart' and 'tenderly' told her she was 'right to keep bringing [Ben's deceased parents] something beautiful now and then' (*FP* 285). Michaels appears to be implying that Ben is not indulging in further self-pity or resentment towards Naomi here, but is instead evolving towards a better understanding of his wife, himself and his parents. This idea seems to be borne out by the last lines of the passage, in which Ben admits that the scent of the scarf is unfamiliar to him, that he 'know[s]' the scarf 'isn't [Naomi's]' and he 'know[s] she has one just like it' (*FP* 285).⁸⁵ In this passage, Michaels also brings Naomi to the fore in replacement of Petra, both for Ben and for us.

Ben's narrative is in the form of an extended 'letter' addressed to the deceased Jakob, in which Ben looks back over his life. In the last pages of the novel it becomes apparent – most obviously because the tense in which Ben 'writes', up to now predominantly the past tense, changes to the present tense – that he is writing the letter while flying home from Greece to Toronto with Jakob's notebooks. He does not actually state that he is writing the letter, in contrast to Jakob, who states more than once that he is writing his memoirs (see, for example, *FP* 191), and so perhaps, like Mandelstam in 'The Weight of Oranges' (34–7), he is writing it in his mind.⁸⁶ In either case, the self-conscious and judgemental qualities of certain comments that he inserts into his narrative irregularly, and then with increasing frequency as the narrative draws to a close, appear to be the result of hindsight. He talks of having 'squandered' his and Naomi's 'life

⁸⁴ Just before leaving, Ben changes his mind about bringing Michaela's note with him to Toronto and returns the note to its original place (*FP* 286).

⁸⁵ On the night of the significant first meeting between Ben and Naomi and Jakob and Michaela, another thing that gives Naomi pleasure is Michaela's admiration for her coat and scarf (*FP* 209). Perhaps Michaela liked the scarf so much that she bought one for herself.

⁸⁶ It is through Michaels that we receive both Ben's letter, in the form of the second part of *Fugitive Pieces*, and Mandelstam's letter to his wife in 'The Weight of Oranges'.

together' and of Naomi's body being 'a map' so 'familiar' to him that he 'never unfurled her anymore' (FP 256).

Ben thereby implies both that he has neglected Naomi and taken her presence for granted, impressions that he compounds in the passage following the above-discussed passage featuring the scarf, where he laments having 'wasted love' (FP 286). Such admissions are hopeful in that for Ben they are regrettable. There is another thread of hope in the fact that, in contrast to his quick and intense familiarity with Petra's physical being,⁸⁷ he also declares his deep knowledge of Naomi, whom he has known for eight years (FP 285), with specific reference to memory: 'I know what she makes of her memories. I know what she remembers. I know her memories' (FP 285). Thus Ben demonstrates that he is moving towards a better understanding of his life. 'In my hotel room the night before I leave Greece,' he asserts, 'I know the elation of ordinary sorrow' (FP 292). Finally, he has achieved the independence he has sought for years and broken free of the 'extraordinary sorrow' (my quotation marks) of his parents. The poorness of the manner in which he has treated Naomi has been growing steadily clearer to him until now he realises his culpability, he knows that his 'unhappiness is [his] own' (FP 292).

Such awareness will help Ben within himself, but whether it will help him to save his marriage is uncertain. Given the great importance of the role that Michaela plays in Jakob's recuperation, as we see in Chapter 3,⁸⁸ it seems logical that Ben would realise the full potential of emotional balance with the aid of Naomi. But the narrative ends with Ben's descent in the aeroplane, not with his actual homecoming. We do not know whether Naomi's reception of him will be welcoming or hostile. This is why I have stated above that Ben's achievement of emotional balance is partial.

However, once again Michaels (in O'Neill 1997) does not leave us in a 'dark place', as she does not leave us in a 'dark place' by ending *Fugitive Pieces* with Jakob's death. The final scene of the novel is one recollected by Ben: Coming downstairs to the kitchen in the middle of the night as a child, Ben for the first time sees 'food make [his] father cry' (FP 294). He has pictured that scene before, but now, with the benefit of the figurative and literal distance of the healing time he has spent on Idhra and the height of the aeroplane in which he sits, Ben recalls the rest of the image: his father leaning his head against Ben's mother, who is standing behind him, and as he eats she strokes his hair, the action functioning as a 'miraculous circuit ... [of] strength ...' (FP 294) in Ben's adult eyes. He at last acknowledges and understands this bond between his parents, and furthermore grasps the implication that he can and should facilitate such a bond between himself and Naomi. If she *is* waiting for him, she will be rewarded, for Ben now knows that he 'must give what [he] most need[s]' (FP 294).

The characters' bodily hexeis in Michaels's poems

Some of Michaels's poetic narrators also show behaviour that is influenced by external and internal guiding factors – their bodies are organised through various practical schemes, and as a result their behaviour is natural or unnatural as the case may be. In 'The Weight of Oranges', we see that exile affects Mandelstam. The external guiding factor of being separated from his wife because of his subversive poetry, and the internal guiding factor of feeling shame for causing the separation,⁸⁹ lead him to dream that his 'skin was tattooed', not with a number like Levi's number, but 'with the words that put [him] here [in exile]', that he is 'covered in sores, in

⁸⁷ Ben 'know[s] her body, ... Each line of bone stretching the surface, ... [he] know[s] her teeth, her tongue. [He] know[s] her sounds' (FP 276). He 'can identify her in darkness' (FP 276).

⁸⁸ See Chapter 3, pages 150–4.

⁸⁹ See the Introduction, pages 5–6.

quarantine' (The Weight of Oranges 35). So vivid is the dream that he is 'too afraid to light the lamp and look' (The Weight of Oranges 35).

Doebelin, for his part, did not suffer physical harm from the Nazis, and his exile was more his own decision than enforced. But in 'Sublimation' his life and behaviour, too, are disturbed by exile. The external guiding factor here is Doebelin's escape from the danger present in his home country. The internal guiding factor is Doebelin's love for his mistress, Yolla Niclas, with whom he is joined like 'magician's hoops/ caught and free, held together and apart/ in desire and idea' (Sublimation 71). Like Mandelstam, he dreams. Torn between staying in exile, where he can at least be with Niclas, and returning to Heidelberg, whose church bells are 'calling [him] back', Doebelin dreams of his

... body sprouting hands,
ripping from my sides with the pain
of broken bone parting skin. (Sublimation 70)

Paula Modersohn-Becker's case is slightly different. Her behaviour is not forced to become unnatural – her various ways of behaving are indeed organised by the external guiding factor of her parents, husband and society's view of her and by the internal guiding factor of her view of herself, all of which seem to seem natural to her. Yet the 'judgement aspect' of her bodily hexis appears to play a powerful role in her life. According to Sara Friedrichsmeyer (1991), Modersohn-Becker used her letters, her journals and her paintings to explore and represent herself in different ways: As a letter writer, she has 'conscious control over the presentation of the self' (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 494); in her journals, she is 'engaged in creating and presenting ... an imagined self or a self [she] would like to be' (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 494);⁹⁰ and in her several self-portraits – extremely daring for the time for also being nudes – she makes her gaze direct, 'confronting' both her 'mirror image' and 'her viewer', thereby 'demonstrat[ing] ... the independence of her vision' (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 491).

Supporting her view with reference to critic Catherine Belsey, Friedrichsmeyer (1991: 494) suggests that Modersohn-Becker's development of 'distinct selves appropriate to the various discourses in which she participated' is a response to the dilemma of being a woman in a 19th century patriarchal society, that is, participating both in "the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality" and in "the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission". Marie Curie's case seems to be fairly similar. When her husband died unexpectedly, Curie began to write a mourning journal in which she not only provides intimate reflections and details, but also uses the epistolary form – addressing her deceased husband directly (Nichols-Pecceu 2000: 872). Critic Martha Nichols-Pecceu (2000: 872) focuses on the 'distinct literary qualities' of the journal 'as a narrative of female subjectivity', in which Curie 'stage[s] the difficulty of writing a woman's life in Belle Époque France'. In some of the passages Nichols-Pecceu (2000: 875) finds a tone of anxiety characteristic of 'a woman negotiating her identity within the patriarchal order of the scientific community' and suggests that 'part of the strategic staging of the epistolary mode is to model the reception and approval [Curie] seeks in public through the fictional reader, Pierre'. We must leave the matter there. It is not possible to engage fully with Nichols-Pecceu's (2000) article, as she quotes fairly extensively from Curie's journal without translating the French into English, and an investigation of an English translation of the journal is beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis.

⁹⁰ Modersohn-Becker did not invent a new self in her journals, however; she rather used the journals 'to define a space in which she felt comfortable speaking in the voice of a dedicated artist and a self-assured woman' (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 497).

While Modersohn-Becker was confident from a young age of her artistic skill – ‘her own genius’ – she was unable and apparently unwilling to convince her family and friends of it in the face of their ‘continuing proof that they did not accept her choice of art as a life’s goal, much less think of her as an artist’ (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 496, 498). She seems to have rebelled to this situation neither outright nor to any degree that relieved the tension between her wishes and those of her loved ones. She was sufficiently concerned about their opinion of her, and sufficiently in need of preserving their love, that she belittles herself and her work in letters to them. On her second night in Paris in 1903, for example, she writes to her husband of wanting to ‘crawl into a mousehole’ because ‘everybody seems to look at [her] and laugh’, and she feels that ‘all those soft voices’ around her are ‘letting [her] know that [she] [does] not belong to their race’ (Busch & Reinken 1983: 291). Her correspondence in general, moreover, is ‘suffused with apologies ... for traits’ ranging from errors in handwriting to her ‘devotion to painting’ (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 500).

In Michaels’s portrayal, Modersohn-Becker is similar to and different from the person described by Friedrichsmeyer (1991). She does not specifically belittle herself or her work in the same-named poem, but she does acknowledge self-doubt and unease, while also expressing her desire for independence and an awareness of the conflict between her own and her family and husband’s views of her work and lifestyle. The tension between the various judgements she receives and gives herself is heralded in the poem’s epigraph: a quotation Michaels takes from Dostoyevsky concerning the great difference in degree of power between ‘the case of human will and human desire’ (Modersohn-Becker 79). As she further explains in the poem, ‘Everyone said [she] was selfish’ (Modersohn-Becker 79) in pursuing her art; while painting alone, in the three visits she makes to Paris, [her] family [was] waiting for [her] to give up/ so [she] could go back to being “happy”’ (Modersohn-Becker 85). The ironic tone in the use of the quotation marks is in line with Friedrichsmeyer’s (1991) view that Modersohn-Becker sought to escape the more conventional married life she had with her husband.

A hint of Modersohn-Becker’s parents’ presumed pleasure at and approval of her return to Worpswede with Otto after her 1906 Paris stay is given in the image of her mother – on that ‘first spring day,/ with Otto in the garden’ – ‘cross[ing] the grass’ towards Modersohn-Becker, ‘her arms open,/ like a child waiting to be lifted’, having travelled towards her ‘since five in the morning’ (Modersohn-Becker 87). Mr and Mrs Becker would most likely be delighted at their daughter’s pregnancy, [her] dress round as the billowing [table]cloth’ (Modersohn-Becker 87) beneath the lunch they are about to share.

But ‘it did not free [Modersohn-Becker] to leave [Otto]’ and she is conscious of ‘failure in every choice’ (Modersohn-Becker 79, 85). She concedes that she is selfish, because ‘fear *is* selfish’ (*FP* 79, emphasis added). In finally leaving her husband and moving to Paris in 1906 she is doing what she wishes, but she is anxious about the decision nevertheless – more in reference to its effect on her painting than on her marriage.⁹¹ She ‘*thought* that finding [her] own hot centre/ would teach [her] colour’ (Modersohn-Becker 81, emphasis added), she does not state that her prediction came true. She does not paint straight away; she ‘stared so long at the canvas’ that she is ‘dragged under’ (Modersohn-Becker 81). She feels that there is something ‘missing’ in her, something that her friend and confidant, the poet Rilke, ‘knew’ (Modersohn-Becker 82). As a wife, her ‘aesthetic turned physical,/ a knowledge [she] couldn’t paint’ (Modersohn-Becker 83).

Such is Modersohn-Becker’s experience of ‘the seemingly insoluble conflict between marriage and art’ (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 495), a conflict that Michaels (2001: 189) describes as ‘a

⁹¹ ‘How similar/ [is] the leap of faith and the leap/ of fear’ (The Second Search 160), Curie could tell her.

wrenching struggle’ between the two commitments – ‘family duty and her art’ – that she treated with ‘equal seriousness’. She embraces her husband ‘until [her] skin was blind with attention’, but the union with the man who as a painter has the potential to understand and support her work does not facilitate her painting – ‘still [she] didn’t know anything, still/ [her] hand was stupid’ (Modersohn-Becker 84). In Paris, therefore, away from him, she ‘started again’, taking ‘classes in life-drawing,/ training [her] hand to see’ (Modersohn-Becker 85). However, her ‘dreams longed for Otto, for forest, for home’ (Modersohn-Becker 86).

From young adulthood, Modersohn-Becker was ‘aware of living her life on different levels’ (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 500). For instance, while studying painting in Berlin in her early 20s, in response to a downhearted letter from her father, she writes that she is grateful for the ‘wonderful education’ he has paid for her to gain, and that she will give up her studies and work as a governess for a year both to alleviate his financial stress and to earn money to resume her studies thereafter (Busch & Reinken 1983: 87; in Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 500). Eight years later, in a letter to her aunt, she downplays her ‘huge desire’ to re-visit Paris by describing it as ‘odd’, and explains it as resulting from the urge to be ‘surrounded by external, active life’ – ‘from which one can [in turn] always escape if one has a mind to’ – that comes as a reaction to the ‘purely inner experiences’ she has at home, in the artists’ colony at Worpswede (Busch & Reinken 1983: 337; in Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 500). Thus in the poem she understandably admits that her ‘two lives, simultaneous’ – of independent artist and of attached wife – make her ‘crazy’ (Modersohn-Becker 86).

Gubar – empathic identification

Ricoeur (1977: 6) refuses to see imagination as ‘a function of the image’, proposing that ‘it consists rather in “seeing as ...” [citing Wittgenstein]⁹² ... seeing the similar in the dissimilar’. This mirrors the concept of empathic identification, which is the act of noting emotional and contextual likenesses between oneself and another, while knowing that one’s identity, and thus one’s emotions and contexts, is different and separate from that of the other person. Susan Gubar provides an interesting interpretation of the notion as a literary device in her article ‘Empathic Identification in Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces*’ (2002) and in similar form in her book *Poetry after Auschwitz* (2003).

The terms ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ are sometimes used interchangeably in everyday speech in referring to an ability to share and understand the feelings, experiences or ideas of another. This is partly true, but the difference between the terms is more important: Sympathy ‘supposes affinity among people’, empathy recognises ‘disparity’ (Gubar 2002: 253). When we sympathise, we feel the same, and we feel we are the same, as the receiver of our sympathy; when we empathise we understand the recipient’s feelings while being aware that he or she is other, that is, not the same as ourselves.

Furthermore, as Ricoeur (1992: 38) points out, ‘ascribing a state of consciousness to oneself is *felt*; ascribing it to someone else is *observed*’. Each one of us knows that we are living. And we know, if not always exactly *what* we are feeling, *that* we feel; thus we can assume that each other one we see living also feels, and thus we can imagine, with a certain amount of accuracy if we have had the same experience and felt the particular emotion ourselves, what that feeling is. The answer to Ricoeur’s (1992: 38) question of ‘whether the expression “my experiences” is equivalent to the expression “someone’s experiences” (and, correlatively, if the expression “your experiences” is equivalent to the expression “someone else’s experiences”)’ seems to be: ‘not

⁹² Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Austrian-born English philosopher.

exactly'. The experiences themselves (the event) can be identical – two people can break their right arms, or have their hearts broken – but the events as experienced by those two people are not equivalent. Each person is unique, has his or her own way of behaving and thus will react to – experience – the break in a way that is particular to himself or herself.

Martha Nussbaum⁹³ is the originator of the term 'empathic identification' and Dominick LaCapra⁹⁴ of the term 'empathic unsettlement' (Gubar 2002: 253). Empathic identification is 'the temporary act of identification' that means 'one is always aware of one's own separateness from the sufferer' (Nussbaum, in Gubar 2002: 253). Empathic unsettlement involves 'a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place' (LaCapra 1999: 722; in Gubar 2002: 253). There is little to distinguish the definitions, but Gubar seems to believe that they are not the same. In her view, Bella's 'practicing, memorizing, and playing the music of Chopin and Brahms' in *Fugitive Pieces* is an example of empathic identification, because Bella 'takes the music's measures into her own being, while simultaneously giving its creator a new vehicle of expression' (Gubar 2002: 257).⁹⁵ And as she sees it, empathic unsettlement takes place 'explicitly inside the fictional world' of the novel and 'implicitly through its creation' (Gubar 2002: 254).

Gubar (2002: 258) cites 'the reading process', in reference to Jakob, as an example of the explicit occurrence of empathic unsettlement. In contrast to Certeau and Ricoeur, she sees reading as generating 'an intersubjective form of being-in-relation with otherness, but without the threat of an actual, living other' (Gubar 2002: 258). Concealed during the war years in the Zakynthos cottage, Athos reads to the adolescent Jakob – giving him 'another realm to inhabit, big as the globe and expansive as time' (*FP* 29). Jakob 'dove into the lavish illustrations' and 'surfaced dripping, as from the sea' (both from *FP* 28–30), with a host of geographical, archaeological, historical and literary knowledge. This constitutes a 'healing escape' route for him, Gubar (2002: 258) believes, a way of avoiding 'the terrors of the past, the dangers of the present': Malnourished and fearful, Jakob listens to Athos reading as a way of 'eluding [his] own circumstances, of suspending self-consciousness'.

Thus Gubar (2002: 258) sees reading as 'a form of hiding out ..., a protective camouflaging'. Jakob does not enjoy the benefit of the 'proper'; he has no other way of dealing or managing relations with an exteriority consisting of threats, of his enemies (Certeau) the Nazis, than not dealing with them – by hiding, and, as Gubar (2002) would have it, by retreating into the worlds displayed by works (Ricoeur) of literature. At this stage, Jakob is trapped in his childhood trauma and he does not yet have the means of coming to terms with his past.

Jakob is certainly a 'weak' tactician-consumer, literally and figuratively. He insinuates himself into the worlds, he addresses the worlds, displayed by the biographies of Marco Polo, Clusius and Sibthorpe,⁹⁶ and by the poetry of Solomos, Keats and Masefield⁹⁷ (*FP* 28–30). Like Ben, his

⁹³ Martha Nussbaum (1947–), American philosopher specialising in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, political philosophy and ethics.

⁹⁴ Dominick LaCapra (1939–), American historian.

⁹⁵ Like the 'molecular passage' of the 'lost lives' (both from *FP* 52) into the hands and blood of the mass grave diggers that we discuss earlier in the present chapter, Bella's playing of the piano 'link[s] ... empathy directly to the body' – learning the music of Chopin and Brahms 'by heart' and then passing it on to new audiences as she (re)plays it, Bella 'generates a fleshly memory in the muscles, on the skin' (Gubar 2002: 257).

⁹⁶ Marco Polo (1254–1324), Italian merchant and explorer. Carolus Clusius (1526–1609), French-born Flemish botanist. John Sibthorpe (1758–1796), English botanist.

⁹⁷ Count Dhionísios Solomós (1798–1857), 'first poet of modern Greece to show the capabilities of demotic Greek when inspired by wide culture and first-rate lyrical gifts' (*EB* 2008). Significantly, his 'lyrical exuberance was curbed by a growing preoccupation with German theories of dramatic form and by an inhibiting dissatisfaction with the as-

reading act is a form of subjective appropriation, but contrary to Certeau's belief that the reader creates meaning by reading, and Ricoeur's faith in the hermeneutical act, perhaps Gubar would say that at certain stages in his life it is Jakob who gains meaning solely through reading. Not only does it occupy his time and consciousness during the war years, it is also a 'familiar drug' to which he returns as an adult in Toronto; 'in the first months of living alone' (both from *FP* 119) after Athos's death Jakob dips into the boxes of his guardian's notes and essays on a variety of geological and archaeological topics and once again the world of the reader and the world of the text merge in a fusion of horizons (Ricoeur) – Jakob again '*inhabit[s]* the other world Athos and [he] had shared: guileless knowledge, the history of matter' (*FP* 119, emphasis added). However, this time the reading process crosses the divide between reading and writing and consumer becomes producer – Jakob writes.

Ben is also a reader-consumer–writer-producer, and also seems to use reading as a form of escape, though of course not quite in the same way that Jakob uses it. As a child Ben neither starves nor is threatened, but he is lonely and emotionally neglected, particularly by his father, as we have seen above. On Sunday afternoon trips to the countryside or to his parents' favourite park at the edge of Lake Ontario, while they sit on lawnchairs sipping strong tea, Ben 'scrambled out alone, collecting rocks or identifying clouds or counting waves'; he 'lay on grass or sand, reading' (*FP* 215). The first comic that the teenaged Ben buys for himself is *Men Against the Sea* because of the affinity he feels when he 'opened it and read: "I have asked for pen and paper to write this account of all that has happened ... to ward off the loneliness already upon me. ..."' (*FP* 227). Reading may be a way for Ben to elude his own circumstances (Gubar), sometimes falling asleep on those Sunday afternoons in his thick jacket to the words of *The Moonstone* or *Men Against the Sea* (*FP* 215). But unlike Jakob, who suspends consciousness of his self, as Gubar (2002: 258) suggests, Ben's escapism is lit by flashes of self-awareness and identification, a sense that even mythical heroes can feel afraid and alone (*FP* 226, 227).

Ben also enacts a kind of identification – perhaps more of an empathic identification – as an adult. Researching the life of Dostoyevsky for his literature thesis, Ben 'experiences' with the author his mock execution among other political prisoners. He vividly imagines the scene, placing himself within it; he 'stare[s] hard into [Dostoyevsky's] face' and sees the man's 'transformation' as 'obvious', 'even under the blindfold' (*FP* 212). He imagines how each prisoner 'experiences the bullet breaking open his chest' and then, with the removal of the blindfold, the 'bare revelation that [he] still live[s]', 'there has been no shot' (*FP* 212). Ben falls 'with the weight of Dostoyevsky's life, which unfolds from that moment with the intensity of a man who begins again' (*FP* 212). He also travels with Dostoyevsky 'across Russia in leg-irons', sinks 'to [his] knees with hunger in the snow at Tobol'sk' and 'spend[s] afternoons in Staraya Russa', all the time aware that, downstairs, Naomi is 'nourish[ing] [his] research', preparing dishes that originated in the places he is inhabiting (*FP* 212).

Fuss – corpse poetry

With Bourdieu's help we can understand more deeply the idea of the spokesperson and one person's act of standing in for another or for a group of people.⁹⁸ A similar concept is provided by Diana Fuss (2003), who explicates the notion of the corpse poem. A corpse poem has three primary characteristics: It is a poem narrated in the first person, it is written in the past or present tense and it speaks in the voice of a person who is dead (Fuss 2003: 1). Michaels's poetic portrayals of 11 real-life people share all of these characteristics. Fuss (2003: 3) furthermore

yet meagre resources of his chosen linguistic medium' (*EB* 2008). John Keats (1795–1821), English Romantic lyric poet. John Masfield (1878–1967), English poet.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 1, pages 34–6 and 42–3.

categorises corpse poetry according to five ‘registers’, the comic and the religious registers being the principle vehicles for the poetry in the 19th century, and the political, historical and literary registers being the principle vehicles for the poetry in the 20th century. Writers of corpse poetry over the centuries include Dickinson, Hardy, Jarrell, Wright and Pagis⁹⁹ (Fuss 2003: 1).

The fact that Michaels’s 11 poems demonstrate the three major characteristics seems to prove that they are corpse poems. In the following discussion, we see that this is and is not the case. Familiar as we become in this doctoral thesis with Ricoeur’s seminal notion of the duality of metaphorical truth – metaphor’s inherent nature of being and not being – we can transfer the notion to the duality of Michaels’s 11 poems and conclude that they are also metaphorically true. Focusing for the moment on Fuss’s exploration of the three 20th century-prevalent registers, we can eliminate or include Michaels’s poems in these categories as we go along.

Michaels’s poems as political corpse poetry

Political corpse poems have two possible aims: ‘They attempt to ‘deflate’ the dead, ‘humbl[ing] those corpses that have been culturally canonized’, or they attempt to ‘redeem’ the dead, ‘elevat[ing] those corpses that have been culturally debased’ (Fuss 2003: 13). Both intend to address the social wrong that has intentionally been committed (Fuss 2003: 13). There are elements of redemption, according to Fuss’s (2003) definition, in one of Michaels’s poems that falls outside the group of 11, that is, ‘What the Light Teaches’. The Nazis calculatedly undervalued (in Fuss’s (2003: 13) terms) the Jews, a fact that the Holocaust-related images in the poem confirms. The ‘bits of bone’, ‘teeth’, ‘shreds of skin’, ‘a mother giv[ing] birth in a sewer’, ‘soldiers push[ing] sand down a boy’s throat’, the ‘number’ and the ‘oven’, and the ‘trains’ (What the Light Teaches 120, 121, 122, 125) that appear in the poem attest to the Nazis’ cruelty and murderousness. However, this poem cannot be categorised as a corpse poem (of any register) because the narrator is not one of the deceased.

The tone of the 11 poems seems neither condemnatory nor valorising. They do not ‘complicate the cultural tendency [of] treat[ing] the dead[, in whose voices they speak,] as either superhuman or subhuman’ (Fuss 2003: 13), and therefore do not intend to take the dead down a peg or raise them up. Thus, it seems that none of them can be accurately identified as a ‘deflating’ or a ‘redeeming’ (Fuss) corpse poem of the political register. However, there may be two exceptions: ‘The Weight of Oranges’ and ‘Sublimation’ quietly, poignantly portray part of the life and some of the experiences of Mandelstam and Doebelin, men who were abused by the Soviets and the Nazis, respectively. These two men indeed suffered ‘calculated undervaluation’ (Fuss 2003: 13), and thus we can perhaps see the poems as redeeming political corpse poems. In other words, while Michaels may not have set out to create redeeming political corpse poems, these poems may have gained such a form in any case.

Through Michaels, we witness Mandelstam’s shame, loneliness and nostalgia while alone in exile, presumably not too long before his death.¹⁰⁰ Wakeful in the middle of the night, he sees “‘shame’/ written in the air’ (The Weight of Oranges 35). His words of poetry, ‘humble with gratitude’ for the meaning they are given by “‘the important’” ‘exploded in [his] face’ (all from The Weight of Oranges 35), perhaps thrown back into his face, along with violent blows, by the

⁹⁹ Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), American lyric poet. Thomas Hardy (1840–1923), English novelist and poet. Randall Jarrell (1914–1965), American poet, novelist and critic. Richard Wright (1908–1960), American novelist and short story writer. Dan Pagis (1930–1986), Israeli poet, lecturer and Holocaust survivor. Diana Fuss (2003: 1 unnumbered (u.n.) fn) furthermore points out that in the three years of research leading up to the writing of this article, she ‘unearthed hundreds of speaking corpse poems’.

¹⁰⁰ See also the Introduction, pages 5–6.

interrogator whom he encountered just before his first exile. Unable to traverse the ‘hundreds of miles’ separating them, Mandelstam’s ‘short arms’, and those of his wife Nadezhda, ‘keep [them] lonely’ (The Weight of Oranges 36). He does not wish to turn back time and relive his life, ‘the only book’ he would ‘write again’ is of his and Nadezhda’s bodies ‘closing together’ (The Weight of Oranges 36). He appeals to Nadezhda ‘to promise/ [they]’ll see each other again’, all the while knowing that ‘promises come from fear’ (The Weight of Oranges 36, 37). He seems aware that his plea is groundless. Nadezhda is ‘always [t]here with [him]’ (The Weight of Oranges 37) exactly because they are literally apart – if she were physically present, the possibility of her being removed would exist as well. This way, her absence makes it possible for Mandelstam to keep her with him. And when he dies, so will she (to him), because ‘people don’t live past each other’ (The Weight of Oranges 37), he believes.

The suffering that Doebelin receives at the hands of the Nazis, as portrayed by Michaels in ‘Sublimation’, is far less physical than it is emotional. Like Mandelstam, Doebelin experiences exile, though he does so voluntarily, unlike Mandelstam. And while he is out of Germany, the country that after many years away he still regards as ‘home’ (Sublimation 68), he does not have his usual facility with language, that essential authorial instrument. The words he carries around inside him are ‘useless’ and ‘meaningless’ (Sublimation 67). This issue and its consequences for Doebelin are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.¹⁰¹ In exile, his anxiety is mirrored by the moon, which ‘calls out in its bad sleep above the earth’ with a ‘chilling scream’ (Sublimation 70, 69). After the war, Doebelin decides to return to Germany, regretfully aware that this will separate him from Niclas, as Germany is ‘the one place [she] won’t [go to]’ (Sublimation 68). Doebelin’s conviction that he is ‘living proof/ we don’t stop wanting/ what we can’t have’ (Sublimation 71) may refer both to his imminent separation from the loved one who has given him essential aid – in exile he has ‘written nothing without [her] help’ (Sublimation 67) – and to his imminent return to a country whose atrocities preclude any return to its former glory.

Michaels’s poems as historical corpse poetry

From a general standpoint we may put the 11 poems into the category of corpse poetry of the historical register simply because they speak in voices of people who lived in the less than recent past. The people are thus historical figures, representing aspects of cultural and scientific development in Europe and England: art, poetry, literature, mathematics, and scientific and geographical research. However, it is more difficult to strictly align these poems with Fuss’s (2003) definition of historical corpse poetry, which is less clear and concise than the characteristics that she highlights for political corpse poetry. Her discussion of historical corpse poetry focuses on the invisibility of the actual corpse, coming about in modern times as a result of ‘warfare and ... genocide’ technologies that ‘deploy weapons of such destructive force that the body itself disappears’ (Fuss 2003: 17). Paradoxically, she suggests that such technologies ‘render the corpse visible as the thing that can now be made invisible’ (Fuss 2003: 17), and in the examples of Jarrell’s poetry that she uses to support her discussion one narrator portrays himself as dead before he is born, and another narrator positions himself as part of a group of deceased Second World War soldiers who ‘bemoan ... the death of Dying’, that is, the fact that their deaths are recorded not as individual deaths but merely as ‘numbers on an ever-rising mortality index’ (Fuss 2003: 18).¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 3, page 119.

¹⁰² The two poems by Jarrell that Fuss (2003: 17–18) quotes and discusses are ‘The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner’ and ‘Losses’.

Fuss (2003: 18) believes that in this second poem the poet has his narrator speak from the position of “we”¹⁰³ for nearly the entire poem to underscore the deep depersonalization of modern death’. By contrast, the voices in Michaels’s 11 poems seem deeply personal – we are made privy to their intimate thoughts and feelings. It is this personalisation that appears to drive the poems, rather than a desire on Michaels’s part to highlight any indication of a generalised nature of their deaths. The poems also do not portray men, corpses or death in the style of Jarrell and historical corpse poetry as presented by Fuss (2003).

Fuss (2003: 19) uses Paul Celan’s poem ‘Psalm’ as an example of the small group of historical corpse poems that stem from the Holocaust (not from the Second World War) and that therefore, she concludes, *cannot* ‘render the corpse visible’ – for Celan, and other survivor poets such as Tadeusz Borowski,¹⁰⁴ ‘death really has died, and mere words cannot bring it back’.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, Michaels’s poems, some of which as we know contain references to the Holocaust and to Jewish suffering, do not reflect a similar view of death and the deceased. As elaborated in Chapter 3, within the time and under the circumstances that many survivors and other authors and critics declare everything to have died, Michaels identifies significant aspects of redemption, such as language.

Michaels’s poems as literary corpse poetry

It is with regard to the register of the literary corpse poem that the dualistic nature of Michaels’s 11 poems – their being and not being corpse poems – becomes most apparent. Perhaps because, as Fuss (2003: 22) explains, the literary corpse poem ‘often incorporates elements of the ... political or historical corpse poem’, this register encourages us to broaden our view and examine corpse poems more generally. The ‘ambition’ of this type of corpse poem is ‘to provide a counter or corrective of the ageing elegy’ (Fuss 2003: 22). While the corpse poem and the elegy share certain characteristics, such as ‘a concern with the certitude of death and a faith in the reanimating powers of language’, unlike the elegy the corpse poem does not ‘presume to console the living for losses so profound they transcend the compensations of mourning’ (Fuss 2003: 22). As an example of one of the many corpse poems that ‘prefer [to] inhabit the way station of the grave’, the poem from which Fuss (2003: 23) quotes ‘openly celebrates the freedom of the dead from life’s dual burdens of duty and concern’.¹⁰⁶ But while ‘disavow[ing] mourning’, the corpse poem ‘more effectively raises the dead than elegy ever could, ... [and does so] to instruct the living’ (Fuss 2003: 24). Thus literary corpse poems have the task of educating readers about their subject matter.

According to Fuss (2003: 25), the main topic of that subject matter is death, and the message that ‘all the modern corpse poems ultimately seek to convey’ is that readers should not assume that ‘what the dead really want is to return to the living’. Like a soldier narrator who dreamed he was dead the night he died (Fuss 2003: 18), corpse poems narrated by those who died in or during war, in Fuss’s (2003: 18) view, are railing against ‘the greatest of [modern] wartime

¹⁰³ Fuss (2003: 18) is incorrect in defining ‘we’ in her article as a ‘third person’ pronoun.

¹⁰⁴ Tadeusz Borowski (1922–1951), Polish poet and short story writer ‘noted for his vigorous, desperate search for moral values that might withstand such realities as the horrors of the Nazi occupation’ (EB 2008).

¹⁰⁵ “‘The dead will not rise from common graves/ and brittle ash won’t come back to life’”, Borowski (in Fuss 2003: 19) states in his poem ‘Farewell to Maria’, while in his poem ‘Psalm’ Celan (in Fuss 2003: 19) expresses similar thoughts thus: “‘No one kneads us again out of earth and clay,/ no one incants our dust’”. For Fuss (2003: 19), such claims clearly make the point that ‘after the unthinkable event of genocide, no fiction of the living dead can possibly be sustained’. Fuss’s (2003) notion of the corpse poem is discussed further in reference to Celan in Chapter 4, pages 167–77, where of necessity there is a certain amount of repetition of points in the present discussion.

¹⁰⁶ The poem from which Fuss (2003: 23) quotes is ‘Ghost Voice’ by British poet and novelist Roy Fuller (1912–1991).

“losses””, that is, ‘the loss of one’s personal, private, and singular death’. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Athos evidently understands this point as well. With regard to his colleagues at Biskupin, some shot and some deported to Dachau, he comments that murder not only ‘steals from a man his future’, it also ‘steals from him his own death’ (FP 120). The dead do not want to live again; each of them wants his or her death to be realised, to be returned to them, as individual instances of death; each of them wants ‘to make dying “Dying” once again’ (Fuss 2003: 25).

In contrast to the elegy, ‘the corpse poem is not a substitute for loss but a vehicle for it, not a restitution for loss but a means to achieve it’ (Fuss 2003: 25). In ‘What the Light Teaches’ (121), the narrator tells us that ‘what we save, saves us’. Michaels’s 11 poems are and are not literary corpse poems. They do not serve as statements of their narrators’ refusal to ‘return to the living’ (Fuss 2003: 5), but they do fulfil the broader role of the literary corpse poem. They extend Michaels’s preservative notion to encompass a process enacted by all modern corpse poetry: They constitute ‘the complex art of saving loss itself’ (Fuss 2003: 25). Employing prosopopoeia (speaking *as* the dead) instead of apostrophe (speaking *to* the dead, as elegies do), corpse poems help us to recall those who are no longer alive without emphasising, as elegies do, the distinction between us, the living, and them, the dead, which would simply be a ‘subtle means of obscuring the dead’ (Fuss 2003: 22). Corpse poems, unlike elegies, are not intent on mourning or grieving over the ended lives of the dead; instead, they tell us about the lived lives of the ones no longer alive.

Michaels’s 11 poems *are* certainly corpse poems in this sense – any grief and mourning that appears in them ‘take place outside the bounds of the poem[s]’ (Fuss 2003: 26). In other words, while they may feature or hint at death, they are not *about* death. A tomb; the figurative destruction of every house Mandelstam and his wife lived in; words exploding in his face; lost youth, lost hair, lost eyesight, lost teeth – all these death-related images are provided in ‘The Weight of Oranges’ (34–7), yet the poem does not centre on the death of Mandelstam. Neither are ‘Modersohn-Becker’, ‘Blue Vigour’, ‘The Second Search’ and ‘Ice House’ about the deaths of Modersohn-Becker, Blixen, Curie and Scott. In her journal, at the age of 24 Modersohn-Becker (Busch & Reinken 1983: 195) recorded her knowledge that she would ‘not live very long’ and this seems to be hinted at in the poem’s last line: ‘Every painting is a way of saying goodbye’ (Modersohn-Becker 88). Moreover, in ‘Blue Vigour’ Blixen mourns the death of Denys Finch Hatton, in ‘The Second Search’ Curie mourns the death of her husband and in ‘Ice House’ Scott mourns the death of her husband. But instead of featuring death, each of these poems reveals details of how the narrator lived.

But Michaels’s 11 poems also *are not* corpse poems. Throughout her article, Fuss (2003) seems to concentrate on the demise of the speaking dead.¹⁰⁷ In her presentation of corpse poetry developing through the 1800s and 1900s, she highlights the differences between Western society’s view of ‘bodies and burials’ in the two centuries – formerly seen as ‘the soul’s temporary abode’, the corpse was later viewed as ‘pure waste matter’; ‘cemeteries [were relocated] from towns’ and ‘corpses [were removed] from homes’; initially characterised by ‘familiarity and immediacy’, the ‘corpse’s visibility’ became characterised by ‘anonymity and estrangement’ (Fuss 2003: 16). The narrators of the poems from which Fuss (2003) quotes are all preoccupied with mortality.

In contrast, Michaels does not practise ‘the art of being dead’ (Fuss 2003: 2) and nor do her narrators. As we have seen above, the state of no-longer-being is one of her narrators’ characteristics, but it is not the pivotal one; it is neither the overt nor the covert theme of the

¹⁰⁷ This is perhaps why Fuss (2003) quite often uses the term ‘cadaver’ in place of ‘corpse’.

poems.¹⁰⁸ In another example of the duality, the voices of Michaels's poems indeed convey 'not a distant trace but a proximate presence' (Fuss 2003: 2) – the daily lives of Brueghel, Doebelin, Renoir and the others come closer to us, or we come closer to them, as we read these poems. However, unlike Fuss's (2003: 2) collection of corpse poems, Michaels's 11 voices do not 'betray a desire to wed [themselves] eternally to voice'. None of her narrators seek immortality; none express a desire not to be forgotten.

Michaels does the remembering herself. Fuss (2003: 26) points out that not one of the many corpse poems she encountered is spoken in the voice of a loved one – no 'deceased parent, child, sibling, lover or friend' speaks from the grave. This is true also of Michaels's 11 poems. Instead, corpse poets choose 'more generic personalities' for their speakers (Fuss 2003: 26). This is also true of Michaels's 11 poems. To Fuss's (2003: 26) group of cultural figures,¹⁰⁹ we can add Michaels's portrayal of Brueghel, Mandelstam, Doebelin, Modersohn-Becker, Blixen, Renoir and Scott. To Fuss's (2003: 26) groups of mythological, biblical and anonymous figures,¹¹⁰ we can attach Michaels's figures from the worlds of mathematics and science, that is, Kepler and Curie, respectively. Watson and Czechowska fall outside of these categories, and thus form another, miscellaneous group.

Speaking in the voices of these figures, in whom she may be highly interested but to whom she is not bound by blood or family relation, Michaels 'avoids the emotional quicksand of personal attachment' and achieves distance, the 'critical prerequisite of any corpse poem' (Fuss 2003: 26). This is the empathic, beneficial form of remembrance that echoes Jakob's eventually enlightened remembrance of his deceased family in *Fugitive Pieces*.¹¹¹ Such remembrance – putting oneself in the place of the dead while being aware that one is not dead and not one of those dead – embodies the 'emotional buffer' that Fuss (2003: 26) sees as necessary to corpse poetry.

If we agree that Michaels's 11 poems are and are not corpse poems, yet clearly speak in the voices of the dead as if they are alive in the present moment, perhaps we can more accurately categorise them as living-corpse poems. If we indulge a slight reluctance to use the word 'corpse' in relation to a re-animated narrator, we might simply use the term 'living-poems', and confirm that within her living-poems Michaels carries out metaphoric-empathic autobiography, which we explore in more detail shortly: Her narrators stand in for their real-life subjects; in speaking as these people, her narrators also speak for them and about them.

Above, we have encountered the terms 'apostrophe' and 'prosopopoeia'. 'Epitaph' is another significant and relevant term that needs to be added here by way of contrast. As well as an inscription on a tombstone memorialising a dead person, an epitaph can be more generally a reminder of the deceased. Michaels's living-poems are not apostrophic – they do not directly

¹⁰⁸ This is also why one of Fuss's significant, ironic conclusions about the function of corpse poetry matters slightly less in this discussion about Michaels's 11 poems. Fuss (2003: 26) points out that, like the elegy, the corpse poem may ultimately 'contribut[e] to death's demise', the 'sheer proliferation' of corpse poems today leading to 'the emptying out of mortality that deprives modern deaths of their singularity and distinction'. If Michaels were focusing on the deaths of her 11 narratorial subjects, Fuss's (2003: 27) question – 'If the living can speak in the voice of the dead, then what exactly is unique or irreplaceable about death?' – would perhaps be more pertinent.

¹⁰⁹ In this group Fuss (2003: 26, and 26 fn 47) provides the examples of Elvira Shatayev, leader of a women's mountain-climbing team that perished in a storm on Lenin Peak, Russia, in 1974 (in whose voice Adrienne Rich speaks in the poem 'Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev' (Moore 2009)), and of Matthew Shepard, a young homosexual American man whose 1998 murder is documented as a particularly brutal hate crime (see, for example, Brooke 1998, and en.wikipedia ... Matthew_Shepard) (in whose voice the American poet, novelist and critic Alfred Corn (1943–) speaks in the poem 'And Then I Saw').

¹¹⁰ In these groups Fuss (2003: 26) gives examples such as Icarus (mythological), Lazarus (biblical) and soldiers (anonymous).

¹¹¹ See Chapter 3, pages 132, 153–4.

address the dead.¹¹² They remind us of her deceased subjects and speak in their voices, and thus they are both epitaphic and prosopopoeic in nature. With the exception of ‘Sublimation’, and that case is slightly different because Doebelin suffered but did not die at the hands of the Nazis, no poem of Michaels’s speaks in the voice of a deceased Holocaust victim, however, and thus Michaels is not a ‘Holocaust poet’ (my quotation marks). In other words, Michaels is not one of those poets who deliberately sets out to ‘find a language for the staggering horror of what had happened’ and whom the device of prosopopoeia allows ‘to speak as, for, with, and about the casualties’ (Gubar 2003: 178).¹¹³ Nevertheless, the Holocaust is clearly a topic with which she has been preoccupied throughout her writing career to date, as the four poems in which she refers to this topic are chronologically spread out over her body of work. ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ appears in the 1986 collection *The Weight of Oranges*, ‘Sublimation’ and ‘What the Light Teaches’ are part of the 1991 *Miner’s Pond* collection, and ‘The Hooded Hawk’ is part of the 1999 collection *Skin Divers*.

In ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ (7), the narrator recalls her father telling two stories on the drives that the family take on their Algonquin holidays. One story is of his life – his train-ride ‘across Poland in 1931’ (Lake of Two Rivers 7),¹¹⁴ for example. The tale conjures ‘spirit faces’ of ‘unknown cousins’ (both from Lake of Two Rivers 7) around the windows of the car in which the narrator and her family travel. The narrator learns how the photograph – ‘the face’ – of her father’s ‘cousin Mashka .../ floated down the River Neman¹¹⁵ [concealed] in [her] father’s guitar’ (Lake of Two Rivers 8). The river played a role in the extermination of the Jews, and the narrator figuratively aligns herself with this event: As a young adult, perhaps visiting the site, she ‘drowned in the River Neman,/ fell through¹¹⁶ when [she] read that the bone-black from the ovens/ was discarded there’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11), the ‘bone-black’ presumably referring to the ashes of the cremated prisoners. ‘Part of you waits up for them’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11), like a parent awaiting the return of their child, she comments, implying that she feels implicated in memorialising the Jews.

‘Sublimation’ confirms the fact that while Doebelin experienced anti-Semitism in being hounded by the Germans, he did not suffer life, and the concomitant ever-present threat of death, in a labour or concentration camp itself. Nevertheless, in the poem he serves as an example of the individual, the ‘autonomous consciousness of each subjectivity touched by a calamity that disproved the powers of individuality and of autonomous consciousness’, in whom Michaels seems to have ‘abiding faith’ and does not shirk from using the device of prosopopoeia to portray (Gubar 2003: 204–5). Indeed, as a poet ‘voicing [one of] the [now] dead’, in Gubar’s (2003: 205) terms, Michaels ‘hear[s] [her]self in the present moment expressing suffering no longer confined to the fate of long-ago, faraway strangers’. She does so not ‘uncannily’, as Gubar (2003: 205) puts it, but deliberately, carefully and courteously.

¹¹² Some of Michaels’s narrators may employ apostrophe; *they* address the dead within the confines of the poem – Blixen speaks directly to the deceased Finch Hatton in ‘Blue Vigour’, for example – but the voice belongs to them, not to Michaels.

¹¹³ The same is not true, of course, with regard to *Fugitive Pieces*, which we can see as a kind of ‘corpse novel’, at least in relation to Jakob’s narration. Speaking in the voice of a man who is fictional but who could have been a real person, and presenting his words to us once he is already dead, Michaels indeed employs prosopopoeia.

¹¹⁴ See Ristić (2005) for a discussion of the parallels between Michaels’s own life and that of this narrator.

¹¹⁵ The River Neman

rises near Minsk in the Minsk Upland and flows west through a broad, swampy basin; it then turns north into Lithuania, cutting through terminal moraines in a narrow, sinuous valley. Near Kaunas, ... it turns west and crosses another marshy basin to enter the Kurisches Gulf of the Baltic Sea south of Klaipeda. (*EB* 2008)

¹¹⁶ Combined as it is with the term ‘drowned’, this image of ‘falling through’ seems to confirm my suggestion in the Introduction (page 11, footnote 29) that Michaels thereby implies death.

The ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ cousins – a term that seems to imply both the narrator’s relatives and the Jews in general – make another appearance in ‘What the Light Teaches’. The narrator dovetails the ‘real’ world around her with that of the camps and burial grounds: She and her sister are momentarily halted, with

one foot
in the spring soil of [the] farm,
the other in mud where bits of bone and teeth
are still suspended, a white alphabet.
...
moonlight on the river ... [appears as] shreds of skin. (What the Light Teaches 120)

She senses the presence of the cousins acutely, cannot but ‘feel they’re [t]here,/ in the strange darkness of a thermosensitive sky’ (What the Light Teaches 120).¹¹⁷ Michaels furthermore deals with oppression as exercised by the Soviets in this poem, an aspect that we explore in Chapters 3 and 4.¹¹⁸

The narrator maintains her focus on the Holocaust by introducing the words ‘number’ and ‘oven’, two ‘simple’ (all from What the Light Teaches 122) but also chillingly significant words. Innocently devoid of such meaning in pre-war times, in the Holocaust context, as we know also from Levi (1960), the ‘number’ is the number that was tattooed onto each prisoner’s arm as they entered Auschwitz, and the ‘oven’ is the piece of equipment that the Nazis used to dispose of their victims’ corpses. Thus these words are examples of the language that carries the intentions of the oppressors. Used by the ‘victim[s]’ – the Jews and the other prisoners – this language ‘reveals/ the one who named [them]’ (both from What the Light Teaches 124), that is, it is stamped with the identity of the Nazis. The narrator is also haunted by another Holocaust image: ‘the double swaying/ of prayer on the trains’ (What the Light Teaches 125), which demonstrates the Yiddish term ‘to *shokele*, that is, the Jewish practice of swaying back and forth during prayer (religionfacts.com). The practice is not strictly enforced, but it seems to enhance concentration, which is considered by the Jewish people as being ‘essential for prayer’ (religionfacts.com).

In ‘The Hooded Hawk’, Wiseman the addressee sits in a darkening room with the narrator

... recounting
a trip to Rome, not the conference
but a woman who remembered *those who hid*
or fled. (The Hooded Hawk 169, emphasis added)

The woman at the conference seems to have been speaking of Jews who fled or hid from the Germans during the Second World War. In this subtle way, Michaels introduces the topic of the Holocaust. Further such references are provided in the ‘silver spoon’ with the ‘swastika on its handle’ lying in Wiseman’s ‘kitchen drawer’ (all from The Hooded Hawk 169); in the cauliflowers ‘harvested’ by Jewish prisoners ‘from the fields near Terezin’¹¹⁹ that Wiseman commemorated by presenting a steamed whole cauliflower – ‘regal/ as the head of a saint’ (all from The Hooded Hawk 171) – as the centrepiece of a Thanksgiving meal; and in the inhabitants of ‘the floating

¹¹⁷ Similarly, in *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob’s parents having just been murdered by German soldiers, the boy gazes at the night sky – ‘darkness turn[s] to purple-orange light above the town’ (FP 7). He has the impression of the spirits of the dead flying upwards, passing him, ‘weird haloes and arcs smothering the stars’ (FP 7).

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 3, pages 119–21, and Chapter 4, pages 177–80 and 187.

¹¹⁹ Terezin, or Theresienstadt, is a town in northern Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic, that the Nazis used from 1941 to 1945 ‘as a walled ghetto, or concentration camp, and as a transit camp for western Jews en route to Auschwitz and other extermination camps’ (EB 2008).

ghettos' whose 'boat was refused at every port' – in other words, the Jews who 'had no place' (all from 'The Hooded Hawk' 169–70) any more, as homeless as are the refugees to whom the narrator refers at the end of 'What the Light Teaches' (both from 129) – those for whom 'language is the house to run to' because they 'have no other place'. These people are not forgotten; Wiseman was ever 'with them' ('The Hooded Hawk' 173), as we see in Chapter 4.¹²⁰

Thus while avoiding being categorised as a Holocaust poet, Michaels follows her impulse to explore the significance of the event at both the personal and historical levels. In line with Gubar's (2003: 202) view that modern writers, critics and theorists have become 'exceptionally sensitive to the political and moral problems' inherent in devices like prosopopoeia in handling subject matter such as the Holocaust, Michaels's four poems perhaps demonstrate her choice as a creative writer 'to emphasize the opacity of the disaster' rather than the potential accessibility of the disaster in poetry (Gubar 2003: 202). In so doing, she and creative writers like her may enhance the disaster's presence, if not its accessibility, because as Ricoeur (1992: 41) explains in a different context, in being opaque a thing 'attests once more to the fact of being a thing and reveals its eminently paradoxical structure of an entity at once present and absent'. In other words, by writing about the Holocaust, creative writers enact its representability, and at the same time what they write about it hints at or directly engages with its unrepresentability.

Michaels – living-poems

As we have seen in the present chapter, in various ways Michaels's texts enact elements of the theories of Certeau (1984), Ricoeur (1977, 1992) and Bourdieu (1991), and the thoughts of Gubar (2002, 2003) and Scarry (1985, 1999) are also directly and indirectly related to those texts. There is a further way in which certain of Michaels's poems enact the process of standing in for, or speaking in the voice of, real-life people.

According to Sutherland (n.d.: 178), Michaels is a 'borrower'; she relies on 'other lives', preferring 'Makers of the Modern Era' as her subject matter. While this statement is literally truthful, such a view may make us wary of Michaels as an author in this day and age, when students, academics and critics alike are acutely aware of the threat and often bemoan the occurrence of plagiarism. In this case, the plagiarism would be more literal than textual or literary – Michaels would be seen to be appropriating and profiting from other people's lives more than from anything they may have written or that has been written about them. From Ricoeur and Certeau's point of view, and in a slightly different sense from Bourdieu's point of view,¹²¹ Michaels may also appear to be a poacher. She writes and thus produces, but a significant and inseparable part of her writing process is consumption, or subjective appropriation. In *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob, and Ben's parents, are representations of real-life Holocaust survivors; Ben is a representation of a child of Holocaust survivors. Jakob and Ben are men. As we see shortly, several of the narrators of Michaels's poems are representations of real-life men and women.

However, there is a crucial difference between plagiarism or poaching and the process that Michaels carries out. On the one hand, she is acutely aware of the dangers of appropriation and misrepresentation. The respect that she accords the subject matter of *Fugitive Pieces* can be seen as applying to the subject matter of her poetry as well. Just as she does not embark on writing about 'material' like the Holocaust 'lightly' (Michaels, in O'Neill 1997), so she does not support her work on people such as Brueghel and Blixen with superficial background information or

¹²⁰ See Chapter 4, page 187.

¹²¹ Within the parameters of Bourdieu's theories, we perhaps cannot use the word 'poach' in reference to Michaels (because he does not deal with the idea); however, as we see shortly below, Bourdieu's notion of the spokesperson speaking on behalf of a group implies that a certain amount of 'poaching', that is, appropriation, is taking place.

unsupported assumption. Just as she thereby avoids ‘a reproach to the material’ (Michaels, in O’Neill 1997), so she avoids mis-portraying her poetic subjects. On the other hand, as we have seen above, in her writing poaching loses its negative connotation and becomes positive – informative, evocative, imaginative, empathic. Poaching *is* empathic identification, in her hands; and, in contrast to Certeau’s everyday life, this leads to something extraordinary. From facts and daily events, Michaels creates lives and presents ideas in a new way (Ricoeur), a way it might not otherwise have occurred to us to contemplate.

In her living-poems, Michaels’s narrators ‘stand in’ for real people; for the duration of each poem the narrator speaks in the voice of the real person, using the first person pronoun. The list has been provided in the Introduction to this doctoral thesis, but is perhaps worth repeating here. ‘January’ is narrated by painter Pieter Brueghel, ‘The Weight of Oranges’ is most probably narrated by poet Osip Mandelstam, ‘Sublimation’ by writer Alfred Doebelin, ‘A Lesson from the Earth’ by mathematician Johannes Kepler, ‘Modersohn-Becker’ by painter Paula Modersohn-Becker, ‘Pillar of Fire’ by ship’s captain Watson, ‘Blue Vigour’ by writer Karen Blixen, ‘On the Terrace’ by painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, ‘Stone’ by Modigliani model Lunia Czechowska, ‘The Second Search’ by chemist-physicist Marie Curie and ‘Ice House’ by sculptor Kathleen Scott. These poems enact metaphoric-empathic autobiography: They are biographical in their revelation of details of these people’s lives, and they are autobiographical in that the narrators refer to themselves in the first person; they are empathic rather than autobiographical in that we are aware, as Michaels is acutely aware, that she is not any of the people. The term ‘metaphoric-empathic autobiography’ is rather a mouthful. The discussion above on corpse poetry generates ‘living-poems’ as a more accessible term, which, in the light of the preceding definition, is also preferable to Moldaw’s (n.d.) term ‘persona’ poems.

The notion of ‘standing in for’ brings to mind Bourdieu’s spokesperson.¹²² Critics such as Henighan and Cook may disagree, but, with the careful qualification that Michaels herself makes (to be provided shortly), we can see Michaels as an authentic spokeswoman for groups of people, that is, her subjects and us, her readers. The groups’ circular relationship, as identified by Bourdieu, does not begin with the subjects or with us, even though without these the relationship would not exist. It begins with her. And just as we are prepared to call a judge Judge and a doctor Doctor, we willingly call her Author and Poet.

In the light of the empathic identification we see her performing in all her writing, however, Michaels’s legitimate imposture¹²³ is even more legitimate than Bourdieu suggests – she does not in all good faith take herself to be something she is not, her awareness of herself and of the distinction between herself and her subjects is always in effect. Her qualification is that ‘no writer speaks for her tribe, but only from her [unique] place in it’ (Michaels 1992: 99). ‘What gives power to ... [her] words is not, for example, her attempt to sum up a corrupt political system by speaking on behalf of a particular group, but instead to say simply: this is what I see’ (Michaels 1992: 99). Like *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels’s living-poems serve as mediating stages, in Ricoeur’s terms, in the process of communication (Michaels and us), of referentiality (Michaels and world), of self-understanding (Michaels and herself).

Michaels is therefore not a ‘spokeswoman’ in title, nor in the strict sense presented by Bourdieu; she is a representer, a teller, a reflector of the world, in practice. And the splitting of personality that results from the ‘oracle effect’ in the usual standing-in-for process presented by Bourdieu is a deliberate separation on Michaels’s part, as we have seen above, of her personal self from her work. She does not ‘make a gift of [her] person to the group[s]’ (Bourdieu 1991: 209), she makes

¹²² See Chapter 1, pages 34–6 and 42–3.

¹²³ See Chapter 1, page 43.

a gift of her *work* to the groups. Moreover, she avoids being a dupe just as Bourdieu's spokesperson is not a dupe, but in a different way. She does not become 'Everything', gaining power 'to exercise recognized constraint, symbolic violence, on each of the isolated members of the group' (Bourdieu 1991: 212). She instead 'forgets self', in Murdoch's (1970: 90) terms, because she seems ever aware that, as Jardine (1998) puts it, 'the enormity of taking on the task of testifying on behalf of others who have died, or suffered intolerably, removes the possibility of any self-interest whatsoever. In order imaginatively to inhabit that world ... the author themselves have to leave the scene'. Michaels seems to be confirming this sense through Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* when he says that neither 'confession' nor 'forgiveness' 'erases the immoral act', but 'even if [such] an act *could* be forgiven, no one could bear the responsibility of forgiveness on behalf of the dead' (FP 160–1, emphasis added).

As we have seen in Chapter 1,¹²⁴ having been transmuted into symbolic form, the power that a producer-dominator exerts over a consumer-dominated gains legitimacy partly in the form of a society's,¹²⁵ and also the world's,¹²⁶ legitimate or official language. Steeped as we have been in the present chapter in the subject of Holocaust-related literature, we can see the Nazis and the Jews in a producer-dominator–consumer-dominated relationship. One of the ways in which the Nazis expressly enforced their anti-Semitic policies was through the use of what was for the years of Third Reich rule the 'legitimate' language. Such overlap of Bourdieu and Certeau's views with the Nazis' use of the German language is explored, along with Klemperer's findings, in Chapter 3.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 1, page 35.

¹²⁵ The European 'society' of the 1930s and 40s is indicated in this case.

¹²⁶ The power that part of the outside world – America and the UK – exerted over the Nazis is indicated in this case. If the Nazis had felt fully supported and vindicated in their policies they would not have sought to conceal them with euphemisms and vague language.