

Chapter 3

The triple powers of language – destroying, recovering, enacting good

One of the major themes infusing the work of Anne Michaels is the dualistic power of language as a destructive force and as a recuperative force. With Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* we learn both ‘the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate’ and ‘the power of language to restore’ that is demonstrated by ‘poetry’ (FP 79). However, there appears to be another dimension to this theme as well. We have encountered the idea of language having the power to ‘be’ moral or immoral, to serve a purpose in which morality plays a role, in Chapter 1. A person who relinquishes his independence and individuality for the good of the group on whose behalf he speaks becomes a selfless, moral person, according to Bourdieu (1991).¹ Aristotle, as interpreted by Ricoeur (1992), sees the characteristic of morality or immorality as inherent in our dispositions.²

Moreover, in Chapter 2 we have learned of Michaels’s view that certain pieces of figurative language, such as euphemism, can be used to deceitful and thus immoral ends, and that other figurative language, such as metaphor, can be used in response in order for an honest and thus moral stance to be re-established.³ In Chapter 4 we explore the poem – namely, ‘What the Light Teaches’ – in which Michaels presents one of her major linguistic and philosophical conclusions concerning morality.⁴ History, as Jakob explains in *Fugitive Pieces* (138) and Michaels (1994: 15) herself suggests, is ‘amoral’; it is simply an event that occurs. Memory, by contrast, is ‘moral’, because that which we recall on purpose is often that which our conscience recalls (FP 138; Michaels 1994: 15). From the poem, we learn that ‘language remembers’ (What the Light Teaches 122) – in other words, it serves as a ‘repository’ of both ‘cultural and personal memory’ and ‘history’ (Michaels 1994: 15).

Thus the further layer in the dualism of language, the additional power that language can exercise, is emphasised for us. Not only does language have the powers of harmfulness and helpfulness, as we see below, it also functions in giving meaning to the events it reflects or describes, and within the broad arena of meaning, language can moreover generate negative (immoral) and positive (moral) meaning. In this light, we can see language’s destructive force as immoral, and its recuperative force as moral. Michaels’s suggestion, which we have encountered in Chapter 2,⁵ that the ‘language of a victim only reveals/ the one who named him’ (What the Light Teaches 124) resonates throughout the present chapter, in relation to the three forces of language and to language in the hands of torturers (or destroyers) and of writers (or creators). The discussions are illuminated by Klemperer’s philological study of the language of the Third Reich (the LTI),⁶ by the language theories of the theorists we have explored in the preceding chapters, and by the theories of Scarry (1985).

In *Fugitive Pieces* and in certain of her poems, Michaels seems to be saying that language can be used to destructive (immoral) or recuperative (moral) ends depending on the person who uses it and the intention for which it is used. As we have seen in reference to Klemperer in Chapter 1,⁷ there are critics who balk at the idea of endowing language with power, of seeing it as

¹ See Chapter 1, page 42.

² See Chapter 1, page 37, footnote 35.

³ See Chapter 2, page 79.

⁴ See Chapter 4, pages 183–4 and 187.

⁵ See, for example, Chapter 2, page 84.

⁶ See Chapter 1, pages 44–59.

⁷ See Chapter 1, pages 60–2.

independently being able *to do* anything. By agreeing with Michaels, by also believing that language is capable of these dual functions, I do not intend to suggest that language is autonomous. However, I concur with Berger's (2001: 452) refusal to define language merely as a tool.⁸ My position lies somewhere in between: Language seems to be an effective tool with which we can express our thoughts and beliefs, it is the horse whose reins we hold and manipulate, but like a real horse language also has the capability of 'running away with us', slipping out of our control – there is in language the possibility of making meaning, confusingly and mysteriously, to both disastrous and serendipitous effect, that we may not have originally intended. To extend the image, we may even fall off the horse, thus losing control of it altogether. This implies that language can also slip totally out of our grasp, and thereby become autonomous. But language always needs a user, the horse cannot ride itself.⁹ Thus in the present chapter while we discuss the 'powers' of language, we bear in mind the actual source of the power.

The destructive power of language

*If a piece of cutlery belonging to orthodox Jews has become ritually unclean,
they purify it by burying it in the earth. Many words in common usage
during the Nazi period should be committed to a mass grave
for a very long time, some for ever.
(Klemperer 2000: 14)¹⁰*

Language poisoned by the Nazis

As argued less figuratively below, the horse cannot ride itself – the user and the user's intention in using language are vital factors in this discussion. Michaels exposes language as a destructive force when it is utilised by the Nazis. An adolescent in Greece, in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob 'already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate' (FP 79). Later, an adult in Canada, he tells us that with this language the Nazis performed an 'old trick', stripping the Jews of their humanity by calling them "“figuren,” “stücke” – “dolls,” “wood,” “merchandise,” “rags”" (FP 165). Using the same twisted logic that caused Clemens and Weser to repeat to the Jewish-born Klemperer's Protestant wife, Eva, every time they searched the house, 'You racial traitor' and 'Didn't you know that it says in the Talmud that “a foreigner is of less value than a whore”?' (Klemperer 2000: 249), the Nazis argued that they had to address the 'fire hazard' posed by the 'rags and clutter in the dirty basement of society' by burning them, and that Jews must not own animals because animals cannot own animals (FP 165–6).

For his part, Klemperer (2000: 138, 139) clearly distinguishes between the term 'human material' or 'manpower' (*Menschenmaterial*), as used in the military context, and "“head” of prisoners' (*Stück' gefangenen*), as used during a war crimes trial by a former female warder of Belsen. Prior to 1914, having yet to encounter war's 'true awfulness', Klemperer (2000: 138) did not see anything wrong with the former term; indeed, he viewed it as harmless as was the term 'case' when used by a civilian doctor in reference to a patient. After his military experiences in the Great War, and his civilian experiences in the Second World War, Klemperer (2000: 139) was inclined to see in the term the 'same cynicism' as was at work in the term 'cannon fodder'. Yet even in 1946 he was 'still not fully convinced of the brutality of this discredited expression' (Klemperer 2000: 139).

⁸ See Chapter 2, page 79.

⁹ The horse may not always *need* a rider, but it is just as likely to stop and return to the person lying winded on the ground as it is to keep running.

¹⁰ Two such words would be the 'star' and 'privileged' – the two worst words in the Jewish section of the LTI, according to Klemperer (2000: 159).

By way of analogy, he argues that there is nothing ‘particularly heartless’ about referring to prisoners, in peacetime prison service, as numbers; their humanity is ‘not thereby automatically negated’, and they are ‘only viewed as numbers as far as lists are concerned’ (Klemperer 2000: 139). Still largely neutral in Klemperer’s eyes,¹¹ this practice became intensely negative during the period of the Third Reich. The significance of the tattooed number that each Auschwitz prisoner, like Primo Levi, received on entering the camp may therefore have struck him differently. ‘Read more briefly than the Pentateuch or the Talmud’, this number nevertheless ‘provides more thorough information. ... It touches the deepest and most closely intertwined roots of [a prisoner’s] existence’, believes Jean Améry (1980: 24, 25), more of whom we learn below. Klemperer may well have agreed with Michaels’s underscoring of the words ‘oven’ and ‘number’ in her poem ‘What the Light Teaches’ (122), because he understands both that ‘it is the single word which reveals the way a particular epoch thinks’ and that the meaning of each word can change ‘depending on the context in which [it] appear[s]’ (Klemperer 2000: 138).

Contrary to his view of the abovementioned military words, Klemperer (2000: 139) rebels against the Belsen warder’s terminology, seeing its ‘brutality’ as ‘palpable’ and ‘undeniable’. The difference, he believes, lay in the processes of abstraction and objectification, respectively (Klemperer 2000: 139). ‘Human material’ and ‘cannon fodder’, terms which he admits to seeing as having an ‘uncomfortable correspondence’, nevertheless implied a ‘professional avoidance of reference to the person’ and to a certain extent remained acceptable (Klemperer 2000: 139). ‘Piece’ or ‘head’ (*Stück*), on the other hand, was a deplorable term when used to objectify a person (Klemperer 2000: 139). In *Fugitive Pieces* (both from 167), knowing as he does ‘the difference between naming and the named’, never ‘confus[ing] objects and humans’, Athos¹² would no doubt grasp the import of the term ‘liquidated’ (*liquidiert*). In a chilling parallel with Bourdieu’s (1991) economic terms, this one clearly comes from ‘the language of commerce’ (Klemperer 2000: 139). Business people around the world close their companies down or ‘put them into liquidation’. During the Holocaust, however, Klemperer (2000: 139, emphasis added) ‘read every day’ that ‘umpteens *people* had been liquidated’ in the camps.

Through Jakob, Michaels suggests that, as a function of the German language, such objectification ‘annihilated metaphor’ (*FP* 143), stripped the figure of speech of its purpose – instead of using language to portray the Jews as something (else), Michaels seems to be arguing, the Nazis made language portray them as nothing. This is one of the ways, more of which we see in Chapter 4,¹³ in which language can be rendered meaningless just as an attempt at meaning is made. For Klemperer (2000), though, metaphor as a function of language that could be used to harmful effect was fully in force in the Third Reich.

Presumably, the idea is that objectifying or dehumanising the Jews made it easier for the Nazis to kill them – ‘ethics’ were not ‘violated’ (*FP* 165) in the extermination of rubbish. However, as Jakob points out, in one ‘harrowing contradiction’ that ‘holds the key to all the others’ (*FP* 166), the Nazis revealed themselves as needing to see Jews exactly as human, rather than sub- or non-human, in order to be able to humiliate them. ‘When citizens, soldiers, and SS performed their unspeakable acts, the photos show their faces were not grimaced with horror, or even with

¹¹ In his few references to Auschwitz, Klemperer (2000) does not mention the number or the tattoo practice.

¹² Athos passes on the essential knowledge of naming to Jakob, as we see below. Jakob identifies his guardian in the same breath as one of ‘the few ... who chose to do good at great personal risk’ (*FP* 167). Athos is a modern example of the Greek Hero distinguished by Klemperer (2000: 6) who performed a deed ‘which benefited mankind’ – he saves Jakob by smuggling him into Greece under the noses of the Germans (*FP* 13). Thus, we can add Athos to the group of people whom Klemperer (2000: 6) sees as ‘possessing a source of inner strength and solace’ that helps them to embody ‘the purest kind of heroism’. (See also Chapter 1, pages 57–8.)

¹³ See Chapter 4, pages 171–2.

ordinary sadism, but rather were contorted with laughter' (*FP* 166). Des Pres (1977: 67) explains that a 'vastly significant reason why in the camps the prisoners were so degraded' is that it 'made it easier for the SS to do their job' – 'it made mass murder less terrible to the murderers'.

Jakob would most likely concur, reasoning as he does that 'to humiliate is to accept that your victim feels and thinks, that he not only feels pain, but knows that he's being degraded' (*FP* 166). And Des Pres (1977: 66) confirms that there was more to the Nazis' murderous policies and actions than 'simple' eradication of the Jewish race:

The exercise of totalitarian power ... seeks ... to crush the spirit. ... So it was in the camps. Spiritual destruction became an end in itself, quite apart from the requirements of mass murder. The death of the soul was aimed at.

Thus Hitler carried out his oft-expressed¹⁴ aim – borne of his prevailing 'infantile attitude to the Jews', which was a mixture of 'scornful derision' and 'panic-stricken fear' (Klemperer 2000: 162) – of 'wip[ing] the smile off the faces of the Jews' (Klemperer 2000: 167).¹⁵

Another way in which Hitler did this is through names and naming, a subject to which Klemperer (2000) devotes a chapter in the *LTR*¹⁶ and which is also a highly significant theme in Michaels's work, as we see elsewhere in the present chapter and in the next chapter. To the group of common nouns that includes 'pieces' and 'rags', in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob makes his own contribution. Reinforcing Klemperer's (2000) evidence that Jews used the LTI just as much as non-Jews, in his extreme state of hunger and emotional trauma while hiding in the forest of Biskupin, emerging from the mud and approaching Athos for the first time, the only name, the only identity, Jakob is capable of giving himself in more than one language is that of 'dirty Jew' (*FP* 13).

Hitler also manipulated proper nouns, thereby altering people's identity as indicated by their name. Any practising Christian who became a member of the SS, or who was also a highly orthodox Nazi, had to leave the Church, Klemperer (2000: 71) tells us. In an article published in early February of 1945¹⁷ in an official Nazi newspaper that reached Klemperer as wrapping paper, the author relates that if such people had initially 'made the mistake of christening their first-born daughter Christa', during the later, more German period of their lives, they would try to 'improve the poor creature's lot' by changing the 'C' to 'a German "K"' (Krista) (Klemperer 2000: 71). To 'complete the atonement', their 'second daughter was given the thoroughly Teutonic and pagan name "Heidrun"' (Klemperer 2000: 71). 'No German child', Klemperer (2000: 72) adds, could be given the Old Testament name of 'Lea' or 'Sara'. The Third Reich furthermore made 'a duty and a uniform out of what before was just a fashion': 'As late as 1944', Klemperer (2000: 70) noticed that six births out of nine announced in a Dresden newspaper had 'explicitly Teutonic (*germanisch*) names'.¹⁸

For the Jews the case was pervasive. In the Physics Department, the name 'Einstein' had to be 'hushed up', and the 'Hertz' unit of frequency had to be referred to by something other than its

¹⁴ Klemperer (2000: 167) describes the threat and the subsequent declaration of threat fulfilled as 'one of the most commonly repeated and paraphrased remarks of the Führer'.

¹⁵ The reasons proposed by survivors, historians, philosophers and critics for Hitler's policies and behaviour, and for his role in bringing about the Second World War, are many and varied. But one suggestion noteworthy in this context is 'the humiliation Germany suffered from the Treaty of Versailles, which concluded the First World War' (Vorbrüggen & Baer 2007: 29).

¹⁶ See Chapter 13 'Names' (Klemperer 2000: 69–77).

¹⁷ The bombing of Dresden took place between 13 and 15 February 1945.

¹⁸ The names were Dieter, Detlev, Uwe, Margit, Ingrid and Uta (Klemperer 2000: 70).

Jewish name (Klemperer 2000: 72). Any Jew without an ‘unmistakably Hebraic name’ had to add ‘Israel’ or ‘Sara’ to their forename (Klemperer 2000: 72). In official contexts Klemperer (2000: 72–3) was always referred to as ‘the Jew Klemperer’, and had to speak of himself in this manner as well. More closely in line with Hitler’s abovementioned aim of humiliating and degrading the Jews, ‘Yiddish pet names’ like ‘Vögele’ and ‘Mendele’ were included in ‘the list of forenames available to the Jews’, because ‘to a German ear [they] sounded somewhat embarrassing and somewhat ridiculous’ (Klemperer 2000: 73). In *Fugitive Pieces*, having lost their first two children in the war, Ben’s parents take the matter into their own hands when his mother gives birth to him, the third child. As an adult Ben discovers that his name stems ‘not from Benjamin, but merely [from] “ben” – the Hebrew word for son’ (FP 253). His parents ‘hoped that if they did not name [him], the angel of death might pass by’ (FP 253). But even the names of those who were already dead were not safe from the Nazis, as we see in the fact that ‘tombstones [were] smashed in Hebrew cemeteries and plundered for [the construction of] Polish sidewalks’ (FP 32).

Some names, in certain situations, cannot be spoken. ‘One becomes undone,’ Jakob suggests, ‘by love that closes its mouth before calling a name’ (FP 17). This is the kind of non-naming typified by the rounded-up parents, ‘who stopped their tongues’ and saved their children ‘by not/ calling out to them in the street’, that we encounter in ‘What the Light Teaches’ (121). Later, Jakob ‘fantasized the power of reversal’: Sifting through ‘photographs of the mountains of personal possessions stored at Kanada¹⁹ in the camps’, he imagines that ‘if each owner of each pair of shoes could be named, then they would be brought back to life’ (FP 50). In this light ironically, and in an echo of the Nazis’ abovementioned need for recognition of the victim’s humanity to precede his or her death, in Auschwitz, for the most part, “the prisoners ... were numbers, nothing else” – however, when they were to be shot, they “were called out *by name*” (Baum 2006: 110).

In the preceding examples of Hitler’s cultural-linguistic policies we can see the producers, that is, the Nazis and other actively anti-Semitic Germans, dominating the consumers, in other words the Jews and the less politically minded German people, through the medium of the legitimate language, in Certeau (1984) and Bourdieu’s (1991) terms. Furthermore, in portraying the Jewish people’s assimilation of the LTI into their everyday speech as unintentional on the whole, Klemperer (2000: 186) provides support for Bourdieu’s (1991) suggestion that consumers accept or accede to the legitimate language unconsciously because, as we have seen in Chapter 1,²⁰ their habitus predisposes them to do so. Glauber, Albert, the factory foreman and all the other Jewish people that Klemperer (2000) noticed using LTI terms – all misrecognised (Bourdieu) the Nazi use of the German language as the legitimate usage and thus they misrecognised the language itself as the legitimate language.

As we know, Certeau (1984) suggests that consumers will not simply accept their lot, and will devise ways of making it more bearable. Michaels’s crucial theme of names and naming is relevant in this regard. Not only are there many people, like Athos, who ‘never confused objects and humans’ (FP 167), Michaels also proposes that there is an incorrect or inappropriate way of going about the process of mourning and remembrance of the dead, and suggests furthermore that the correct or appropriate way of going about that process is enacted through the process of

¹⁹ ‘Upon arrival at Auschwitz, Jews were stripped of their clothes and personal possessions. ... The 34 barracks in Auschwitz where these belongings were sorted and stored were known as “Kanada” by camp inmates, who imagined Canada as a land of plenty’ (museevirtuel.com).

²⁰ See Chapter 1, pages 40–1.

naming.²¹ It is at first easy to become confused by her use of the terms ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ in her work. For example, in ‘What the Light Teaches’ (120), the narrator states that by ‘remembering’, she and her sister ‘learn to forget’, and goes on to describe the process as the kind of forgetting that for Michaels is the inappropriate kind.²² However, Michaels herself is not confused; she seems to use the terms in each case with specific purpose. On further consideration, we can also come to understand the meaning of each instance.

Jakob performs the inappropriate process of remembrance in *Fugitive Pieces* for much of his life. The child Jakob is traumatised by his parents’ death and sister’s disappearance in differing ways. Because he actually sees his parents’ lifeless bodies, he is able to apprehend the fact of their death and let them go. A few days after the murder, he suddenly knows that his mother ‘was inside’ him, ‘stopping to say goodbye’ (FP 8). Feeling her ‘caught’, perhaps by his sorrow and sense of loss, he tears at his clothes and hair – he is aware of and fulfils his ‘responsibility to release her’ – and ‘she was gone’ (FP 8). Some time later, just before he and Athos meet in the Biskupin forest, Jakob is suddenly certain that Bella is dead (FP 12). But without the evidence of her lifeless body, and beset by guilt at initially failing to notice her disappearance, he is unable to let her go; he strives to keep the memory of her with him all the more fervently because he has no knowledge of her condition and whereabouts prior to and at her death. His way of keeping her memory with him is to keep *her* with him, as closely as possible. In his and Athos’s escape from Poland to Greece, and in hiding on Zakynthos for the duration of the war, Jakob feels Bella with him all the time, ‘everywhere’ (FP 31). He ‘hesitated in the doorway’ in order to let ‘Bella enter ahead of [him]’; he pauses during meals to give her ‘extra bite[s]’ (FP 31).

Later, in Toronto, she is there too. On long evening walks through the city as a young adult, Jakob describes himself and Bella as being still ‘inches apart, the wall between [them]’ (FP 111). When he and Alex are married, Bella’s things become superimposed on Alex’s things: ‘Alex’s hairbrush ... Bella’s brush’, ‘Alex’s bobby pins ... Bella’s hairclips’; Alex’s touch on his back reminds him of Bella writing on his back (FP 140). He collects facts obsessively; his ‘eagerness for details is offensive’ (FP 139) because his wish to know what happened to his sister is greater than his sorrow for the thousands of victims over whose fate he pores in reports and photographs. In his imagination, he replays the various directions of ‘Bella’s path from the front door of [his] parents’ house’ into the unknown again and again in an attempt to ‘give her death a place’ (FP 139).

Much later, divorced and in Greece, in his ongoing desire ‘to remain close to Bella’, Jakob evocatively pictures her lying on a wooden bunk in the concentration camp barracks, the ‘icy feet’ of another prisoner ‘push[ing] into the back of her head’, and silently describing to herself how she will play a Brahms intermezzo (FP 167). Through his research, as we know, Jakob has learnt that people in the gas chamber cried out – ‘they were heard from the other side of the thick walls’ (FP 168). He places Bella there too – it is also her ‘mouth’ that ‘strained for its miracle’ (FP 168) – but his imagination stops short of ‘hearing’ (my quotation marks) those sounds. In this passage and a subsequent passage Jakob has the pivotal realisations that show him both how his manner of mourning and remembering his sister has up to this point been inappropriate, and how it should be. We discuss these realisations below.

²¹ A discussion of a psychoanalytical perspective on the appropriate and inappropriate ways of remembering the dead (in terms of the most beneficial way of promoting emotional healing following loss), with reference to the concepts of mourning and melancholy, respectively, is given in Ristić (2005).

²² We explore the pertinent verse in detail in Chapter 4 (pages 174–5).

Language damaged by Nazi and Soviet oppressors

Four of Michaels's poems are infused with references to the Holocaust, and have been discussed in this regard in Chapter 2.²³ Two of those poems – 'Sublimation' and 'What the Light Teaches' – examine language as negatively affected by Nazi and Soviet oppression.

In 'Sublimation', Doebelin's suffering, as Michaels sees it, is rooted in his writing and his mother tongue. During his escape he is followed by a man with a 'uniform under his coat' and from then on he 'had no language' (both from Sublimation 67); not only unwilling perhaps to speak and write in German until his safety is secure, he also seems figuratively silenced or stifled. His words remain 'inside' him, 'useless in France,/ meaningless in America' (Sublimation 67). Levi would have understood the experience. On the first day of their imprisonment, he and his fellow prisoners 'became aware that [their] language lacks the words to express this offence, the demolition of a man' (Levi 1960: 32). And he feels that had the Lagers lasted longer, a 'new, harsh language would have been born' in order for the true meaning of their horrors to be conveyed (Levi 1960: 129). Both Doebelin and Levi are thus victims of linguistic dominance. In their differing circumstances, they have little or no 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu); their language is at best hyper-controlled, at worst silenced altogether, by the Nazis.

While in New York and Los Angeles, attempting unsuccessfully to write screenplays, Doebelin was apparently unable to get along with the German-speaking artistic community, finding Bertolt Brecht 'too Marxist' and Thomas Mann 'too bourgeois' (Simon 1992). Such conflict probably increased the alienation from his home language that was initiated by his European 'peregrinations', which Harold von Hofe (1944: 28) sees as a particular tragedy in this case of a writer who 'derives his spiritual sustenance, the raw material for his work, ... from his own lingual group'. Any link with German speakers that he accepted, and cherished, during his self-imposed exile seems to have been provided by Niclas. 'In Paris [they] spoke [their] mother tongue/ in each other's arms', and Doebelin very likely commiserates with Niclas's tears 'for the familiar sounds' (Sublimation 67).

In 'What the Light Teaches', as we know, Michaels presents the theme of language in the mouths of the Nazi and Soviet oppressed. The poets Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Akhmatova 'suffered profoundly during the Stalinist regime' (Michaels 2001: 190). So that their work might be preserved, Michaels (2001: 190) explains in her Notes, their 'friends and family often memorized complete poems'. However, under duress of the type inflicted upon language by the oppressors, language can fulfil the preservative intentions of memorisation in an equally perverted manner: The 'mission' of 'smuggling language/ from the mouths of the dying/ and the dead' (What the Light Teaches 124) is suicidal, in Michaels's eyes, not only because of the threat that the action poses to the smugglers' safety, but also because of the uselessness of preserving that which turns out not to be what they were trying to save – it transpires, in other words, that the language is contaminated by the oppressors. The Russian poets' words, the 'last words of the murdered mothers', reveal themselves to be merely a skeleton of the, by implication traditionally rich, 'old language' that is free of the oppressors' taint (What the Light Teaches 124).

Similarly, a city can be stripped of its identity when the meaning of its name is lost: 'Petersburg vanished into Leningrad, became/ ... invisible' (What the Light Teaches 125–6). In this city, the narrator explains, 'poets promised to meet/ so they could pronounce again/ "the blessed word with no meaning"' (What the Light Teaches 125–6). As we know, the embedded quotation comes from Mandelstam's poem 'We Shall Meet Again, in Petersburg'. In 1924, the former

²³ See Chapter 2, pages 108–10.

Russian capital, Petrograd (previously St Petersburg), was renamed Leningrad in honour of the recently deceased Lenin²⁴ – it was one of the ‘whole cities’ that were ‘razed with a word’ (What the Light Teaches 125)²⁵ – and there was a corresponding oppression of any poetry and writing that was considered to be subversive to the government. In 1930, for instance, a letter written by Stalin appeared in the magazine *Bol'shevik* in which he ‘demanded that nothing which deviates in the slightest way from state policies be allowed to appear in print’ (Struve 1971: 20).²⁶ Having ‘no meaning’ in such a context, the ‘blessed word’ could be ‘Petrograd’ itself, bearing in mind the word’s link with or implication of the support that the cultural arts received from the more liberal pre-communist leaders.²⁷ Or, more specifically when uttered by poets, the word could be ‘poetry’.

The three poets and the Holocaust victims in Michaels’s poem ‘shared the same table, the same street’ (What the Light Teaches 124) as their abusers – being unwilling or unable to escape, they had to live in close proximity with Stalin and Hitler’s soldiers. Thus they had ‘no idiom to retreat to’ (What the Light Teaches 124). The narrator lists three possible responses: ‘cut out one’s tongue’, ‘cleave it with new language’ or ‘try to hear a language of the dead’ (What the Light Teaches 124). The poem ‘Sublimation’ implies that in exile Doebelin’s German tongue is cut out. As we see in Chapter 4,²⁸ a poet such as Paul Celan was forced to cleave his mother tongue with a new form of itself. And attempting to hear a language of the dead, ‘who were thrown into pits, into lakes’ (What the Light Teaches 125), at first seems an extremely difficult task, but it proves not to be impossible, as we see below.

For their part, and for a time, Akhmatova and Mandelstam sought a fourth alternative, which is not mentioned in ‘The Weight of Oranges’, but is perhaps implied in ‘What the Light Teaches’: They bowed to linguistic domination, apparently in the hope that it may save their loved ones, Lev Gumilev and Nadezhda Mandelstam. When Akhmatova’s son Lev was sent to Siberia, the poet attempted to secure his release and return – in vain (poets.org) – by writing several poems glorifying Stalin and Soviet communism (*EB* 2008; poets.org; Struve 1971). In Nadezhda Mandelstam’s view, this was an acceptable thing for Akhmatova to have done (Struve 1971). Nadezhda felt the poet’s case was different from that of her husband, whom she sees, together with Pasternak, as having

at the end of their lives ... acted contrary to their entire life orientation ... Mandelstam was quite ready for a rapprochement [with the Soviets], but this, it turned out, was too late. ... it was an attempt to extricate himself when the noose was already around his neck. (Nadezhda Mandelstam, in Struve 1971: 21)

²⁴ Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870–1924), founder of the Russian Communist Party and first head of the Soviet State. Predecessor of Stalin (see the Introduction, page 5, footnote 6).

²⁵ In similar fashion the city of Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad in 1925 in honour of Stalin (en.wikipedia ... Stalingrad).

²⁶ Mandelstam seems to reflect this situation in his poem: In the second verse the speaker ‘will pray in the Soviet night/ for the blessed word with no meaning’; the Soviet night is that which is associated in the first verse with ‘the black velvet Void’. Thus he allows ‘syntax to affirm and obscure an identity between the Bolshevik society and the void’ (Wesling 1992: 94).

²⁷ Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky (1881–1970), as a ‘moderate socialist revolutionary who served as head of the Russian provisional government from July to October 1917’ (*EB* 2008), was one such leader. This period of four months followed the February Revolution, in which revolutionists overthrew the Russian monarchy and formed the provisional government with the intention of establishing, in time, a democratic government; the period furthermore preceded the October Revolution, in which Bolsheviks in turn ousted the provisional government and formed the Soviet Communist government. In Kerensky’s unique position during this time as ‘vice chairman of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies’ and of ‘minister of justice in the provisional government’, he established throughout Russia certain basic civil rights, such as freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion, and equal rights for women (*EB* 2008).

²⁸ See Chapter 4, pages 165 and 172–3.

Nadezhda is referring to the verses her husband wrote during his first exile in favour of Stalin, including the ‘Ode to Stalin’.²⁹ JM Coetzee³⁰ (1991: 72, 81 fn 3) confirms the possibility of the suggestion made by Shirazi (2003: 209)³¹ that he did this for his wife’s sake. The full version of the poem, published in 1976, was accompanied by anonymously provided evidence that Mandelstam could not have been ‘ashamed’ of the ode, ‘as Anna Akhmatova and [his wife] had claimed’, because he ‘had several times read it to gatherings’ (Coetzee 1991: 72). In their ensuing defence of Mandelstam and of poetry in general, critics worldwide have attempted to present the poems as being ‘insincere’, coming from something other than ‘his true self’ (Coetzee 1991: 73). Coetzee (1991) argues persuasively why he disagrees with the former claim and concurs with the latter; unfortunately his discussion of Mandelstam being compelled to write the ode in the language of Stalin ‘the father’³² is beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis.

Language harmed during the practice of torture

A pivotal aspect of language’s destructive power is revealed in the process of torture. The following discussion pays attention to elements of torture generally, as well as more particularly in reference to Jean Améry, a real-life victim of torture at the hands of the Nazis, and to the torture scenes portrayed by Jakob and implied by Ben in *Fugitive Pieces*. Michaels does not deal with the notion of torture in her three volumes of poetry at all. In her suggestion that the victim’s language reflects the one-who-names (What the Light Teaches 124), she identifies the ‘namer’ as the Nazis and Stalinists in their role as oppressors, not torturers. But the suggestion can also be applied to the torturer and the tortured. The discussion is illuminated by the theories of Scarry (1985) and Berger (2001).

Hans Maier was born in Vienna in 1912 to a Jewish father, whom he hardly knew (Améry 1980: 16) and who died when he was a child (Ben Shai 2007: 850), and a Catholic mother. Until 1935, with the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in Germany, he did not consider himself Jewish, seeing himself ‘as a boy at Christmas, plodding through a snow-covered village to midnight mass’ rather than one who goes to synagogue (Améry 1980: 15). Nevertheless he was classified and persecuted as a Jew, and was imprisoned in various concentration camps during the war (Brudholm 2006: 7; Langer 1995: 119). Having left the Christian boy behind, he assimilated his Jewish heritage to the extent that he joined a resistance movement after escaping from a camp and fleeing to Belgium in 1941 (Langer 1995: 119). Two years later, he was caught ‘spreading anti-Nazi propaganda among the members of the German occupation forces’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 123). He was taken to and tortured at ‘the notorious Gestapo prison’ at Fort Breendonk, situated between Antwerp and Brussels (Langer 1995: 119).

After the war, Maier returned to Brussels and changed his name to Jean Améry (Brudholm 2006: 7). This further act of resistance signifies his complete separation, at the very level of identity, from that which was German and thus tainted, as ‘Jean’ is the French version of the German

²⁹ John Bayley (1984: 152) suggests that it is ‘characteristic’ of Mandelstam that this poem and the others like it – ‘written to rehabilitate himself’ – are ‘actually better, more subtle and more rich’ than the preceding poem about Stalin that got Mandelstam exiled the first time.

³⁰ JM Coetzee (1940–), Nobel prize-winning South African novelist, critic and translator.

³¹ Shirazi (2003: 209) proposes that Mandelstam wrote this poem partly in reaction to the Kirov trials. Sergey Kirov, Stalin’s close colleague and possible rival, was assassinated in 1934, perhaps at Stalin’s own order, and Stalin used the event as an excuse to bring some communist party members to trial, two of whom were executed in 1936 (*EB* 2008). The trials convinced Mandelstam that ‘no individual life had any necessity to the state’, and while he was certain of his own doom, he hoped at least to ‘save his wife’ (Shirazi 2003: 209).

³² Nadezhda Mandelstam (in Coetzee 1991: 83) explains how texts addressed to Stalin ‘had to be couched in “the special style of Soviet polite parlance” – a ‘*handed down* language’ in which ‘the self cannot find expression’.

‘Hans’, and ‘Améry’ may well have been intended to be an anagram of ‘Maier’ or ‘Mayer’. Améry committed suicide in Salzburg in 1978 (Langer 1995: 120; Vetlesen 2006: 35). While his reaction to the war and his experiences, voiced in the form of polemical articles and essays³³ written decades later, not to mention the reactions his texts elicited from literary and Holocaust critics, make for fascinating reading, we narrow our gaze here to consider his actual experience of torture, which he wrote about in the mid-1960s, and the way in which this example of the act relates to language.

Upon arrest, Améry was taken to the Gestapo headquarters. Having been caught carrying out resistance activities, he was subjected to the form of torture that ‘has been most frequently justified throughout history’ – that of interrogation (Tindale 1996: 350). He was required to provide details of ‘accomplices’ and ‘hiding places’, none of which he knew owing to the way in which the movement was organised (Améry, in Langer 1995: 125). The Gestapo were not satisfied and dealt Améry (in Langer 1995: 125) the ‘first blow’. Repeated many times, the blow failed to fulfil the Gestapo’s goal, and they carried out their threat and sent Améry (in Langer 1995: 127) to Breendonk.

In two examples of the LTI – which Améry refers to as ‘Third Reich ‘cant’ – that Klemperer would no doubt have appreciated, Fort Breendonk was known as a ‘reception camp’ to the Nazis, and there prisoners were delivered by the Gestapo and received by the SS and SD officials in the ‘business room’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 121). Améry’s actual torture was conducted in a ‘windowless vault’ deep inside the fort (Améry, in Langer 1995: 122). In an attempt to obtain information about the resistance movement, Herr Leutnant Praust had him hung from a hook-and-chain instrument in the ceiling by a shackle that bound his arms and hands behind his back (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). As Améry’s shoulder joints dislocated under the weight of his own body, Praust hit him repeatedly with a metre-long horsewhip (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130).

In contrast to Jakob’s research findings in *Fugitive Pieces*, which reveal the laughter of the people committing ‘unspeakable acts’ (FP 166), Améry (in Langer 1995: 132) observes that the faces of his torturers were ‘serious’ and ‘tense’. Like Jakob, Améry (in Langer 1995: 132) believes that these men were not sadists in the ‘narrow sexual-pathologic sense’. However, they were sadists in the sense of having and acting upon a ‘dis-ordered view of the world’, Améry (in Langer 1995: 132) suggests, gaining insight from Georges Bataille.³⁴ While Améry may have conceded Berger’s (2001: 446) opinion that ‘the majority of torturers are neither sadists – in the clinical sense of the word – nor incarnations of pure evil’, he does see their evil as ‘overlay[ing] and exceed[ing]’ the ‘banality’ attributed to them by Hannah Arendt,³⁵ whom he believes knows ‘the enemy of mankind only from hearsay’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 124).

Praust’s torture rendered Améry speechless, and then speechful. In the first few minutes, he was unable to respond to any prompts; his entire attention was focused on his body (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130–1). But soon, in response to the constantly repeated questions, he became voluble, accusing himself ‘of invented absurd political crimes’ in the apparent hope that the disclosures would be followed by a blow resulting either in death or at least in unconsciousness (Améry, in Langer 1995: 133). The latter effect indeed eventually occurred, and he describes no further acts of torture, though one might imagine he continued to suffer various forms of it,

³³ Améry (in Langer 1995: 123) is of the opinion, for example, that torture ‘was not an accidental quality of [the] Third Reich, but its essence’. See essays such as ‘Torture’ and ‘Resentment’ in Améry (1998).

³⁴ Georges Bataille (1897–1962), French librarian and writer ‘whose essays, novels, and poetry expressed his fascination with eroticism, mysticism, and the irrational’ (EB 2008).

³⁵ Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), German-born American political scientist and philosopher ‘known for her critical writing on Jewish affairs and her study of totalitarianism’ (EB 2008).

because he was subsequently sent to Auschwitz and then to Bergen-Belsen, where he survived until the end of the war (Améry, in Langer 1995).

Critics such as Scarry (1985) make for us a pivotal point about pain that every person who has experienced pain may well be able to perceive for themselves upon consideration. Afflicted by a stomach ache or disabled by a broken leg – troubled by toothache or a slight cigarette burn on one's finger, as Améry (in Langer 1995: 135) was and no doubt countless others of us have been – when we try to describe the pain that these experiences generate we always fall short. Those around us are probably aware of our condition – Améry's (in Langer 1995: 135) toothache made him gruff with his family, the cigarette burn put him in a bad mood for hours – and should we try to describe it to them they may nod and wince and empathise, but they will never feel the pain as we feel it.³⁶ Pain is un-sharable. It will always comprise 'two wholly distinct orders of events': "one's own physical pain" and "another person's physical pain", explains Scarry (1985: 4).³⁷ Because it is within my body, pain is easily grasped by me; outside of the other person's body, pain is easily not grasped by them (Scarry 1985: 4).

It is in language that this failure takes place. The pivotal point about pain is its inexpressibility. Quoting Virginia Woolf,³⁸ Scarry (1985: 4) shows how language can express the thoughts of Shakespeare's characters but "has no words for the shiver or the headache". Berger (2001: 446) knows this too: 'Of all experiences, systematic human torture is probably the most indescribable'. Améry would most likely have agreed, believing that 'it would be totally senseless to try to describe ... the pain that was inflicted on [him]' (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). Images such as 'a red-hot iron' and 'a dull wooden stake' come to his mind, only to be rejected immediately as comparisons that stand for each other, figurative speech as 'hoax' rather than clarification or illumination (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). Because 'qualities of feeling' are 'incomparable' as well as 'indescribable', to him they 'mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate' (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). Thus Améry (in Langer 1995) focuses on illustrating what pain did rather than on what it was, for him.

For her part, Scarry (1985: 5) explains that, unlike 'any other state of consciousness' pain 'has no referential content'. All our other feelings are for, or as a result of, someone or something – we love our children, and a good meal or a compliment makes us happy. But pain is 'not *of* or *for* anything', and because it 'takes no object' it 'resists objectification in language' (Scarry 1985: 5). It is tempting to counter Scarry's view by arguing that surely we can feel pain 'of' something. There is the pain of homesickness that results from exile; the pain of toothache, whose cause is obvious; the pain of bereavement that results from a loved one's demise. However, the pain in these cases, as in all cases, Scarry (1985) seems to be explaining, is caused by something. From a grammatical point of view, pain is the object in the preceding examples – exile, toothache and death are the subjects, and they bring about emotional or physical pain.

Like Berger (2001), as we see below, Scarry (1985: 4) proposes that pain 'does not simply resist language', it 'actively destroys it', reverting the sufferer 'to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human makes' before they learn how to form and utter words. To a certain extent, this was Améry's experience as well. He spent the first moments of his torture sweating and gasping, unable to speak, 'all [his] life' gathered in the 'single limited area' of his shoulder

³⁶ Thus in this case sympathy can never be enacted, in the sense that sympathy dissolves the awareness of distinction between one person and the other, as we have seen in Chapter 2 (page 100).

³⁷ Owing to the overall subject of her text, Scarry (1985) concentrates on physical pain, as does this section of this doctoral thesis. The topic of any noteworthy similarities and differences of other, less tangible kinds of pain to physical pain, and their causes and consequences, must be left aside.

³⁸ Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), English author and critic.

joints (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). And at some point in the proceedings he indeed cried out, in ‘strange and uncanny howls’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 123). But along with the pain, the torturer’s questions did not cease. And then Améry ‘move[d] up out of [the state of] pre-language’, in Scarry’s (1985: 6) terms, and ‘project[ed] the facts of sentience into speech’. In short, he talked, and thereby carried out what Scarry (1985: 6) suggests is ‘the birth of language’.³⁹ As we have seen above, he used language exactly in the hope of bringing the pain to an end.

Interestingly, because they were lies (Améry, in Langer 1995: 133), the responses Améry provided to the torturers’ incessant questions were as inaccurate as his descriptions of the inflicted pain would be. But in giving them something, in acquiescing to their wish by answering their questions, Améry was also contributing to the torturers’ power because, as Scarry (1985: 36) points out about torture victims in general, his ‘confession’ – ‘at the halfway point in the disintegration of language’ – was in their words.⁴⁰ His confession was in the kinds of words they wanted to hear, and therefore their voice and the voice of the Nazi regime behind them were ‘doubled’ (Scarry 1985: 36). By extension, then, and in my taking of a liberty with Michaels’s words, we can see how the ‘language of a victim [not] only reveal[ed]/ [but also empowered] the one who named him’ (What the Light Teaches 124).

From a position of two decades’ distance, Améry (in Langer 1995: 130) is able to see the ‘dangling bundle’ of his body – his arms ‘torn high from behind’ and ‘twisted over his head’ – as a ‘visual instruction in etymology’: the word ‘torture’ coming from the Latin *torquere*, to twist. His body was the very image of torture. In Scarry’s (1985: 27) formulation, torture ‘is itself a language’, in that it ‘demonstrat[es] and magnif[ies] the felt-experience of pain’. For Améry there was no imagining and thus no metaphor; the pain was most certainly felt. The picture is as clear in his mind’s eye as is the memory of the experience itself. While he concedes that ‘many things do indeed happen approximately the way they were anticipated in the imagination’, and thus certain elements of his arrest and torture fitted in with his assumptions,⁴¹ some other of those elements did not,⁴² and ‘when [the] event placed the most extreme demands’ on him, he found that ‘there [was] no longer any abstraction and never an imaginative power that could even [have] approach[ed] its reality’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 124).

In buying a newspaper, and being a man who bought a newspaper, Améry did something that did not differ from his imagining of doing it – such is the ‘codified abstraction’ that characterised ‘everyday reality’, ‘even in direct experience’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 125). In being tortured, by contrast, Améry (in Langer 1995: 125) was ‘thrust into a reality whose light blind[ed] [him] and burn[ed] [him] to the bone’. Moreover, the degree of torture did not dictate the extent of the prisoner’s experience of such reality – his ‘burns’ did not worsen in concurrence with the intensity of the torture – the very first blow indicated to him that he was ‘helpless’, and thus the blow serves as the source of everything to follow (Améry, in Langer 1995: 126). Possibility

³⁹ Nevertheless, Scarry (1985: 46) proposes, ‘the question, whatever its content, is an act of wounding’, and ‘the answer, whatever its content, is a scream’.

⁴⁰ Scarry furthermore provides numerous examples of words *for* torture worthy of the LTI (see, for example, Scarry (1985: 44)). And indeed, we need not look far to find the Nazis’ own words that refer to the act: ‘special treatment’ (*Sonderbehandlung*); ‘enhanced interrogation’ (*verschärfte Vernehmung*), also known as ‘intensified’ and ‘sharpened interrogation’. The latter phrase ‘appears to have been concocted in 1937, to describe a form of torture that would leave no marks’ (andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com).

⁴¹ ‘Gestapo men in leather coats’ pointed their pistols at him upon his arrest, as anticipated (Améry, in Langer 1995: 124). He was interrogated, as anticipated (Améry, in Langer 1995: 125).

⁴² The ‘auto’ in which he was taken to the headquarters was ‘different’, ‘the pressure of the shackles’ was a new experience, and while he had walked past the headquarters many times in the past, it had ‘other perspectives, other ornaments’ when he ‘cross[ed] its threshold as a prisoner’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 125).

became certainty; permitted to administer that first blow, the torturer was likewise authorised to continue, ‘to do with [the prisoner] what [he] wanted’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 126).

Like Bourdieu, Améry (in Langer 1995: 126) proposes that there exists in the world ‘written or unwritten social contracts’, according to which we all behave in relation to one another. We agree to respect each other’s ‘physical’ and ‘metaphysical beings’, he believes (Améry, in Langer 1995: 126). In this way, we establish trust, an understanding that we feel on our skin – as the ‘boundary of [our] body’ and ‘[our] self’ – ‘only what [we] *want* to feel’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 126). Améry himself lived according to this principle and never regained it once he lost it. The first blow shattered his trust in the world, and some 20 years later he confesses that he lost this trust anew ‘every day’ (Améry 1980: 25).⁴³ The Gestapo man who dealt him the first blows, and Praust and his henchmen, were torturers who fell ‘on’ him and thereby ‘destroy[ed]’ him (Améry, in Langer 1995: 126).

Another element of normal life was also lost. The expectation of help that we usually have in times of injury is flatly denied in the torture setting; with ‘the physical overwhelming by the other’ our ‘fundamental experience’ of ‘the certainty of help’ becomes our experience of the certainty of harm, ‘an existential consummation of destruction altogether’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 127). In this way, Breendonk represents for Améry (in Langer 1995: 128, 127) ‘the end of the world’, in its torturous environment ‘a part of [his] life end[ed] and ... [could] never again be revived’. ‘Intense pain is world-destroying,’ Scarry (1985: 29) confirms. Thus Améry’s views seem to share the sociological flavour of those of Bourdieu (1991), and for him the experience of broken trust ultimately means a concomitant and total break in social contracts: ‘The dominion of the torturer over his victim has nothing in common with the power exercised on the basis of social contracts, as we know it’ – it is instead ‘the power of the survivor’ over ‘the prey of death’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 136).

We now turn to Michaels’s rare literary presentations of torture. She does not dwell on the explicit details of the act of torture in *Fugitive Pieces*, nor do her two linked and specific portrayals of the act echo Scarry (1985) and Améry’s (in Langer 1995) abovementioned notions of language with regard to pain. In a way, however, Ben’s father embodies an anti-linguistic effect of torture. As we have seen in Chapter 2,⁴⁴ his response to his and Ben’s mother’s experiences as concentration camp prisoners is an ongoing and pervasive silence, under which boil his rage and despair (see *FP* 204, 218, 248). What little detail Ben knows of this part of his father’s life he learns in ‘strange episodic images’ from his mother, for example his terrible thirst on the enforced march back to the camp, ‘his tongue a thing of wool ... as he walked at gunpoint, past a bucket of rainwater’, he and his fellow inmates ‘praying for rain so they could swallow what fell on their faces’ (*FP* 216). Such a state, as quite possibly characterised many moments in the camp for those like him, is certainly a form of torture.

Jakob presents the two specific torture scenes in the novel. First, ‘in the Golleschau quarry’,⁴⁵ he tells us, ‘stone-carriers were forced to haul huge blocks of limestone endlessly, from one mound

⁴³ Levi (1960: 149) had had ‘an enormous, deep-rooted ... faith in the benevolence of fate’, which he acknowledges in hindsight as also being ‘foolish’. This is a deliberately restrained choice of words for someone who had regarded killing and dying as ‘extraneous literary things’ before the war, who experienced the trauma of the camp, and finally who, extremely ill himself, was in the process of tipping a dead hospital room mate onto the frozen edge of a pit overflowing with corpses when the first Russian soldiers crossed the limits of the camp, implying its liberation from the Germans (Levi 1960: 149, 187).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Chapter 2, page 91.

⁴⁵ By one account, the

Golleschau sub-camp was opened in July 1942 at a cement factory belonging to Ostdeutsche Baustoffwerke GmbH – Golleschauer Portland Zement AG. At its peak, in October 1944, it held 1,059

to another and back again' (FP 53). This is a form of torture, in Jakob's eyes, which Michaels subtly conflates in literal and figurative presentation, of the physical and the emotional: Staggering under the weight of the blocks, the people 'carried their lives in their hands' (FP 53). Literally and physically, they carry something, blocks of stone, that is extremely heavy. Unlike the Nazis, Michaels does not see their lives as expendable or meaningless – figuratively, their lives are just as weighty, or significant, as the stone. For many of them, reluctant to die as the people in the gas chambers were reluctant to die, their lives also carried emotional weight or meaning. There is further figurative action at work here: The ironic implication is that if the carriers fail in their assigned task and drop the blocks, they will probably be executed, but their continuing to perform the task will just as likely lead to their death, from exhaustion.

Second, Michaels links the case of the stone-carriers with that of the torturer, the abovementioned soldier who must humiliate his victim before inflicting death. This case exemplifies the form of torture whose 'primary goal is to bring about a change in the victim's self-conception' (Tindale 1996: 351). Even this soldier, a representative of the unthinking mass used by Hitler in the attempt to exterminate the Jews, at the crucial moment is aware of the irony – of his need for the Jew to be a man and not 'a "figuren"' (FP 166), in other words, something that is not human. And he is *also* aware that he must follow through, he must 'continue his [murderous] task' (FP 166). The stone-carrier's 'only chance of survival', in Michaels's view, is 'to fulfil his task as if he didn't know its futility'; similarly, the torturer goes about 'his job' as if 'he didn't know the lie' of man as non-human (FP 166). Such is the 'Nazi mechanism' (FP 166).

The torturer's behaviour seems to embody Hitler's abovementioned derisive, fearful attitude towards the Jews, as presented by Klemperer (2000) – he is enraged at finding the victim to be human, and 'his desire to destroy that humanness [was] so intense [that] his brutality had no limit' (FP 66). For the Nazis 'hated the word "humanity" like the pious man hates sin' (Améry, in Langer 1995: 129). Interestingly, this Nazi mechanism (Michaels) had the opposite effect for Améry. The Nazis never convinced him of being inhuman. Though he sees his body-centred experience of torture as a form of reduction – 'the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else' (Améry, in Langer 1995: 131) – he never had the sense of losing either his humanity or his mind. It was the torturer, by contrast, who was neurotic and even mad; it was their reality that oppressed him. Witness to 'the Germans' call for the Jews to "die like a dog!", to the rationalisation that the Jews 'were being arrested, so they must have done something [wrong]', Améry (1980: 26) views himself as having been 'a fully sane person' among 'madmen'.

'Quick as a weasel, tough as leather, hard as Krupp steel' as the torturer may have been, it was only through torture, that is, destruction, that the 'Hitler vassal' achieved his 'full identity', in Améry's (in Langer 1995: 128) view. While communism, though 'terrible', 'still symbolizes an idea of man', 'Hitler-Fascism was not an idea at all, but depravity' – thus Améry (in Langer 1995: 129) reiterates a suggestion made by Thomas Mann,⁴⁶ one which Klemperer would surely have supported, as he notes the descent of fascism into bestiality in the hands of the Germans.⁴⁷ The Nazis tortured 'to obtain information', they also tortured 'with the good conscience of depravity', but above all they tortured because they could and 'because they were torturers',

prisoners, of whom 1,008 were Jews. Some of them performed slave labor in the factory and nearby quarries. The sub-camp was liquidated on January 18–21, 1945. (en.auschwitz.org.pl)

By another account, 'Golleschau is just inside the Polish border with Germany some 40 kilometres southwest of Auschwitz (Oswiecim), near the town of Ustron' (holocaust-history.org).

⁴⁶ Thomas Mann (1875–1955), German novelist and essayist, who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1929.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 1, page 50. And Klemperer may well have concurred with Améry's (in Langer 1995: 129) suggestion that 'National Socialism ... could not claim a single idea, but did possess a whole arsenal of confused, crack-brained notions'.

placing torture ‘in their service’ and becoming ‘even more fervently ... its servants’ (Améry, in Langer 129).

Berger (2001: 446) tells us that the torturer’s training begins with ‘the ideological proposition that a certain category of people’ – the Jews, in this case – ‘are fundamentally different and that their difference constitutes a supreme threat’. The torturer’s function is illustrated linguistically, in the ‘tearing apart of the third person, *them*, from *us* and *you*’ (Berger 2001: 446). Moreover, they must be punished for the lie they embody. Here, too, as in Améry’s experience, the pivotal site is the body – ‘*their* bodies are lies because, as bodies, they claim *not* to be so different’ (Berger 2001: 446). ‘Torture is [the] punishment for this lie’, Berger (2001: 446) concludes. Améry may well have agreed.

Like Michaels’s torturer, Berger’s (2001: 447) torturer would continue to torture even if he began to question what he has learnt. For Michaels, he does so because he has made a choice – he has ‘decided to do his job’ (FP 166) in the face of the contradiction between man and non-human. Ironically, in doing so, in ‘reject[ing] [the] contradiction’, he has given himself a ‘lie’ to ‘live by’ (FP 66). For Berger (2001: 447), he continues to torture ‘out of fear of what [he] had already done’. In this state, he is either ‘damned’ (FP 166), or saved, torturing now ‘to save [his] own untortured skin’ (Berger 2001: 447), or surviving then in contrast to ‘the one who [was] plunged from the world into agony and death’ (Améry, in Langer 1995: 136).

For Améry (in Langer 1995: 125), torture is so ‘real’ – bringing him ‘face to face with ... [searing] reality’ – that it precludes all possibility of metaphor. But in line with Scarry’s (1985) thinking, in torture, however, metaphor *does* occur, in two ways. We explore the second way below. The first way in which it occurs is as a distorted mirror of Ricoeur’s formulation that malevolently turns metaphorical truth into metaphorical lie. We recall Ricoeur’s (1977: 7, 249, 255) presentation of the dual nature of metaphor, that is, its ability simultaneously to be and not be.⁴⁸ In torture, ‘is’ becomes ‘is something else’ and thus no longer what ‘is’ was originally. Domestic objects take on chilling form as agents of torture, as weapons: A refrigerator becomes (is) a bludgeon, the edge of a filing cabinet is a blade (Scarry 1985: 41).

Overtly, there was no domestic arrangement in the site of Améry’s torture; shackles and chains are not used in the home, and though the Breendonk vault was constructed of walls as is a house, he was not slammed into any of them. But there was a fundamental domestic arrangement in Améry’s own body – his physical home – being instrumental in causing his pain. The ‘muscular force’ with which he held himself ‘at a half-oblique’ angle immediately after his arms had been hung up behind him did not last long and he had no choice but to permit the ‘luxation’, the dislocation, of his shoulders (Améry, in Langer 1995: 130). This contradiction is just as ironic as the abovementioned contradiction pointed out by Michaels of the Nazis viewing the Jews as non-human, but at the same time needing them to be human so that they can humiliate them. Domestic objects – rags, pieces, wood, dolls – play a role there too, not as tangible weapons that can harm the Jews physically, but as metaphors that seek to harm them, as Améry (for example, in Langer 1995: 126) may say, metaphysically. Through the German language, Jakob points out, the Nazis ‘annihilated metaphor’ (FP 143) as it is meant to operate and forced it to operate in a different, that is, deformed, manner.

While there are no specifically domestic objects in the two scenes of torture presented by Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* – he leaves the ‘acts’ of ‘the citizens, soldiers, and SS’ as unspecified as he finds them ‘unspeakable’ (all from FP 166) – the limestone blocks carried by the Golleschau stone-

⁴⁸ See also Chapter 1, page 32.

carriers are indeed torturous in the role they play. Moreover, the simple domestic implements of the bucket of rainwater and also a cup of water become weapons used against Ben's father when the German soldiers deny him access to them (*FP* 216, 217). The metaphorical lie was that in causing him pain, Améry's body intended him to experience pain. The lie is that the limestone blocks must be carried; the possibility of the bucket and cup as tools for quenching thirst is a lie. The shower (another domestic site),⁴⁹ in the form of the gas chamber, lied in its semblance of normality and promise of cleanliness for the prisoners. In these ways, the perverted kind of metaphor seems to contribute to what Scarry (1985: 21, 27–157) names and elaborates as the 'unmaking' of the world that is a function of torture and pain.

The recuperative power of language

*Poems and novels 'exist both to celebrate
and help us to understand the nature of creating'.
(Scarry 1985: 314)*

The beneficence of language and naming in Fugitive Pieces

Several instances in *Fugitive Pieces* and Michaels's poems exemplify her attitude towards language as a recuperative force. In the following discussion, which focuses for some time on Jakob before paying attention to the poems' narrators and portrayals of language, it may seem as if the effects of language are just as negative for Jakob as they were in the above discussion of language's destructive power. He finds learning Greek and English a slow and painful series of experiences; initially, his 'numb tongue attaches itself, orphan, to any sound it can: It sticks, tongue to cold metal' (*FP* 95). The outcomes of the use of language by the Nazis were generally so negative that the only solution, Klemperer (2000: 14) suggests in the quotation used at the start of the section on the destructive power of language, is to 'bury' some of the words 'for a very long time', and others 'for ever'. By contrast, my argument is that the overall result of new-language acquisition in Jakob's case is positive. His tongue eventually 'tears painfully free' (*FP* 95), and Greek and English come to play a significant and beneficial role in his career as a translator and as a poet in his own right. Some of Michaels's poetic narrators and characters are similarly restored or supported by language, as we see below.

On the island of Zakynthos during the war, Athos and Jakob become closely acquainted – they 'entered a territory of greater and greater tenderness' (*FP* 22). 'Gradually, [they] learned each other's languages' (*FP* 21). Here, among other occasions in the novel, Michaels presents language in the metaphor of food, specific words being as nutritious to the spirit and mind as food benefits the body. The 'new words', vital to Jakob's education and Athos's continued guardianship of him, are 'foreign foods' which they take in at first as 'suspicious, acquired tastes' (*FP* 21). Athos does not let Jakob forget the Hebrew alphabet (*FP* 21), which as we learn in 'What the Light Teaches' (121) is the alphabet of the rich 'old language' that, if saved, can play a role in saving Jakob. But he also bestows on him the 'sad new powers' (*FP* 22) of Greek and English. From Athos, Jakob learns of the 'beloved' Zakynthoan poets Foscolo,⁵⁰ Kalvos⁵¹ and

⁴⁹ Scarry (1985: 41) also uses the 'shower', along with 'oven', 'lampshades' and 'soap', as examples of words – and elements of torture – that intensely evoke 'our awareness of Germany in the 1940s'.

⁵⁰ Ugo (Niccolò) Foscolo (1778–1827), Italian poet and novelist, born of a Greek mother and a Venetian father.

⁵¹ Andréas Ioannídis Kálvos (1792–1869), Greek poet, for six years secretary to Foscolo, who influenced his work greatly.

Solomos, the latter of whom ‘wrote the words to the national anthem there [on Zakynthos] when he was twenty-five’ (*FP* 27).⁵²

In Athens as a boy just after the war Jakob encounters graffiti serving as a form of resistance. Kostas explains that ‘no one wanted to erase’ the single symbols – ‘V – Vinceremo, we will overcome’, ‘M – Mussolini Merda’ – that the ‘graffitos’ had ‘scrawled’ onto the town walls during the occupation (*FP* 78). Because they risked immediate execution if discovered by the Germans, the graffiti’s actions required ‘swiftness’ and great ‘courage’ (*FP* 78). Nevertheless, their pronouncement of the single letters was ‘exhilarating’ (*FP* 78). ‘A spit in the eye of the oppressor’ (*FP* 78), their language was nothing short of heroic, as was that of another revered poet to whom Kostas alerts Jakob: Palamas.⁵³ With the aid of these creative artists, Jakob realises, Athos and Kostas are teaching him of ‘the power of language to restore’ (*FP* 79).

In brief diversion, an example used by Jakob of one of the Nazis’ many methods of torturing the Jews reveals itself to have a linguistically recuperative aspect. In a significant breaking of long-held silence, Michael W Klein, a real-life ‘stone-carrier’ just like those described by Jakob (*FP* 53), in the mid-1980s finally wrote about his experiences at the Auschwitz sub-camp of Golleschau. One particular experience focused less on the hard labour at the quarry and more on an instance in which a resounding utterance of defiance in the face of suffering and impending death served to raise to ‘the highest spiritual level’ (Klein n.d.) all the inmates forced to stand muster on the night of Yom Kippur.⁵⁴

At the age of 15, Klein (n.d.) witnessed the hanging of a friend for an attempted escape, but not before the friend cried out: “*Sh'ma Yisrael ...*”, “Hear O Israel”, thus ‘declaim[ing] the eternal proclamation of the Jewish people’s belief in one God’.⁵⁵ The man was hanged before he could complete the declamation (“the Lord our God is One”), nevertheless his initial outburst was enough to defy ‘evil’, ‘the Germans’, ‘the silence of humanity’ and ‘the silence of the Heavens’ (Klein n.d.). He was about to die, at that moment (as in so many other moments of the Holocaust) ‘God seemed to be totally absent’, but still he ‘proclaimed the Godliness of the Jewish People’ (Klein n.d.). This was a statement of faith in the very moment of despair, the idea we have touched upon in Chapter 2⁵⁶ and with which we see Jakob coming to grips below. Its effect was enlivening: Greatly heartened by the cry, greatly saddened by the death of the friend, Klein (n.d.) and the other inmates were able to save their ‘evening portion of bread’, starving though they probably were, for ‘the next evening’, for ‘the end of the Yom Kippur fast’.

Returning to the main discussion, we see Jakob again feasting on language in his first years together with Athos in Toronto after the war. He ‘shoved’ English into his mouth, ‘hungry for

⁵² ‘In 1942’, Jakob relates, an Athenian was shot for kneeling and singing that anthem in front of ‘the statue of the revolutionary Mavrocordatos’ (*FP* 60). Aléxandros Mavrokordátos (1791–1865) was ‘one of the founders and first political leaders of independent Greece’ (*EB* 2008).

⁵³ Kostís Palamás (1859–1943), Greek poet ‘who became the central figure in the demotic movement of the 1880s’ (*EB* 2008).

⁵⁴ Also known as the ‘Day of Atonement’, Yom Kippur is ‘the most solemn of Jewish religious holidays, observed on the 10th day of the lunar month of Tishri (in the course of September and October), when Jews seek to expiate their sins and achieve a reconciliation with God’ (*EB* 2008).

⁵⁵ This cry is also made in the production *A Survivor from Warsaw* by the Austrian-American composer Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951). Améry attended a performance of this production with a Jewish friend. Hearing the cry, his friend was visibly moved, but his own heart ‘did not beat faster’, Améry (1980: 28) comments. He could not attain the state and personhood of the ‘deeply stirred Jew’; he could be a Jew ‘only in fear and in anger, when – in order to attain dignity – fear transform[ed] itself into anger’ (Améry 1980: 29). His concern was not “‘Hear, oh Israel’”; “‘Hear, oh world’” wanted angrily to break out from within [him]’, demanded by ‘the six-digit number on [his] forearm’ (Améry 1980: 29).

⁵⁶ See Chapter 2, page 77.

it', though the accompanying 'gush of warmth' is mixed with panic at the loss of his history (all from *FP* 92), that is, the myriad cultural elements characterising his early, non-English childhood. The 'facts of war' begin to reach them 'through magazines and the newspapers' (*FP* 92), and Jakob tries to bury these images, which elicit his nightmares; he tries 'to cover them over with Greek and English words' (*FP* 93).

Through Athos, Jakob is gaining an invaluable but incomplete education. He is comfortable discussing geography and climate, and like a child he knows the basic common nouns such as 'bread, cheese, table, coat', but as yet he has no idea what the more colloquial terms 'cocktail' or 'Kleenex' mean (*FP* 95). He has some linguistic capital but little 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu). He also hears 'suspicions' when the word 'chickens' (both from *FP* 94) is barked by a grocery store manager in response to his request for fish. While the incident gently amuses Athos, for Jakob it is highly distressing. At this stage he is as acutely conscious of acquiring language as is an amputee of re-learning to walk – neither action comes naturally. For Jakob a 'heavy black outline' (*FP* 95) separates each thing from its name. Over time, Greek and English become his familiar companions, but he never really loses this awareness, as we see below, perhaps because it is inherent in his role as a poet.

In order to help Jakob to practise his vocabulary, Athos teaches him to play with language (*FP* 100). Each malapropism, each pun that Jakob invents represents for him a 'considerable achievement' (*FP* 100), because he understands that in this way – using puns, in particular – he grows familiar not only with single words but also phrases and whole sentences, and most importantly their cultural meanings. With his 'mastery of a new tongue',⁵⁷ he reaches 'the heart of comprehension' (*FP* 100). This is a foundation on which Jakob can build – from puns he moves to poetry, at first translating well-known poems into his own words, using his own choices of verb-less phrases and his own form of slang (*FP* 100). Here the intangible benefit of the education he receives from Athos begins to be revealed: 'Suddenly a word seemed to become itself, his grasp of English now has the quality of 'a quick clarity' (*FP* 100). This skill stands him in good stead, facilitating his introduction to translating into English poetry 'banned in Greece' (*FP* 108) – work that supports him through the rest of his life. He becomes proficient, as a translator moving 'from language to life', as a poet moving 'from life to language' (*FP* 109). Thereby he retains the identity of an outsider, because both kinds of writing require the ongoing attempt 'to identify', just as the immigrant does, 'the invisible, what's between the lines, the mysterious implications' (*FP* 109).

Initially wanting truth to be 'a single thing', in the poem 'Sublimation' (69) Alfred Doebelin then sees truth as 'a field, a cage, a cloud of sound' – in no other way can he

... reconcile the faces of those running away
with the faces of those turning away,
with the faces of those in uniform ...[;]

in no other way can his mind

... encompass both that crying and those
orders; the sound of my own voice
begging, and my voice telling jokes to the man

⁵⁷ The mastery is literal as well as figurative – Jakob's pride in punning on some 'famous words' of Silas Wright is not only in the pun itself, but also in his ability to pronounce it 'in impeccable Canadian English' (*FP* 99). Silas Wright is Sir Charles Seymour Wright (1887–1975), physicist, glaciologist and the only Canadian member of explorer Robert Falcon Scott's otherwise all-British expedition to discover the Antarctic (eu.wiley.com).

without shoes beside me on a train[.]

As a young adult fully immersed in dealing with his childhood trauma, wandering the streets at night while Athos writes of the Nazis' destruction of Biskupin in *Bearing False Witness*, Jakob feels *his* 'truth' is that his life cannot 'be stored in any language but only in silence'; everything leads towards and then follows from the crucial event that occurred to him as a child, that is, the silent 'moment [he] looked into the room and took in only what was visible [that is, his parents' murder], not vanished. The moment [he] failed to see Bella had disappeared' (FP 111).

But being unable to rely on silence for an answer to the riddle of where Bella was taken and what happened to her then, Jakob sees himself as a 'touch-typist who holds his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless [and] garbled' (FP 111). He imagines writing poems like this also – with 'every letter askew, ... loss would [thereby] wreck the language, become the language'⁵⁸ loss of meaning, loss of life, loss of understanding – all these can be so pervasive and intense as to break language down and reform it into something as difficult to comprehend as the events that caused such loss. Jakob's own poems of this time are all about the past – 'the forest' in which he hid as a refugee child, 'the burst door' of his parents' house on the fateful day, 'the minutes' he spent hiding 'in the wall' while his parents died and Bella was taken (FP 112). His attempt to 'restore order by naming' (FP 111) in this way is theoretically sound, but for some time the way in which he goes about it is inappropriate, as we have seen above.

Following Athos's death and Jakob's divorce from Alex, Jakob moves back to the house on the island of Idhra. There he 'finally began to feel [his] English strong enough to carry experience' (FP 162). He relinquishes the imaginative immersions-into-the-past that he takes in the poems that Maurice Salman calls 'ghost stories' (FP 163), and concentrates instead on genuine metaphor, precisely on 'the moment when language at last surrenders to what it's describing' (FP 162). In Ricoeur's (1977) terms, we can see this as another way – a meta-metaphorical way – of describing metaphor at work: Reference splits, literal meaning surrenders to metaphorical meaning. Jakob completes his first collection of poetry, *Groundwork*, in his second winter on the island (FP 164–5). As we learn later from Ben, who has a copy of the collection, Jakob dedicates the volume to his family, commenting that his love for them '*has grown for years in decay-fed soil*' (FP 206). Echoing the image of love that 'bursts up from the ground, fully formed' that concludes the poem 'Lake of Two Rivers' (12), Jakob sees this familial love as '*an unwashed roof*' that he '*pulled suddenly from the ground*' (FP 206). As Michaels (in *Gazette* 1997) reasons, following an event such as the Second World War, which traumatised faith in practical and philosophical ways, 'we must rebuild our faith in humanity from the ground up'.

It is around this time that Jakob relates his understanding of the Nazi manipulation of the German language to portray the Jews as something other than human, and of the 'harrowing contradiction' (FP 166) of the Nazis' need to humiliate the Jews before they killed them. We have examined both aspects above. Staring yet again at all the 'photos of strangers' (FP 167) that he has collected over the years, Jakob yet again tries to give Bella's death a place by imagining her in the camp and in the gas chamber. However, he has a revelation here that leads to his further pivotal realisations. One of the photographs is of the 'pyramid of flesh' (FP 168), formed by the prisoners in the chamber, that demonstrates their final bid for survival. In this photograph, Jakob perceives a similarity between 'the sounds of those who are in despair and ... of those who

⁵⁸ This topic is addressed further in Chapter 4 (pages 171–2).

want desperately to believe’, which is the source of his conclusion that ‘at that moment of utmost degradation ... is the most obscene testament of grace’ (FP 168).⁵⁹

Such faith in the face of apparent futility is also displayed by the stone-carriers in the Golleschau quarry that we have encountered above. Their ‘insane task’ – the carrying of the stone blocks – is ‘not futile only in the sense that faith is not futile’, Jakob suggests (FP 53). Like the people in the gas chambers, the stone-carriers stubbornly cling to life, excruciatingly taxing as it may be for them. They do not collapse under the blocks’ weight, nor do they relinquish their lives through purposefully failing to carry out the task. Their ‘faith in man’ is being ‘forced to change’, just as ‘mercilessly’ as is the faith in man of those in the gas chamber, ‘into faith’ (FP 168).

It is this series of conclusions that lead Jakob to realise both that his ‘*brokenness has kept [Bella] broken*’ (FP 169) and that ‘*to remain with the dead is to abandon them*’ (FP 170). His inability to let Bella go, in contrast to his ability to let his parents go, keeps him from practising the appropriate kind of remembrance. Below, we discuss Jakob’s perception of Bella as a ghost and then as a spirit. In Michaels’s formulation, ghosts are unnamed and inappropriately remembered. While Doebelin points out in ‘Sublimation’, as we see shortly, that living things can remain unnamed and still exist, it is the naming process that turns ghosts (that which and those who no longer exist) into spirits and enacts the appropriate form of remembrance. Thus, while seeing Bella as a ghost, in mistakenly, ‘brokenly’, perceiving her, Jakob keeps her broken. As with Michaels’s use of the words ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’, moreover, at first it may seem paradoxical for Michaels to suggest that remaining with someone means abandoning them. However, once we understand that, by keeping his sister close to him as a person whose existence is in question, Jakob is *too close* to Bella, we can also understand that he thereby forsakes her as a person who has died.

These realisations teach Jakob that neither by reconstructing the past with factual information, nor through imagining Bella’s journey from the house to the camp and her subsequent sufferings and death there, will he succeed in giving her death a place (FP 139). Michaels’s implication seems to be that no death can be given its place in this way. It is inappropriate to try to record death as objectively as possible, in the manner that Henighan (2002) and like-minded critics seem to uphold.⁶⁰ Instead, Jakob must learn to love and remember in a different way those he loves who have died and those who suffered alongside them. ‘We don’t stop loving people when they die,’ Michaels (in Grossman 1998) believes, ‘and we have to learn how to love them differently.’⁶¹ Supported by these realisations, and with Michaela’s aid, as we see below, Jakob learns to love Bella differently, to see her as a spirit, and thereby to accept the fact that her death has no place. His attempt to ‘restore order by naming’ (FP 111) at last proceeds in the appropriate way.

When Jakob and Michaela and Ben and Naomi meet, the latter couple are as yet unaware of Jakob’s specific realisations because Ben has not yet found and read Jakob’s notebooks. The realisations appear to Ben more generally as either ‘a remarkably simple truth or a remarkably simple lie’ that infuses Jakob with ‘such peace’ (FP 207). Jakob’s prolonged and arduous process of emotional development is complete, and this is reflected in the poems he writes towards the end of his life: ‘History ... casts its shadow on the page, but is no longer in [Jakob’s] words themselves’, Ben feels (FP 207). The gap, the black outline, between words and the things they

⁵⁹ In Chapter 2 (page 77), we have considered this metaphor and its implications as an example of Michaels’s ‘learned experience’, in Ricoeur’s (in Reagan 1996: 108) terms.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2, page 81.

⁶¹ Michaels applies the notion of ‘loving differently’ to her poetic subjects as well. Following the death of Denys Finch Hatton, for example, Karen Blixen has to learn ‘to love the air’ (Blue Vigour 102). Michaels selects the image of air here because towards the end of his life Finch Hatton learned to fly and died in 1931 when his small aeroplane stalled and crashed (Donelson 1999a).

represent has become for Jakob a link: ‘*The seam of density that separates leaf from air/ is not a gap, but a seal*’ (FP 268).

Upon discovering the Jewish market alongside the Greek neighbourhood in Toronto, as a teenager Jakob is ‘jolted with grief, listening ‘thin and ugly with feeling’ to the sounds of ‘the ardent tongue of [his] childhood’ spoken by ‘the cheese-seller and the baker’ (FP 101). In ‘What the Light Teaches’ (129), the narrator’s sister ‘translate[s] fear into love’; for Jakob, Yiddish will always represent ‘fear and love intertwined’ (FP 101). The alphabet of this language, as well as Polish, presumably, can never cast off its blackness; it will always be laden with memory. By contrast, towards the end of his life for Jakob English takes the form of ‘a revelation’ (FP 101). It is ‘an alphabet without memory’, and therefore it can ‘protect’ (both from FP 101) him from the damage that the trauma-laden languages of his early years in Poland have the power to inflict on him.

Greek and Hebrew – the legacies of Athos in that he taught Jakob the first and encouraged Jakob to maintain the second – also play a crucial role. Jakob’s first sight of Greek lettering reminds him of Hebrew (FP 16);⁶² later he envisages the Hebrew alphabet and the Greek ‘crossing the page to greet each other in the middle of historia’ (FP 169); later still, as we learn from Ben, the broadsheet of the last collection of poems that he writes before his death reflects English, Greek and Hebrew: ‘the Greek translation written in ink under the English, a shadow; the Hebrew translation written above, an emanation’ (FP 267). His understanding of his own work, his aims and himself achieves its fullest potential in the use of all three languages, and thus his linguistic capital (Bourdieu) is extensive in terms of featuring not socially apt terminology but the more important personally apt terminology.

The beneficence of language and naming in Michaels’s poetry

Bidding Jakob farewell for the moment, we now explore the manner in which certain of Michaels’s poetic narrators and characters are nourished by language. We furthermore examine the process of naming that also features in her poetry.

Like Bourdieu (1991), the narrator of ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ suggests that we do not enter the world as yet devoid of cultural background. Instead, we ‘rise from our histories’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11). ‘Faces press the transparent membrane/ between conscious and genetic knowledge’ and it is a ‘name’, a ‘word’ – bringing to mind Klemperer’s (2000: 138) all-important ‘single word’, mentioned above – that ‘triggers the dilatation’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11). ‘Dilatation’ is the widening of the cervix, an essential part of the process of giving birth. Michaels uses this image to imply perhaps both that the narrator and her addressee’s recent and older predecessors, or the ‘unknown cousins’ (Lake of Two Rivers 7) who appeared earlier in the poem, are pressing their faces to the ‘membrane’ to pass on their memories, and that the narrator and her addressee press their own faces to the membrane to gain those memories and personal details. The utterance of the name or the word dissolves the membrane and ‘motive is uncovered’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11), the narrator finds. The naming of a relative could elicit their life story, as well as the reasons behind their actions, which up to now may have seemed vague or mysterious.

In ‘Anna’ (19), Michaels suggests that it is in speaking the names of the people we love, calling them their names and having our names voiced by them, that we begin to see what love means. When they die, it is their name that is associated with death, and thus again our perception is enhanced – we start to see what death means (Anna 19). A failure in this, exemplified in the

⁶² The ‘ornate Greek script’ seems to Jakob ‘like a twisting twin of Hebrew’; both languages, Athos tells him, ‘contain an ancient loneliness of ruins’ (FP 21–2).

narrator and the community's failure to notice the death of the poem's subject (Anna 18), is registered in language and naming: The 'young girl[s]' name is 'turned ugly' by their 'deafness' (Anna 19).

In 'Sublimation' (67), all through Doebelin's exile, it is the sound of Niclas's voice, speaking their mother tongue, that 'call[s] [him] back to [him]self' – everything he writes in that period he attributes to her help. He must return to Germany, 'for the first time ... going/ where [Niclas] can't join [him]', Michaels suggests, in order to 'hear [his] language in every mouth' and to carry out the process essential to a writer – so that he can think (Sublimation 68). In the above- and below-mentioned poems we see some of the ways in which naming is significant and beneficial. Nevertheless, Doebelin points out that naming is not an essential characteristic of existence – that which is not named can still be alive. Music resolves 'the illusion that what's unnamed remains unformed' (Sublimation 68). We do not necessarily know what the notes of a Hindemith⁶³ composition are called, nor the style in which they are played, but we can still hear each one – in our auditory perception, they live. In Michaels's poem 'Words for the Body' (41), the narrator explains that the musician, too, can learn to relinquish the name, the word, the symbol, because as Casals⁶⁴ said: "The best musician learns to play what's not on the page".

We have seen in Chapter 2 that Modersohn-Becker was strongly dominated by her bodily hexis at the physical level – she continually struggled to behave in a manner that was on the one hand true to her independent and artistic self, and on the other hand acceptable to her more conventional family and friends, and at the time of her demise it was not clear whether she had found a happy medium between the two. At the linguistic level, the domination seems to be evident in the letters she exchanges with her parents, husband and other relatives. In their letters to her, for instance, her parents offer and then retract the offers of independence; they allow her to pursue a painting career while implying that they have little faith in her talent (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 498). Thus they place her in a similar kind of 'double bind' position that Ben experiences in *Fugitive Pieces*,⁶⁵ though because this takes place in her young adulthood, when her life experience is more developed than when she was a child, the situation is even less likely to lead her to invent a new world than it is in Ben's case. It may be extremely irksome for her, but it would not be traumatic.

For her part, while studying art in Berlin in her early 20s, Modersohn-Becker describes herself in a letter to her parents as being 'inside ... still just as nervous and anxious as [she] was when [she] was young', and changing the subject to a women's suffrage lecture that she had attended, she goes on to criticise some 'modern⁶⁶ women' for speaking about men in 'an indulgent, rather scornful way', which immediately put her 'on the men's side' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 65). 'I guess little Paula is going to let the great men of the world carry on and I'll continue to trust in their authority,' she concludes (Busch & Reinken 1983: 65). Similarly, she signs the 1903 letter to Otto that has been quoted in Chapter 2,⁶⁷ 'Your little Wife in the big city of Paris' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 291), providing another of the many instances of 'little' as a self-denomination in her letters to him and to her parents (Busch & Reinken 1983).

⁶³ Paul Hindemith (1895–1963), German composer and leading musical theorist. His way of thinking resembles that of Bourdieu (1991), regarding as he does 'the composer as a craftsman' who turns out 'music to meet social needs' (EB 2008).

⁶⁴ Pablo Casals (1876–1973), Spanish-born cellist and conductor.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 2, page 91, footnote 71, and pages 93–4.

⁶⁶ 'Modern' was a word that Modersohn-Becker's father and husband 'used disparagingly' (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 502).

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, page 99.

We know, with Friedrichsmeyer's (1991) help, that Modersohn-Becker inhabited or experimented with differing personae in her letters, journals and paintings.⁶⁸ Perhaps her journals – her writing that was both personal and intended for empathic ears⁶⁹ – served as a mediator between the letters and the paintings. She seems to have been least comfortable with herself in her letters, tense as they were with her effort to please the recipients, and she was perhaps most comfortable with herself in her self-portraits, bold as they were in her effort to convey her self-confidence. In her journals she could have rationalised the unease that pervaded her roles of daughter and wife, and allowed herself to entertain thoughts and views that resulted in the more assertive approach she took in her paintings.

The more comprehensive study of her journals necessary to prove this idea is beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis, but Friedrichsmeyer's (1991: 503) following suggestion may serve to support the idea here: 'In her journals Modersohn-Becker was able to give the word "modern" an entirely different treatment from that in the letters, and one more compatible with her aspirations as a painter'. Not only did she encourage her brother to read many 'modern things' to raise himself from his 'rooted[ness] in the ideas of the previous generation' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 182; paraphrased in Friedrichsmeyer 1991), she also demonstrated in her paintings her ongoing 'artistic struggle to ... ally herself with the "moderns"'⁷⁰ (Friedrichsmeyer 1991: 503). If the view of her journals as a mediating force is true, then the partially linguistic domination that she experienced was of a positive as well as a negative nature.

The preceding ideas centring on the letters, journals and paintings concern Modersohn-Becker, the real person. Her letters are hardly mentioned in the poem, other than the 'year of envelopes' on which she wrote her husband's name, 'until [she] finally saw/ the shape of it: Otto – two bodies, two mouths' (Modersohn-Becker 79–80). Yet language, in the form of poetry, has an instructive effect on her life because it is Rilke, husband of her close friend, Clara, from whom she learns about love, 'just [by] watching him hold a cup or peel an orange' (Modersohn-Becker 82).⁷¹ Perhaps she had also watched him writing – she likens 'words on a page' to 'black roofs' bleeding 'through thin snow' (Modersohn-Becker 82). Modersohn-Becker believes that, in times of separation, when she and her husband are 'not speaking with skin', in other words, when they are not able to make love, they 'must love with language' (both from Modersohn-Becker 86), that is, they must write letters of love to each other. She goes on to suggest that Rilke 'would say that's even more intimate' (Modersohn-Becker 87) than lovemaking, as letters can employ metaphor to convey a combining of the heart and the mind of the writer and to elicit such combining in the receiver: Metaphor is activated

the instant words become picture,
leaping from his throat, to my inner eye. (Modersohn-Becker 87)

It is a testament to language's recuperative force that, first, Michaels can present in it the function of metaphor so precisely, succinctly and evocatively, and second that troubled as

⁶⁸ See Chapter 2, page 98.

⁶⁹ In 1901 she sent Rilke her diary – her 'thick book', her 'childlike book', of which 'the first part is not [her] at all' and of which 'a few parts' are 'too much [her]' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 236) – and in the previous year she wrote in her journal that she had had 'some thoughts' that she wished to record 'for the people [she] loves' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 195; paraphrased in Friedrichsmeyer 1991).

⁷⁰ Her attempt was so successful, it seems, that she is considered to have helped to introduce the modern style of the Post-Impressionist painters to the German art world (EB 2008).

⁷¹ However, Modersohn-Becker soon acknowledges that Rilke's 'kind of love deepens/ only with loss' (Modersohn-Becker 82). She perhaps challenges him to avoid becoming mired in angst and negativity by telling him not to be 'a "writer"', but to 'stay/ a man who writes!', to which he rather condescendingly responds, "What do you know about it, Paula?" (Modersohn-Becker 82–3).

Modersohn-Becker is about her various roles in life, she can still take pleasure in exchanging resonant, loving letters with her husband.

Loving letters can also traverse the boundary between life and death. In the poem ‘The Hooded Hawk’ (173), the narrator paraphrases Colette:⁷²

... when one we love dies
there’s no reason to stop
writing them letters.

We can see some of Michaels’s other poems as letters, in the broad sense of the term, to the beloved dead. ‘Blue Vigour’ is Blixen’s letter to the deceased Finch Hatton; she speaks of her love for him continuing as a love for the space that he inhabited and that they shared – the Ngong hills that ‘gather [her] in’ as she loves him, ‘each particle of green and/ each animal part of life’, as well as ‘the air’ (Blue Vigour 101–2). ‘The Second Search’ is at least partially based on Curie’s journal that also, according to Nichols-Pecceu (2000: 872), takes an epistolary form in addressing the deceased Pierre Curie directly; Curie addresses her husband thus in the poem as well, but speaks of her love for him – which grows in size as the time they live together increases in length (The Second Search 160) – in the past tense.

Slightly by contrast, while Kathleen Scott does not use ‘Ice House’ to address her deceased husband in the form of a letter, precisely, she nevertheless simultaneously mourns his death and expresses her love for him in the present tense – she ‘love[s] [him] as if [he]’ll [still] return/ after years of absence’ (Ice House 168). Finally, perhaps we can see ‘The Hooded Hawk’ itself as a kind of loving letter, from the narrator to Wiseman. The last time that she sees her – ‘in [her] last apartment,/ early winter/ late afternoon’ (The Hooded Hawk 173) – mirrors many previous series of moments spent together, discussing Walter Benjamin,⁷³ listening to Wiseman’s mother’s descriptions of her dolls, which formed stories – ‘he’s the French type .../ ... likes to chase after women ...’, the Englishman who is ‘more mature for his responsibilities’ because his wife is pregnant – and sharing the Thanksgiving meal (The Hooded Hawk 170–1). At this last visit, Wiseman’s face expressed affection – ‘the tenderness of a hand’ (The Hooded Hawk 173) – that was perhaps not only for all those she was ‘with’, all those whom she remembered, but also for the narrator.

While Karen Blixen does not seem to be dominated at the linguistic level, precisely, the poem ‘Blue Vigour’ shows external and internal guiding factors that are particularly strong in relation to her writing. By the time she arrived in Africa she had had some short stories published in a magazine, and in the years following her final return to Denmark her two volumes of short stories – *Seven Gothic Tales* and *Winter’s Tales* – as well as *Out of Africa* and a novel that she wrote under a different pseudonym were all published.⁷⁴ Not only does she tell stories about other people, she also tells the one of herself, in her memoir *Out of Africa* and also here, in Michaels’s ‘Blue Vigour’. As the poem indicates, she feels that her own ‘life’ is a ‘story’, as she had ‘lived through [more than one] war’, ‘made [her] home in a country/ not [her] own’ and ‘learned/ to love one man’ (Blue Vigour 99).

⁷² (Sidonie-Gabrielle) Colette (1873–1954), French writer.

⁷³ Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Jewish-German literary critic.

⁷⁴ The film version of *Out of Africa*, in which the role of Blixen is played by Meryl Streep and that of Finch Hatton is played by Robert Redford, implies that Blixen started writing as a result of Finch Hatton’s great pleasure in and encouragement of her storytelling. Biographer Linda Donelson (in Neumueller 1999) denies this suggestion, arguing that Blixen ‘had been writing ... from girlhood’.

Blixen is aware, too, that she has flouted convention by being in love with Finch Hatton, and because he is ‘not [her] husband’, she has become the subject of gossip, ‘[her] life becomes the story everyone else tells’ (Blue Vigour 99). Finch Hatton is away on safari for long periods of time, and it is words that help Blixen through perhaps a great sense of loneliness: The external guiding factor of his ‘expectation’ of ‘another story’ on each return ‘lets [her] love [him]/ when he’s gone’, and ‘were it not for words’, the internal guiding factor of her ‘wanting’ him ‘would have both encased [her]/ and driven [her] out of [her] skin’ (Blue Vigour 101). Thus, ‘each day [she] write[s] to greet [him]’ (Blue Vigour 101).

‘When there are no places left for us,/ this is where we’ll still meet,’ asserts the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ (117). Thus the poem provides a place for those who no longer have any place and who at some future point will have no place, that is, the narrator’s deceased relatives and the narrator and her sister, who are growing older and who will also die. The place is the sister’s farm, site of their personal history – it contains the river that has often ‘been bruised by [their] bodies’; it has trees planted by the sister grown to twice the height of a person (What the Light Teaches 117). In the farmhouse, ‘everything [is] familiar’ to the narrator (What the Light Teaches 118).

As we see in Chapter 4, the inappropriate kind of forgetting arrests the two women while walking on the farm. In order to move – in order to relieve their sense of proximity to the Jewish cousins, the Nazis’ victims, the women ‘try to withstand memory/ with memory, to go back further’ (What the Light Teaches 121) to the generations living before the Holocaust. Therefore they recall not only the Kochtobel dacha and the River Moyka in Petersburg, but also ‘poems in the old language’ (What the Light Teaches 121), the rich, traditional language whose negative transformation we have explored above. ‘Even [their] parents can’t speak’ it – either because they never learned it, or because by the time they did learn it it had become the language of the oppressor – but in the mouth of the narrator’s sister its sounds are as ‘natural as cicadas’ and ‘bird calls’ (What the Light Teaches 121). It is the source of Michaels’s suggestion – in flawless illustration of the notion of language as a recuperative force – that ‘what we save,/ saves us’ (What the Light Teaches 121).

Through ‘language’, through naming, moreover, ‘ghosts enter the world’ (What the Light Teaches 121).

They gather
in the white field and look up,
waiting for someone
to write their names. (What the Light Teaches 121–2)

Fulfilling their expectation would have a beneficial effect, Michaels hereby proposes – remembering the dead in the living world by writing their names would return to them their identity. Thus naming, in Michaels’s hands, is another form of restoration, of changing ghosts into spirits, and of creating anew that which already exists, akin to the re-creational act elaborated by Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996).⁷⁵ To counter words that become horrific in the Holocaust context – like ‘number’ and ‘oven’ – the narrator presents the equally ‘simple’, ‘translatable’ words ‘tea’ and ‘dacha’ and ‘river’ ‘to raise’ herself and her sister ‘to new meaning’ (all from What the Light Teaches 122), to cleanse their language of the oppressors’ presence. In Chapter 4, we see one or two more instances of the beneficial nature of naming.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 2, page 75.

The narrator is as aware of language's potential deficiency as is Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces*, its characteristic 'outline' and 'circling [of] absence' (What the Light Teaches 125). 'Truth is why words fail,' she suggests (What the Light Teaches 125). But while truth cannot be captured and presented by words alone, 'language/ can [also] remember truth when it's not spoken' (What the Light Teaches 125). It is through language that we learn from Jakob of the truth of faith: that at 'the end of strength' (*FP* 12), at the point of utmost despair – when we 'reach/ what breaks in us', as the narrator of 'What the Light Teaches' (125) describes it – our faith in man becomes faith (by) itself (*FP* 168). Then, we can 'penetrate heaven' (What the Light Teaches 125), the narrator claims. In 'praying', she tells us, through which the swaying people 'on the trains' illustrate their faith in the face of an impending death of which they may or may not be aware, they are 'wresting words/ not from silence,/ but from the noise of other words' (What the Light Teaches 125).

Similarly, at times, the narrator fears that she herself will become lost in 'the forest of words', from which 'the only way out [is] to write [her]self into a clearing,/ which is silence' (What the Light Teaches 129). She fears that she and her sister will not be able to 'wrest' (What the Light Teaches 125) their words from 'the clattering branches' (What the Light Teaches 129), that very 'noise of other words' (What the Light Teaches 125). However, she is finally soothed by the sound of her sister's voice in her head: 'When [her] heart listens/ through the cold stethoscope of fear,' her sister's voice 'reminds [her]/ of what the light teaches' and 'slowly ... translate[s] [her] fear into love' (What the Light Teaches 129). This translation is the culmination of the lesson of the 'light' that we explore in detail in Chapter 4, as it is closely linked with Michaels's presentation of the appropriate form of remembrance.

Marie Curie 'wrote out her grief' (Michaels 2001: 190), as we know, in a private mourning journal when her husband died suddenly. Having made the various scientific discoveries with him, Curie must make a second search, as indicated by the poem's title, 'The Second Search', to 'retrieve' him after his death. In this attempt, Curie is aided by figurative language. According to Nichols-Pecceu (2000: 877), it is in the 'rhetoric of radioactivity' that Curie 'finds the metaphor for embodying the connection between herself and Pierre, between self and other in her writing'. Quoting from a passage (in French) in which Curie describes her sensations on the day of her husband's funeral, the critic elaborates:

Words such as "accumulation" and "condensant" describe experimental processes; both the *accumulateur* and the *condensateur* were machines used in the Curie's [sic] lab to store the energy released during a chemical reaction. In this passage, Pierre's body is transformed metaphorically into a mineral emitting energy that is absorbed by Marie. ... Like language, the rays figure presence and communication. The division between self and other is traversed and Marie internalizes the experience: "*je m'absorbe dans la contemplation de la vision interieure*" (181). (Nichols-Pecceu 2000: 877)

Michaels confirms this demonstration of connection and internalisation in her poem. Even before Marie and Pierre were married, Marie 'felt [him] through [her] clothes, like the radium kiss' that burned into their colleague Becquerel's 'belly' through his 'vest pocket' (The Second Search 160). Married and collaborating in their investigations, Marie and Pierre cannot avoid at least partial contact with the chemicals they are dealing with – their 'skin/ was wool, long gloves eating [them]/ to the bone' (The Second Search 161).⁷⁶ Pierre's death leads Marie to conclude

⁷⁶ Curie 'always said' that the work she and her husband did together 'was a combination of two closely related minds': She analysed the uranium ores with which they worked for any trace of radium, while he examined the 30 odd elements within the ores 'to determine the amount of ionization that each sample produced' (Carter Wood 1938: 380).

that ‘everything we⁷⁷ touch burns away’ (The Second Search 162). Months after the death, she realises that she ‘can only find [Pierre]/ by looking deeper’ (The Second Search 163), ‘no longer see[ing] the world/ with [his] eyes, but see[ing] [him]/ in the world’ (The Second Search 162), and at the end of the poem, the connection is as strong as ever – Marie’s ‘hands burn/ all the time’ (The Second Search 163).

Finally, while the poem ‘Ice House’ does not actually reflect the fact, Michaels’s (2001: 190) Notes explain that Falcon Scott and his wife ‘had made a pact to keep a daily journal for each other’ while he attempted to reach the South Pole. As demonstrated in the poem, Scott is comforted in her loss by her husband’s Antarctic ‘journals’; though they had been ‘scavenged’ by ‘newspapers’ and ‘politicians’ eager for a share in Falcon Scott’s near-victory, ‘[his] words never lost their way’ to her (Ice House 168).

Language restored by the exercise of imagination

As we have seen above, metaphor occurs in perverted form in torture, and is related to Scarry’s (1985) notion of the unmaking of the world. Metaphor occurring in the benevolent form that we have discussed just above relates to Scarry’s (1985: 22, 161–326) notion of the ‘making’ of the world that is a function of imagination. Imagination, Scarry (1985: 162) suggests, is ‘the only [other] state that is as anomalous as [is] pain’. Pain as presented by Scarry (1985), we remember, has no object – we feel it because an experience causes us to feel it, we do not feel it of or for anything or anyone else. Imagination, by contrast, is inseparable from objects – it *is* its objects. ‘It is impossible to imagine without imagining something,’ Scarry (1985: 164) argues. We feel pain when we are in pain, but we do not *feel* pain in imagining feeling it.

‘Physical pain then is an intentional state without an intentional object; imagining is an intentional object without an experienceable intentional state’ (Scarry 1985: 164). This idea seems to further illuminate Gubar’s (2002) notion of empathic identification, and the fundamental distinction between sympathy and empathy being awareness of difference.⁷⁸ The sympathetic person seeks to share the troubled person’s woe because she thinks she is the same as he, while the empathic person seeks to share the troubled person’s woe knowing that they are separate beings. And now we see that the identification, the placing of oneself in another’s position through exercising our imagination, is by its very nature empathic: We imagine our troubled friends’ woe, but we do not (cannot) feel their pain.

Clearly, physical pain is literally unsharable. My sprained ankle may make my friend flinch, because once she too sprained her ankle and felt the attendant pain. But my condition will not actually make her feel the pain I am feeling. Nor would I be able to make her feel that pain by describing it to her in detail: ‘When I stand up and put weight on my foot it feels as if a knitting needle is stabbing into my ankle joint. And when I sit down and put my foot up on a cushion, my ankle throbs as though someone were squeezing it’. My friend may commiserate a great deal, but she will still be able to sit next to me comfortably and get up and walk to the kitchen with ease. The inability of language to express pain, as presented by Scarry (1985), is evident in the need for me to use the phrases ‘as if’ and ‘as though’ in my descriptions. But it is paradoxically the metaphorical nature of these phrases that points to the ability of language, as a vehicle for imagination, to facilitate or enact a sharing of pain.

⁷⁷ I suggest that here Curie is referring both to herself and to people in general.

⁷⁸ See Chapter 2, page 100.

For while pain is involved in destruction, imagination is involved in creation.⁷⁹ ‘The story of *physical pain* becomes as well the story about the expansive nature of human *sentience*, ... just as the story of *expressing* physical pain eventually opens into the wider frame of *invention*,’ Scarry (1985: 22) explains. As indicated above, I am not the only person in the world to have sprained my ankle. Hearing my specific descriptions of the pain the sprain caused, my friend and other people may be able to respond that *they* know how it feels. Thus the experience is shared among us. It becomes a common experience to the extent that, over time, we invent a common name or phrase to describe it.

The ‘elemental’ phrases ‘as if’ and ‘as though’ ‘lead out into an array of counterfactual revisions’ (Scarry 1985: 22), of which Michaels provides an appropriately evocative example in *Fugitive Pieces*. She presents the sensation we call ‘pins and needles’ metaphorically but also physically, in the feeling of tingling that causes mild pain. Athos breaks the move he and Jakob are making from Greece to Canada to stay for a few days in Athens with the Mitsialises. On the day that they arrive and sit in Kostas and Daphne’s living room, ‘dusty and tired’ (*FP* 61), Jakob is furthermore overwhelmed not only by his recent emotional trauma but also by the vivid light and colours of the city. He is distracted by ‘a little dish of wrapped candies on the table’, which ‘gave [him] a painful glimmer’ (both from *FP* 61) that affects him both literally and figuratively.

Literally, he has known various degrees of hunger for weeks, and the full dish before him likely seems a luxurious source of easing that suffering. He does not understand that he is allowed ‘to help [him]self’ (*FP* 61) to the sweets, and thus the glimmer could be painful for him in the form of anticipation of unknown duration. There are two possible figurative implications: First, in earlier, more comfortable times, perhaps his parents had had the same habit of keeping a bowl of sweets on the living room table, in which case the painful glimmer would be the reminder of the people and the home life he recently lost. Or, second, he could be almost numbed by his trauma and the arduous and upsetting journey thus far, and the sight of the sweets could trigger within him a flash of feeling, a glimmer that is painful as any return, however brief, to sensation after numbness is likely to be. This last possibility is borne out by the conclusion of the image. Michaels locates the predominantly emotional event in the physical body: Jakob experiences the painful glimmer as akin to the moments ‘when part of you falls asleep and then blood returns to the place’ (*FP* 61).

We have encountered the concept of the quale in Chapter 2.⁸⁰ Lodge (2002: 12) readily acknowledges that the example he cites from *Fugitive Pieces* is one of many that Michaels provides. The image I discuss here is surely another such example. In Scarry’s eyes, language fails to facilitate the expression of pain. Neuroscientists and artificial intelligence researchers may concur with her view, as ‘brain scans’ show that ‘qualia are produced by the same pattern of neuronal activity in any subject’ and it is therefore portrayal in ‘natural language’ that makes the qualia ‘seem uniquely subjective’ (Lodge 2002: 9). However, as Lodge (2002: 13) argues, qualia ‘verbalis[e]’ the ‘nonverbal’, implying that thereby they elicit in us a sharing of sensations and experiences. In the abovementioned image, Michaels appears to succeed as far as is possible in expressing a form of physical pain that many of us have felt and therefore can ‘feel’ again in our imaginations, whether we feel it in exactly the same way or not.

⁷⁹ This formulation, while being useful as a link between ideas in this doctoral thesis, would be simplistic in application to Scarry’s entire project in *The Body in Pain*. She does not merely contrast the infliction of pain with the act of imagining. For her, these acts are also interwoven in various ways: The discovery of ‘the structure of torture’ is also the discovery of ‘the relation between physical pain and imagining’; and because torture ‘entail[s] the appropriation, aping, and deconstructing of the territory of creating’, it ‘entail[s] some of the very elements’ of imagining (Scarry 1985: 161).

⁸⁰ See Chapter 2, pages 85–6.

The act of imagining, of making, according to Scarry (1985: 21), consists of two activities: The act of ‘mental imagining’, or ‘making-up’, is followed by the act of ‘making-real’, that is, ‘endowing the mental object with a material or verbal form’. In the first activity, Michaels thinks about, she imagines, the Jews of Zakynthos. But, through Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* (40), she does not simply convey the literal meaning of these people’s war-time situation by writing that they run into the hills to escape being caught by invading German soldiers. She exercises her authorial skill and prerogative, and tells us about the Jews in figurative language. She follows the process described by Ricoeur (1977) in which she makes the literal meaning surrender to the metaphoric meaning. Michaels imagines the Jewish people hiding in the hills and caves of Zakynthos. She pictures them being so quiet, so still, that they appear stone-like. But they remain alive, and thus Michaels chooses something that is both living and ‘stony’ to represent them: coral. In so doing, she is also providing an example of Ricoeur’s (1977) metaphorical truth: The Jews are human, they are not made of coral. But for a time the Jews are stone-like as well; in order not to be conspicuous, they cease to be moving, talking humans. In Scarry’s (1985: 307) terms, Michaels ‘projects’ her ‘perception’ of the Jews as coral into the ‘object’ or ‘freestanding artifact’, which is her novel *Fugitive Pieces*.

As part of the process of creating, the object or freestanding artefact is ‘invested with the power of creating’ (Scarry 1985: 312) so that it can return the perception to the human realm and recreate us with that perception when we receive it. We could be excused for, but we would be mistaken in, assuming that the artefact is also a ‘freestanding creator’ (Scarry 1985: 310). The novel or the poem is separate from Michaels herself, but it does not create the perception; it is ‘a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site’ (Scarry 1985: 307). The projection (the projected perception) is reciprocated by the lever. In other words, the lever or object is the means by which Michaels conveys her perception to us, her readers, who occupy the human realm just as she does.

And here occurs the second activity, the act of ‘making-real’ (Scarry), for when the perception has been returned to the human realm or site – when the perception has been reciprocated – it ‘remake[s] human sentience’, it ‘remakes the makers’, Scarry (1985: 307) suggests. By presenting writers and readers as existing in the same place and being affected by the world, and by the world of the text, in the same way, Scarry (1985) differentiates herself from Certeau (1984), who as we know proposes that readers have no place and must insinuate themselves into a text in order to interpret it.⁸¹ Michaels may well agree with Scarry. The world, she believes, is in ‘a state of perpetual change’; it is ‘seen and re-seen through our [equally dynamic] consciousnesses’ (Michaels 1994: 15). To her, the ‘successful poem’ not only demonstrates our changing vision, but also presents a vision of us, as writers and readers – we ourselves are ‘seen and re-seen’ (Michaels 1994: 15).

The ‘great poem’s grace’ is that it ‘seems as inexhaustible as our [evolving] experience’, concludes Michaels (1994: 15). Just as the tailor makes the coat not for the sake of making it, but for the sake of helping the wearer to feel warmer,⁸² so Michaels writes her poems and novels not for the sake of writing them, but for the sake of giving us the opportunity to become aware of her perceptions, to perhaps learn something brand new or to gain a different perspective on something we knew already, about ourselves and the world around us. I had not been aware of the Jewish people of Zakynthos before I read *Fugitive Pieces*. Michaels’s coral metaphor informed me of them and their need for self-concealment not only as historical fact, but also as providers

⁸¹ See Chapter 1, pages 16 and 21.

⁸² See also Chapter 2, page 66.

of metaphorical truth (Ricoeur) – as being capable of stillness such as stones are capable of stillness, while palpably not being stones.

In the mid-1800s John Ruskin⁸³ coined the term ‘pathetic fallacy’ to censure certain writers’ tendency to attribute human actions and feelings to inanimate objects, giving life or consciousness to rocks and rivers, for example. Today, the term is still used for that literary device, but much more neutrally. Michaels takes it further. Rather than stating ‘they wait like coral, still as stone’ or ‘they wait like coral, only half-alive’, Jakob tells us that the hidden Zakyntos Jews ‘wait like coral; half flesh, half stone’ (FP 40). Thus Michaels hones the pathetic fallacy to even greater accuracy – through Jakob she sustains the quiddity, and thereby the efficacy, of the coral metaphor as a whole by ensuring that each component works in its own context, that is, by providing a counterpart for the Jews in something that is inanimate, but also alive, like them; and she provides a counterpart for coral in something that is alive, but also inanimate, like it. By means of images such as this in her poems and novels, she ‘enters into and in some way alters [our] alive percipience’ (Scarry 1985: 307).

In brief diversion, in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob perhaps exemplifies the ‘special case’ that all autobiographers would seem to represent in Scarry’s imaginative domain. Jakob writes poetry and a record of his life and is therefore a creator in the normal way, as creators are presented by Scarry (1985). His poems and memoirs are his objects or artefacts, and in reciprocation they seem to have altered his own ‘alive percipience’. As ‘ghost stories’ (FP 163) his early work reflects his inappropriate approach to mourning Bella, and his later work reflects the changes wrought by his profound introspection and interpretation of the factual research that he has conducted, changes that contribute to his taking the appropriate approach to mourning. His work seems to have altered the alive percipience of his readers too, particularly Ben, as we have seen in Chapter 2.⁸⁴ The great popularity of the novel among the reading public also suggests that their percipience has been altered as well. But perhaps he becomes also *his own* object or artefact. From a biographical point of view, Ben muses that in contrast to the more usual case in which ‘a man’s behaviour’ differs from ‘his words’, in Jakob’s case ‘there seemed to be no gap between the poems and the man’ in the last years of his life (FP 207). This is logical, Ben suggests, ‘for a man who claimed to believe so completely in language’ (FP 207).

Jakob’s poems appear always to be about himself, his life and those he loves. The earlier poems return to the pivotal traumatic event of his childhood, the volume *Groundwork* representing for Ben ‘how [Jakob] descended into horror slowly, as divers descend, with will and method’ (FP 266). However, the implication seems to be that while Jakob is remembering Bella inappropriately, his words and his life are separate; like the other writers to whom Ben refers when giving his impressions of his first meeting with Jakob, Jakob perhaps tries to ‘put everything into his work that he couldn’t put into his life’ (FP 206–7), the word ‘everything’ possibly implying a clearer understanding of his familial loss and its consequences. This seems to be the case because, as Ben considers while being alone on Idhra, Jakob’s later poems – the poems ‘from those few years with Michaela’ in which he enjoyed profound peace and contentment – demonstrate that ‘[his] words and [his] life [are] no longer separate, after *decades of hiding in [his] skin*’ (FP 267). These poems portray Jakob and Michaela’s close bond in ‘the *circular language* of Michaela’s arms’, and the ‘moment of pure decision’, the moment Jakob brought his ‘life entire to another’, ‘*shaking like a compass needle*’ (FP 267). Jakob’s memoirs are by their very nature autobiographical; his poems seem to be autobiographical as well. In this way, Michaels seems to present us with a character that comes as close as possible to inhabiting his own texts – or ‘being’ those texts both by generating them and by providing their subject matter.

⁸³ John Ruskin (1819–1900), English critic of art, architecture and society; also a painter and a prose writer.

⁸⁴ See Chapter 2, pages 91 and 95–6.

We return to the main discussion. As Scarry (1985: 315) furthermore points out, the object or lever in the two-part activity of creating is also ‘the site of magnification’, which results in ‘the action of reciprocation [being] vastly in excess of the action of projection’.⁸⁵ This also confirms the ability of language to enact a sharing of pain (in the imagination), among myriad other experiences. A single creator can bring about a ‘sharable outcome’; ‘material and verbal artifacts are ... by nature social’ (Scarry 1985: 316–17). The tailor need not, usually does not, sew only one coat. Several people can be made warmer by the several coats that one tailor is capable of sewing. Many readers can be instructed, educated, entertained, enlivened, awakened by the many texts that one author is capable of writing. Such is the ‘large-spirited’ nature of imagination and creating, claims Scarry (1985: 323).

Significantly, as well as a text such as a poem or a novel, language is also one among many other levers or objects, Scarry (1985: 312) makes clear. In this view, the LTI presented by Klemperer (2000) is an (the) object. As Scarry (1985: 310, emphasis added) comments, ‘the recreating action is accomplished by the *human makers* and must be included in any account of the phenomenon of making’. Just as in order to be ridden the horse must be ridden by someone, language needs a person or people to voice it. Language is not independent; as an object, the LTI was not a freestanding creator (Scarry) – it needed the Nazis to use it to recreate both themselves as the superior race, and the Jews as the inferior or even the non-human race. ‘The conception that artifacts create people is right,’ Scarry (1985: 311) believes. By extension, Klemperer and the critics’ conception that the LTI created the Nazis and the Jews is right. ‘The conception that that creative power *originates* in the artifact is wrong,’ Scarry (1985: 311, emphasis added) clarifies. By extension, the critics’ conception that that power originated in the LTI is wrong. While the critics see ‘only the second half of the total arc of action’, Scarry (1985: 311) and Klemperer and we see the total arc.

Logically, the two activities constituting creating are irrevocably linked – the making-up ‘has no meaning’ without the making-real because ‘the human act of projection assumes the artifact’s consequent act of reciprocation’, and ‘it is only because of the [latter] that the [former] is undertaken’ (Scarry 1985: 307, 310). Those of us who enjoy reading are receivers, but as human beings capable of exercising our imaginations, we are also makers. Through creating, as we have seen above, each novel and poem that we read remakes (Scarry) us. We read the works of Shakespeare, Brontë and Yeats, for example, ‘as though by doing so we gain some of the “sensitivity” and “perceptual acuity” projected there’; in reading Keats we become to an extent ‘Keats-like’ (Scarry 1985: 307). By extension, through reading Ricoeur we possibly gain some of his insight, and in reading Michaels we can become partially like Michaels. As we see in the next section, this re-creation has the potential to make us moral readers, and moral people.

The moral power of language

Story is the fortress of morality.
Shirazi (2003: 205)

⁸⁵ Scarry’s (1985: 315, 316) discussion of this ‘major attribute of the overall phenomenon’ of making is characteristically comprehensive and elaborates four forms of ‘excess’ with regard to the activity of reciprocation. My interpretation and adaptation of one of those forms – share-ability, which she describes not as the tailor making more than one coat, but as the tailor sharing the coat that she made for herself with her friends and relatives (Scarry 1985: 316) – is necessarily simplistic in comparison to the scope of Scarry’s discussion, but is not intended thereby to detract from it.

Michaels's awareness of the capability of language to be moral and immoral suffuses all of her work, and for various reasons – for example, because she is clearly on the side of Jews and other victims of oppression, because she has never aligned herself with the oppressors, and because she upholds the great service metaphor and memory can do for the act of remembrance – we can view Michaels herself as an author who consistently takes a moral stance. In the following two-part discussion that brings the present chapter to a close, we explore another way of coming to the same conclusion.

Morality in literature

From the very start of *The Body in Pain*, Scarry (1985) sets us on the path to gaining an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the nature of the act of creating or imagining. In her introduction, she points out that in the modern era this act is not usually perceived as having a moral character – we may imagine good or bad people and situations, but the exercise of imagining itself is seen as 'ethically neutral' (Scarry 1985: 22). She does not subscribe to this view. Creation is the 'very thing being deconstructed' in an event like torture, which is 'widely recognized as close to being an absolute of immorality', and in an event like war, which is regarded as 'morally problematic by everyone and as radically immoral by some', Scarry (1985: 22) points out.⁸⁶ Why then, she wonders, 'in its intact form' does it not have 'a moral claim on us that is as high as the others' is low'? (Scarry 1985: 22). Such failure to recognise imagination's ethical content, Scarry (1985: 22) feels, indicates 'how faulty and fragmentary our understanding of creation is'. To her mind, creating *does* have a moral claim: 'The imagination is not ... amoral', she asserts at the book's conclusion (Scarry 1985: 306). We return to this point with regard to Scarry below.

In an article on *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James,⁸⁷ Martha Nussbaum (1985) expresses a range of ideas on the novel that prove illuminating on the abovementioned topic when applied to Michaels's poetry and prose. Echoes of the ideas of Bourdieu (1991), Gubar (2002), Scarry (1985; 1999), Murdoch (1970), Fuss (2003) and Berger (2001) can also be detected. In Chapter 4,⁸⁸ it becomes clear that the creative approaches of the Russian poets Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Akhmatova, to whom Michaels refers in her poem 'What the Light Teaches', can be viewed in the same light. Nussbaum's (1985) statements hinge on the general concept of morality, and its sub-elements moral attention, moral imagination, moral communication, moral creation, moral philosophy and moral achievement. We first examine the statements, following Nussbaum's (1985) references to James's novel and his non-fiction text *The Art of the Novel*, and then explore the parallels that exist between them and Michaels's work. Our conclusion is that Michaels's poetry and prose is as moral as Nussbaum (1985) believes James's work to be, and as James believes good writing to be.⁸⁹

The Art of the Novel is a collection of critical prefaces to what the author of the book's Introduction calls 'the major monument of [James's] life', that is, the 'New York Edition' of his novels (Blackmur, in James 1937: vii). In the preface to his novel *What Maisie Knew*, James

⁸⁶ The first half of her book – 'Unmaking' (Scarry 1985: 27–157) – examines the ways in which this deconstruction occurs.

⁸⁷ Henry James (1843–1916), American novelist and short story writer. *The Golden Bowl* (1904) is his final novel, in which a tale of adultery is told through the eyes of the husband and then through the eyes of the wife.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 4, page 180.

⁸⁹ James 'often stresses' the analogy that 'the work of the moral imagination is ... like the work of the creative imagination, especially that of the novelist', explains Nussbaum (1985: 516), and her overall intentions in her article are to explore how and why the analogy 'is more than analogy' – finding 'its most appropriate articulation' in novels – and also why 'the novel is itself a moral achievement, and the well-lived life is a work of literary art'.

(1937:⁹⁰ 149; in Nussbaum 1985: 516) talks about ‘the effort really to see and really to represent’, which is ‘no idle business in face of the *constant* force that makes for muddlement’. ‘We live amid bewildering complexities’, and ‘obtuseness and refusal of vision are our besetting vices’, Nussbaum (1985: 516) elaborates. We should try to counter these vices with ‘responsible lucidity’, and thus ‘our highest and hardest task is to make ourselves people “on whom nothing is lost”’ (Nussbaum 1985: 516, also quoting from James’s novel *The Princess Casamassima* (first published in 1886)). Nussbaum (1985: 516) relies on the analogy proposed by James between the ‘moral imagination’ and the ‘creative imagination’, thus suggesting that in this context ‘ourselves’ indicates literary artists as well as people in general. In order to ‘live well’ (Nussbaum 1985: 516), we must all pay each other responsible, moral attention, and one way of doing this is for the novelist to pay proper attention to his⁹¹ characters and to engender such a regard in us, his readers.

Nussbaum (1985) cites a particular scene in the *Bowl* in illustration of this idea, as well as of the other ideas she presents in her article. This scene represents, for her, a ‘record of the experience of beings committed to value’, who use an

“immense array of terms, perceptual and expressional, that ... in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms – or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to a clearer air”. (Nussbaum 1985: 517, citing James)

The passage that Nussbaum has selected concerns a father, Adam Verver, and his daughter Maggie. The two have a close and powerful bond, but they both understand that they must ‘give one another up’ if Maggie is to achieve her independence as an adult woman and ‘live with her husband as a real wife’ (Nussbaum 1985: 517). Nussbaum quotes Adam’s silent description of his daughter:

“A creature consciously floating and shining in a warm summer sea, some element of dazzling sapphire and silver, a creature cradled upon depths, buoyant among dangers, in which fear or folly ... was impossible”. (James, in Nussbaum 1985: 519)

In Nussbaum’s (1985: 519) eyes, Adam thus accurately perceives his daughter’s ‘sexuality and free maturity’ in ‘an image of delicate beauty and lyricism’. Nussbaum (1985: 521) believes that his use of ‘language of lyrical splendor’ demonstrates that he has a moral imagination that is ‘subtle and high ... precise ... richly coloured ... exuberant ... generous ... [and] suffused with loving emotion’. Indeed, it is these qualities that seem to make his imagination moral. Such language is not simply a characteristic of James’s writing; it is the ‘only’ language that can reflect that splendour, suggests Nussbaum (1985: 521). ‘It is *relevant*’ that Adam’s image of Maggie is ‘not a flat thing’ – James does not simply tell us that Adam ‘thought of [his daughter] as an autonomous being’ – rather, it is ‘a fine work of art’ (Nussbaum 1985: 521, emphasis added).

The selected descriptive passage in the *Bowl* moreover indicates, to Nussbaum (1985: 521), that Adam knows Maggie and also knows, consciously or unconsciously, ‘their situation’ – the precise details of their life together, past and present and what ought to be their future. Such knowledge is ‘moral knowledge’ (Nussbaum 1985: 521), and it is elicited by what we have seen Scarry (1999:

⁹⁰ Nussbaum (1985) cites the publication date of James’s text as 1934. This date is given in the imprint page of the book, but newer dates are given on this page as well, to indicate that the copyright was renewed by the publishers. The most recent copyright date is 1937, and so this is the date that I use in acknowledging this source.

⁹¹ I use the male pronoun here because it is James to whom Nussbaum and I are referring. I use the female pronoun below when referring to Michaels.

61) calling, above, ‘perceptual acuity’⁹² – Adam is certainly open ‘to the arrival of beautiful sights and sounds’. Much more than an ‘intellectual grasp of propositions’ or even of ‘particular facts’, moral knowledge is ‘perception’, Nussbaum (1985: 521) tells us; it is ‘seeing a complex concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling’. If Adam had grasped the ‘same general facts’ – that Maggie was now a young, independent woman, for instance – without responding to them with the description he provides ‘in all its specificity, he wouldn’t really have known her’ (Nussbaum 1985: 521).

The communication that takes place between Adam and Maggie in this passage also has a moral quality, because it ‘partakes both of the specificity and of the emotional and imaginative richness of their individual moral effort’ – they come to deep mutual understanding through ‘seeing where they come to share the same pictures’ (Nussbaum 1985: 521–2). The above-quoted description of Maggie is clearly Adam’s, whereas with regard to the following phrases that she quotes from the *Bowl* – “‘the act of their crossing the bar’” and their “‘having had to beat against the wind’” – Nussbaum (1985: 522) demonstrates that the originator of the phrases is unknown; they can have been used by Adam or Maggie in portraying their common situation.

The two characters are in such accord that ‘they even share descriptive language’ (Nussbaum 1985: 522): In describing their situation, Adam finds “‘their word’” and Maggie “‘helped him out with it’” (James, in Nussbaum 1985: 522). However, according to Nussbaum (1985: 522), the understanding and the knowledge that this father and daughter share do not make them the same, they do not ‘confound[d] their separateness’. It is their ‘fine attention to [one] another’ that makes them ‘inhabit the same created world’ (Nussbaum 1985: 522). Their ‘moral likemindedness’, moreover, is a ‘delicate communication of alert beings who always stand separated as by “an exquisite tissue” ... through which they alertly hear one another breathing’ (Nussbaum 1985: 522, citing James).

Thus James’s characters are always aware of themselves and each other as distinct individuals. James and Nussbaum (1985), similarly, never lose the important distinction between Adam the character, who presents an image of his daughter, and James the author, who presents us with the image of a father describing his daughter. And there is a third ‘person’ inhabiting the narrative: James (1937: 327) gives us not his ‘own impersonal account’ of Adam and Maggie’s situation, but ‘[his] account of somebody else’s impression of it’ (‘somebody else’ being his narrator). The image of the daughter is brought to us first by the father, then by the narrator and then by James, in the form of a paraphrase that matches the original in artistic quality. The father and the narrator exist in James’s imagination, yet in the world of the novel, Adam is real, his voice is different from the voices of the narrator and of James. However, we gain access to the father’s words, thoughts and perceptions only through the narrator, to whose words we gain access only through James, and so we gain them third-hand, in a form that is James’s rather than the narrator’s and the father’s.

Nussbaum (1985: 521) emphasises the fact that Adam’s sea creature image gains superior quality in *both* their hands (his and James’s); it must do so in order to *be* superior – the image ‘could not be captured in any paraphrase that was not itself a work of art’. Concomitantly, for Nussbaum (1985: 522) the scene’s conclusion demonstrates that James believes that a ‘responsible action is a highly context-specific and nuanced and responsive thing whose rightness could not be captured in a description that fell short of the artistic’. Indeed, James (1937: 339) himself feels that the act of ‘seeing’ his novels again – in going over his novels for re-publication – ‘caused whatever [he] looked at on any page to flower before [him] as into the only terms that honourably express it’.

⁹² See also Chapter 2, page 83.

Maggie and Adam's mutual understanding and regard are summarised in the phrase 'well then' at the scene's end, which Maggie utters as a question and Adam uses in response as an exclaimed confirmation.⁹³ Behind this phrase lie 'thoughts of ending, of immeasurable love, without which the brief utterance would be empty of moral meaning', proposes Nussbaum (1985: 523). Maggie speaks "'as for the end and for other matters – for anything, everything else there might be'"; Adam's response is in a tone that "'at last was right'" (Nussbaum 1985: 523, citing James). They both speak well, and move into an equally appropriate embrace – prolonged and full of feeling, but dignified and tearless (Nussbaum 1985: 523). Moreover, Nussbaum (1985: 523) feels that 'it is the precise tonality and quality of [the] embrace' that make it 'a wonderful achievement of love and mutual altruism', because 'no description less specific than this could convey the rightness of [the] action'. In paraphrasing that action, which she must do so that she does not repeatedly provide the same quotation from the passage while elaborating her ideas about it, Nussbaum (1985: 524) suggests that she renders it 'flat and toneless and lifeless', because the language she uses is by its very nature not lyrically splendid. She concludes that 'the only way to paraphrase this passage [or any such passage] *without loss of value* would be to write another work of art' (Nussbaum 1985: 524, emphasis added).⁹⁴

In their 'fine-tuned perceiving', explains Nussbaum (1985: 524), Adam and Maggie are accountable 'to standing obligations, some particular and some general'. In other words, standing terms – the 'general rules and obligations' of social behaviour – have a role to play in moral engagement (Nussbaum 1985: 525). Perceptions 'perch' on the 'heads' of those terms, 'they do not displace them' (Nussbaum 1985: 524). Nussbaum (1985: 524) emphasises this point in defence against the 'objection' another James-related article of hers⁹⁵ elicited from a critic to the effect that 'the morality of [the] hypersensitive beings [in James's novels] is an artwork embroidered for its own intrinsic aesthetic character, without regard to principle and commitment'. The critic is reproaching James's work, as interpreted by Nussbaum, for having precisely the qualities that Nussbaum is saying it must have in order to be moral. The critic would have the principles of and commitment to the moral code portrayed in appropriate language, in other words, language that perhaps is not overly figurative or full of adjectives; whereas Nussbaum (1985) suggests that it is only embossed language, engendered as it is by responsible perception, that can convey those principles and that commitment.

Indeed, two of James's other characters in the *Bowl*, Bob and Fanny Assingham, may serve as examples of the type of 'moral' person that the abovementioned critic seems to advocate: Through them, Nussbaum (1985: 524) suggests by way of contrast, James illustrates 'how perception without responsibility is dangerously free-floating, even as duty without perception is blunt and blind'.⁹⁶ In further contrast, according to Nussbaum (1985: 524) Adam and Maggie's 'loving conversation' shows 'the right "basis" for action'. Just as Adam proves, with his sea creature metaphor, that he perceives Maggie properly and lovingly, so Maggie provides the appropriately perceptive and affectionate metaphor of a work of art in relation to her father,

⁹³ The passage quoted by Nussbaum that contains this exchange and its equally significant surrounding text is too long to be reproduced here; see Nussbaum (1985: 522–3) for the quotation in its entirety.

⁹⁴ But as learners, students and academics of literature, we cannot produce works of art when we paraphrase the work of a writer that we are studying or criticising. Perhaps we should accede, then, that literary criticism must be conducted in far less valuable language, albeit that which is partially saved from flatness, tonelessness and lifelessness by an adept critic.

⁹⁵ The article is Nussbaum's "'Flawed Crystals": James's *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy' (1983), in *New Literary History*, xv(4): 25–50.

⁹⁶ Nussbaum (1985: 525) does not quote from the *Bowl* or expand her views in this regard, other than commenting that 'Bob Assingham has no connection with the moral realities about him until he seeks the help of his wife's too fanciful but indispensable eyes'.

being aided as she is by her ‘standing obligations’ towards him – ‘her sense of a profound obligation to respect his dignity’ (Nussbaum 1985: 524).

Concomitantly, if, being persuaded by Nussbaum (1985: 524), we agree to see perception as ‘a created work of art’, we must also concede that artists cannot just create ‘anything they like’, it is ‘reality’ that they must render ‘precisely and faithfully’. And indeed ‘art deals with what we see’ – it ‘plucks its material ... in the garden of life’, confirms James (1937: 312; in Nussbaum 1985: 528). Artists are aided in this function, Nussbaum (1985: 524) explains, ‘by general principles and by the habits and attachments that are their internalization’. Nussbaum (1985: 525) summarises the qualities of standing terms and their connection with the ‘higher’ and ‘more alert’ winged creatures, that is, the novelist’s descriptions, as follows: First, the descriptions *must* be based on perception, because without it the novelist would be unable to assess the particular standing terms that operate in the context in which he is writing. ‘Situations are all highly concrete’, but they do not make themselves known, Nussbaum (1985: 525) points out – they do not come with ‘duty labels’. Responsibility is also duty, and ‘without the abilities of perception’, Nussbaum (1985: 525) reiterates, ‘duty is blind and therefore powerless’.

Second, a person who grasps only standing terms may be able to apply them to ‘the concrete case’, but they would not enable him to ‘act rightly’ in that case (Nussbaum 1985: 525). By themselves, they ‘don’t suffice to make the difference between right and wrong’, clarifies Nussbaum (1985: 525). If Adam had simply given Maggie his blessing in her right to behave as a sexually active young woman, and by implication if Maggie had simply demanded such a blessing from him, they would have ‘g[o]t it all wrong’ (Nussbaum 1985: 525); their relinquishing of each other’s love and company and all the other powerful elements that constitute their bond would have been in vain because it would have been inappropriate. Nussbaum (1985: 525) sees the obtuseness that would characterise such a course of action as ‘a moral failing’. And logically, she proposes that ‘by themselves, trusted for and in themselves, standing terms are a recipe for obtuseness’ (Nussbaum 1985: 525). Instead, in Nussbaum’s (1985: 525) eyes, Adam (and Maggie) achieves the opposite, summarised by Aristotle (in Nussbaum 1985: 525) thus: ‘To respond at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence’.

Third and finally, standing terms appear static in their concreteness – they do not allow for development or flexibility. There are elements in the author’s ‘good action’, in his responsible action of writing, Nussbaum (1985: 525) argues, that are so ‘surprising and new’, or ‘irreducibly particular’, that they cannot be conceptualised in standing terms. The good author – the ‘fine Jamesian perceiver’ – uses standing terms in ‘an open-ended evolving way’, and is likewise open-minded in being ‘prepared to see and respond to any new feature’ that may arise in the scene, concludes Nussbaum (1985: 525).

Moreover, specificity continues to play a vital role. According to Blackmur (in James 1937: xi), James ‘knew that only by constantly retaining the specific in the field of discussion could he ever establish or maintain the principles by which he wrote’. Therefore, Adam and Maggie are particular people who have specific experiences. They also view their particularity, along with their history, as being of the ‘highest moral relevance’ (Nussbaum 1985: 526). James or we would not be able to rewrite the scene of their mutual understanding, regard and relinquishment without them as the central actors; if we attempted to do so, we would not know ‘who should do what’, Nussbaum (1985: 526) points out. She furthermore deduces that to ‘confine ourselves to the universal’ in this way would be another form of obtuseness (Nussbaum 1985: 526).

As readers, we too play a significant role in the moral context. If we ‘read well’, our attention will have a moral nature (Nussbaum 1985: 527). We thereby ‘actively care for [the] particularity’ of James’s characters and we ‘strain to be people on whom none of their subtleties are lost, in intellect and feeling’ (Nussbaum 1985: 527). Thus, according to Nussbaum (1985: 527), the *Bowl*, and novels like it, not only shows what ‘moral attention’ is, ‘better than an abstract treatise’ could do that, it also encourages us to perform such attention-giving – it ‘elicits’ moral attention from us. And thereby it requires us to become at least some sort of artistic creators in turn. While it is the artist’s responsibility to express life’s myriad concerns and felicities – ‘put[ting]’ them down on paper and ‘put[ting]’ them before us as a form of ‘doing’ – it is our responsibility to ‘do’, to engage with those concerns and felicities, in the form of ‘put[ting]’ (Nussbaum 1985: 527–8).

Nussbaum composes this corollary from James’s (1937: 347; in Nussbaum 1985: 527) view that ‘to “put” things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them’. But as Nussbaum (1985: 528) clarifies, we need not take too literally her suggestion, with reference to James, that ‘our whole moral task ... is to make a fine artistic creation’. We do not all need to become writers. Being quite aware that our imagination, like the imagination of the child character Maisie in his novel *What Maisie Knew* (first published in 1897), is capable of deeds that need not be articulated to realise their full potential, James ‘does not give linguistic representation pride of place’. But ‘he does insist that our whole conduct [be] *some* form of artistic “putting”’ (Nussbaum 1985: 528) – some form of lucid engagement with and interpretation of ‘what happens to us as social creatures’ (James 1937: 64–5; in Nussbaum 1985: 528), as well as the possible expression of such experience’s significance.

Nussbaum (1985: 528) concludes her article with the question of how far we can identify with James’s characters, or how far we can make them identify with us – in other words, of whether we really can view ‘the consciousness of a Maggie Verver ... as [a] paradig[m] of our own responsible conduct’. Critics may doubt the authenticity of such an idea; Nussbaum (1985: 529) envisages them questioning whether she is positioning James and his characters as the only ‘finely sensible’ beings to ‘show us the way’ to lead our lives, as well as whether, in presenting us with ‘supersubtle fry’ as characters, James (1937: 221; in Nussbaum 1985: 528) has not lost his sense of connection with real life. James (1937: 223; in Nussbaum 1985: 529) seems to suggest that we can indeed view his characters’ consciousnesses as paradigmatic because while they are ‘high’, they are also ‘possible and available’ – ‘in *essence*’ they are ‘observed realit[ies]’.

Moreover, according to Nussbaum (1985: 529), James illustrates his ‘commitment to the fine possibilities of the actual’, of real life, by creating ‘their actualization’ in his imagination: For ‘what better example’ is there of ‘the high and the helpful public and ... civic use of the imagination?’ he argues (James 1937: 223; in Nussbaum 1985: 529). James (1937) is talking about people here, about whether we can take fictional characters to resemble ourselves to the extent that they seem as real to us as we know *we* are real. Scarry (1985) echoes James’s view in talking about inanimate objects. With reference to Ruskin’s ‘pathetic fallacy’, which we have encountered above, Scarry (1985: 286) believes that ‘the habit of poets ... to project their own aliveness onto nonalive things itself suggests that *it is* the basic work of creation to bring about the very projection of aliveness’.

Morality in Michaels's literature

Let us now apply Nussbaum's statements to Michaels's poetry and prose.⁹⁷ As an example among many, in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob describes the bodies in the gas chamber as forming a 'pyramid' (FP 168), not a 'stack' or a 'pile' or a 'heap', all of which would be accurate but derogatory, and thus morally irresponsible, terms in this context. The poem 'The Second Search' (160) provides further illustration: 'Day after day', Marie Curie 'poured something purer/ into basins and jars', thereby symbolising the distillation of her love for her husband as well as describing the progress of their chemistry research. Thus, in line with Nussbaum's belief that James's images are 'fine works of art', Michaels's images are also, and relevantly rather than erroneously or unnecessarily, fine works of art – elicited by her perceptual acuity (Scarry).

Some of Michaels's characters' images have this characteristic too: The style in which Jakob writes his memoir is enhanced not only by his poetic practice but also by his hard-earned perceptiveness, his prolonged and, over time, lucid engagement with 'what happens to him as a social creature'. By contrast, the style in which Ben writes his 'letter' to Jakob is supported by his biographical practice, but the majority of his narrative is hampered by his lack of perceptiveness – his apprehension of his experiences is confused and inaccurate rather than lucid. However, in the same way that James is able to present in words the things for which the young Maisie 'could not have found ... words', Ben's murky vision is brought to us in words that Michaels '*rightly render[s]*' (cf. Nussbaum 1985: 528).

Michaels is able to use 'lyrically splendid' language properly because, like James with regard to Adam and Maggie Verver, she knows her characters and their situations, and she shows them having, or lacking, such knowledge of each other. For there are those who do not 'really know' others. Alex fails to know Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces*. She grasps 'general facts', about him as about the world around her, without responding to them with any kind of deeper understanding or perception. Jakob's history, the personal and historical Holocaust-related facts and thoughts he is likely to have shared with her, are simply too much for her – she feels she 'get[s] more than enough of it [from him] at home' (FP 136). Naive and intellectually lazy, she desires 'a life of the mind – without all the reading' (FP 131). She is adept at word-play and produces some amusing palindromes, and thus impresses her male friends with evidence of her linguistic capital (Bourdieu), but there is little behind this display other than her sexual innocence and lack of confidence (FP 132, 133) and the capital proves worthless in her marriage. Jakob does not blame her, he feels that the nightmares and bouts of depression that resume afflicting him two years into their marriage are 'no fault of hers' (FP 139), yet in the light of Nussbaum's discussion, Alex's lack of moral response to and knowledge of Jakob – her wish to 'explode' Jakob and 'set fire to everything' (both from FP 144) around and of him, in contrast to the painstaking reconstruction that Athos had facilitated – very likely contributes to the failure of their union as well as to Jakob's continuing despair.

By contrast, Michaela does understand Jakob. The first time they meet, at a party given by the Salmans when he is on one of his annual visits to Toronto, Jakob finds himself telling her the story of the birth of one of Maurice and Irena's sons. The baby was so premature that Jakob, allowed to visit him in hospital, had seen him as 'a soul, ... not yet a self, caught in [an] almost transparent body' (FP 176). To him, the baby resembled the 'musselman' of the concentration camps, the person whose body continues to operate at the basic level while their spirit had resigned itself to the promise of death – their 'eyes in the photos [that Jakob has studied] show

⁹⁷ As becomes clear, the quotation marks in the rest of the discussion either enclose quotations from Michaels's texts, or indicate source acknowledgement of Nussbaum and James, as a way of avoiding repetition of the conventional references that appeared in the first part of the discussion.

the faint stain of a soul' (*FP* 176).⁹⁸ Michaela listens quietly without interrupting Jakob. Then, aided not only by her training as a museum administrator but also by an innate depth of understanding,⁹⁹ she acknowledges not knowing 'what a soul is', but displays her apprehension of Jakob's words and thoughts by expressing her belief that 'somehow our bodies surround what has always been' (*FP* 176–7).

Thus, like Adam and Maggie, Jakob and Michaela each inhabit, from their own point of view, the world of the 'same picture'. They are able to do this because of the 'fine attention' that they pay to each other, and by extension it is Michaela's fine attention to these characters, as to all her characters, that makes them inhabit the 'created worlds' of her novels and poems. It is her fine attention to us, and our fine attention to her, that makes us inhabit her created worlds for the duration of our reading practice.

Adam and Maggie Verver's relationship is presented to us by an omniscient narrator. This is not someone who knows everything in the sense that they would therefore know how to behave, in order to bring about the best outcome, if they were in any of the positions occupied by the other characters. No one in James's novels should be "too interpretative of the muddle of fate, or in other words too divinely, too priggishly clever", explains Blackmur (in James 1937: xxiv, citing James) because 'without bewilderment, as without intelligence, there would be no story to tell'. Instead, his narrator is someone who, from a certain distance, can tell us what all his characters are thinking, feeling and doing. Indeed, James (1937: 327) prefers handling his subject matter in this way, that is, 'through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter'.

We must accept that what this witness or reporter says of Adam's thoughts and actions are indeed his, Maggie's thoughts and actions are indeed hers, and those whose originator Nussbaum points out as indistinguishable are theirs. By contrast, Jakob and Michaela's relationship – indeed Jakob's whole story – reaches us in his voice; he is the narrator, and it is impossible for his thoughts to become indistinguishable from Michaela's in quite the same way. Nevertheless, Jakob and Michaela are able, like Adam and Maggie, to come to deeper mutual understanding 'by seeing where they come to share the same pictures'. At this first meeting there is the single picture of a baby's emotions and character enclosed in fragile corporeality. Later, there are various pictures created by the interweaving of Michaela's childhood memories with those of Jakob – the sight of Michaela baking a pie, for example, which 'carries [Jakob's] memories' of his mother teaching Bella the secrets to her honey cake (*FP* 192–3).

So close is the accord between Jakob and Michaela that they 'share descriptive language'. Jakob ends his memoirs with an address to his unborn child. It was one of his dreams that his and Michaela's son or daughter would inherit the masculine or feminine form of his sister's name, so dear to him that when he was hiding, 'so afraid', in the Biskupin forest as a child, he 'replaced [his] heartbeat' with the name's two syllables (*FP* 194–5). He dies without learning this, but later we learn from Ben that Michaela was indeed pregnant at the time of his, and her, death, and that she shared his wish for their son to be named Bela or their daughter to be named Bella (*FP* 279).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Primo Levi had direct contact with such people. In his aptly titled chapter 'The Drowned and the Saved' he explains: 'This word "*Muselmann*", I do not know why, was used by the old ones of the camp to describe the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection' (Levi 1960: 94 u.n. fn).

⁹⁹ Michaela's deep understanding is furthermore illustrated in the fact that 'she discusses the influence of the trade routes on European architecture, while still noticing the pattern of light across a table' (*FP* 176).

¹⁰⁰ Just as Petra, the young woman with whom Ben has a brief affair while on Idhra, inadvertently reveals Jakob's notebooks to Ben (*FP* 283–4), so her presence and in this case her specific action leads to the discovery of the fact of Michaela's pregnancy: The first and only time Ben brings her to Jakob's house, Petra leads him upstairs to the

Moreover, we can now consider Gubar's (2002) notion of empathic identification from another perspective: Jakob and Michaela's shared understanding is also, evidently, an empathic understanding, because like James's two characters they are aware of themselves and each other as separate people – their identities are not 'confounded'. They may 'turn cloudy' when they are together, as do 'ouzo and water', reports Ben, but separately their personalities are 'clear and strong' (*FP* 206). Michaela uses imagery that is closely similar to Nussbaum's imagery in describing the 'delicate communication' that 'alert beings' perform and enjoy as taking place through an 'exquisite tissue', but the 'tissue' in Jakob's case is less exquisite than simultaneously disturbing and reassuring, and it does not exist between him and Michaela.

The 25 years that separate Jakob and Michaela in age could have acted as a 'tissue' between them, but the distinction proves to matter little in their relationship. At their first meeting Michaela soon dispels Jakob's fears of being 'too old' for her, and of repulsing her, by 'placing her cheek – soft sun-warmed peach – against [his] cold palm', and then by giving him 'the most extravagant permission to roam the surface of her; and only after [he] explore[s] her this way ... does she burst into touch' (*FP* 179–80). Subsequently Jakob 'cross[es] over the boundary of skin into Michaela's memories' (*FP* 185), but he does not clone himself anew from her; he maintains his awareness, as does Adam Verver with regard to his daughter, that he and she are not the same person. We know this because when Jakob and Michaela take several road trips, 'in their first weeks together', through 'the landscape of her adolescence', he realises that he will 'show her the land of [his] past as she was showing [him] hers' (*FP* 186). Thus he keeps their identities and their memories separate, as he does not do in relation to Athos and his own family when he is still a boy, seeing '[his] mother sewing at the table, [his] father looking at the daily papers [and] Bella studying her music' as he 'watched Athos reading at his desk in the evenings' in their Zakynthos cottage (*FP* 18–19).

Instead, the tissue exists between Jakob and Bella. On Zakynthos, the adolescent Jakob senses the invisible barrier or link between himself and his sister as a 'vibrating membrane' through which he hears her 'breathing or singing'; it is a 'gossamer wall' through which she watches her 'half comforted, half terrified' brother with 'curiosity and sympathy' (*FP* 31). The link continues to exist between Bella and Jakob as a young married man. 'Lying next to Alex', he hears the 'tapping' with which he and Bella used to bid each other goodnight on the wall that separated their bedrooms (*FP* 146). In this prolonged phase of his emotional development, for Jakob Bella is a ghost. One of his dreams of her is filled with images that infuse 'What the Light Teaches' as well, as we see in Chapter 4:¹⁰¹ a river, the 'noise' of leaves – 'like a rush of falls' – in the surrounding birch forest 'overwhelming' Jakob as he calls to the suddenly vanished Bella, 'dogwood' and then moonlight 'becom[e] her white dress' in the dark, her 'black hair' is both a 'shadow' and 'the river' (*FP* 125). He wakes and 'stare[s] a long time at Alex's silk robe hanging from the bedroom door, as if it is [his] sister's ghost' (*FP* 125).

Even as he gradually comes to his pivotal realisations while on Idhra – that '*[his] brokenness has kept [Bella] broken*' (*FP* 169), among the others – he fears that memory is 'only skin', and not also 'spirit' (*FP* 170). In other words, he fears that he is still apprehending just the 'standing terms' of bereavement, mourning and remembrance, and has not yet achieved the powers of perception that would make memory – remembering the dead – moral and redemptive. The narrator of 'What the Light Teaches' understands this as well. 'If memory is only skin', she explains, she and

bedroom and begins to remove the bedcover, under which they find among the cushions the note – the 'two lines of blue ink' – written by Michaela in anticipation of her and Jakob's return from the trip to Athens: 'If she's a girl – Bella./ If he's a boy – Bela' (*FP* 278–9).

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 4, pages 180–94.

her sister ‘become dervishes ... feeling nothing’ (What the Light Teaches 124). They ‘spend hours by the river, telling everything’ and ‘when [they] are gone, .../ the river will remember’ it all (both from What the Light Teaches 124),¹⁰² but it will simply be the bare bones, the standing terms, of ‘what has happened to them as social creatures’. When Jakob comes to his second pivotal realisation, that ‘to remain with the dead is to abandon them’, he concludes that Bella has been ‘whisper[ing]’ to him all this time not so that he can ‘join her’, but so that ‘she can push [him] back into the world’ (FP 170). But even in this brilliant flash of enlightenment, Bella is still a ‘ghost’ (FP 170).

The beneficial role that Michaela is to play in Jakob’s life is heralded by the quality of her intellectual knowledge in a crucial scene in *Fugitive Pieces* that we discuss further below. While Alex is bored by history, Michaela loves it: ‘She moves through history with the fluency of a *spirit*, mourns the burning of the library at Alexandria as if it happened yesterday’ (FP 176, emphasis added).¹⁰³ She is the one who helps Jakob to see Bella as a spirit, which she can do because her intellectual prowess – ‘her mind’ is signalled for us by Jakob as being ‘a palace’ (both from FP 176) – is combined with a great capacity for emotion. In the embrace Maggie Verver and her father share, their eyes remain dry. By contrast, Michaela sobs when she has ‘heard everything’ Jakob has to tell her; she cries for Bella then and in the dream that Jakob has soon after that (FP 182). And in the dream Bella appears as a spirit, as a girl who ‘just now [is] without [her] body’ (FP 182). Above, we have seen how Jakob gradually earns a personally apt linguistic capital; with the breakthrough represented in this dream, Jakob gains an empathically ‘familial-ly’ apt linguistic capital that is just as significant and beneficial.

At the very end of this scene, Jakob tells us that ‘each night heals gaps between [them] until [they] are joined by the scar of dreams’ (FP 183). He appears to be talking about himself and Michaela, because it is she to whom he refers in the immediately preceding and following text. If this is the case, then the ‘gaps’ could be all the things they have yet to learn about each other, while the ‘scar of dreams’ could be, finally, the exquisite tissue that separates these two ‘morally likeminded’ characters. But he could also be referring to himself and Bella, of whom he has dreamt many times. The gaps in that case could be all the instances in which he has failed to remember his sister appropriately over the years, while the scar perhaps is figuratively the portion of recuperated tissue that binds him and Bella at last in the appropriate form of remembrance that should take place between spirits and the living. Aided both by Michaela and by Bella in her new form, Jakob’s ‘desolation exhales in the breathing dark’ (FP 183). He is in awe at having been ‘saved by such a small body’ (FP 183): Michaela or Bella, or both.

If Michaels were any less adept at manipulating language in this way, and if she were any less perceptive, she would perhaps have portrayed her real-life poetic subjects and her fictional characters – Jakob, representative of a real-life Holocaust survivor, and Ben, representative of a real-life child of Holocaust survivors – in language that simply paraphrased the details of their lives. Thus she would have fallen pray to the trap of ‘flatness and tonelessness and lifelessness’ that lies in wait for all paraphrased text, in Nussbaum’s eyes. For example, in *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob is reborn during the first 24 hours he spends with Michaela. Their physical, intellectual and empathic union brings him intense peace and comfort. These words, as Nussbaum finds in relation to her paraphrases of the scene she has selected for discussion from the *Bowl*, fall far short of the miraculous nature of Jakob’s experience. It takes one of Michaels’s other characters,

¹⁰² Moreover, having frequently ‘been bruised by [their] bodies’, the river is the repository of their ‘ghost skins’ (What the Light Teaches 117).

¹⁰³ Michaela is familiar with the history both of the world and of her own family: She ‘offers her ancestors’ to Jakob in the ‘old world’ of her apartment, in which magazines like *Archaeology* and books on art history are piled (FP 177–8).

Maurice Salman, to highlight that nature, as he joyfully likens the couple's newfound love to '*the discovery of agriculture*' (FP 185).

The scene is several pages in length, and thus cannot be quoted in full here. The above discussion pertaining to Bella in the forms of ghost and spirit, as well as some further examples here, is intended as sufficient support for my suggestion that the scene fulfils all of Nussbaum's requirements for attention, communication, like-mindedness – indeed, writing – to be moral, as Michaels and her characters demonstrate responsible mutual perception, and like all of Michaels's other scenes, this one is written in precisely the lyrically splendid type of language that Nussbaum upholds. Jakob and Michaela's experience, like Adam and Maggie's, embodies 'a wonderful achievement of love': In their first physical embrace, Michaela falls asleep, paying Jakob the great compliment of growing still in his arms 'not with the stillness of something broken, but of rest', sharing with him the beauty of 'the body's pull towards trust, ... pulling towards [him]' (FP 181).

At dawn they make love, and during the course of the ensuing morning Jakob relates his childhood story to her. Michaela perceives the story responsibly, in Nussbaum and James's terms, and empathically, in Gubar's (2002) terms: 'She has heard everything – her heart an ear, her skin an ear' (FP 182). In 'What the Light Teaches' (129), it is partly light imagery that facilitates the notion of the narrator's fear being 'translate[d] into love'; the 'light and heat' of Michaela's tears for Bella 'enter [Jakob's] bones' (both from FP 182) and trigger a similar transformation. Following this series of physical and emotional embraces, Jakob falls asleep 'in the first sleep of [his] life' and wakes reborn, in Michaela's arms, with 'every cell' in his body having been 'replaced, suffused with peace' (FP 182).

While the word 'love' does appear in the scene a few times, neither Jakob nor Michaela use it in a declaration to the other. Michaels conveys the emotion much more subtly. Michaela implies her love for Jakob in suggesting, Michaels thereby deftly dovetailing the physical and the emotional, that though he is not hungry 'perhaps [they] should eat so that hunger won't seem, even for a moment, the stronger feeling' (FP 182). Moreover, Michaela sharing her 'family stor[ies]' with him, feeding his 'hunger for her memories' shocking in its intensity (both from FP 179), her absolute physical trust in him and her passionate physical response to him (FP 180), her emotional candour (so different from Alex's response) at hearing the story of Bella's disappearance and likely fate (FP 182) – these are the elements that constitute Michaela's empathic identification with Jakob, and in Nussbaum's terms they are the 'thoughts and responses' behind her question, 'Are you hungry?' (FP 182), 'without which the brief utterance would be empty of moral meaning'. In this 'highly context-specific and nuanced and responsive' scene, which Michaels renders in her characteristically artistic manner, Michaela and Jakob say and do exactly the right things; Michaels thereby performs one of James's 'responsible actions'.

We cannot fail to hear loud echoes of Bourdieu in the standing terms or obligations to which Adam and Maggie are willingly subject.¹⁰⁴ The 'general principles' and the 'habits and attachments that are their internalization' are clearly akin to the concepts of the habitus and the bodily hexis, Bourdieu's (1984; 1991) terms, as we remember, for our ingrained, behaviour-influencing dispositions and for the internal and external social factors by which we guide our behaviour and by which our behaviour is guided by other people and events. The element of

¹⁰⁴ The ideas of Bourdieu that appear in this doctoral thesis are taken from his 1991 text, which seems to make them chronologically younger than Nussbaum and James's ideas. However, Bourdieu published his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, which contains the seeds of his thoughts on the bodily hexis, in English in 1984, that is, the year before Nussbaum brought out her article. The book was originally published in French even earlier, in 1979.

socially attuned judgement¹⁰⁵ that accompanies the bodily hexis is hinted at here, too, in the terms ‘obligations’ and ‘principles’. Michaels and her characters are as answerable to such social strictures as is any other artist or person. She may well concede that standing terms remain necessary, despite being, as we have seen above, of themselves dangerously affiliated with obtuseness. Quite possibly for her, as for Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996: 106), they constitute the ‘background’, the ‘ordinary language’ against which occurs a ‘breakthrough of metaphorical language’.

Critics Henighan (2002) and Cook (2000) seem to be aligned in attitude with the critic who took James’s characters, as presented by Nussbaum, to task for demonstrating as he sees it an aestheticised, superficial form of morality, because they hold Michaels accountable for failing to render reality precisely – as we know,¹⁰⁶ they think she conceals and aestheticises that which they would have her present in ‘scientific’, ‘objective’ (my quotation marks) language. Such language is one example of the obligations that Henighan (2002), and to a lesser degree Cook (2000), seem to believe she owes to society. Nussbaum appears to take the obligations or principles as positive factors in the process of reality-rendition, whereas because Henighan (2002) and Cook’s (2000) views are so arguably incorrect, I suggest that their obligations are negative.

By contrast, Michaels would almost certainly agree with Nussbaum, I think. *Fugitive Pieces*, ‘Sublimation’ and ‘What the Light Teaches’ clearly demonstrate her acceptance of the positive obligation or principle of treating as serious a subject as the Holocaust with respect and corresponding solemnity,¹⁰⁷ and indeed her poetry and prose in general demonstrate her acceptance of the positive obligation of treating all her subjects with the common courtesy that almost everyone deserves. She does so by supporting her work with a firm and deep factual foundation, and by correctly perceiving the ‘material’ (Michaels, in O’Neill 1997) – not just the Holocaust, but everything she selects for her subject matter – as vulnerable to abuse and thus in need of protection and care.

Nussbaum feels that ‘loving dialogue’ should support the action of writing morally. Much of Michaels’s work appears to be infused with loving dialogue, be it between characters and between real-life subjects and their addressees, all of whose identities are evident or deducible, or between an unnamed narrator and an unnamed addressee. In the 42 poems she has published only 13 do not have an addressee, and in the remaining 29 poems almost all of the addressees are ‘approachable’, to use Celan’s (2003: 35) expression; in other words, they appear to be people for whom the narrator feels some affection or regard or with whom the narrator appears to assume an affinity.

Mandelstam enjoys a loving dialogue with his wife as the presumed addressee of his letter in ‘The Weight of Oranges’, Doebelin with Niclas in ‘Sublimation’, Modersohn-Becker with her husband in ‘Modersohn-Becker’, Blixen with recently deceased Finch Hatton in ‘Blue Vigour’, Curie with her recently deceased husband in ‘The Second Search’ and Scott with her deceased husband in ‘Ice House’.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the poems ‘The Day of Jack Chambers’, ‘Depth of Field’, ‘Another

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter 1, page 37.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter 2, pages 78–82.

¹⁰⁷ While at times Michaels may infuse her novel and poems with humour or light-heartedness, making fun *with* her characters, she never makes fun *of* the Holocaust or those who experienced it.

¹⁰⁸ Collected in a group in this way, these poems seem to indicate a dialogue taking place between the narrator and the addressee that is bittersweet as well as loving. Mandelstam is separated from his wife by his second exile, Doebelin is in the process of affirming his connection with Niclas while physically leaving her behind, Modersohn-Becker’s love for her husband is not without reservation, and Blixen, Scott and Curie are mourning the deaths of their beloved partners. But while the poems with unknown narrators and addressees at times have a nostalgic or sad air, the dialogue that takes place in them appears to be more affirmative.

Year', 'Flowers', 'Skin Divers' and 'Three Weeks', for example, are infused with intense emotion such as love. And in *Fugitive Pieces* Jakob enjoys several years of loving dialogue with Athos, and their friends Daphne and Kostas Mitsialis, and Maurice and Irena Salman, and finally, most profoundly, with Michaela. In her work, Michaels, too, seems to be in loving dialogue with her characters, and with us. Thus, she shows herself as 'responsively alive and committed', as Nussbaum (1985: 525) describes Maggie being, to the 'evolving narrative[s]' of her texts, to the ethical 'laws and constraints' of the Holocaust as a 'genre' and to its 'history' of misrepresentation.

Ben, in *Fugitive Pieces*, is perhaps similar to Bob Assingham in the *Bowl*, as represented by Nussbaum. Both characters seem to be at least partially lacking in the perceptiveness that would help them to lift themselves above the standing terms and become 'alert winged creatures'. Ben's response to the death of his parents (as a fact, not an occurrence) seems to be an example of obtuseness and blind duty. As we learn in the conversation that Naomi has with Jakob, reported to us by Ben, Naomi admits to visiting the graves of Ben's parents 'often, bringing flowers' (FP 208). She is self-conscious about this because Ben has been 'so annoyed with her for those visits', accusing her of 'not being able to get over her own parents' death' (FP 208). His jealousy makes him obtuse; his clearly un-empathic view of her behaviour is perhaps sparked by an uneasy awareness – like the resentful, guilty consciousness that caused him to distance himself from his parents as a college student (FP 231) – that though he grasps the conventional social standing terms of 'respect for the dead' and 'remembrance of the dead', he does not have the impulse to visit his parents' graves as frequently as his wife does.

His lack of understanding leads him to misunderstand and misperceive Naomi, at worst likening her gifts of flowers and prayer stones to the 'jewellery' that 'a man buys ... for his mistress' in order to gain a 'guiltless conscience' (FP 248). Thus he gets it 'all wrong'. If he had perceived Naomi properly, if he had known her and her situation with his parents, as Adam knows Maggie and their situation in the *Bowl*, and as Jakob knows Naomi minutes after meeting her, Ben would have been able to assure her, as Jakob does, that she is not 'foolish', that 'it seems right to keep bringing them something beautiful now and then' (FP 208). And he would have been the recipient of her 'gratitude' (FP 208) rather than painfully watching it go to Jakob.¹⁰⁹

Bearing in mind the role that standing terms necessarily play in moral writing, Michaels seems aware, too, of their constancy and inflexibility. Avoiding this danger, she conducted the research and writing of *Fugitive Pieces* in a highly detailed, highly considered manner, learning as she went along rather than commencing with a set of conclusions to which she matched the unfolding story, as we have seen in Chapter 2.¹¹⁰ This demonstrates again her perceptual acuity (Scarry) and makes her precisely one of the 'fine Jamesian perceivers' who uses standing terms in 'an open-ended evolving way' – her faith was tested and thus evolved as she wrote. Furthermore, while

¹⁰⁹ Characteristically of Michaels's deep understanding of human nature, however, the matter does not end there. From Ben's point of view, it is Naomi who lacks the proper understanding of his parents. He admits to being 'ashamed' when he asks her bluntly why she visits his parents' graves and she replies, made guilty by his negative perspective, it is 'because [she] loved them' (FP 248). But he also feels that her attitude and behaviour towards them is superficial – she is as 'blunt and sweet' as a 'crayon'; she does not see that 'everything before her had been written in blood' (FP 248). 'Decorous' and 'patient', Naomi never overtly 'overstep[s] her position' in Ben's parents' home (FP 249), but to Ben she offends with 'her openness, her Canadian goodwill ... her seeming obliviousness to the fine lines of pain, the tenderly held bitterness, the mesh of collusions, the ornate restrictions' (FP 248–9) with which he has had to engage all his life. Having grown up both neglected and stifled, as we have seen in Chapter 2 (pages 93–4), he struggles intensely to understand how anyone could 'simply love [his] parents', and 'by what right ... Naomi earn[ed] their trust' when he, who *is* aware of all the undercurrents and thus whose love for them is not simple, did not (FP 248).

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 2, page 76.

writing the novel she was indeed willing to accept and react to ‘any new feature’ that its scenes elicited, as is established by one of the instructions that she gave to her aspiring writer students:

Although it’s a good idea to thoroughly plan your novel and to think about its questions for a long time before you write, certain elements of the plot will rise organically in this process. By the time I am writing, the fundamentals are known and necessary, but there will always be an unexpected turn in the road – which is certainly necessary and most certainly desirable! (Michaels, in Ogden 2004)

Michaels began work on *Fugitive Pieces* with certain questions, such as ‘Is faith possible?’ in the light of an event such as the Holocaust, ‘What would it feel like?’, ‘If you escape your fate, whose life do you step into?’ (Michaels, in Scully 2003) and ‘Why did [the Germans] laugh?’ (Michaels, in Abley 1996), as photographs show them laughing, while they committed their atrocities. She incorporated into the novel the new features brought forward by the scenes she researched and imagined. Jakob sees the ‘pyramid of flesh’ in the gas chamber as an ‘obscene testament of grace’, of faith (*FP* 168). He escapes the fate his parents and sister have met, and is ‘lucky’ enough, when he begins his new life, to ‘emerge again in someone’s arms’ (*FP* 5). And in answer to Michaels’s question about the Germans’ amusement, Jakob realises the striking Holocaust irony of the Germans needing to see the Jews as human in order to be able to humiliate them before killing them, even while making every effort to represent them as non-human – the ‘harrowing contradiction’ (*FP* 166), in other words, that we have examined above.

Michaels understands, as does Nussbaum, the value of the ‘particularity’ and the ‘history’ of her characters – these elements indeed have the ‘highest moral relevance’ in both James and Michaels’s work.¹¹¹ Michaels could not ‘rewrite’ any of her fictional or poetic scenes without the ‘particularity’ of the subject of each. *Fugitive Pieces* would be a quite different story if, for instance, Jakob were not one of its narrators; the portrayal of the Krakatoa eruptions would be something other than they are in the poem ‘Pillar of Fire’ if Michaels wrote about them from a climatologist’s point of view. Doing this, Michaels may be flummoxed as to ‘who should do what’ in these texts, among the others. But this is speculation; Michaels does not obtusely restrict herself to ‘the universal’, and instead deliberately, carefully and perceptively mixes the particular and the universal, as we have seen in Chapter 2.¹¹²

Michaels furthermore teaches us the power of our five senses. They can ‘bypass language’, she explains (Michaels 1994: 14): A scent can captivate our attention to the extent that we simply, strongly experience inhaling it and, at that moment, do not, and do not feel the need, to articulate the sensation. James would agree, suggesting as he does that children, for example, ‘have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them’ – ‘their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even ... stronger, than their ... vocabulary’ (James 1937: 145; paraphrased in Nussbaum 1985: 528). But language also ‘jump starts the senses’ – reading the description of a sound or the presentation of an image ‘send[s] us spiralling into memory or association’, elaborates Michaels (1994: 14).

Such a ‘sensual mirage’ – the idea of a reality, frequently presented to us in the form of a metaphor, which James sees as an alert winged creature – ‘is the heart of the poem’, Michaels (1994: 14) believes; ‘it’s the moment ... we take the poet’s experience as our own’.¹¹³ In this way,

¹¹¹ This is bearing in mind Michaels’s distinction, which we have encountered at the start of this chapter, between history as being amoral and memory moral. Amorality notwithstanding, the role that history plays in Michaels’s texts is a highly significant role.

¹¹² See Chapter 2, pages 85–7.

¹¹³ It is a rather ‘intimate’ experience itself, as Michaels portrays in the poem ‘Modersohn-Becker’ (87). As we have seen also above, the narrator Modersohn-Becker describes the moment that metaphor is activated as ‘the instant

we care for the poet's 'particularity' and for that of her characters. Poetry 'makes language care' (Berger 2001: 450), and for its part language makes us care for poetry, for all creative writing. We extend our attention, which is 'heightened' by our perception of the 'beauty' in Michaels's writing, in Scarry's (1999: 81) terms, to other, similar things – to her fictional and poetic subjects, for instance.¹¹⁴ In thus moving from ego to caritas (Plato, in Scarry 1999: 81), we also initiate the 'occasion of unselfing', identified by Murdoch (1970: 84), that is akin to Michaels's deliberate retreat as an author from the spotlight that we play over her work.¹¹⁵

According to Michaels (1994: 14), we feel the connection that we can achieve with the poet and her characters, or that she and they can achieve with us, either so deeply that it is 'mysterious'¹¹⁶ or so plainly that it is 'overwhelming in its familiarity' to us – 'and if the poem is able to forge an intellectual bond in the guise of the sensual illusion, the seduction is complete'. Thus, we strive to be people on whom none of the poet and her characters' 'subtleties are lost, in intellect *and* feeling' (emphasis added) – we strive, by extension, to be alert winged creatures ourselves. Thus, like James's novels, Michaels's texts not only demonstrate moral attention in ways that reports or other scientifically precise texts (as proposed by Henighan (2002: 148)) cannot do, they also draw moral attention from us. And our attention is not sympathetic, we do not see ourselves as being the same as her characters and poetic subjects: As in the *Bowl*, the very 'fictionality' of Michaels's novels and poems ensures that we are not 'jealous' or 'possessive' of their characters, explains Nussbaum (1985: 527), and they thereby guide us towards the achievement of 'a tender and loving objectivity that we can also cultivate in life'. This seems to be just the sort of 'emotional buffer' of which Fuss (2003: 26) speaks in relation to corpse poets, which Michaels has and which we will have if (when!) we practise empathic identification.¹¹⁷ This 'tender and loving objectivity' is altogether different from the impassive objectivity advocated by Henighan (2002) and Cook (2000).

Nussbaum's conclusion about James's novels both finds and lacks a parallel with Michaels's poetry and prose. I have explained in Chapter 2¹¹⁸ how, try as she might, Michaels never fully removes herself from her work. This is as it should be, and it is to our benefit.¹¹⁹ The reality that she renders precisely and imaginatively is as "'internal" and human', composed of the 'raw material' of 'human social experience', as is James's rendered reality (Nussbaum 1985: 528). Thus perhaps we can view her characters' 'consciousnesses' as 'paradigmatic'. Like James's characters, Michaels's characters are within reach. Jakob, for example, is not so 'high' as to be unavailable to us – we may be as traumatised and as restored by our experiences as he is traumatised and restored by his experiences, or, if we are more like Ben, as yet partially enlightened, we can learn

words become picture,/ leaping from [Rilke's] throat, to [her] inner eye' (Modersohn-Becker 87). Every metaphor of Michaels's that we receive is such an instance – a moment of connection between something deep inside her with something deep inside each of us.

¹¹⁴ See also Chapter 2, pages 83–4. Scarry (1999: 67) would have us pay good attention to the other, similar, 'nearly-as-beautiful' drafts of a poem, a suggestion that Nussbaum (1985: 524) would perhaps endorse because the draft would indeed be 'another work of art', rather than a valueless paraphrased text.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 2, pages 84–7.

¹¹⁶ Mystery is 'there', Nussbaum (1985: 528) agrees, 'when the context presents [it], as so often in human life it does'. But then 'the thing is to respond to that with the appropriate "quality of bewilderment", ... intense and striving' (Nussbaum 1985: 528, citing James).

¹¹⁷ See also Chapter 2, page 107.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 2, page 87.

¹¹⁹ James (1937: 78) believes that

if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but that if you *are* so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal.

Michaels *has* these things in her, and it is because she is able to convey such awareness to us that we are no longer 'helpless' before life's often 'abysmal' mysteries.

from Jakob's realisations, as Ben does, and progress, as Ben seems to be doing at the end of *Fugitive Pieces*, towards experiencing the emotional peace and fulfilment that Jakob achieved in the last years of his life. Moreover, we benefit from Michaels's images, taking the form of the pathetic fallacy as some of them do. If we were to side with Ruskin, and say that the only function of light is that of illumination in its strictest literal sense, we would fail to grasp anything of what the light offers to teach the narrator and her sister, and us, in Michaels's poem 'What the Light Teaches'.

There is an aspect of James and Michaels's writing, however, relating to the realism of their characters, in which these artists diverge. In response to a critic who demanded of James to explain 'where roundabout [them] at this hour' he had found real-life models for his characters, he admits unabashedly to being unable to 'give chapter and verse' for their 'eminence' (James 1937: 222; in Nussbaum 1985: 528, 529). He argues:

If the life about us for the last thirty years refuses warrant for these examples, then so much the worse for that life. The *constatation* [the declaration of that situation] would be so deplorable that instead of making it we must dodge it: ... there's a kind of rudimentary intellectual honour to which we must, in the interest of civilisation, at least pretend. (James 1937: 222; partially in Nussbaum 1985: 529)

To this end, his characters are all ironic. A possible reason for this provides a further contrast between his and Michaels's work: Whereas Michaels (in Crown 2009) infuses her texts with metaphors because she believes that they are the 'best' and 'richest conduits' of 'emotion', which in turn facilitates our grasp of 'ideas', James is driven by the belief that his stories needed to be 'amusing' and 'interesting' in order for at least something of 'his subject' to 'transpire in the reader's mind' (Blackmur, in James 1937: xvii). In using 'operative irony' to portray his characters, he 'implies and projects the possible other case, the case rich and edifying where the actuality is pretentious and vain' (James 1937: 222). The Nazis and the Soviet oppressors had various deplorable characteristics, beliefs and forms of behaviour, but they were not part of the societal norm to which James's critic seems to be referring. Nor did the real-life subjects of Michaels's poems demonstrate 'pretentiousness' and 'vanity' as their common or most noteworthy traits. Thus, Michaels's characters are not – they have no need to be – ironic.

At the start of this section, we have encountered both Scarry's (1985) refusal to concede to the seemingly widespread view that creating is an amoral action, and her contrasting belief in the action's moral nature. Her argument runs along the following lines: Being sentient means that we are able to perceive and feel, and there are negative and positive aspects to these abilities. At one time or another, many of us have known the aversive sensations of hunger¹²⁰ and discomfort. Similarly, those of us who are attentive readers have enjoyed the stimulation of our powers of perception. Imagination works on behalf of our sentience, Scarry (1985: 306) affirms, 'eliminating its aversiveness and extending its acuity'. Imagination thereby presents and maintains the 'elementary moral distinction between hurting and not hurting' (Scarry 1985: 306).¹²¹ Moreover, 'at least at a certain moment in her life cycle', imagination is 'almost indistinguishable' from 'the phenomenon of compassion', Scarry (1985: 306) proposes. Rare exceptions aside, most people's view is that pain is not pleasurable or desirable. Our awareness of another person's pain is thus (almost) always accompanied by both our 'sorrow' for the fact of 'that actuality' and our

¹²⁰ The sensation of hunger is not or need not be aversive, however, 'if the person experiencing [it] inhabits a world where food is bountiful', clarifies Scarry (1985: 166).

¹²¹ In her book Scarry (1985) never implies that imagination as an aid to the act of making is (therefore) the opposite of torture as an aid to the act of unmaking; nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Berger (2001: 446) sees 'charity' as the opposite of torture.

desire that it be ‘otherwise’ (Scarry 1985: 289). We might not be feeling pain ourselves, but we know what pain could and does feel like, and so we wish that the other person’s unpleasant or traumatic state should cease.¹²²

But in its ‘maturer form’, Scarry (1985: 306) qualifies, imagination is no longer entwined with compassion, as it ‘grows tired of the passivity of wishful thinking’. I suggest that Michaels’s work demonstrates imagination having reached its maturer form (Scarry) without entirely losing sight of the value of compassion. In *Fugitive Pieces*, for example, it is because of Athos that Jakob realises ‘there’s nothing a man will not do to another’, but also ‘nothing a man will not do for another’ (FP 114). Michaels’s novels and many of her poems, in varying ways, enact far more than wistful and wishful thinking. ‘Children soak up a lot of stories’, Michaels (in Jardine 1998) points out, and whatever happens to these stories – they could be ‘buried’ or ‘abandoned’, ‘remembered’ or ‘confronted’ – they ‘take root in us’.

Beginning as it did in the late 1950s, Michaels’s childhood featured stories of the recent devastating historical event – ‘war was in [her family’s] house’, just as it very likely was ‘in varying degrees’ for anyone of her generation, ‘no matter what their cultural background’ (Michaels, in Jardine 1998). In observing that ‘we do not descend, but rise from our histories’, the narrator of ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ (11) possibly refers to everyone, not just the family in the poem. Moreover, while we all must face the ways in which we are touched by our parents’ lives, Michaels (in *Gazette* 1997) believes, for the generation that was born after the war the task is ‘not only biographical but deeply philosophical’ as well. In Michaels’s (in Jardine 1998) case, the childhood stories chose to be ‘brought out later in life’; Michaels answers their call to be ‘remembered’ and ‘confronted’. By tackling the issues, by ‘creating on behalf of the pain in her own body’, in Scarry’s (1985: 324) terms, Michaels ‘remakes herself [as] one who creates on behalf of the pain originating in another’s body’.

Furthermore, Michaels’s texts seem to carry out what Scarry (1985: 324) sees as another attribute of imagination: ‘its nonimmunity from its own action’. The artefact, the text, changes not only the sentience of people as readers and makers in their own right, but also the power of change itself, thus ‘revis[ing] the [very] nature of creating’ (Scarry 1985: 324). For in ‘creating out of pain (whether [her] own or others)’, as an author and maker Michaels can ‘remake’ herself into one who ‘create[s] out of pleasure (whether [her] own or others)’, Scarry (1985: 324) elaborates. In all its manifestations pain pervades Michaels’s work, as we have seen in the above discussions on the destructive, immoral power of language. For example, trauma characterises much of Jakob and Ben’s lives in varying ways; Anna’s family lose Anna; Modersohn-Becker battles with aesthetic imperatives amid social convention; the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ oscillates between fear and love, with fear predominating; Curie and Scott are without their life partners. However, pain does not triumph. Michaels gives it respectful and thoughtful attention, but not exclusive privilege.

As our study of the recuperative, moral power of language has shown, pleasure in all *its* manifestations suffuses Michaels’s work. It too gains her thoughtful and respectful attention. Jakob eventually achieves peace, and enjoys it to the full for some years, while Ben progresses a certain distance along the path to such an achievement; the memory of Anna is partially restored by Michaels’s poem, the poem’s eponymous title itself initiating the naming process that

¹²² Just as the ‘same pattern of neuronal activity’ produces qualia in each person, as we have learned above, the ‘complex action of many neurons’ cause the ‘single percipient event’ of “‘seeing the pain and wishing it gone’”, explains Scarry (1985: 289, 290, 289). It is a more obvious example (in line with the examples mentioned above) of the way in which pain and imagining are combined, in Scarry’s (1985: 290) view: Here, ‘the reality of pain and the unreality of imagining are ... conflated’ – ‘neither can occur without the other’.

facilitates, as we know, the appropriate form of remembrance; in the time that she has, Modersohn-Becker uses painting as the strongest form of self-expression and -fulfilment; the narrator of 'What the Light Teaches' is eventually able to experience love as the stronger emotion; Curie and Scott are sustained through sorrow by their love for their deceased husbands and language in the form of personal journals and letters.

Finally, Michaels not only remakes herself as a creator who creates out of pleasure (Scarry), she can also be, and is, a creator whose writing practice is driven, again and again, by a moral force. Her texts are missing the element of irony that plays a significant role in James's work. Nevertheless, as I have sought to demonstrate in the preceding discussion, if we 'take the view of morality seriously' and desire to 'have texts that represent it at its best', as Nussbaum (1985: 526) proposes we do, we can indeed turn to Michaels's texts as being 'no less elaborate, no less linguistically fine-tuned, concrete, and intensely focused, no less metaphorically resourceful' than Nussbaum sees James's novels being. A moral artist, like James, Michaels is thus vitally important 'for the rest of us', for 'in the war against moral obtuseness, [she] is our fellow fighter, frequently our guide' (cf. Nussbaum 1985: 528). In successfully creating moral works of literary art, her 'moral achievement' is on our behalf (cf. Nussbaum 1985: 529).