

*These Shining Themes*

The Use and Effects of Figurative Language  
in the Poetry and Prose of Anne Michaels

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Submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree D. Litt. in the Faculty of Humanities  
in the Department of English at the University of Pretoria

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January 2011

## Acknowledgements

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I wish to acknowledge with thanks and gratitude my parents, Andries and Eloise Wessels, Rico Schacherl and everyone else who accompanied me in the process of writing this thesis.

I also wish to acknowledge the American author Henry James as a source of inspiration for the title of this doctoral thesis, and the University of Pretoria for financial support.

## Abstract

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This study explores the manner in which Anne Michaels uses figurative language, particularly metaphor, in her poetry and prose. In her first novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, and in certain of her poems, Michaels demonstrates the powers of language to destroy and to recuperate. For her, metaphor is not simply a literary device; it is an essential mechanism in the creation of an authentic story or poem. Moreover, in contrast to other figurative language such as euphemism, which she feels can be used to conceal the truth and make moral that which is immoral, metaphor in her view can be used to gain access to the truth and is therefore moral. Thus, as this study demonstrates, Michaels proposes as well as utilises the moral power of language.

The ideas of four language theorists provide the basis of this study, and prove highly useful in application to Michaels's work. With the aid of Certeau and Bourdieu, we examine Michaels's participation in and literary presentation of the relationship of domination and subordination in which people seem to interact and which takes place partly through language. In the light of Ricoeur's explication of the precise functions of metaphor, we discuss *Fugitive Pieces* as a novel whose engagement with the topic of the Holocaust in intensely emotive and figurative language makes it controversial in terms of what may or may not constitute the appropriate manner of Holocaust literary representation. Klemperer's meticulous, first-hand study of the Nazis' use of the German language during the period of the Third Reich proves illuminating in our exploration of the works of Michaels that feature themes of oppression and dispossession.

In certain of her poems, Michaels stands in for real people and speaks in their voices. This is also a form of metaphor, this study suggests, as for the duration of each poem Michaels requires us to imagine that she is the real-life person who expresses him- or herself in the first person singular, which she patently is not. We could see this as appropriation and misrepresentation of those people's lives and thoughts; however, with the aid of the notion of empathic identification we learn that Michaels's approach is always empathic – she imaginatively places herself in various situations and people's positions without ever losing her sense of individuality and separate identity, and her portrayal of their stories is always respectful and carefully considered.



## Keywords

Anne Michaels  
Michel de Certeau  
Paul Ricoeur  
Pierre Bourdieu  
Victor Klemperer  
language theory  
figurative language  
metaphor  
metaphorical truth  
domination  
oppression  
symbolic violence  
legitimate language  
Holocaust literary representation  
empathic identification  
corpse poetry  
destructive language  
recuperative language  
moral language



*The metaphor guides the poet down the twisting and sudden neural paths  
between conscious and unconscious, between personal and social,  
between memory and meaning.*

(Michaels 1992: 96)

*I don't think we take in ideas unless they're attached to an emotion,  
and I believe that images are the best, richest conduits for emotions that we have.*

(Michaels, in Crown 2009)

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## Introduction

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*Knowing something's made up  
while thinking that it matters is what all fiction insists on.*  
(Gopnik 2006: 158)

Contemporary Canadian author and poet Anne Michaels gave courses in Creative Writing at the University of Toronto before the commercial success of her own fiction and poetry allowed her to stop teaching full-time (Crown 2009). If we were to go back in time and attend one of those courses we would have a better than usual chance of writing a decent piece of literature using the information that we receive from her there. We return to the significance of the term 'decent' in this context in the Conclusion of this doctoral thesis. The instructions Michaels provided in these classes were clear and precise, and they constitute indications of the ways in which she herself went about writing at the time, and continues to go about writing to this day. In our hands their implications would be potentially profound; in Michaels's hands the potential is realised.

'Don't be in a hurry to start writing'; forbid 'self-indulgent' prose, 'each fact must have its necessity';<sup>1</sup> 'allow your characters a certain amount of freedom'; to circumvent a 'brick wall', simply 'start from a different place'; avoid plotline chronology – 'start not necessarily at the beginning'; failure can be useful if it has you 'pushing and exceeding your own boundaries' (Michaels, in Ogden 2004). These are some of Michaels's suggestions for would-be authors, which she follows as well. Two other pieces of her advice serve as significant pointers to the discussions that ensue in this doctoral thesis.

First, 'pick a major historical event that will shape your characters and their relationship to the world around them', Michaels (in Ogden 2004) counsels. The Second World War informs the stories of the two narrators in Michaels's first novel, *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), while her more recently published second novel, *The Winter Vault* (2009), features the relocation of the Abu Simbel temple necessitated by the Aswan Dam construction of the 1960s, linked with the reconstruction of Warsaw following the war and the building of the St Lawrence Seaway in Canada in the late 1950s. Nazi and Soviet oppression are historical events that also feature in some of the poems in Michaels's three volumes of poetry – *The Weight of Oranges* (1986), *Miner's Pond* (1991) and *Skin Divers* (1999), published together in the book *Poems* (2001) – as do her considerations of the lives of certain real people who contributed significantly to the development of the world in their chosen fields, including art, literature and science. Kepler's astronomical discoveries, the Curies' investigations in physics and chemistry, and Modersohn-Becker's innovative paintings, for example, can thus be seen as 'major historical event[s]' (Michaels) in their own right (see further below).

Second, Michaels (in Ogden 2004) suggests that students need to 'decide on a series of persistent motifs that will run through [their] novel' – such as 'geology, history, poetry, music [and] language'. This idea may seem to relate to the form of a text, but for Michaels (in Ogden 2004) the motifs are 'more than mere literary devices' – as 'metaphorical tools', they can 'give [the

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<sup>1</sup> Michaels (in Ogden 2004) also seems to suggest that the practice of poetry writing could usefully precede the writing of a novel. Poetry 'is such a good discipline for a novelist: it makes you aware that even if you have four or five hundred pages to play with, you mustn't waste a single word', she explains (Michaels, in Ogden 2004).

students'] characters depth'. In other words, Michaels believes that the motifs play a significant role in the content of a text as well. In this way they can also, and in Michaels's case they do, serve as vehicles for conveying philosophical, sociological and ethical conclusions that stand to enhance our understanding of ourselves as living, interacting and dying human beings.

There is another element relating to Michaels's motifs and metaphorical language that she upholds as equally significant. She demonstrates the precise way in which metaphor works most successfully. While many authors can dazzle us with wordplay and original imagery, these figures of language may simply exist in a text for their own sake – they might not further a character's argument, develop the plot, flesh out the characters themselves or present us with reflections of our own behaviour and meditations on the consequences thereof. For Michaels (1994: 14), each component of a metaphor must make sense within its context in order for all of them to work, authentically, as a whole. Thus, for example, she sees any landscape as a story, and any story or poem (any poetic story) as a landscape: both are 'cross-section[s]', 'archaeological/geological slice[s]' whose density 'reflect layers of time as well as meaning' (Michaels 1992: 96).

In keeping with her 'sense of the poem as a slice of time', for Michaels (1992: 98) the abovementioned poems about real-life subjects are 'biographical "monologues"', demonstrations of the ways in which she explores how 'a life can embody an age, historically and geologically'. Through metaphor, Michaels is able to stand in for or speak in the voices of these people for the duration of each pertinent poem; through metaphor Michaels asks us to pretend to believe that for the duration of each pertinent poem the voice of the narrator *is* the voice of the real person about whom she has written the poem. She is able to interweave the historical and the personal in this way, taking the lives of eminent people from the past, who are all deceased, and making their voices speak again in the present. In *Fugitive Pieces*, she interweaves the historical and the personal by portraying the lives of two men, who could so easily have been real men (one a Holocaust survivor and the other a child of concentration camp survivors), from the more recent past that is also a past whose influence she recalls experiencing in her own childhood home several years after the end of the Second World War (Michaels, in Jardine 1998).

In terms of her writing style, Michaels's fictional sentences and lines of poetry are not noticeably long or complex. The words are 'plain', as Michaels (in Crown 2009) herself describes them more than a decade after having gathered them into the cluster that constitutes her first novel. The meanings of the words 'rain' and 'night', for example, and the concept of making are accessible meanings, and the idea of material possession seems to be something that all children learn when they start to distinguish themselves as individuals from every other individual around them and concurrently begin to perceive toys or food, for example, as 'theirs' and not anyone else's. The meanings of the words 'time' and 'guide', and of the concept of sightlessness, are equally understandable.

The preceding word groups comprise, respectively, the beginning of the first line of one of Michaels's more concise poems and the first sentence of the first narrator's narrative in *Fugitive Pieces*, both of which exemplify her characteristic style. The first example is made slightly more complicated by my explanation, but the meaning of the sentence that Michaels forms with them is easily graspable: 'Rain makes its own night', we are told by the narrator of 'Rain Makes Its Own Night' (32).<sup>2</sup> In this way, Michaels subtly describes the darkness, the reduction of light, that comes about with the falling of heavy rain, or 'hard' (Rain Makes Its Own Night 32) rain, as the narrator subsequently calls it. In using the verb 'to make', in the present tense, and 'own' as an

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<sup>2</sup> Quite a few of Michaels's poems from which passages are quoted in this doctoral thesis are fairly long, stretching over several pages. Thus, the number of the page in the three-volume collection *Poems* (Michaels 2001) is provided as source reference rather than the line number in each case.



adjective indicating possession, Michaels not only gives the rain human attributes, but also differentiates it from the noun 'night' as the succinct description of the stretch of time that we experience without the presence of the sun. There is nothing to menace us in this sentence, unless we dislike night-time and therefore do not wish to contemplate it in a new form. For those of us who enjoy the night hours, in the poem's opening line Michaels perhaps also hints at an atmosphere of seclusion and, possibly, comfort in this first phrase, which is brought to fruition in the latter part of the line: 'long mornings with the lamps left on' (Rain Makes Its Own Night 32).

By contrast, the second example perhaps requires an explanation. Jakob Beer, the first of *Fugitive Pieces*'s two narrators, suggests that 'time is a blind guide' (FP 5). In this way Michaels arranges just five words in a sentence to signify several things. Instantly and simultaneously we learn of a guide that is not human; of a guide that paradoxically is unable to 'see' and thus seems unable to fulfil its helpful task; of a guide who indeed *is* able to do its task, as established by the simple present-tense declarative form of the sentence; and of a guide that possesses the identity of one of humankind's most widely utilised constructs for understanding existence and measuring its progression.

As these examples show, Michaels uses plain words in evocative and imaginative positions in sentences with the result that they become elements of figurative language whose meanings are thereby made many and varied. Moreover, with such figurative language, Michaels is able to engage with the ethical implications of the historical and modern events and human experiences that she portrays.

In the course of this doctoral thesis, we encounter the following thoughts of Michaels on metaphor, which she expresses in reference to poems, but which I suggest can be extended to refer to novels as well: We discover her belief that metaphor is an essential component, indeed, the 'genetic key', to the 'whole organism' of the poem (Michaels 1992: 96). We receive her understanding that metaphor is *the* mechanism by which the poet presents her perceptions to her readers and through which the readers can absorb those perceptions for themselves (Michaels 1994: 14). We are perhaps made uneasy by her idea that the euphemism, as a figure of speech, conceals the truth of an event by stripping the event of its 'ethical consideration' and thus portraying it as less horrific, for example, or less serious or less abusive than it actually is (Michaels 1994: 15). She feels, moreover, that the euphemism is immoral in doing so (Michaels 1994: 15). We are perhaps reassured by her concomitant idea that the metaphor, as a figure of speech, reveals the truth of an event by paying close attention to the event's 'ethical consideration' and thus portraying it – through the two-fold process, as we see in subsequent chapters, of simultaneously presenting similarity and difference, showing what the event is and is not – as it really is (Michaels 1994: 15). She feels, furthermore, that the metaphor is moral in doing so (Michaels 1994: 15).

The coming discussions confirm Michaels's faith in figurative language, but the above statements alone demonstrate just how valuable Michaels perceives metaphor to be. As a tool of language that is far more than simply a tool, metaphor would constitute a fascinating topic of study in itself. However, I suggest that other functions of metaphoric language with regard to history, sociology, philosophy and ethics that come to light in the following chapters with specific reference to Michaels's work provide an even more significant and worthwhile basis for study. Moreover, while the Holocaust is also undoubtedly an important subject, as Michaels herself and many other writers and witnesses have shown, it is given a position in this doctoral thesis that is subordinate to the foremost topic of the use and effects of metaphor in Michaels's poetry and

prose. In this doctoral thesis, in other words, I wish to examine in detail Michaels's awareness of how and why certain others use metaphor, and how and why she uses it herself.

In this Introduction, I introduce Anne Michaels as the contemporary Canadian writer whose poetry and prose is the broad material for this study. Michaels's particular views on and use of metaphor, I explain, is the basis on which this doctoral thesis rests, because for Michaels metaphor is the essential vehicle for presenting her perceptions and engaging with her audience at the emotional and intellectual levels. The study is supported by an examination of language theory as expounded by four language theorists, and extended by the application of elements of these theories to certain of Michaels's many poems and to her first novel. Her second novel is discussed briefly in the Conclusion of this doctoral thesis. Furthermore, I hereby describe the content of each chapter.

I initiate the study in Chapter 1 by examining figurative language from the perspectives of three French language theorists, and language in a highly specific context from the perspective of a German philologist. Michel de Certeau (1984), Paul Ricoeur (1977; 1992) and Pierre Bourdieu (1991) help us to understand better the workings of language in general and metaphor in particular, while Victor Klemperer (2000) gives us acute, first-hand insight into the workings of the German language in the hands of the Nazis during the period of the Third Reich.

In Chapter 2, I apply the theories that are explored in Chapter 1 to some of Michaels's texts. The discussion broadens to encompass other theories that furthermore illuminate Michaels's project, namely, Susan Gubar's (2002) presentation of the notion of empathic identification and Diana Fuss's (2003) concept of the corpse poem. The chapter ends with an examination of Michaels's 11 'living-poems', a term that I coin in this doctoral thesis to label more simply Michaels's technique of metaphoric-empathic autobiography. Above, we have found that she calls these poems 'biographical "monologues"' (Michaels), but they seem to have greater dimensions than are implied in this description. In the 11 poems, Michaels stands in for and speaks in the voices of the real-life people who serve as the poems' subjects, and thus these poems are autobiographical. But they are metaphorically so, because even when we read 'I' in the poem in which the Impressionist painter Renoir refers to 'himself', for example, we never lose sight of the fact that it is Michaels who has written the poem 'On the Terrace' and who clearly is not Renoir. Nevertheless, for the duration of these 11 poems each time we read them, we can take the narrators *to be* the real-life people that Michaels portrays.

We now briefly look at the biography of each of these people. The narrator of 'January' is the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel (1525–1569). The poem's starting point is Brueghel's completion of the painting called 'Hunters in the Snow', part of a series of 'The Months or Seasons' commissioned by merchant and patron Nicholas Jongelinck (Zagorin 2003), only five of which remain today. The poem is entitled 'January' because this painting was intended to represent that month in the calendar series. In the poem, Brueghel directly addresses Giulio Clovio,<sup>3</sup> with whom he worked while living for some months in Rome in 1553 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (EB) 2008). Brueghel implies the significance of this experience in his comment that

my heart is everywhere. In the front room with Mayken,<sup>4</sup>  
and in Italy with you. (January 27)

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<sup>3</sup> Giulio Clovio (1498–1578), Italian miniature painter and priest.

<sup>4</sup> Mayken, Brueghel's wife, was the daughter of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, a leading sculptor, architect and designer of tapestry and stained glass to whom Brueghel was at first apprenticed (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (EB) 2008).

The poem is an imaginative dialogue, a ‘hypothetical dialogue’ (January 27) as Brueghel sees it, between himself and Clovio based partly on his invention of Clovio’s responses and partly on their actual experiences together. It also presents some of Brueghel’s thoughts on his current work.

The poem ‘The Weight of Oranges’ is quite possibly narrated by the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891–presumably 1938). This is the conclusion at which we can arrive after considering the following factors: In *Poems*, Michaels (2001: 189–90) provides A Note on the Text for ‘Sublimation’ (Doebelin), ‘A Lesson from the Earth’ (Kepler), ‘Modersohn-Becker’ (Modersohn-Becker), ‘Blue Vigour’ (Blixen), ‘Stone’ (Czechowska), ‘What the Light Teaches’ (Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Akhmatova), ‘The Second Search’ (Curie) and ‘Ice House’ (Scott) (see further below), briefly explaining the details of these people’s lives that are pertinent to the poems. As we see in Chapter 2,<sup>5</sup> she also acknowledges the usefulness in her research of the biographies of Marie Curie and Kathleen Scott, and the log entries of Captain Watson (Michaels 2001: 191). This leaves ‘January’, ‘The Weight of Oranges’ and ‘On the Terrace’ among the group of 11 poems that are not mentioned in either the *Poems*’ Notes or Acknowledgements.

‘January’ is undoubtedly narrated by Pieter Brueghel – not only is the poem addressed to Clovio by way of an epigraph, the narrator also exhorts Clovio to

send me some of your Italian light,  
...  
... the kind we labelled ...  
... “dawn, the day Pieter Brueghel left for home.” (January 28)

‘On the Terrace’ is, conclusively, narrated by the painter Renoir, as we see below.

‘The Weight of Oranges’ has as an epigraph a quotation from one of Mandelstam’s poems, which is the first clue that the narrator may be the poet himself. Mandelstam founded the Acmeist school of poetry in collaboration with the Russian poets Anna Akhmatova and her husband Nicholas Gumilev; the school ‘rejected the ... abstraction of Russian Symbolism and demanded clarity and compactness of form’ (EB 2008). Such an enterprise distinguished Mandelstam from the official Soviet literary establishment and little of his work appears to have been published in Russia while he was alive. In 1934 he voiced a derogatory epigram about Stalin<sup>6</sup> to a small circle of friends, no doubt aware that to the ruling party the recitation ‘was the equivalent of the most frightful and potentially contaminating gaffe’ (Shirazi 2003: 206).<sup>7</sup> Everyone around him would agree that what he said about Stalin was true, but in presenting the view in the form of a poem he ‘made its offensiveness a thousand times more serious’ (Shirazi 2003: 206). One of those friends betrayed him: He was arrested soon after giving the recitation.<sup>8</sup> Traumatized by harsh interrogation, he was exiled for the first time, with his wife Nadezhda,<sup>9</sup> to a small provincial town (EB 2008; Shirazi 2003). Having served his sentence, Mandelstam returned with Nadezhda to Moscow, but he was arrested again a year later while in a rest home (EB 2008). Thus in 1938 he was exiled for the second time, without Nadezhda and much further

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2, page 69.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), secretary-general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1922–53) and premier of the Soviet State (1941–53). Successor of Lenin (see Chapter 3, page 120, footnote 24).

<sup>7</sup> As Said Shirazi (2003: 205) sees it, by the time Mandelstam came to recite the Stalin poem, ‘he believed his days were already numbered because of his earlier verse’. Mandelstam went ahead with the recitation because he ‘did not want to pass without having spoken his mind’ (Shirazi 2003: 205).

<sup>8</sup> The ‘same night’ of the recitation ‘Stalin knew of it’ (Wesling 1992: 109).

<sup>9</sup> Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam (1899–1980), Russian writer and educator, who wrote two memoirs about her life with Mandelstam.

away, and the precise circumstances and day of his subsequent death are unclear (EB 2008; Shirazi 2003; Strakhovsky 1947; Struve 1971; Wesling 1992).

Further clues to Mandelstam being the narrator of ‘The Weight of Oranges’ seem to be as follows: The narrator describes the poem itself as a letter of ‘dry tears, to honour [himself and his addressee] like a tomb’ (The Weight of Oranges 35). This could be a reference to a ‘letter’ that Mandelstam addressed, silently or literally, to Nadezhda during his second exile. Rain features at the start of the poem (The Weight of Oranges 34) and is portrayed at the end as the trigger of the ‘letter’ he writes; sometimes he pretends that his addressee is ‘in the other room/ until it rains’ and then this – the poem –

... is the letter I always write:  
The letter I write  
when they’re keeping me from home. (The Weight of Oranges 37)

The narrator is ‘ashamed of [their] separation’, of the ‘hundreds of miles’ between himself and his addressee (The Weight of Oranges 35, 36). He blames himself for that turn of events, having ‘burned/ every house [they] had, with a few words to start the flames’ (The Weight of Oranges 35).<sup>10</sup> During the traumatic interrogation preceding his first exile Mandelstam was asked ‘which poem of [his] [did] [he] think might have caused [his] arrest’ – in response he ‘recited three of his poems, suppressing the eight most dangerous lines of one of them’ (Shirazi 2003: 201). The interrogator had ‘not even heard two of them’, but since he then heard them he ‘copied them down for the record’ (Shirazi 2003: 201–2). Believing that his ‘words of wood,/ ... had no power of their own’, in the poem Mandelstam further expresses the belief that it is “‘the important’” that gives them meaning (both from The Weight of Oranges 35), referring perhaps to that fateful, shocked circle of listeners, the Stalinist government, Stalin himself and the interrogator.

Significantly, according to Said Shirazi (2003: 209), this meaning is rendered null by some of the same people, the ‘regime’, that is, who had ‘a devouring curiosity’ for what he wrote ‘not for what any of it means, rather only to be assured that all of it means nothing; to them it all means nothing’. Mandelstam was one of the thousands killed ‘not because they were any threat to the regime but simply because thousands must be sacrificed to keep millions living in fear’ (Shirazi 2003: 209). Such meaninglessness seems to be reiterated in Michaels’s poem ‘What the Light Teaches’, where we encounter an example of the dovetailing of fact and fiction so characteristic of Michaels’s writing in the form of a line from Mandelstam’s poem ‘We shall meet again, in Petersburg’:

Petersburg ... became  
an invisible city where poets promised to meet  
so they could pronounce again  
“the blessed word with no meaning.” (What the Light Teaches 125–6, citing Mandelstam)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This shame could perhaps be rooted in the voices that Mandelstam heard while he and his wife were being transported to Cherdyn, the town to which he was initially exiled: The voices ‘told him that he had sentenced to death everyone who had heard his poem [insulting Stalin], that he had effectively murdered his wife and all of his friends’ – ‘examine your conscience, the voices told him’ (Shirazi 2003: 206).

<sup>11</sup> The lines of Mandelstam’s (date unknown (d.u.)) poem from which Michaels quotes are as follows:

We shall meet again, in Petersburg,  
as though we had buried the sun there,  
and then we shall pronounce for the first time  
the blessed word with no meaning.

...  
I will pray in the Soviet night  
for the blessed word with no meaning.

While the conclusion is not foregone, these aspects of the poem certainly seem to indicate that Mandelstam is the poem's narrator, and in subsequent relevant discussions I take this view. One last suggestion on the issue remains: Leonid I Strakhovsky (1947: 63) believes that while Mandelstam may at first seem to be 'introspective' as a poet, 'in reality he is impersonal' – 'the "I" in his poetry may not be Mandelstam at all, but merely a reflection of himself as provided by his imagination'. I think it is possible that Michaels is aware of this aspect of Mandelstam's poetry, as identified by this and other critics contemporary to Mandelstam,<sup>12</sup> and uses it to influence the poem she writes in his voice.

The poem 'Sublimation' is narrated by the German writer Alfred Doebelin (1878–1957), perhaps best known for his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). His addressee, his 'shadow bride' (Sublimation 67), is the photographer Yolla Niclas (dates unknown (d.u.)) (Michaels 2001: 189), with whom the married Doebelin is said to have had an affair (see, for example, Simon 1992). The poem mainly explores the nature of his intense bond with Niclas, but his experience of Germany, his motherland, as a Jew and a Socialist, before and during the Second World War plays a significant role in the poem as well. Doebelin felt compelled to leave Germany first for France in 1933, and then for America in 1940 (EB 2008), and 'was one of the few exiled writers who made the difficult decision to return after the war', Michaels (2001: 189) explains in her Notes. The decision is a pivotal element in the poem. However, and this is not mentioned in the poem, it seems he could not reconcile with his home, because he finally resettled in Paris in the early 1950s (EB 2008).

The narrator of 'A Lesson from the Earth' is the German mathematician Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). Among his many other achievements, Kepler discovered three characteristics of planetary motion, which he saw as 'celestial harmonies that reflected God's design for the universe' (EB 2008). Today, they are called 'laws'; they not only 'freed thought by marrying astronomy and physics for the first time', but also 'pav[ed] the way for Newton's theory of gravity' (Michaels 2001: 189). These laws are rather complex, even when made more accessible to the layperson by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2008), and they need not be listed here. In the poem Kepler sums up their significance and implications as follows:

... the entire planetary system  
rests on the plainest pattern.  
...  
... the Church must someday give up  
hundreds of perfect circles,  
for the simple, blasphemous ellipse.  
...  
measure not from the earth but from the sun.  
...  
God's eternal clue:  
...  
the moon not less in its halfness. (A Lesson from the Earth 74–8)

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(Oddly enough, most of (the few) internet sites that present the English translation of this poem are personal blogs. I took these lines from a random choice, of the blog [audiopoetry.wordpress.com](http://audiopoetry.wordpress.com), which acknowledges that the poem was translated from the Russian by Clarence Brown and William Stanley Merwin. Elsewhere on the internet Brown and Merwin are acknowledged as the translators of the *Selected Poems of Osip Mandelstam* (2004) (<http://books.google.co.za>), though the poem itself is not made available at this site.)

<sup>12</sup> Leonid I Strakhovsky (1947: 64) cites two other critics, Zhirmunsky and Selivanovsky, who also highlight the impersonal quality of Mandelstam's poetry.

While highlighting certain historical events and personal experiences, as well as an apparently difficult relationship with Kepler's predecessor, Tycho Brahe,<sup>13</sup> the poem provides a broad view of Kepler's life and scientific standpoint.

The German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907) narrates Michaels's poem by the same name. As much as she was able to, Becker pursued her interests in art from an early age, though her parents insisted that she train for a career in teaching and pressurised her to lead a life more suitable for a woman according to the conventions of the time. Nevertheless, in her early 20s, she was able to join the Worpswede school, a group of regional artists who lived in a colony near Bremen (*EB* 2008). There she met Clara Westhoff, with whom she formed a close and ongoing friendship and who married the poet Rilke.<sup>14</sup> She also met and in 1901 married Otto Modersohn.<sup>15</sup>

In her short adult life, Modersohn-Becker visited Paris three times; her work was informed by the post-Impressionist art that she saw there, particularly that of Cézanne<sup>16</sup> (*EB* 2008). She became 'increasingly dissatisfied with the aims of the Worpswede artists' (*EB* 2008), indeed representing, in a letter to her husband upon her arrival, the reason for her visit to Paris in 1903 as 'to learn to see Worpswede through more critical spectacles' (Busch & Reinken 1983: 291). This attitude, combined with her parents' opposition to her work (an ambivalent stance on their part, as we see in Chapter 3)<sup>17</sup> and her difficulty in reconciling her role of artist with that of wife, quite possibly led to her decision to leave her husband and settle in Paris in 1906, though she remained financially dependent upon him. Modersohn followed her there, and in 1907 she returned to Worpswede with him. At the end of that year she died as a result of cardiac arrest caused by an embolism in her leg, several days after giving birth to their daughter.

The narrator of the poem 'Pillar of Fire' is British sea captain Watson of the HMS *Charles Bal*. The dates of his birth and death are unavailable, but evidently he lived in the 19th century because as an adult he witnessed first-hand the Krakatoa explosion of 1883 from the deck of his ship. Michaels (2001: 191) acknowledges that the poem is based on Watson's log entries. In the poem, Watson intersperses descriptions of the devastating geological effects of the eruption with recollections of sea journeys with his father in the same area. The poem serves also as a direct address to his father.

The Danish writer Karen Blixen (1885–1962), who published her stories under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen, speaks in the first person in the poem 'Blue Vigour'. Blixen married her cousin, Baron Bror Blixen-Finecke, in 1914, and together they started a coffee plantation in Kenya. She contracted syphilis from her husband and had to return to Denmark for several months of treatment (Donelson 1999b). Blixen and the Baron were divorced in 1921, and she continued to run the farm by herself for a further 10 years before accepting defeat – the plantation was troubled by 'mismanagement, drought and the falling price of coffee' (*EB* 2008) – and returning

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<sup>13</sup> Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), Danish astronomer. Kepler was Brahe's assistant at the time of the latter's demise, and in *Heavenly Intrigue: Johannes Kepler, Tycho Brahe, and the Murder Behind One of History's Greatest Scientific Discoveries* (2004), Joshua and Anne-Lee Gilder claim that Kepler poisoned Brahe (Roeder 2005: 559). By contrast, Kitty Ferguson, author of *Tycho & Kepler: The Unlikely Partnership That Forever Changed Our Understanding of the Heavens* (2002), links Brahe's death with self-medication, and points out that Kepler faithfully fulfilled Brahe's dying plea – 'Let me not seem to have lived in vain' – though he did so in his own way (Roeder 2005: 560).

<sup>14</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926), Austro-German poet. According to Robert Hass (in Rilke 1982: xiv), in her youth the poet Marina Tsvetaeva wrote a letter to Rilke in which she calls him 'poetry itself'.

<sup>15</sup> Otto Modersohn (1865–1943), German painter, one of the first to arrive in Bremen and form the Worpswede school (*EB* 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), French painter.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 3, page 134.

to Denmark. She recorded her experiences in and deep ties with Africa in the well-known memoir *Out of Africa* (first published in 1937). During her time there Blixen met and seems to have fallen in love with Denys Finch Hatton.<sup>18</sup> The poem is addressed to him while they conduct their affair and immediately following his death.

As mentioned above, ‘On the Terrace’ is narrated by the French painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919). The name of Renoir is not stated in the poem, but we know the precise identity of the narrator – clearly a painter – for the following reasons: Gabrielle Renard, ‘a distant cousin’, initially invited to the household ‘to help with the children’, also attended to Renoir later in his life (renoirgallery.com). In the poem, the narrator describes how ‘Gabrielle wraps’ his hands, almost totally debilitated by arthritis, ‘in powdered gauze, to stop the chafing’ of the paintbrushes (On the Terrace 103; described in renoirgallery.com). Gabrielle also modelled for the painter (renoirgallery.com), and the poem’s narrator concedes that she ‘gains twenty pounds under [his] brush’ (On the Terrace 103). Renoir recollects certain artistic experiences in the poem and meditates on his artistic role at this advanced stage of his life. ‘Now that I have no hands, I long for clay,’ he comments (On the Terrace 105); in real life, Renoir fulfilled this urge by directing one or two assistants in working the clay (theartgallery.com.au).

In ‘Stone’, Lunia Czechowska (d.u.) reminisces about the painter Modigliani<sup>19</sup> as an artist in his own right, for whom she modelled, but also as her lover. The details of Czechowska’s life are not easily ascertainable. While Linda Lappin (2002: 792) describes her as Polish, Michaels (2001: 190) presents her as a Russian émigré. Though there is evidence that she published her journals or memoirs (see artifact.com; kahbonn.de; Lappin 2002; Mann 1980), with the exception of one extract<sup>20</sup> the actual texts seem to be untraceable. And the nature of her relationship with Modigliani is itself inconclusive. Michaels evidently takes it to be sexual – Czechowska remembers it in the poem as characterised ‘not [by] passion’ only ‘at first’ (Stone 107) and by desire ‘clinging like windy paper to [their] legs’ (Stone 108). Carol Mann (1980: 164–6), by contrast, describes Czechowska as the ‘closest friend’ of the Zborowskis<sup>21</sup> and the wife of ‘a poet and a revolutionary, who was away at war’, and relates that Modigliani reportedly ‘made declarations of love to her but that she resisted his advances’. Elsewhere Czechowska is also described as ‘one of his most loyal and treasured friends’ (artifact.com).

Modigliani was a sculptor as well as a painter. Michaels’s poem is titled ‘Stone’ rather than something to do with painting perhaps because, as Czechowska sees it, while ‘paint submitted to [his] frenzy’,

... limestone loved him perfectly,  
resisted with integrity, showed him  
what to do. ... (Stone 109)

Michaels’s poem ‘What the Light Teaches’ confirms, as we learn in Chapter 4,<sup>22</sup> the fact that the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova also had an affair with Modigliani (Akhmatova & Austin 1989).

The narrator of ‘The Second Search’ is Polish-French chemist and physicist Marie Curie (1867–1934). As a girl, Maria Skłodowska was gifted with a ‘prodigious memory’ and gained an

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<sup>18</sup> Denys George Finch Hatton (1887–1931), English big-game hunter.

<sup>19</sup> Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920), Italian painter and sculptor.

<sup>20</sup> In this oft-cited extract, Czechowska describes what seems to be her first experience of modelling for Modigliani (see, for example, Mann 1980: 164).

<sup>21</sup> Zborowski was Modigliani’s ‘friend, art dealer and part-time patron’ (Lappin 2002: 796).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 189–90.

excellent secondary education (EB 2008). Financial difficulty owing to her father's bad investments plagued her early adult life, but she managed to educate herself and her sister, and gained accolades in the field of physics. She met and married Pierre Curie,<sup>23</sup> and together they discovered polonium and radium. With her husband and Henri Becquerel,<sup>24</sup> she was awarded the 1903 Nobel Prize for Physics and in 1911 she was the sole recipient of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry. Pierre Curie's sudden death<sup>25</sup> was a 'decisive turning point in her career' (EB 2008), but it is Curie's personal loss to which the poem pays closest attention. In the poem, she addresses Pierre directly. While she recalls details of their life together, she seems to concentrate on the time – perhaps a few weeks – immediately following his death, as is attested to by the epigraph (The Second Search 159; in Nichols-Pecceu 2000: 874), which is a quotation from her (real) 1906 mourning journal in which she confesses to being unable to fully grasp the fact of that occurrence.

In the poem 'Ice House', British sculptor Kathleen Bruce Scott (1878–1947) also addresses her recently deceased husband, Robert Falcon Scott.<sup>26</sup> Having been educated at the Slade School of Art in London and at the Academie Colarossi in Paris, where she 'learnt to sculpt with Rodin' (spri.cam.ac.uk), she was already established in her career when she met the man who became her husband. Two years later, she travelled with him to New Zealand, in order to send him off on the British Antarctic Expedition that intended to be the first group of men to reach the South Pole. He did reach it, only to find that Roald Amundsen<sup>27</sup> had been there about a month before. In 1913 Scott learned that her husband had died the previous year on his return journey from the South Pole. As implied by the poem's epigraph – in which she 'regret[s] nothing but [her husband's] suffering' (Ice House 164) – she supports his work away from her and their son. He 'reached farthest south,/ and then [he] went further', but 'in neither of those forsaken places/ did [he] forsake [them]', she feels (Ice House 167). The bronze statue that Scott made of her husband is in Waterloo Place, London, while the marble statue of the same design is situated in Christchurch, New Zealand (spri.cam.ac.uk), testament to her description in the poem of having taken his

face in my hands and your fine  
arms and long legs, your small waist,  
and loved you into stone. (Ice House 166)

Such are the backgrounds of the people in whose voices Michaels speaks in the 11 particular poems. 'January' and 'The Weight of Oranges' come from Michaels's 1986 volume *The Weight of Oranges*. We find 'Sublimation', 'A Lesson from the Earth', 'Modersohn-Becker', 'Pillar of Fire', 'Blue Vigour', 'On the Terrace' and 'Stone' in her 1991 volume *Miner's Pond*. 'The Second Search' and 'Ice House' appear in her third and most recent volume *Skin Divers* (1999). Of these poems, only 'A Lesson from the Earth', 'Modersohn-Becker', 'On the Terrace' and 'Stone' do not have a specific addressee. There are two other poems by Michaels whose subjects are also real people: 'The Day of Jack Chambers' and 'What the Light Teaches'. But these poems are not narrated, respectively, by Jack Chambers,<sup>28</sup> and by the Russian poets Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova (see further below), and therefore they are not included in subsequent discussions of the particular nature of the 11 abovementioned poems.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Curie (1859–1906), French physical chemist.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Becquerel (1852–1908), French physicist, who discovered radioactivity.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Curie was run over by a cart in a Parisian street, the Rue Dauphine, and died instantly (EB 2008). In the poem, Curie describes him as being 'carried/ home from Rue Dauphine, half [his] skull/ hardened into pavement' (The Second Search 159).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Falcon Scott (1868–1912), British naval officer and explorer.

<sup>27</sup> Roald Amundsen (1872–1928), Norwegian explorer.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Chambers (1931–1978), Canadian painter and film-maker.



Certain other poems are also discussed, briefly or in some detail, in this doctoral thesis. In 'Lake of Two Rivers', the narrator recollects holiday trips to Algonquin shared with her<sup>29</sup> parents and her sibling(s). Rather than being an actual, single lake, Lake of Two Rivers appears to be another name for the Algonquin Provincial Park, which is one of the 'oldest', 'largest' and 'most famous' parks in Canada (campsource.ca). Some four hours' distance from Toronto, the 8 000 square kilometre area comprises 'wild and beautiful lakes and forests, bogs and rivers, cliffs and beaches' (campsource.ca). The narrator interweaves her personal memories with historical events in this poem. For example, as we find in Chapter 2,<sup>30</sup> the River Neman features both in the narrator's father's recounted memories and in the narrator's own discovery of a Holocaust-related event. This is a narrative style that, as we learn in the following chapters, is highly significant and prevalent in Michaels's work.

'Anna' is a poem about the death by drowning of a teenager with whom the narrator seems to have been distantly acquainted. It is arguable whether the event is a suicide or an accident. The narrator of 'Words for the Body' is a writer, and her addressee is a pianist. In the poem the narrator reminisces about their lifelong friendship, highlighting pivotal moments of failure, success and enlightenment in their artistic 'performances'. In the former poem, Anna's death serves as a trigger for the narrator's exploration of the significance of naming in the mourning process, and in the latter poem the artistic and more mundane moments that the narrator pinpoints support Michaels's perspective on the potentially beneficial functioning of memory. Mourning and remembrance, as well as their facilitation in language, are extremely important ideas in Michaels's work that we explore in detail in the coming chapters.

In 'Miner's Pond' the narrator contemplates her sibling relationships; she intersperses childhood memories with images from the world of science and references to explorers of that world, such as Pasteur,<sup>31</sup> Einstein,<sup>32</sup> and the Curies. The poem's elegiac air is introduced in its dedication to 'the memory' (Miner's Pond 55) of someone who may have been a relative of Michaels's, as the surname is the same.<sup>33</sup> The title of the poem 'Phantom Limbs' is a metaphor for the old and broken down buildings of a city on which the narrator focuses with affection. She aligns herself and her addressee with these buildings, describing both the

... Places in us  
old light still slants through to (Phantom Limbs 92)

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<sup>29</sup> It is not obvious that the narrator of 'Lake of Two Rivers' is female, but I presume so, based on evidence such as her identification with her mother:

When she was my age  
her mother had already fallen through.

Pregnant, androgynous with man,  
she was afraid. When life goes out,  
loss gets in, wedging a new place. (Lake of Two Rivers 10)

The image of 'falling through' seems to symbolise death, here; and the narrator's mother was 'androgynously' pregnant presumably because she would be giving birth to a boy. This poem is an example among a few of Michaels's poems in which the narrator's gender is not conclusive. In each of these instances I choose to assume that the narrator is female, for various reasons – for example, because I wish to avoid using the potentially cumbersome 'he or she' style, because at times the sensory focus of the images and events seems feminine, and because some of Michaels's other unnamed narrators are clearly female.

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 2, page 108.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Pasteur (1822–1895), French chemist and microbiologist.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Einstein (1879–1955), German-born American physicist.

<sup>33</sup> The name is Elie David Michaels (Miner's Pond 55).

and their love for

... the abandoned distillery:  
...  
... high rooms  
run through with swords of light. (Phantom Limbs 93)

Because the narrator of the poem ‘What the Light Teaches’ (121) refers to herself and her addressee as ‘our father’s daughters’,<sup>34</sup> we know that the poem is narrated by a woman and is addressed to her sister. The poem is set on the sister’s farm, presumably in Canada, and extends points touched on in ‘Lake of Two Rivers’. The narrator interweaves recollections of visits to the farm, and her family’s related personal experiences and history, with meditations on Nazi and Soviet oppression, mainly in terms of language. In this regard she highlights the well-known modern Russian poets Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941), Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966), all of whose work was considered subversive to the ruling Soviet government in the early to mid-20th century.

As with ‘Lake of Two Rivers’, ‘What the Light Teaches’ is a typical example of Michaels’s longer work in that it merges personal or particular elements with historical or international elements. It also illustrates, as does *Fugitive Pieces*, the capacity of language to carry both history and memory, with the specific traits that Michaels attributes to each of these things, as we see from various viewpoints in the following chapters. Like Michaels’s other texts, the poem is rich in figurative language, significance and implications. There is much that can be said about each metaphor, but I do not attempt to explore all of them in the poem. As we have seen above, from Michaels’s point of view, there are certain metaphors that can be used to present her main ideas, and it is these ideas with which we are also concerned. Thus in this doctoral thesis there is some repetition in quotations from the poem. In Chapters 2 and 3, the discussions are necessarily incomplete and rather specific; in Chapter 4 we closely examine the poem’s major themes, images and intentions.

Like ‘Rain Makes Its Own Night’ and ‘Phantom Limbs’, the poem ‘Wild Horses’ seems to approach in intensity what Michaels (1992: 97) calls the ‘ideal’ short poem, which she describes as an instance of ‘concision that heightens complexity, without obscurity or reduction, a glint of profundity ..., in language that brands itself into memory, musical and charged’.<sup>35</sup> The poem is based on the discovery of the ancient cave paintings in Lascaux, France. It serves as a particular example of Michaels’s literal and figurative engagement with time, a subject that evidently fascinates her. Concluding with the image of ‘the strap of river/ dig[ging] into the flesh of field’ (Wild Horses 145), the poem embodies her poetic ‘attempt to achieve horizontal flow and vertical descent at the same time, seeming effortless as a river searing its way through hills over time’ (Michaels 1992: 97). This poem is used in Chapter 2 in the service of applying Ricoeur’s theories on metaphor to Michaels’s work.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kimberly Verwaayen (2000) at first identifies the addressee of this poem as the narrator’s ‘childhood/lifelong friend’, but if that were the case Michaels would have distinguished two fathers, as in, ‘our fathers’ daughters’. However, later in her article Verwaayen (2000) states that the narrator presents ‘reminiscences of a sister figure ... and their shared experiences’ in the poem.

<sup>35</sup> Michaels (1992: 97) believes that this ideal is ‘so far out of reach that it makes [her] head ache and [her] limbs nervous’, but it appears that her respect for her material, for her characters and for her readers (see, for example, Michaels, in Crown 2009) dictates that she make the attempt towards achieving this ideal every time she writes a text.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 73–5.

Finally, in ‘The Hooded Hawk’ (171), the narrator pays tribute to an addressee whose ‘writing life’ reveals her to be a writer. Michaels (2001: 191) names the source of the quotations that she provides in this poem as Adele Wiseman,<sup>37</sup> specifically the author’s novel *Old Woman at Play* (1978). The most autobiographical of Wiseman’s work, this novel ‘provides aesthetic insights into her [other] novels, combining descriptions of her mother’s dollmaking and ... speculations [of her own] on artistic creativity’ (Boyd no date (n.d.)). Wiseman’s ‘abiding concern with encouraging and nourishing creativity in any form, at any age’ forms the basis of this book, which Alan Belkin (2008), a family friend of long standing, sees as being precisely ‘about her mother’. Wiseman’s mother was presumably the ‘old woman’ of the book’s title, who was perpetually ‘at play’ because she continued to sew dolls up to her death – ill with cancer, Chaika Wiseman would ‘quietly sew into the night, talking to whoever was there in the simplest way, exuding a gentle tolerance at once naive and yet ... profoundly sophisticated’ (Belkin 2008). As ‘The Hooded Hawk’ (172) shows, in *Old Woman at Play* Wiseman wrote of her mother’s death:

“my loss is endless ... its only closure  
will be my own.”

Wiseman’s parents were Russian-Jews who fled to Canada in order to escape the pogroms that took place during the Russian Civil War (1918–20) in the Ukraine. As is evidenced by the poem’s dedication – ‘for A.W.’ – and by phrases such as ‘your mother’s dolls’ (both from ‘The Hooded Hawk’ 169), Wiseman appears to be the addressee of the poem.

In the Master’s dissertation that precedes this doctoral thesis, I explore the dual powers of language, namely, the powers of destruction and recuperation, as presented by Michaels in *Fugitive Pieces*. In Chapter 3 of this doctoral thesis, I add a third component: enacting good. The discussion of Michaels’s demonstration of the destructive power of language is supported by Elaine Scarry’s (1985) theories of physical pain, and Scarry and John Berger’s (2001) ideas about the practice of torture. The concomitant discussion of Michaels’s demonstration of the recuperative power of language is illuminated by Scarry’s (1985) theories of the act of creation. Finally, with the aid of Martha Nussbaum (1985) and Henry James (1937), we discover the additional aspect of the nature of Michaels’ work, which is the moral power of language.

Chapter 4 focuses on Michaels’s major poem, ‘What the Light Teaches’, which features crucial images, metaphors and themes that, as we have seen above, convey her equally important historical, sociological, philosophical and ethical understandings. Language serving as a home in this poem is one such metaphor, and we investigate whether it appears in any of Michaels’s other texts. The metaphor would seem to apply directly to the Romanian Holocaust poet Paul Celan, because he had an extremely difficult relationship with German as the language that was both his treasured mother tongue and the language of the people who dispossessed him during the war of all that is normally considered to be essential for life: family, home and freedom. While the work and poetic approaches of Celan and Michaels share certain characteristics, Celan is used mainly as a foil in this chapter in order for Michaels’s work to be further illuminated. The chapter includes a brief discussion of the biographies of the three real-life Russian poets who are referenced in the poem, as well as a close reading of the poem.

In the Conclusion of this doctoral thesis, I sum up the main points that are discussed in the preceding chapters while briefly looking at Michaels’s second novel, *The Winter Vault*. I close

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<sup>37</sup> Adele Wiseman (1928–1992), Canadian novelist, whose work shows the influence of her Russian-Jewish parentage (Boyd no date (n.d.)). Michaels wrote the Afterword of Wiseman’s first novel *The Sacrifice* (originally published in 1956, republished in 2008), the ‘moving and complex story of Abraham, an orthodox Jew with Old World values whose life turns to chaos and tragedy in the New World’ (Boyd n.d.).

with a broad description of the efficacy of Michaels's particular views on and uses of metaphor, and a review of the ways in which we ourselves may follow her multi-faceted example to similar effect.

## Chapter 1

### The theorists – thinking about language

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*Words alter, words add, words subtract.*  
(Sontag 2004)

The academic Certeau and the sociologist Bourdieu appear to share views on the ways in which people live and interact. These theorists see people as existing in a relationship of domination. One group of people, for various reasons, is able to dominate and oppress another group of people. In differing ways, both theorists explore the power that people wield, and to which other people are subject, through language.

As a philosopher-historian and linguist, Ricoeur approaches the use of language from another direction. He is concerned less with language's effect on human behaviour than with humans' effect on language, that is, on the ways in which people can use language to represent their subject matter. He pays close attention to the linguistic element of metaphor, showing how it yields highly significant results.

Klemperer, the Jewish academic and philologist, studies the German language from the point of view of the oppressed. Forbidden to work, among other things, during the period of the Third Reich, he sets himself the task of recording linguistic evidence of the anti-Semitism that he also experiences directly in more practical restrictions and forms of abuse.

#### **Certeau – how we behave**

##### *Producing and consuming*

Michel de Certeau (1925–1986), as well as being an ordained Jesuit priest, was a French academic of many interests: theology, history, psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and literature. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Certeau (1984) sees society as consisting of dominant and dominated elements or groups of people. He gives the dominated element, which he immediately defends as not necessarily being 'passive' or 'docile', the title of 'consumers' (Certeau 1984: xii). The dominant element, then, constitutes the producers. 'Everyday life,' Certeau (1984: xii) tells us, 'invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others'. In *Practice* he elaborates on the idea of how a group of people – 'group' meaning a collection of people, such as a culture, a race, a community – who have been imposed upon in some way, either by another group or policy or law, for example, manage to live with the strictures by adapting or manipulating them to suit themselves (Certeau 1984). He calls this kind of poaching 'consumption', and believes that 'the weak make use of the strong' through ingenious methods, or 'tactics of consumption' (Certeau 1984: xvii).

As well as tactics, there are two other pivotal notions that run through this work, namely, strategies and the 'proper'. By referring to tactics and strategies by themselves Certeau (1984) may initially give the impression that they are entities. But on closer inspection, tactics and

strategies, according to him, are actions – they are ‘two ways of acting’ (Certeau 1984: 39). In the light of his proposal that tactics are methods by which the consumer makes use of the producer, we can align strategies with producers and perceive of strategies as methods by which the producer makes use of the consumer. A strategy is the ‘calculation of power relationships’ that comes into being when a subject possessing ‘will and power’ – such as ‘a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution’ – can be isolated from an environment (Certeau 1984: 36). The wilful and powerful subject, the producer,<sup>1</sup> through exercising strategies, occupies a place that can be distinguished as its own and that serves as the base for managing relations with an ‘*exteriority*’ that consists of targets or threats – such as ‘customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, ... objects of research’<sup>2</sup> (Certeau 1984: 36).

Certeau (1984: xix) calls the quality of occupying a position that can be differentiated from other positions the ‘proper’, or simply ‘proper’. We can see the ‘proper’ as a result of the use of strategies on the producer’s part. Certeau believes that this quality has three significant effects. First, the achievement of a ‘proper’ position allows the producer to ‘capitalize acquired advantages’ and ‘prepare future expansions’, and thus brings with it both ‘a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances’ and ‘a mastery of time’ (Certeau 1984: 36). Second, and concomitantly, the ability to recognise the difference between one position and another – that is, ‘the division of space’ – allows the producer’s eye to ‘transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured’, and thereby controlled and included within the scope of his vision (Certeau 1984: 36). Being able to see into the distance is being able to predict, and in this way the producer is also able to assert power over time – to ‘run ahead of time by reading a space’, notes Certeau (1984: 36). Third, it would be true to state that another effect or result of the producer’s and the strategies’ ability to ‘transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces’, as implied in the preceding two points, is a ‘*power of knowledge*’ (Certeau 1984: 36). But it would be more accurate, Certeau (1984: 36) believes, to state that the producer and the strategies have a ‘specific type of knowledge’ that is ‘sustained and determined’ by the power to provide themselves with their own place. In other words, this power ‘*is the precondition of this knowledge*’ as well as its effect – this power ‘makes this knowledge possible and at the same time determines its characteristics’ (Certeau 1984: 36).

By contrast, the apparently biddable and weak subject, the consumer, does not enjoy the benefits of the ‘proper’. She cannot distinguish a place of her own, because she cannot use her tactics in this effort: ‘The space of a tactic is the space of the other,’ explains Certeau (1984: 36). Using tactics, she must rather ‘insinuat[e] [her]self into the other’s place, ... without taking it over in its entirety, [but] without being able to keep it at a distance’ (Certeau 1984: xix). She has no base from which to address relations with an exteriority – be it a target or a threat.<sup>3</sup> Her life is not independent of circumstances, and she cannot master time. On

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘producer’ is used collectively and generally, because it can refer to any of these things – business, army, city, scientific institution, person-who-produces, and – as we see below – writer, and so on. The producer is soon after referred to as male, and the consumer as female, in this doctoral thesis. This is not intended to imply inequality of the sexes. I present the gender-distinct pronouns partly to facilitate the discussion and partly because Certeau uses a woman in an example of consumption that we examine below.

<sup>2</sup> Certeau (1984: 36) is referring here, in other words, to consumers, and – as we see below – readers. The term ‘consumers’ is also used collectively and generally.

<sup>3</sup> As we have seen above, the consumer *is* the exteriority; she is a target or threat.

the contrary, her tactics ‘depend on time’ and she must always look out for opportunities that she can seize and manipulate (Certeau 1984: xix). She ‘must continually turn to [her] own ends forces alien to [her]’ (Certeau 1984: xix).

As an example, Certeau (1984) portrays a housewife going to the supermarket to buy food for a dinner party. She knows the items that she already has at home, she can go around the supermarket and see what is available and at what price, and she knows what her guests would probably enjoy eating. Her ‘intellectual synthesis’ of these ‘heterogeneous elements’ (Certeau 1984: xix) is an example of her tactical seizure of an opportunity and thus of her small victory over ‘the strong’ (my quotation marks), which in this case comprises the producers of all the items that are for sale in the supermarket.

There are two more characteristics that define strategies and tactics. Whereas ‘*a certain power is the precondition for [the] knowledge*’ that a strategy brings to the producer, Certeau (1984: 36) proposes, through a tactic the consumer neither exercises power nor gains knowledge. Indeed, her tactic ‘is determined by *the absence of power* just as [his] strategy is organized by the postulation of power’ (Certeau 1984: 38). The only ‘power’ with which the tactic is imbued is that gained from the use of tricks, ruses and games. Basing his reasoning on Freud’s<sup>4</sup> text *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1960), Certeau (1984: 37–8) suggests that with a tactic the consumer ‘boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place’. In this way, she introduces witty ‘play’ into ‘the foundations of power’ (Certeau 1984: 39).

And finally, Certeau (1984) relates the distinctions between space and time directly to strategies and tactics, respectively. Bearing in mind the three effects of the ‘proper’, through the producer’s abilities to use gained advantages to prepare for future expansion (first effect), to recognise the division of spaces and to make predictions (second effect) and to exercise the knowledge he has gained (third effect), the producer attempts ‘to reduce temporal relations to spatial ones’ (Certeau 1984: 38). By employing strategies and thus the ‘proper’, Certeau (1984: 36) explains, the producer enacts a ‘*triumph of place over time*’. By contrast, through exercising her (time-dependent) tactics, the consumer will be briefly victorious when a series of ‘precise instant[s] of an intervention transforms into a favourable situation’ (Certeau 1984: 38). The housewife’s dinner party will be considered a success by all involved if she shops, returns home and prepares the dinner in good time to receive and entertain her guests that evening. Certeau (1984: 39) sees the producer as desiring to feel secure, while the consumer desires to act: ‘The former ‘pin[s] [his] hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time’, while the consumer pins her hopes ‘on a *clever utilization of time*’.

### *Writing and reading*

Certeau (1984) believes that the production–consumption relationship can be equated with that of writing and reading. The relationship and, as we see below, certain points that Certeau makes imply that the latter two elements are closely linked; however, he also feels that between them there has existed ‘a major division’ (Certeau 1984: 168). For the moment, let us put the link and division to one side and explore each element’s characteristics.

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<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Austrian neurologist, founder of psychoanalysis.

For Certeau (1984: 134), writing is the activity of ‘constructing, on its own, blank space ... – the page – a text that has power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated’. He breaks down the statement in the following manner: The blank page ‘is an autonomous surface’ that is ‘put before the eye of the subject [the writer, the producer] who ... accords himself the field for an operation [writing] of his own’ (Certeau 1984: 134). The writer constructs a text in (and on) this place. ‘A series of articulated operations’ – that is, literally, writing – ‘traces on the page the trajectories that sketch out words, sentences, and finally a system. ... an itinerant, progressive, and regulated practice ... composes the artefact of another “world”’ (Certeau 1984: 134–5).<sup>5</sup> The ‘production of a system’, ‘a space of formalization’, is a possibility whose condition is that ‘it be detached from actual social practices’, Certeau (1984: 135) explains.

The meaning of this space, according to Certeau (1984: 135), ‘refers to the reality from which it [the space] has been distinguished *in order to change it* [the reality]’. ‘Its goal is social efficacy [sic] – it manipulates its exteriority’, as, strategically, do producers (Certeau 1984: 135). And indeed Certeau (1984: 135) feels that writing has ‘a “strategic” function’:

Either an item of information received from ... outside is collected, classified, inserted into a system and thereby transformed, or the rules ... developed in this place (which is not governed by them) allow one [that is, the producer, the writer] to act on the environment and to transform it’.

The page is a place of transition – ‘what comes in is something “received”, what comes out is a “product”’ (Certeau 1984: 135) – and the product shows the writer’s power of fabricating objects. The writer and the writing ‘retain what [they] receive from ... outside and create internally the instruments for an appropriation of [that] external space’, proposes Certeau (1984: 135).

While Certeau (1984: 136) concedes that ‘we all owe [writing] a great deal’, he does not seem to endorse the strategist-producers any further. Instead, he supports the tactician-consumers, and firmly rejects the apparently prevailing view of consumption as an essentially passive experience – Enlightenment ideology claimed that ‘the book was capable of reforming society’, that certain products ‘could remodel a whole nation’, Certeau (1984: 166, 167) comments, and that writing could ‘mould’ the public. In the 1970s the ‘text’ (my quotation marks) that was imposed upon people was no longer particularly a written text, it was ‘society itself, taking ‘urbanistic, industrial, commercial, or televised forms’ (Certeau 1984: 167). The view persists in the mutation from ‘educational archaeology to the technocracy of the media’, and Certeau’s (1984: 167) suggestion that the 70s public was likewise thought to be ‘passive, “informed,” processed, [and] marked’ may perhaps be applied to the public even today.

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<sup>5</sup> Certeau (1984) thus describes the page as a place of transition. It is also a place of transfer – the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (COED) (2004) gives the Greek etymology of the word ‘metaphor’ as ‘to transfer’ and transport. It is not a coincidence, Certeau (1984: 115) points out, that ‘in modern Athens, the vehicles of mass transportation are called *metaphora*’. In writing and reading, in the use and reception of figures, language and meaning also move: They begin as something and become something else.



This view, along with the accompanying assumption that the public necessarily becomes similar to the products that are imposed upon it and that it absorbs, is precisely what should be examined and refuted, in Certeau's (1984: 166, 167) opinion. He proposes instead that the public has the ability to make that which they absorb similar to themselves, an idea that is carried through in his presentation of a 'fundamental' aspect of consumption – that is, reading (Certeau 1984: 166, 167).

Certeau (1984: xix) believes that many everyday practices – such as 'talking, reading, moving about [and] shopping' – are tactical in nature. Reading is imposed upon by the writing (the consumers are imposed upon by the producers and the products). He traces examples, from the reading of 'the catechism or of the Scriptures' offered by the clergy to girls and mothers, to the more modern "'reading'" of television programmes by viewers, who seem unable to 'trace their own writing on the screen' (Certeau 1984: 169). Extending the argument to more recent times, those of us who turn to the internet for information – whether to satisfy casual curiosity or more formal research requirements – may also be subject to apparently dominant views, in this case of the people who write the text that appears on websites.

Thus even today reading may *seem* 'to constitute the maximal development of the passivity assumed to characterize the consumer', Certeau (1984: xxi) acknowledges. But on the contrary, he explains, reading has 'all the characteristics of a silent production' (Certeau 1984: xxi). 'To read is to wander through [the] imposed system ... of the text' (Certeau 1984: 169), just as the housewife wanders, with intent, through the supermarket; and as we see shortly with reference to an example that Certeau (1984: 169) takes from Descartes,<sup>6</sup> the reader's function is to 'give a meaning' to that text, just as the housewife's function is to use the items she buys in the supermarket to provide an appetising meal for her guests.

Tactically, readers poach on a text, are 'transported into it' – 'a different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place', Certeau (1984: xxi) suggests. But readers do not replace the author, they 'invent in texts something different from what [the author] intended' (Certeau 1984: 169). A 'text' (my quotation marks), in its various forms, is not a hermetic system of signs and significations that readers receive and consume but on which they cannot 'put [their] own mark'; rather, 'a system of verbal [such as that provided in television programmes] or iconic [provided by a written text] signs is a reservoir of forms to which the reader must give a meaning' (Certeau 1984: 169).

In exploring the very act of reading, Certeau (1984: 170, emphasis added) feels that 'the division separating the readable text ... from the act of reading' is impossible to maintain, and he goes so far as to conclude that 'the text has a meaning *only* through its readers'. He bases this conclusion on Descartes' description of the process of decoding a cipher, or coded text written in ordinary letters: The person who wrote the cipher fulfilled their writing intention by using certain letters in certain positions, while the person attempting to decode the cipher may replace certain of its letters with other letters – 'reading a B everywhere he finds an A, and reading a C where he finds a B' (Certeau 1984: 171). If this method reveals words that have a meaning, the decoder 'will not doubt that he has found the true meaning of the cipher ... even though it could very well be that the [writer] meant something quite different' (Certeau 1984: 171).

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<sup>6</sup> René Descartes (1596–1650), French mathematician, scientist and philosopher.

Using this explanation, Certeau (1984: 171) proposes that therefore meaning is located not in any authorial intention, but in ‘the operation of encoding’. The slight contradiction in his use of the terms ‘decode’ and ‘encode’ in this explanation may be as a result of an incorrect translation from his original French text into English. Or perhaps Certeau sees the actual process of reading a B in place of every A as one of providing a code for a set of letters, in this case for what happens to be already a code. Thus, taken literally, he presents Descartes’ example as a process that comprises both actions – through encoding, the decoder is able to decode the cipher.

The consumer-reader’s memory<sup>7</sup> – tactical, too – can act on and in the process of reading. Her memory is furthermore enhanced by that process, as we see shortly. The writer provides the product, the text, which tells a story. In the hands of a skilful writer, the story may *seem* to progress in a certain way, but actually it progresses in a different way. If the reader is not paying attention or for some other reason fails to notice that there is something going on beneath or behind the plainer elements of the story, she finishes the story and assumes that what she thinks happened is indeed what happened therein. However, if the reader is sharp-eyed or perceptive, like the housewife shopping in the supermarket her memory, while she reads, takes advantage of an existing occasion, and transforms the occasion into an opportunity (Certeau 1984: 86). The ‘occasion’ may be a hint from the writer positioned within the text that there is something going on in the story other than that which is immediately obvious. The ‘opportunity’ consists of the reader noticing the hint and interpreting its meaning. As well as an example from comic stories and from religious stories, Certeau (1984: 85) briefly supplies an example from a ‘whodunit’ form of story: “‘He must be the murderer, then!’” It seems clear that this exclamation is made by the reader of a crime novel on realising the correct identity of the murderer, which has not yet been revealed (if it will indeed be revealed) by the writer.

This multi-faceted process of realisation is aided, Certeau (1984: 85–7) proposes, by the reader’s memory. It is in the following way that her memory acts on and in the process of reading: I suggest that here Certeau indicates the reader’s memory not only of the preceding facts of and events in the story, but also of her own life and of the behaviour of others, for he comments that the ability of the reader to exercise her memory in the above-described way is ‘given the name of *authority*: what has been “drawn” from the collective or individual memory and “authorizes” (makes possible) a reversal, ... a transition into something different’ (Certeau 1984: 87). Thus for much of her reading of the crime novel the reader may believe that the murderer is person X, and at some point along the way she realises – because of something telling that the murderer or another character says or does, and because of her knowledge of how she and/or other people might behave in such a situation – that the murderer is actually person Y; thereby, she effects a change in her apprehension of the story and in the story’s own elements.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Certeau (1984: 218 fn 7) uses ‘memory’ here ‘in the ancient sense of the term, which designates a presence to the plurality of times and is thus not limited to the past’.

<sup>8</sup> There are many such examples in the novels of English detective novelist and playwright Agatha Christie (1890–1976). In *Fine Little Pigs* (1942), for instance, Amyas Crale is murdered by poisoning. A comment that family relations report him to have made about the taste of more than one bottle of beer that he drinks one or two hours before his death is Christie’s first clue to the poisoning having occurred in a way that differed from

Just as through tactics the consumer ‘insinuates [her]self’ into the place of the other, Certeau (1984: xix, 86) suggests that memory, like a cuckoo laying her eggs ‘only in other species’ nests’, ‘produces in a place that does not belong to it’. The reader’s memory ‘produces’ the detail – the ‘little something’, the ‘scrap which becomes precious in these particular circumstances’ of the story, in Certeau’s (1984: 86) words – that had until now been missing. The cuckoo metaphor, rather loosely applied, is effective in illustrating the particular characteristics of memory here: Memory does not create the occasion, the occasion is created by the author and thus already exists, just as the ‘other species’ of bird create the nests. Memory ‘receives its form and its implantation from external circumstances, even if it furnishes the content (the missing detail)’ (Certeau 1984: 86). Each nest of the ‘other species’ of bird is the ‘external circumstance’ (Certeau) that gives a place in which the cuckoo can lay her eggs; each cuckoo egg is the ‘missing detail’ (Certeau). Each story, in other words, is the external circumstance that gives the reader’s memory its ‘form’ and ‘implantation’ (Certeau), even though the memory itself provides the murderer’s true identity, in the case of the abovementioned example.

However, the cuckoo metaphor seems slightly inappropriate in that it implies that the act of memory here is unwanted, or an intrusion; whereas it is Certeau’s (1984: 85–7) opinion that, on the contrary, by noticing the writer’s hint and by interpreting its meaning, the reader comes to the conclusion that enhances the deeper meaning of the story. If the writer reveals the true identity of the murderer at the end of the story, the rather slower witted reader is made cognisant of that identity along with the sharper eyed reader. If the writer does not reveal the murderer’s true identity, the slower witted reader never knows it, while the sharper eyed reader still divines it for herself before the story’s end. By producing the missing detail, the reader generates the ‘practical “harmony”’ of the story (Certeau 1984: 86), and thus the act of memory here is useful and effective.

In being formed by ‘external circumstances’, memory is formed by ‘*arising from the other* (a circumstance) and by *losing it* (it is no more than a memory)’ (Certeau 1984: 86–7). Though she may exercise her memory, the reader does not gain any fixed position thereby; lacking any fixed position – in other words, also unsupported by the ‘proper’ – memory is alterable. And there is a double alteration, Certeau (1984: 87) points out: ‘of memory, which works when something affects it, and of its object, which is remembered only when it has disappeared’. A scent of cut grass – that is, an external circumstance – may trigger a person’s pleasant recollection of a childhood birthday party, causing the memory to come into being, and by the nature of memory, the party itself – the object – is not part of the recollection, it has gone, it is in the past.

Likewise tactical, as we have seen above, since readers cannot collect or keep what they have read, unless they write it down themselves, they are subject to an ‘erosion of time’ – ‘while reading, [they] forget [themselves] and [they] forget what [they] have read’ – unless they buy the book, which even then is ‘no more than a substitute ... of moments “lost” in reading’ (Certeau 1984: xxi). Readers insert into the text ‘the ruses of pleasure and appropriation’, and thus the production of reading is also, in Certeau’s (1984: xxi) view, ‘an “invention” of the

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the seemingly most obvious way. However, the reader may easily fail to notice the full import of the comment, just as the family members and the police fail to notice it, as it is hidden among the other details of the scene.

memory': 'Words become the outlet or product of silent histories. The readable transforms itself into the memorable'. We can read Descartes, for example, in Certeau's text, just as we can read Certeau in this doctoral thesis. In this way, the reader's memory is enhanced by the process of reading, and thus we can say that with regard to the reader's memory, the reading process entails the functions of both memory-utilising and memory-making.

Let us now return our attention to the distinction and the link to which Certeau (1984) points with regard to the processes of writing and reading. In explaining his view that there had been a major division between the processes, Certeau (1984: 168) highlights two elements, at first discrete, then related: 'the written and the oral'. He feels that it is only in schools that (the pupils') abilities to read and write have been linked, and fragiley (Certeau 1984: 168). These abilities were separated up until the late 19th century, and may sometimes be separated even today, when adults who have attended school dissociate "'just reading'" from 'writing' (Certeau 1984: 168).

Under the general 'heading' (my quotation marks) of the process of reading, Certeau (1984: 225 fn 6) also makes a finer distinction, based on cited research results: 'Deciphering' is the process of looking at groups of letters and understanding the meanings of the individual words that these groups form, while 'reading for meaning' is the process of looking at groups of words and understanding the meaning that the groupings suggest or represent (or, as could be more accurately presented in the light of the abovementioned discussion on reading, providing meaning to the groups of words to which the reader has been given access). It may seem logical to believe that the former leads to the latter – that being able to read results from being able to decipher. But the cited research shows, by contrast, that schoolchildren's learn-to-read process '*parallels*' their learn-to-decipher process (Certeau 1984: 168).

'Reading and writing' and 'the written and the oral' are not twin pairs of distinctions, and it would be incorrect to conflate the two, to imply that because writing and the written are synonymous, the oral should be aligned with reading, or to imply that the difference between the former is also the difference between the latter. Certeau (1984) does not make such an error either. The reason for his inclusion of both pairs in this part of his discussion becomes clearer when he links the four elements together and proposes that children become capable of reading (for meaning) that which is written if they have participated in oral communication: 'Cultural memory alone', to which children gain access 'through listening, through the oral tradition', 'makes possible and gradually enriches the strategies of semantic questioning [that is, the process of reading for meaning] whose expectations the deciphering of a written text refines, clarifies, or corrects' (Certeau 1984: 168).

Evidently, writing and reading can be included in the category of 'spatial practices' (Certeau 1984: 91) – certain ways of acting in or in relation to a place. As we have seen above, the blank page is the place on and in which the writer-producer constructs the 'system' – the text (Certeau 1984: 134); the reader-consumer enters and travels through this system, and emerges having devised a meaning that may or may not also be that which the author intended. With regard to other such 'practices', Certeau (1984: 97) parallels the effect of the act of walking on an 'urban system' (a city) with the effect of the 'speech act' on language. While his brief explanation focuses on this parallel, he acknowledges that other relations can be as easily identified, such as that between 'the act of writing and the written text' (Certeau

1984: 98). He highlights these as being among the many examples of ‘the first determination of a much more general distinction between the *forms used* in a system and the *ways of using* this system’ (Certeau 1984: 98).

In this regard, Certeau (1984: 93) identifies ‘ordinary practitioners of [a] city’, apparently speaking of people who are native to the city, who were either born in it or have been living in it for so long that they feel it is theirs. ‘They walk,’ he says, ‘they are walkers, ... whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” [that] they write’ (Certeau 1984: 93). Even though Certeau links walkers with writers, I suggest that they can be likened rather to readers.

They may be writers in the sense that they leave traces on the spaces that they traverse while going about their daily business – ‘every “proper” place is altered by the mark others have left on it’ (Certeau 1984: 44). But first and foremost they are, in a sense, readers, because they enact the process of ‘*appropriation* of the topographical system’ (Certeau 1984: 97) just as readers poach on the text, they conduct a ‘spatial acting-out of the place’ (Certeau 1984: 98) just as readers conduct a referential or interpretive acting-out of the text, and their walking implies ‘*relations* among differentiated positions’ (Certeau 1984: 98) just as reading implies relations among the differentiated positions of reader and writer. Moreover, walkers are consumers of a system, a city, imposed upon them by town planners and architects just as readers are consumers of the various texts that authors and the media impose upon them. Finally, Certeau (1984: 115) confirms the implication of a nature that is shared by walking and reading when he tells us that ‘spatial practices concern everyday tactics’.

Incorrectly perceived as *passive* consumers, readers are furthermore mistaken for ‘voyeur[s]’ (Certeau 1984: xxi), that is, for people who watch and do not participate. As we have seen above, Certeau believes that readers do indeed participate in the reading process, by generating textual meaning. When people cannot participate, such as when they look out over a city from a considerable height, Certeau (1984: 92) believes that their ‘elevation transfigures [them] into ... voyeur[s]’. But at street level, his walkers are ‘below the thresholds at which visibility begins’ (Certeau 1984: 93). Not only do their ‘bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” [that] they write’, they write this text ‘without being able to read it’ (Certeau 1984: 93) – they are too close, literally and figuratively, to see the spaces they inhabit. Their ‘knowledge’ of these spaces ‘is as blind as that of lovers in each other’s arms’ (Certeau 1984: 93). This is a blindness born of familiarity, perhaps, which has led to complacency. Moreover,

it is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of space. (Certeau 1984: 93)

The city is the already existing ‘background’, to borrow a term from Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996: 106),<sup>9</sup> and is thus the basis on which the walkers’ spatial practice rests. It is the system they ‘read’ – and like readers, they are forgetful and subject to the ‘erosions of time’ (Certeau

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<sup>9</sup> We encounter this term again in the section on Ricoeur (see below, page 33).

1984: xxi); it is the code that they decipher; it is the text from which they create meaning. They are both readers and writers, and neither one.

As we can see, ‘place’ and ‘space’ feature prominently in Certeau’s (1984) discussions. He uses the terms neither lightly nor broadly, and he shows how the notion of the ‘proper’ can be applied to them (Certeau 1984). In his eyes, place seems to have a linear quality. ‘The possibility of two things being in the same location’ is excluded – ‘the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own ... distinct location’, a location that is supported by the ‘proper’ because it is self-defined (Certeau 1984: 117). A place implies stability. By contrast, space is multi-dimensional, characterised by ‘vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables’ (Certeau 1984: 117). Space ‘is composed of intersections of mobile elements’ and thus does not have the stability of a “proper” (Certeau 1984: 117).

While thus being distinct, place and space are nonetheless linked, because in Certeau’s (1984: 117) view, ‘*space is a practiced place*’. The street, that is, the place provided by urban planners, ‘is transformed into a space by walkers’; so too a text, that is, a place provided by an author, is transformed into a space by readers involved in the act of reading (Certeau 1984: 117). This point seems to lend support to my abovementioned suggestion of walkers principally resembling readers.

## **Ricoeur – how we use metaphor**

### *Creating a metaphor*

Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) was a French philosopher and historian who studied certain linguistic and psychoanalytical theories of interpretation (EB 2008). In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur (1977) traces the development of his ideas regarding the concept of metaphor through three linguistic disciplines, each of which relate to particular linguistic entities. The word is the linguistic entity of the discipline of classical rhetoric, the sentence is that of the discipline of semiotics and semantics, and discourse is that of the discipline of hermeneutics. This pairing becomes a tripling when Ricoeur (1977) also points out that metaphor has the quality of a form, then of a sense and finally of a reference, respectively.

Within classical rhetoric, Ricoeur (1977) suggests, metaphor is a single-word figure of speech defined as a trope of resemblance. A metaphor ‘constitutes a displacement and an extension of the meaning of words’ (Ricoeur 1977: 3). Using metaphor, Anne Michaels, for example, writes a poem – and calls it ‘What the Light Teaches’ – in which she ‘says’ that language is a house (What the Light Teaches 128). Using metaphor, she takes a situation or an entity that we accept as standard and displaces its particular (literal) meaning by extending that meaning to reach a different situation or entity. Conventionally, literally, we use language in communication; we cannot live in it. Metaphorically, language becomes something that we can use as a place of residence. By giving language a characteristic that in reality it does not have, Michaels encourages us to imagine it differently. Ricoeur’s (1977: 6) discussion here is

based on Aristotle's<sup>10</sup> theories, a central tenet of which is that 'to metaphorize well ... implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars'.<sup>11</sup>

Within the discipline of semiotics and semantics, metaphor is transferred into the framework of the sentence, though clearly the single word is never completely left behind. Michaels's sentence containing the abovementioned metaphor reads: 'Language is the house with lamplight in its windows,/ visible across fields' (What the Light Teaches 128). In semiotics, a word is 'treated as a sign in the lexical code'; in semantics, a sentence 'is the carrier of the minimum complete meaning', Ricoeur (1977: 4) explains. He bases this categorisation on Benveniste's<sup>12</sup> distinction between 'the sign [as] the unit of semiotics' and 'the sentence [as] the unit of semantics' (Ricoeur 1977: 69). The distinction is useful in supporting and leading to other distinctions of discourse, in Ricoeur's (1977) view, which he identifies and presents in pairs.

For the purposes of this discussion, Ricoeur's fourth pair is most relevant: the distinction between sense and reference, which takes place at the level of the sentence. Only at this level 'can what is said [house] be distinguished from that of which one speaks [language]', Ricoeur (1977: 74) explains. He highlights this trait as marking the fundamental difference between semiotics and semantics: 'Semiotics is aware only of intra-linguistic relationships, whereas semantics takes up the relationship between the sign and the things denoted – that is, ultimately, the relationship between language and world' (Ricoeur 1977: 74). The verse containing the pertinent sentence in Michaels's poem provides, semiotically, nouns (*language, lamplight, house, windows, fields*), verbs (*is, can, bear*), an adverb (*across*) and a pronoun (*anyone*), for example. Semantically, there is the idea or the image of language standing house-like in a field and welcoming people inside with its lamplight. A corollary to this distinction is that the semiotic is subordinate to the semantic viewpoint (Ricoeur 1977: 217), a notion that Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996: 107) reiterates in the following form: 'What is ultimately important in the text ... is not the object which it depicts but the world that it generates'.<sup>13</sup> We discuss this idea of the world generated by texts further below.

Upon Ricoeur's fourth pair, it may seem logical to base an alignment of sense with semiotics and reference with semantics. Semiotics is intra-linguistic and sense entails what is said, while semantics seems extra-linguistic in its relating of language with the world and reference facilitates our apprehension of a reality outside of language. However, such an alignment would not be in accordance with Ricoeur's views. He does not categorise the second linguistic discipline as semiotics, with the linguistic element being the sentence and the quality being sense. Nor does he categorise the third linguistic discipline as semantics, with the linguistic element being discourse and the quality being reference. Instead, he combines semiotics and semantics as parts of the second discipline, to which he allocates the element of sense (Ricoeur 1977). The aptness of this combination is evident in his view of 'the *sense* of metaphor as a founding of a new semantic pertinence' (Ricoeur 1977: 6). Thus, sense is applicable to semantics as well as to semiotics.

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle (384–322 BC), Greek philosopher and scientist.

<sup>11</sup> In Certeau's copy of Aristotle's *Poetics*, metaphor is described as 'consist[ing] in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else' (Aristotle, in Certeau 1984: 109).

<sup>12</sup> Émile Benveniste (1902–1976), French linguist.

<sup>13</sup> See below, page 27, footnote 16, for further comment on this aspect of Ricoeur's theory.

In 'What the Light Teaches' the word 'language' is a noun, which means it has semiotic value; *and* it means something, it has a sense – it tells us of a medium of communication. Among the accepted standards of language there is not a capability of serving as a place of residence, or 'housing'. The word 'house' in the poem is also a noun and it also has a sense – it tells us of a physical structure of walls, windows and a roof. One of the accepted standards of that structure is the capability of housing people. By attributing the title 'house' to the thing 'language' – that is, by using metaphor – Michaels is giving language the characteristic of the capability of housing people. The term 'language' has sense semiotically as language and semantically as house.

Within the discipline of hermeneutics, the focus shifts from the sentence to what Ricoeur (1977: 6) calls 'discourse properly speaking'. Discourse, in his eyes, comes into being when words are used to create something, or when they are arranged in a particular way. Through these actions, the product – the discourse, such as a poem or a novel – is entire and cannot be broken down into a collection of words. Moreover, he calls discourse a 'disposition' (Ricoeur 1977: 219), a whole made up of arranged parts, bearing in mind also the verb 'to dispose', which indicates the act of arranging. It is this act that makes the discourse irreducible. In all discourse, Ricoeur (1977: 6) believes, there is a connection between 'sense' (discourse's 'internal organisation') and 'reference' ('its power to refer to a reality outside of language'). In quality the two are contrasted – as we have seen above, Ricoeur attributes the quality of sense to the discipline of semiotics and semantics, and the quality of reference to the discipline of hermeneutics. In the hermeneutic act the two are combined, as we see now.

In an address given in 1971, Ricoeur (1977: 319) defines sense as 'the immanent content of the text' and reference as 'what [the text] says *about* the world'. Michaels's poem proposes that there are similarities between uninhabitable language and an inhabitable house, that words resemble shelter, that sentences can take on tangible form – in being spoken, for example – and thus that, for a time, the impossible can be possible. Aware that the structuralists exclude from their view of a text not only textual 'reference to an external world' but also 'its connections to an author who *intended* it and to a reader who *interprets* it', Ricoeur (1977: 319) follows his hermeneutic urge by attempting to formulate 'a better connection between the [structuralist] stage of objective explanation and the [hermeneutic] stage of subjective appropriation'. In his view, the hermeneutic act is based on a recognition of the contrast between 'the objective meaning of the text' (related to sense) and 'the subjective intention of the author' (related to reference) (Ricoeur 1977: 319). He sees this objective meaning as 'a requirement addressed to the reader' (Ricoeur 1977: 319). The first stage in the process of interpretation would be the reader's 'obedience to this injunction' (Ricoeur 1977: 319).

The process advances 'not so much from an intersubjective relation linking the subjectivity of the author and the subjectivity of the reader as from a connection between ... the discourse of the text and the discourse of interpretation' (Ricoeur 1977: 319). While holding in common 'some basic propositions' (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 101) with theorists such as Dilthey and Schleiermacher,<sup>14</sup> Ricoeur (1977: 220) is opposed to their proposal that

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<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), German philosopher. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), German theologian, preacher and classical philologist.



‘harmony’ between ‘the spirit of the author and that of the reader’ is the first principle of interpretation. As an alternative to the ‘difficult’ and ‘often impossible’ quest for harmony, for ‘an intention hidden behind the work’, he proposes a quest that ‘addresses the world displayed before the work’ (Ricoeur 1977: 220). In performing the hermeneutic act, in interpreting a work, the reader will ‘display the world to which [the work] refers by virtue of its “arrangement”, its “genre” and its “style”’ (Ricoeur 1977: 220).<sup>15</sup>

The combination of sense and reference is evident in Ricoeur’s (1977: 319, emphasis added) belief that ‘what has to be interpreted in a text is what it says *and* what it speaks about, i.e., the kind of world which it opens up’.<sup>16</sup> As he explains, the final stage of interpretation – ‘the final act of “appropriation”’ – is ‘less the projection of one’s own prejudices into the text than the “fusion of horizons” [in Gadamer’s<sup>17</sup> terms] that occurs when the world of the reader and the world of the text merge’ (Ricoeur 1977: 319), in other words, when the reader has embarked on the quest and is addressing that world. If we read the above-quoted sentence from Michaels’s poem by itself, we may accept her suggestion of language as a house but express the attendant question: ‘What of it?’ We need to read further to find the answer. The metaphor is extended in the verse to represent not only a house, as a structure of housing, but also a home, a place of refuge, for someone who has lost everything but himself, for ‘anyone/ who has only his tongue left’ (What the Light Teaches 128). Michaels seems to suggest that an almost wholly dispossessed person can find sanctuary in a medium of communication that he is able to use by virtue of knowing how to use it and of having the physical attributes that facilitate such use. By extension, and perhaps merging the world of Michaels’s poem with our own world more fully, we can see her metaphor as proposing that (even) a country-less, homeless, family-less<sup>18</sup> person still has himself, which is also the source of his ability to use language.

A corollary to Ricoeur’s line of thought is evident in his acknowledgement of being influenced by the British and American school of ordinary language philosophy. He presents what he sees as two significant contributions that this type of philosophy can make: First, ‘the polysemic feature of our words in ordinary language appears to [him] as the basic condition for symbolic discourse’ and therefore ‘the most primitive layer in a theory of metaphor [and] symbol’ (Ricoeur 1977: 321). Second, ordinary language seems to him ‘to be

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<sup>15</sup> According to Ricoeur (1977: 219), there are three ‘categories of production and of labour’ that we can use to describe a text, a work, in order to distinguish each one: First, there is the dispositional character of the work – it is made up of arranged parts and is thus not reducible to ‘a simple sum of sentences’. Second, the work obeys ‘formal rules’ or a ‘codification’ that we call its ‘literary “genre”’ (Ricoeur 1977: 219). Third, the work has a certain style that makes it unique, different from all other works, even if they are of the same genre (Ricoeur 1977: 219). Thus, ‘arrangement, belonging to genres, achievement in a particular style, are the categories proper to the production of discourse as work’ (Ricoeur 1977: 220).

<sup>16</sup> There may be a slight contradiction in this aspect of Ricoeur’s theory: On the one hand, here he argues for the importance, in the interpretive act, of paying attention to what the text says (words and sentences, senses) *and* what it talks about (the text as a whole, references). And on the other hand, as we have seen earlier in this section, he suggests that the world that is generated by a text (made up of the things that the text refers to) is more important than the object the text depicts (the things it says). However, it may also simply be that his ideas have changed over time. He proposed the former idea in 1971 (Ricoeur 1977: 319) and the latter in 1982 (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 107).

<sup>17</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), German philosopher.

<sup>18</sup> This is an adaptation of the line in the poem that reads: Language is ‘a country; home; family’ (What the Light Teaches 128).

a kind of conservatory for expressions which have preserved the highest descriptive power as regards human experience, particularly in the realms of action and feelings' (Ricoeur 1977: 321–2).

Ordinary language, then, is the firm foundation on which metaphor can be built. It is within such language that we may be able to locate sense, or perhaps it would be more accurate to use the term 'senses', in the light of the polysemic nature of words highlighted by Ricoeur (1977: 321). Ordinary language comprises senses, which – through suspension of first-level denotation or reference – become split-referents, in the rather complex process that we explore below, and as such can become instances of instruction and of evocation.

Dealing with Aristotle's text *Rhetoric*, Ricoeur (1977: 33) identifies the instructive value of metaphor, a quality that 'concerns the pleasure of understanding that [hopefully] follows surprise'. This function is carried out in the sudden combination of 'elements that have not been put together before' (Ricoeur 1977: 33). 'Strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already,' Aristotle (in Ricoeur 1977: 33–4) believes; 'it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh.' The implication is that 'strange words' are not instructive. And Aristotle (in Ricoeur 1977: 33) uses the word 'only' pejoratively in reference to what he sees as the unhelpful capability of ordinary words in this context. By contrast, I suggest that, in the light of Ricoeur's abovementioned approval of ordinary language, we can take 'ordinary words' as being the basis of the metaphors through which we gain access to something surprising and fresh, and, ultimately, instructive. Aristotle (in Ricoeur 1977: 34) uses an example of 'a withered stalk' to portray the state of old age – we would not be able to imagine that state in terms of a plant that has lost its vitality should we be, and remain, ignorant of the meaning of the ordinary words 'withered' and 'stalk'. We would not be able to conceive of the potential of language to serve as housing should we be ignorant of the meaning of ordinary words like 'house', 'lamplight' and 'home'.

Metaphor's evocative function links to the abovementioned 'realm of feelings' and to Ricoeur's engagement with the work of Paul Henle.<sup>19</sup> In dealing with Henle, Ricoeur (1977: 190) proposes the following additional function of metaphor: 'Metaphor ... adds to the way in which we perceive .... This still rests upon resemblance, but at the level of feelings'. Northrop Frye<sup>20</sup> (in Ricoeur 1977: 226) also identifies this emotional aspect of poetic language, calling it the poem's 'mood', which is 'articulate[d]' by 'poetic images'. Below, we see how Ricoeur's use of this aspect differs from Frye's original intention, as well as how, again in contrast to Ricoeur, Gottlob Frege<sup>21</sup> uses the term 'feelings' with regard to what he believes is poetry's non-referential nature.

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<sup>19</sup> Few biographical details for Paul Henle are available on the internet. He seems to have been affiliated with Northwestern University in America, and presumably he was born in the early years of the 20th century and died in the mid to later part of that century, because JSTOR, the online academic journal archive, provides over 50 articles and book reviews by Henle published in ethics and philosophy journals from 1935 to 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Herman Northrop Frye (1912–1991), Canadian educator, literary critic and author.

<sup>21</sup> Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), German mathematician, logician and philosopher, whose work is influential in the philosophy of language.

### *Re-describing reality*

Still within the hermeneutic discipline, in terms of reference, Ricoeur (1977: 6) believes that ‘the metaphorical statement has the power to “re-describe” reality’. ‘Metaphor presents itself as a strategy of discourse that, while preserving and developing the creative power of language, preserves and develops the *heuristic* power wielded by *fiction*’ (Ricoeur 1977: 6). From fiction, in other words, as readers we can learn something for ourselves, and Ricoeur’s point is that we can do so through an exploration of possibilities that is the underlying motivation of the heuristic function. As he muses: ‘Is not the function of poetry to establish another world ... that corresponds to other possibilities of existence, to possibilities that would be most deeply our own?’ (Ricoeur 1977: 229). The phrase ‘another world’ could have two, simultaneously-operating, meanings here: In the way that ‘poetry’ indicates the genre, the body of poetic work made up of poems, the other ‘world’ could indicate the body of worlds made up of poetic worlds; and the other world (singular) could also indicate each world – established by the author and addressed by the reader – of each poem or work of fiction.

However, poetic discourse ‘*seems* to be essentially non-referential and centred on itself’, suggests Ricoeur (1977: 6, emphasis added). Basing this part of the discussion on the work of Frege, he points out that Frege believes that when we speak and think we are intentionally seeking ‘the truth’, an action that ‘drives us always to advance from the sense to the reference’ (Ricoeur 1977: 218). This drive is evident only in scientific research and the making of scientific statements, according to Frege (in Ricoeur 1977: 218), and not in the making of poetic statements. He (Frege) uses ‘Ulysses’<sup>22</sup> as an example of a proper name, in epic poetry, that has no reference – ‘we are interested only in the sense of the [name] and the images and feelings thereby aroused’ (Frege, in Ricoeur 1977: 220).<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur (1977: 224) proposes that, likewise, the ‘dominant current of literary criticism’ has in mind ‘the destruction of reference’ (‘current’ being in the 1970s). In poetry, the fusion of sense and sound, and of sense and images, put forward by theorists such as Pope, Valéry, Wimsatt, Hester and Husserl<sup>24</sup> result in the poem – the solid object forged by ‘poetry converting language into matter, worked for its own sake’ – being ‘not the representation of some thing, but an expression of itself’ (Ricoeur 1977: 224–5).

The idea arises also in the linguistic communication theory of Roman Jakobson.<sup>25</sup> Jakobson presents six factors and six related functions of communication. His insistence that ‘the difference between poetic and non-poetic texts can be explained in purely linguistic terms’ (Jefferson & Robey 1986: 56) is manifested in his view that the poetic function is not only related to the message factor, it also ‘deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects’ (Jakobson, in Ricoeur 1977: 222). A direct result of this action, according to Ricoeur (1977: 222), is ‘the highlighting of the message for its own sake’.

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<sup>22</sup> ‘For Frege’s semantics, proper names in logic designate real beings. “Socrates” is the name of the real Socrates’, explains Ricoeur (1992: 29 fn 3) in his subsequent text, *Oneself as Another* – and thus ‘Ulysses’ is the name of the (as it happens) fictional hero of Homer’s epic poem, the *Odyssey*.

<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur (1992: 29 fn 3) elaborates: ‘The name is therefore a tag that is attached to the thing’.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Pope (1688–1744), English poet and satirist. Paul Valéry (1871–1945), French poet, essayist and critic. WK Wimsatt (1907–1975), American theorist and critic. MB Hester (d.u.), author of *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (1967). Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), German philosopher.

<sup>25</sup> Roman Jakobson (1896–1982), Russian-born American linguist and Slavic-language scholar.

Ricoeur (1977: 225, 226) identifies Frye as approaching the limit of the argument ‘most radically’ in proposing that ‘in literary discourse, the symbol represents nothing outside itself but links the parts to the whole within the discursive framework’, and in seeing poetry as ‘ignor[ing] reality and limit[ing] itself to forging a “fable”’. From this point of view, ‘meaning in literature is literal; it says what it says and nothing else’ (Ricoeur 1977: 226). As mentioned above, Frye introduces the additional aspect of mood, which apparently colours but leaves unharmed his premise. According to Frye (in Ricoeur 1977: 226), mood ‘*is* the poem, not something else still behind it’.

There is also an epistemological side to the argument, which Ricoeur (1977) sees as having been imported from philosophy into literature. Logical positivist critiques state that ‘all language that is not *descriptive*, that is, gives ‘information about facts’, ‘must be *emotional*, with ‘the emotional’ being ‘sensed purely “within” the subject’ (Ricoeur 1977: 226–7). In this situation, the contrasting elements of cognition and emotion, as well as denotation and connotation, are established. He cites the ‘positivist conviction’ of Cohen<sup>26</sup> in this regard: ‘The function of prose is denotative, the function of poetry is connotative’ (Ricoeur 1977: 227).

But if poetry or metaphorical discourse expresses only itself and is incapable of acting referentially, as the above theorists suggest, how can such discourse say something about reality, as Ricoeur would have us believe? Ricoeur is evidently opposed to the abovementioned ideas. His aim is ‘to do away with this restriction of reference to scientific statements’ (Ricoeur 1977: 221), and he questions whether ‘the expressivity of things’ must not ‘find in language itself ... a power of designation that escapes the alternative of denotative or connotative’ (Ricoeur 1977: 228). Bearing up under the weight of Frege’s view that we strive for truth whenever we think or speak, Ricoeur’s (1977: 221) solution is that ‘the literary work ... displays a world only under the condition that the reference of descriptive discourse is suspended’. When the first-level denotation or reference is suspended, a second-level denotation or reference is ‘set free’ (Ricoeur 1977: 221).

In Frege’s terms, the word ‘language’ in ‘What the Light Teaches’ can only denote or refer to a method of communication, and cannot serve as a form of housing. Following Ricoeur’s argument instead, we can realise that the word ‘language’ does not necessarily mean such a thing, and that once we grasp the idea that language is not a method, it is a physical structure, we can suspend our belief in language as language and be free to imagine language as a house of refuge. The second-level denotation of language as house is released, and attained by us. Ricoeur (1977: 229) sees this suspension as the ‘negative condition of the appearance of a more fundamental mode of reference’. And here he brings in Frye’s ‘mood’ for a purpose other than that which Frye intended – he sees mood not as the poem, but as ‘the index of a manner of being’, which thus has an ‘extra-linguistic’ quality and serves as ‘a way of finding or sensing oneself in the midst of reality’ (Ricoeur 1977: 229). A dispossessed person likely feels utterly bereft; the suggestion of a refuge may, to him, bring with it great relief and comfort that in turn lends him the courage to go on living.

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<sup>26</sup> Jean Cohen (1949–1994), French linguist.

Moreover, while Ricoeur may agree that the creative act figuratively converts language into matter (just as coincidentally language is converted into a house in the example we are using), in contrast to the theorists of the ‘dominant current’ he does not concede that the solid or ‘concrete object’ expresses itself; instead he suggests that the creative act ‘opens up access to reality in the mode of fiction and feeling’ (Ricoeur 1977: 229). Ricoeur (1977: 229) sees this as one of the significant clues in the search for ‘another reference’ or, in Jakobson’s terms, a ‘split reference’ (Ricoeur 1977: 230). Thus Ricoeur (1977: 224) does not reject Jakobson’s views outright – he accepts what he believes to be one of Jakobson’s ‘valuable suggestions’. As he explains, Jakobson argues in favour of an ‘ambiguity’ that affects ‘all the functions of communication’ (Ricoeur 1977: 224): ‘The ‘addresser’ and ‘addressee’ are ‘split’, and by extension so is the message and thus the reference (Jakobson, in Ricoeur 1977: 224). Jakobson (in Ricoeur 1977: 224) locates this case as being played out in fairytales – Majorcan storytellers, for example, tend to begin their tales with the pronouncement: ‘It was and it was not’.

Ricoeur (1977) suggests that the analysis of a metaphorical statement is the two-part action which establishes a referential conception of poetic language that patterns itself on Jakobson’s notion of the split reference. In one part of the metaphorical analysis, the way in which metaphorical meaning is created points to the splitting of reference, because the meaning of a metaphorical statement comes into being when the literal meaning is blocked. ‘In a literal interpretation, the meaning abolishes itself’ (Ricoeur 1977: 230). We can find a metaphorical statement believable only when we grasp its figurative meaning, knowing that there is usually no benefit to be gained from turning a small problem into a much larger problem; whereas we cannot find a metaphorical statement believable when we grasp its literal meaning and contemplate the magic that would be required to make a mountain out of a molehill.

In this creation of metaphorical meaning, Ricoeur (1977) sees the referential act as undergoing a two-phase process, initially negative and then becoming positive. In the first, negative phase, ‘poetic discourse’ seeks to abolish the reference ‘by means of self-destruction of the meaning of metaphorical statements’ (Ricoeur 1977: 230), the destruction being rooted in the loss of the literal meaning. A molehill of earth cannot be turned into a mountain of rock; language cannot house people. In the second, positive phase, the metaphorical meaning is gained through ‘a “twist” of the literal meaning’ (Ricoeur 1977: 230). We can worry about a small problem, the molehill, so much that it becomes a much larger problem – a mountain in our mind. In the event of absence of all other habitations, language can serve as a form of habitation. ‘It is this innovation in meaning that constitutes living metaphor,’ Ricoeur (1977: 230) proposes.

With regard to the other part of the metaphorical analysis, Ricoeur (1977) feels that the semantic study of metaphor is also useful in this discussion. He recalls Aristotle’s point about resemblance: seeing similarity in what is dissimilar. In this process, meanings are paralleled, and he concludes that therefore the objects being metaphorised can also be paralleled (Ricoeur 1977). This brings us the ‘schema’ of the split reference, he suggests: ‘It sets up a parallel between metaphorization of reference and metaphorization of meaning’ (Ricoeur 1977: 231). To substantiate this proposition, he sets out to ‘overcome the

opposition between denotation and connotation’ and to ‘insert metaphorized reference into a *generalized* theory of *denotation*’ (Ricoeur 1977: 231). He uses the theories of Goodman<sup>27</sup> (in Ricoeur 1977: 231), whose belief that ‘in aesthetic experience the *emotions function cognitively*’ shows a refusal to distinguish between the cognitive and the emotive with which Ricoeur evidently agrees.

### *Eliciting metaphorical truth*

The destination that Ricoeur (1977) has been travelling towards in his line of argument is the concept of metaphorical truth, and he proceeds to explore the question of whether or not we can speak of that concept with any kind of conviction. Judging by his view that we seek truth only in scientific statements, Frege and like-minded theorists would say ‘no’ to the question. By contrast, in his identification of a world before the work and a reality to which we gain access through fiction and feeling, Ricoeur seems to be answering the question in the affirmative.

One of Ricoeur’s (1977: 7) fundamental conclusions is that ‘the “place” of metaphor ... is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*’. A copula is a linking verb; it connects a subject and a complement, and indicates a state rather than an action. Ricoeur (1977) narrows it down here to designate a state of existence, and, as we see shortly, a state of non-existence. Based on the abovementioned combination in fairytales of the states of ‘is’ and ‘is not’, his belief that metaphorical statements are equally, essentially dualistic is closely related to this conclusion (Ricoeur 1977).

There are some theorists, Ricoeur (1977) suggests, who deny this dualism, to the detriment of the concept of metaphorical truth. Those who proclaim only that metaphors identify – saying ‘this is that’ – give in to ‘ontological *naïveté*’; those who proclaim only that metaphors compare, that is, who subject a metaphor to the ‘critical pressure’ of the ‘is not’, thereby lose the ‘is’ by ‘reducing it to the “as if” of a reflective judgment’ (Ricoeur 1977: 249). In his view, ‘there is no other way to do justice to the notion of metaphorical truth than to include the critical incision of the (literal) “is not” within the ontological vehemence of the (metaphorical) “is”’ (Ricoeur 1977: 255).<sup>28</sup> ‘What the Light Teaches’, perhaps, in Ricoeur’s hands, would not state ‘house’ every time it meant language, it would not say or hint that language is not house – it would make sure that we know that language is not a house while imagining or even believing that it could be. Because it is and is not – language cannot serve as a form of housing, and yet it does serve as a form of housing.

### *Re-describing the re-description of reality*

A few years after *The Rule* was published, Ricoeur (1977: 6) qualified his statement concerning the power of metaphor to “re-describe” reality’. In an interview with philosophy professor Charles Reagan (1996: 106) (at various times Ricoeur’s student, confidant and colleague), Ricoeur conveys his discomfort with the expression ‘re-describe the world’, its

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<sup>27</sup> Nelson Goodman (1906–1998), American philosopher.

<sup>28</sup> In exploring the identity of the ‘irreducible basic particular’ – that is, a person – Ricoeur (1992: 52, 3) proposes something similar: ‘The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other’.

inappropriateness ‘to what [he] was doing’ in this book and his avoidance of the term in his subsequently published three-volume text *Time and Narrative* (1984–88). By stating that ‘in *The Rule of Metaphor* ... [Ricoeur] speak[s] of the power of metaphors and narratives to redescribe the world, [which] implies first of all a power of description’, Reagan (1996: 106) seems to ground the issue in the place from which Ricoeur is at pains to move on. Taken literally, re-description indeed implies a power of description, but in Ricoeur’s view it is precisely the literal that we must leave behind.

Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996: 106) explains that he took the expression “redescribe” the world (hence his placement of the term in inverted commas) from the field of the theory of models. Model theorists use the premise that there are situations in which ‘something has been already decided in terms of a description’; the benefit Ricoeur (in Reagan 1996: 106) was expecting to gain from this is that ‘the same thing happens with poetic language’. His expectation seems to have been fulfilled, as he argues that ‘it is always against the background of ordinary language ... that there is a breakthrough of metaphorical language’ (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 106). By transferring the premise from model theory to metaphor theory Ricoeur does not commit himself to a ‘representational philosophy of description’, but simply acknowledges that ‘it is impossible to put in question everything in a discussion without having a background’ (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 106).

### **Bourdieu – how we communicate**

#### *Dominating and being dominated through language*

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a French sociologist and anthropologist, positions and activities that differentiate the primary substance of his work from that of this doctoral thesis. As a premise, he distinguishes between objectivism and subjectivism, and, according to John Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 11), the editor of the English translation of his book *Language and Symbolic Power*, regards both as ‘inadequate intellectual orientations’, the former being slightly less inadequate than the latter. ‘His alternative theory of practice is an attempt to move beyond objectivism without relapsing into subjectivism, that is, to take account of the need to break with immediate experience while at the same time doing justice to the practical character of social life’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 12). The details of this theory are beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis, as are Bourdieu’s ‘more concrete anthropological and sociological studies’ to which we should refer, Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 23) recommends, if we are to better understand his ‘rather flexible notions’ of symbolic power and symbolic violence. Instead, it is Bourdieu’s prevailing interest in and work on language that play a significant part here, and I propose that by its very nature the symbolism of which Bourdieu (1991) speaks can indeed, without such reference, be introduced here and included in discussions in subsequent chapters.

A pervasive characteristic of *Language* is Bourdieu’s (1991) use of terminology taken from the field of economics. Words such as ‘capital’, ‘market’ or ‘field’, and ‘profit’ abound, supporting the less easily recognisable ‘habitus’, ‘symbolic power’ and ‘symbolic violence’. Bourdieu (1991) does not refer to this aspect of his book himself, but Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991) feels it necessary to provide some explanation, as well as support. To regard Bourdieu’s perspective as a form of ‘economic reductionism’ would be erroneous, Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 15) suggests; we should rather recognise that his approach is

‘more complicated and more sophisticated’ – he treats the economy as ‘one field among a plurality of fields’, of which some others are literature, art, politics and religion. While these fields have ‘distinctive properties’ and ‘distinctive forms of capital, profit’ and so on, practices within each field may ‘concur with a logic that is economic in a broader sense’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 15). Thus Bourdieu uses the terms ‘in ways that are at least partly metaphorical’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 14).

Two of the major thrusts of Bourdieu’s argument in *Language* are, first and logically springing from his sociological standpoint, that we should not, indeed cannot, separate an act of communication – speaking, writing and reading – from the context in which it is enacted. The approach leading to this error would be ‘to treat language as an object of contemplation’ (Bourdieu 1991: 37), ‘an autonomous object’, and thus to accept ‘the radical separation which Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>29</sup> made between internal and external linguistics’ (Bourdieu 1991: 107). Second, the relation between such an act and its context is also a relation of power, a relation in which power is exercised by some people over others. According to Bourdieu (1991: 37, emphasis added), we should see language ‘as an *instrument* of action and power’. Language is a tool to be used by people – ‘used’ in a broad sense, that is, used to various effects and acknowledged as having various effects. And it is people who ‘give’ language power. If we accept Saussure’s distinction, Bourdieu (1991: 107) believes that we are then ‘condemned to looking within words for [their] power ... where it is not to be found’. ‘Authority comes to language from outside’, Bourdieu (1991: 109, 107) explains, and advises that we would do better to look outside words, in the ‘*delegated power* of the spokesperson’.

‘Language at most *represents* ... authority, manifests and symbolizes it’ (Bourdieu 1991: 109). Thus, ‘linguistic exchanges’ comprise ‘relations of symbolic power<sup>30</sup> in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized’ (Bourdieu 1991: 37). Bourdieu (1991) presents a circular relationship: There is a group; it can be a political group, a religious group, or any other kind of group. The group appoints a person, or a person volunteers, to speak on its behalf, to voice its views.<sup>31</sup> The person speaks for, or represents, the group. He would not be in such a position without the group, nor would the group have a spokesperson without him. ‘*In appearance* the group creates the man who speaks in its place and in its name ... whereas *in reality* it is more or less just as true to say that it is the spokesperson who creates the group’ (Bourdieu 1991: 204). The person is ‘the cause of that which produces his power’ (Bourdieu 1991: 204) – he is given power or authority to speak by the group, and he exercises the power of speaking *and* the power of choosing what to say. For ‘when a single person is entrusted with the powers of a whole crowd of people, that person can be invested with a power that transcends each of the individuals who delegate him’ (Bourdieu 1991: 203).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), Swiss linguist.

<sup>30</sup> According to Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 23), and it seems logical, Bourdieu uses the phrase ‘symbolic power’ to refer not so much to ‘a specific type of power’, but rather to ‘an aspect of most forms of power as they are routinely deployed in social life’.

<sup>31</sup> Hence Bourdieu’s (1991: 107) use of the phrase ‘delegated power’, above.

<sup>32</sup> By extension, the larger the group, the greater the transcendental power, as Bourdieu (1991: 191) suggests that ‘the speech of the *spokesperson* owes part of its “illocutionary force” to the force (the number) of the group that he helps to produce’.



Like Certeau (1984), Bourdieu (1991) thus posits people interacting in situations of dominance – of production and consumption, domination and subordination. As Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 23) reminds us, in daily life, in ordinary situations, ‘power is seldom exercised as an overt physical force’. If it is not physical or literal, it must be figurative – ‘it is transmuted into a symbolic form’, and as a result of this transformation power gains a legitimacy that it would not otherwise possess (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 23). One form of such legitimacy is language designated as the ‘legitimate language’, the ‘official language’, that is, the language that some people use and teach, and that others learn and accept as the appropriate one to be used. Bourdieu (1991: 69–70) defines it as the ‘authorized, authoritative language, speech that is accredited, worthy of being believed, or, in a word, *performative*, claiming (with the greatest chance of success) to be effective’.

The use of this language ‘depends on the social position of the speaker’, on the amount of access he has to the institution that generates and promotes the language (Bourdieu 1991: 109). The spokesperson is believed, is endowed with authority to speak the authorised language, because ‘his reality ... is based not on his personal conviction or pretension ... but rather on the collective belief, guaranteed by the institution’ (Bourdieu 1991: 125–6). We return to this point below.

Symbolic domination occurs partly through the use of the official language. The producers are ‘authors who have the authority to write’ and speak the language, and the consumers are the ‘grammarians and teachers who ... fix and codif[y]’ it and must also use it, ‘inculcate its mastery’ in classes and lecture theatres (Bourdieu 1991: 45). By extension, students, who are the receivers and the learners, are also consumers. The producers produce the language and the consumers accept it as a legitimate product. Such usage and acceptance of usage is affected, to a significant degree, by sociological relationships – by class structures. Basing the idea on the work of Durkheim,<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu (1991: 166) explains that symbols are ‘instruments of knowledge and communication’, and as such effectively facilitate social integration. ‘The different classes ... are engaged in a symbolic struggle ... aimed at imposing the definition of the social world that is best suited to their interests’ (Bourdieu 1991: 167). Through the use of symbols, the dominating class can achieve a ‘*consensus* on the meaning of the social world’, which in turn ‘contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order’ (Bourdieu 1991: 166), that is, to the continuation of their dominance.

Someone from a higher class, by which they are attributed with greater social standing or status, can symbolically dominate – as Bourdieu (1991: 167) sees it, commit ‘symbolic violence’ against – someone from a lower class by using the legitimate language. This is evident, for example, in a conversation taking place in a clothes shop between an upper class customer and a lower class sales assistant. Without intending to, the customer can intimidate the assistant simply by speaking the more formal language she has been taught at school. The assistant is ‘condemned to a practical, corporeal recognition of the laws of price formation which are the least favourable to [her] linguistic productions’, and thus her responses may be either ‘embarrassed’ or ‘broken’, or she may resort to silence, ‘very often the only form of expression left to dominated speakers’ (Bourdieu 1991: 97, 99). Symbolic violence can also take place without a word being exchanged, as we see below.

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<sup>33</sup> Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), French social scientist.

Expressed in Bourdieu's (1991: 66) economic terms, a linguistic exchange constitutes an economic exchange, in which producer(s) and consumer(s) participate. A producer is 'endowed with a certain linguistic capital' (Bourdieu 1991: 66). 'Capital' comprises various forms of resources. Economic capital is money, cultural capital is knowledge and skills, and symbolic capital is accumulated prestige or honour (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 14). Linguistic capital is 'the capacity to produce expressions' that fit, that best suit the particular context, or market,<sup>34</sup> in which the words are used or uttered (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 18). The linguistic exchange is also 'capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit' (Bourdieu 1991: 66).

Thus Bourdieu (1991: 66) sees utterances as '*signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed'. By extension, utterances made by the consumer, the dominated person, may perhaps be seen as signs of submission or adherence, intended to be noticed and accepted in turn. In a manner similarly circular to the relationship between the group and the spokesperson, this situation seems to imply that a consumer can turn into a producer – a person not only accepting a language as legitimate but also assimilating it and using it particularly appropriately thereby becomes one of the people who dominate others with that language.

Bourdieu (1991: 50–1) furthermore believes that the situation of dominance would not exist without the acceptance of the dominated, who are similar to but also different from Certeau's (1984) crafty consumers: 'All symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values'. For Bourdieu (1991), a consumer's acceptance of a language as legitimate is not conscious, or deliberate; instead, it is rooted in the consumer's habitus.

#### *Learning how to behave – defining the 'habitus'*

Perhaps one of Bourdieu's better known and significant usages of an 'old', 'Aristotelean' concept (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 12) concerns the 'habitus'. The habitus comprises a set of dispositions, a series of characteristics and qualities of mind that each person has and that informs the ways in which the person behaves and thinks. Characteristically, Bourdieu (1991: 51) feels that these dispositions are sociologically guided; they are 'unquestionably the product of social determinisms'.

As summarised by Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 12–13), the dispositions have the following characteristics: They are inculcated – from birth we learn things, such as table manners among many others, that gradually become habits of behaviour and thinking. Dispositions are structured in that they reveal the social conditions in which we acquired

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<sup>34</sup> 'Market' is the slightly less-preferred term that Bourdieu (1991) uses to describe each of the social contexts in which people act. He also uses the term 'game', in some instances, and the more-preferred term 'field', to indicate 'a structured space of positions, in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital' (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 14). A field allows one form of capital to be converted into another, for example one can get a certain job if one has the necessary educational qualification, and as such is always a 'site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of capital specific to [that field]' (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 14) – one person will wish to keep his lucrative job, another person will try to gain a promotion and improve her career.

them. The very fact that some of us are taught table manners indicates the existence of a class structure, a level of behaviour and thought that is considered appropriate and therefore in opposition to one that is considered inappropriate. Dispositions are also durable, they exist in and of the body, which lasts as long as its organs continue to function. In this they are ‘pre-conscious ... not readily amenable to conscious reflection and modification’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). Dispositions are, lastly, generative and transposable. They can elicit a range of ideas and ways of behaving in social contexts other than the context in which we originally gained them.

The habitus furthermore gives us a sense of what is and is not appropriate, of how to behave and respond in our daily lives.<sup>35</sup> In other words, rather than simply carrying out an action, we frequently attach a judgement to that action. Eating a lot of food is ‘bad’ because it can be detrimental to one’s health and can be seen as a sign of greed (itself considered a bad state). Eating moderately is ‘good’ because it can help us to maintain our health and can be seen as a sign of reasonable self-restraint (itself considered a good state). Moreover, these judgements are usually influenced by our perceptions of how other people view us and of what they think of us. I may refuse a second helping of lasagne because I do not want to appear greedy in other people’s eyes, while my own opinion may be that eating two plates of lasagne is acceptable. If I am concerned about other people’s opinion of me, I will refuse the second serving and thus stop myself from doing that which I wish to do but that may seem inappropriate to them; if I am not concerned with their opinion of me, I may happily accept the second serving.

Having introduced the concept of the habitus, among others, in 1972,<sup>36</sup> in 1979 Bourdieu published a monograph exploring the judgement aspect of the concept in much greater detail, discussing as it does the relationship between aesthetic taste and class position in France – a person with ‘good taste’ has thereby ‘acquired the distinction that separates him from other class positions in society’ (Partapuoli & Nielsen n.d.). The habitus guides rather than determines our behaviour. It gives us a practical sense that ‘is not so much a state of mind as a state of the body, a state of being’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). This relates to Bourdieu’s concept of the bodily hexis.

*Judging ourselves and others – exploring the ‘bodily hexis’ and the ‘linguistic habitus’*

Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 13) defines the concept of the bodily hexis as ‘a certain durable organization of one’s body and of its deployment in the world’. The body is ‘a repository of ingrained dispositions’<sup>37</sup> that make ‘certain actions, certain ways of behaving

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<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, as Ricoeur (1992: 94) points out, adds a moral tone to the matter: Together, ‘dispositions ... form our character’. Virtues are ‘voluntary’, for we are ‘somehow partly responsible for our states of character’ (Aristotle, in Ricoeur 1992: 94). The same is true of vices. Thus, Ricoeur (1992: 94) believes, ‘Aristotle’s intention is certainly to extend the responsibility for our acts to our dispositions, hence to the whole of our moral personality’. For Aristotle, then, the dispositions cannot be pre-conscious.

<sup>36</sup> Bourdieu introduced the concept in a text that was published that year in French. The text was published in 1977 as *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, which has been described as ‘his breakthrough in English’ (Partapuoli & Nielsen n.d.).

<sup>37</sup> There seems to be a slight contradiction in terms in this phrase, as ‘repository’ suggests something being received from elsewhere and stored, whereas ‘ingrained’ describes something already existing within. Perhaps ‘site of ingrained dispositions’ would be a more accurate phrase.

and responding, seem ... natural' (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). There are two things at work here: external and internal guiding factors that give the bodily hexis a dualistic nature. On the one hand, the relation between our habitus and the special social contexts in which we act<sup>38</sup> ““orients” [our] actions and inclinations without strictly determining them’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). In other words, our behaviour is influenced but not controlled by this relation that exists outside of ourselves.

On the other hand, we too play a role in organising our body and the manner in which we use it in the world. Within each of us is the capacity to decide how to move and speak, and then to carry out that behaviour. Indeed, the bodily hexis is our ‘practical way of experiencing and expressing [our] own sense of social value’, suggests Bourdieu (1984: 474) in his earlier text, *Distinctions*. Our ‘relationship to the social world and to [our] proper place in it is never more clearly expressed’, he explains, ‘than in the space and time [we] fee[re] entitled to take from others’, that is, in the space we claim physically with our bodies, through ‘bearing and gestures’ that indicate our ‘self-assur[ance] or reserv[e] ... (“presence” or “insignificance”)', and in the ‘interaction time’ that we claim with our speech, as well as the manner – ‘self-assured or aggressive, careless or unconscious’ – in which we do that (Bourdieu 1984: 474).

The bodily hexis’s dualistic nature is further evident in the body being ‘the site of incorporated history’, because ‘the practical schemes through which the body is organized are the product of history and at the same time the source of practices and perceptions which reproduce that history’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). The manners that we have learned at table as children may well become second nature by the time we are adults; they are part of the history of our lives, and if we believe in them we will pass them on to our children.<sup>39</sup>

Concentration camp survivor Primo Levi<sup>40</sup> was branded, upon entering Auschwitz in 1944, by a number tattooed on his forearm – a mark on the body that in subsequent decades has widely come to serve as a notorious symbol of the attendant Holocaust horrors. Levi’s body was literally ‘organized’ through the ‘practical scheme’ (Thompson) of branding, as well as through the reasons for and the implications of the branding – he was given the number because of who he was, and because of his number he was forced to be a certain way and do certain things. Without it, for example, at the most literal level, he would almost certainly have starved. As we learn in Levi’s (1960: 34) memoir of his time in Auschwitz as a Jew and Fascism resistance fighter, *If This Is a Man*, only by ‘showing [his] number promptly’ did he receive ‘bread and soup’.

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<sup>38</sup> We need to bear in mind here Thompson’s careful qualification concerning the production of practices or perceptions in which the habitus is involved (see below, page 76, footnote 42).

<sup>39</sup> This is one example among many. Equally relevant would be the ideas and practices that are passed on and enacted without ever having become ‘object[s] of a specific institutional practice, explicitly articulated in language’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). Some of us do not put our elbows on the table while eating because we have been given the verbal instruction not to do so; some of us show respect to people who are several, and many, years older than ourselves not necessarily because we have been told to do so, but because we have seen our parents and siblings doing so.

<sup>40</sup> Primo Levi (1919–1987), Italian-Jewish writer, chemist and concentration camp survivor.

The number, too, was accompanied by a judgement: Prisoners displaying a lower number had been in the camps for a longer time and were thus given respect because they were seasoned not only in the myriad and mysterious workings of the camp but also in suffering and the art of survival; prisoners displaying a higher number had been in the camp for a shorter time and were a source of amusement to the former because they could be hoodwinked into giving up some of their precious food ration and sent on pathetic, fictitious errands (Levi 1960: 34). More seriously, as Levi (1960: 34) points out, the numbers represented a ‘funereal science ... epitomiz[ing] the stages of destruction of European Judaism’. Thus we can see the number as an example of a site of incorporated history (Thompson).

In *Language*, Bourdieu (1991) does not discuss the concept of the bodily hexis itself, but instead focuses on the relationship between it and the linguistic habitus. The linguistic habitus is ‘inscribed in the body’ and thus forms ‘a dimension of the bodily hexis’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 13). A sub-category of the habitus, the linguistic habitus is the set of dispositions that we attain in relation to speaking. We learn to speak by hearing our family and peers speak, *and* by speaking ourselves – the linguistic habitus is ‘linked to the market no less through its conditions of acquisition than through its conditions of use’ (Bourdieu 1991: 81). The bodily hexis’s dualistic nature is thus shared by the linguistic habitus.

Integral to our linguistic education and practice is, understandably, an awareness of the value, or lack thereof, of what we say and how our speech affects those around us. We learn – through being told, through observation, through perception of others’ reactions – what to say and what not to say. ‘The system of successive reinforcements or refutations has thus constituted in each one of us a certain sense of the social value of linguistic usages and of the relation between the different usages and the different markets’ (Bourdieu 1991: 82). The polite pupil will get a more positive reaction from his schoolteacher than will a rude child; the joke-telling teenager will have more friends than her shy sister. Levi (1960) was obliged to learn German in the camp, where his safety was utterly precarious. In *The Truce*, Levi’s memoir of his return home following the war’s end, we learn that he was advised more than once *not* to speak German, for his own safety, during the slow and circuitous journey (Levi 1965: 223, 227).

The awareness, the knowledge, of how to speak and how not to speak gives us a ‘linguistic “sense of place”’ that ‘governs the degree of constraint which a given field will bring to bear on the production of discourse, imposing silence or a hyper-controlled language on some people while allowing others the liberties of a language that is securely established’ (Bourdieu 1991: 82). As we see shortly, in certain relations one person, consciously or unconsciously, can dominate to the point of silencing another person with their greater linguistic resources – or linguistic capital, as Bourdieu (1991) calls it – or simply with their presence.

A parent puzzled by her son’s erratic behaviour may be further frustrated by his monosyllabic responses to her probing questions; an undergraduate student may be intimidated into silence by a professor’s criticisms of her essay. In both cases the producer-dominator is dominating the consumer-dominated, and one of the places in which the effects of the process are evident is in the dominated’s language – hyper-controlled in the first example, non-existent in the second example. At the start and at the end of his

imprisonment, Levi (1960: 44; 1965: 226–7) could not control his intense desire to speak, formerly because he was profoundly anxious and confused, and latterly because he felt compelled to ‘tell the civilized world [of the things] ... that ought to shake every conscience to its very foundations’. In the first instance, he was told quite literally to ‘be quiet’, and in the second instance his audience simply moved off without responding (Levi 1960: 44; 1965: 227).<sup>41</sup>

These examples of course point to the linguistic habitus’s social character – ‘competence, which is acquired in a social context and through practice, is inseparable from the practical mastery of a usage of language and the practical mastery of situations in which this usage of language is *socially acceptable*’, explains Bourdieu (1991: 82). The linguistic habitus’s relation to the bodily hexis is also evident in the way in which our ‘sense of [our] *own social worth*’ governs our ‘practical relation to different markets ... and [our] whole physical posture in the social world’ (Bourdieu 1991: 82). In the above examples the mother and the professor are competently using socially acceptable language, which is mirrored by their body language. Perhaps the mother is standing in the doorway of her son’s bedroom, or sitting beside him on his bed; perhaps the professor is sitting at his desk or striding around his office. Either way, most likely their body language indicates a focus on the receivers of their speech. By contrast, the receivers’ body language likely indicates resentful or fearful submission. The son may be lying stiffly on his bed, refusing to look at his mother; the student may be sitting, cowed, in the professor’s office. For Levi (1965: 379), it was only after ‘many months’ of being at home after the war that he was able to stand up straight, in other words had lost ‘the habit of walking with [his] glance fixed [submissively] to the ground’.

*Unconsciously acceding to the legitimate language*

Consumers do not simply submit to symbolic domination, or express a belief in that which dominates – they accept or recognise a language as legitimate because their habitus predisposes them to do so. The linguistic market in which they grow up, or in which, as adults, they act, exercises certain allowances and restrictions on their dispositions, and the dispositions are adapted in order for these ‘holders of a given linguistic capital’ to gain material and symbolic profit (Bourdieu 1991: 51).<sup>42</sup> And this all occurs without the person being aware of it, without their having decided it – bearing in mind the characteristic of durability that Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 13) links with a state of pre-consciousness, a state not easily accessible to conscious reflection. Indeed, Bourdieu (1991: 51) proposes that

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<sup>41</sup> In the first instance it was his fellow prisoners who told the babbling Levi (1960: 44) to be quiet – they needed their sleep, and they did not need their feelings repeated for them by him. In the second instance, during a halt in one of the many train trips that he was forced to take in heading for home, Levi (1965: 226–7) stood among a group of Poles who had surrounded him and were interrogating him, perhaps because of his “zebra” clothes’, the shabby striped jacket and trousers that had served as the prisoners’ uniform. A Polish, multilingual lawyer translated Levi’s (1965: 227) German ‘torrent’, and believed he was protecting him by presenting him only partially truthfully as an Italian political prisoner. Levi was not a devout Jew, but it was as a Jew that he had suffered most in the camp. Newly free, having this essential aspect of his person left out and finding that his religious status continued to put him in danger, Levi (1965: 227) felt ‘tired beyond human measure’ at realising that the war was not over, that the nightmare he had frequently had in the camp had come true – he ‘sp[oke] and [was] not ... listened to’, he had found ‘liberty’ and remained ‘alone’.

<sup>42</sup> Bourdieu (1991: 77) also expresses this situation as being one of making ‘concessions ... to a social world by accepting to make oneself acceptable in it’.

the factors which are the most influential in the formation of the habitus are transmitted without passing through language and consciousness, but through suggestions inscribed in ... apparently insignificant aspects of things, situations and practices of everyday life. ... the ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking ... are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious.

Thus, symbolic dominance can even take place in silence, and often without the dominator intending domination. Bourdieu (1991: 52) cites the ‘domestic unit’ as an example, specifically the ‘marital or teenage crises’ that occur from time to time in many families: ‘Therein is a ‘power of suggestion’ that tells the child (or the spouse) not ‘what he must do’, but ‘what he is’, and thus ‘leads him to become durably what he has to be’. The relationship between the parent and the child, between the spouses,

may be such that one of them has only to appear in order to impose on the other, without even having to want to, ... a definition of the situation and of himself ... which is all the more absolute and undisputed for not having to be stated. (Bourdieu 1991: 52)

In this way, we are influential in the ongoing (in)formation of each other’s habitus; we teach each other how to behave, towards us and subsequently towards others – a state of affairs that confirms Bourdieu’s (1991) emphasis on the significant role that social interaction plays in our practices of everyday life.

Closely related to the issue of the consumer’s complicity, or perhaps simply another way of expressing the matter, is Bourdieu’s (1991: 170) proposal that power cannot exist unless people believe in it, accept its legitimacy: ‘Symbolic power ... can be exercised only if it is *recognized*’. The politician

derives his political power from the trust that a group places in him. He derives his truly magical power over the group from faith in the representation that he gives to the group and which is a representation of the group itself and of its relation to other groups. (Bourdieu 1991: 192)

An author derives power from her published work, and from the fact that her work is published. With regard to her chosen subject matter, she must compete with other authors for the readers’ favour, but she need not compete with them over the issue of whether work such as this should be published in the first place. ‘The struggles among writers over the legitimate art of writing contribute, through their very existence, to producing both the legitimate language ... and [a] belief in its legitimacy’ (Bourdieu 1991: 58).

An important point to bear in mind is Bourdieu’s (1991: 113) sense that misrecognition ‘is the basis of all authority’. ‘Symbolic violence,’ he believes, ‘can only be exercised by the person who exercises it, and endured by the person who endures it, in a form which results in its misrecognition as such, in other words, which results in its recognition as legitimate’ (Bourdieu 1991: 140). As Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 23) explains it, dominated people operate within ‘hierarchical relations of power’, and they do not see that ‘the hierarchy ... is an arbitrary social construction which serves the interests of some groups more than others’. Their recognition of the legitimacy of power is based on this observational failure – they do not see and so do not question the arbitrariness; they accept the construction, and therefore they accede the legitimacy. Thus in paraphrasing his own above-quoted statement about

power being exercisable only if it is recognised, Bourdieu (1991: 170) states: ‘that is, misrecognised as arbitrary’. He does not mean that the people submitting to the power see the power as arbitrary; he means that they do *not* see it as arbitrary and therefore they misrecognise it. The consumers’ misrecognition interweaves with their awareness, or exercised lack of awareness, of their own state. For they ‘do not want to know that they are subject to [symbolic power]’, that they are being dominated, nor that ‘they themselves exercise it’ (Bourdieu 1991: 164).<sup>43</sup>

The conversational relationship may be one of domination and subordination, but as with Certeau’s (1984) producers and consumers, Bourdieu (1991: 37) nonetheless seems to believe that the participants play an equally active role, that the receiver of a linguistic message is just as involved as the sender, and that both are subject to the rules of the field or market in which the exchange takes place – the ‘dispositions of the linguistic habitus’ are ‘socially constructed’. Each speaker is ‘socially characterized’, and ‘fashions an idiolect from the common language’ (Bourdieu 1991: 38, 39); each receiver ‘helps to *produce* the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience’ (Bourdieu 1991: 39).<sup>44</sup> Thus, if we are to understand the symbolic effects of language, Bourdieu (1991: 41) feels, we must view language as ‘the exemplary formal mechanism whose generative capacities are without limits’. We use language to convey myriad meanings; we receive and interpret – thereby producing – myriad meanings from the language used.

This case is altered in the act or context of the spokesperson speaking for, or representing, a group. Bourdieu (1991: 211–12, latter emphasis added) sees this act, this context, as embodying an ‘*oracle effect*’, that is,

the trick which consists in producing both the message *and* the interpretation of the message, in creating the belief that ... the spokesperson, a simple symbolic substitute of the people, is really the people in the sense that everything he says is the truth and life of the people.

By speaking, the spokesperson brings into existence the group in whose name he speaks. Through the oracle effect, Bourdieu (1991: 211) tells us, the spokesperson undergoes a ‘*splitting of personality*’: In order to align himself with the group, to be one of the group, to say what the group says, the spokesperson can no longer be just himself; he must become part of the group, he must abolish that which is purely individual and ‘make a gift of his person to the group’ (Bourdieu 1991: 209). He cancels himself in order to become, as Bourdieu (1991: 211) sees it, a moral person, an institution (that is, a being that has been instituted – with authority). A religious leader who declares himself ‘prepared to die for his people’, a

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<sup>43</sup> Herein lies a possible contradiction, perhaps one of the ‘various aspects of Bourdieu’s work which could be [and have been] questioned and criticized’ (Thompson, in Bourdieu 1991: 3): The consumers’ exercised lack of awareness points to a degree of consciousness on their part that is in contrast to Bourdieu’s (1991: 51) presentation of dispositions being ‘constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint’. Moreover, symbolic violence cannot be exerted, Bourdieu (1991: 51) implies, on people who are not predisposed to feel it – they ‘will ignore it’ – which also seems to indicate that there are (at least some) people who may perceive the violence but choose not to be affected by it.

<sup>44</sup> As Thompson (in Bourdieu 1991: 14) emphasises: ‘Particular practices or perceptions’ – such as a conversation or train of thought – ‘should be seen, not as the product of the habitus as such, but as the product of the *relation between* the habitus, on the one hand, and the special social contexts or “fields” within which individuals act, on the other’.



politician who promises to ‘give herself to her country’, are spokespeople playing out the oracle effect.

The spokesperson is not the dupe in this situation. His individual abolishment may seem selfless, but is not. For in becoming ‘Nothing’ he becomes ‘Everything’, Bourdieu (1991: 211) believes. While he may lose the individual that he was, he gains power: The oracle effect ‘enables the authorized spokesperson to take his authority from the group which authorizes him in order to exercise recognized constraint, symbolic violence, on each of the isolated members of the group’ (Bourdieu 1991: 212). In linguistic terms, he shifts from the indicative to the imperative. Bourdieu (1991: 212) questions whether anyone would follow him if he, as himself, says that people must overthrow the government, for example. ‘Everything changes’, he concludes, if he is ‘placed in statutory conditions such that [he] may appear as speaking “in the name of the masses”’ (Bourdieu 1991: 212). All the difference is made when ‘I’ becomes ‘we’, which is when a ‘takeover of force’ occurs symbolically as a ‘*takeover of form*’ (Bourdieu 1991: 213).

Bourdieu (1991: 211) also calls this process ‘usurpatory ventriloquism’. ‘The fact of speaking for someone, that is, on behalf of and in the name of someone, implies the propensity to speak in that person’s place’ (Bourdieu 1991: 209). It is not a case of the spokesperson merely reiterating what the original person has said or told them to say; it is rather a case of the spokesperson hearing what the original person wants him to say, interpreting it, and then deciding what to say. In speaking for someone the spokesperson usurps, tends to take over, and say things on behalf of the original person that they may or may not have said had they spoken for themselves.

In Bourdieu’s (1991) eyes this does not necessarily have the negative connotation it could appear to have – the group is not automatically misrepresented. Perhaps it is in the split, in the process in which a spokesperson becomes something other than the individual he was, that Bourdieu (1991: 214) finds reason for suggesting that he ‘is not a cynical calculator who consciously deceives the people, but someone who in all good faith *takes himself to be* something that he is not’. Because for Bourdieu (1991: 214–15),

one of the mechanisms that allow[s] usurpation ... to work ... in all innocence, with the most perfect sincerity, consists in the fact that, in many cases, the interests of the [spokesperson] and the interests of the [group], of those he represents, coincide to a large extent, so that [he] can believe and get others to believe that he has no interests outside of those of his [group].

This is a mechanism of ‘legitimate imposture’ (Bourdieu 1991: 214), or a person’s authorised presentation of themselves. When we name a doctor or a judge Doctor or Judge, as they name themselves, we and these people thereby affirm that they have performed the necessary studies and gained the medical or legal qualifications that allow them to practise under the title. The ‘pretension expressed by [their] appearance’ – for example the white coat and the black gown – is the tangible manifestation of the person’s legitimate posture (Bourdieu 1991: 76).

## Klemperer – how the Nazis manipulated the German language

### *Surveying the Nazi use of German*

Victor Klemperer (1881–1960) was not so much a language theorist as a keen, observant and authoritative philologist. While his work is described in this section alongside that of the French language theorists that are discussed in this chapter, his involvement is more deeply rooted in the practical than is that of Certeau, Ricoeur and Bourdieu. Even though the latter also base their theories on the study of particular cultures and contexts, Klemperer's work is based on his lengthy, first-hand, traumatic experience. He himself describes the work as 'half ... a concrete report on lived experience and half ... the conceptual framework of an academic study' (Klemperer 2000: 12). In the years leading up to the Second World War, he was a professor of French literature in Dresden, favouring the writers of the 18th century. It was a role that seems to have elicited his sensitivity to preceding and current linguistic changes, and in which he developed the skills that helped him to pay such careful attention, during the 12 years of Hitlerism<sup>45</sup> (1933–45), to the manner in which the Nazis manipulated the German language, as well as to ponder the matter's present and future implications.

Klemperer was Jewish, but because his wife Eva was Aryan, he was spared some of the harsher Nazi strictures in the earlier years. Soon, however, he was stripped of his post and forced to do manual labour in a factory (Klemperer 2000: 18).<sup>46</sup> From a philological research point of view, this would prove to be useful, because there he mixed with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds with whom he might otherwise not have come into such direct contact. By this time in his 50s and with an unstable heart,<sup>47</sup> he would wake at three-thirty each morning and record in his diary the previous day's events and conversations, telling himself that 'what matters is that [he] listen in specifically to the everyday, ordinary and average things' (Klemperer 2000: 265) in order to bear witness to 'the typical Nazi way of thinking and its breeding-ground: the language of Nazism' (Klemperer 2000: 2). His diaries formed the basis of the *LTI* – the *Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen*,<sup>48</sup> which he wrote in 1945–46 and which has been published in German in at least three editions. Half a century later, in 2000, the text was translated by Martin Brady and published in English as *The Language of the Third Reich: A Philologist's Notebook*.<sup>49</sup>

It is arguable whether Klemperer had this intention from the outset – whether the *LTR* had always been, consciously or unconsciously, his goal. His academic training and interests may have led him seamlessly into his new philological role, and his diary moreover had the crucial benefit of regularly coming to his aid:

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<sup>45</sup> Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), leader of the Nazi Party and chancellor and Führer of Germany from 1933 to 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Klemperer (2000: 87) worked in the envelope and paper bag factory Thiemig & Möbius, the boss of which 'was a member of the SS' but 'did whatever he could for his Jews'.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Klemperer (2000: 262). According to Hans Reiss (1998: 79), however, Klemperer 'seems to have been a bit of a hypochondriac' – 'his medical brothers [physicians Georg and Felix] were unable to find anything wrong with his heart', though 'angina pectoris was diagnosed in 1944'.

<sup>48</sup> Henceforth, the *Tertii Imperii* language is referred to as the *LTI*.

<sup>49</sup> Henceforth, the *Language of the Third Reich* is referred to as the *LTR*.

Again and again during these years my diary was my balancing pole,<sup>50</sup> ... without which I should have fallen down a hundred times. ... in [numerous, genuine] dire straits ... I was invariably helped by the demand I had made on myself: observe, study and memorize what is going on – by tomorrow everything will already look different ... keep hold of how things reveal themselves at this very moment and what the effects are. (Klemperer 2000: 9)

In this way, Klemperer (2000: 9) strove and seems to have managed ‘to safeguard [his] inner freedom’. But the means did not necessarily have the *LTR* end in sight. In the months following February 1945, having narrowly escaped not only Dresden’s fate of being bombed by the Allies, but also his own fate of being included in a final deportation order by fleeing on foot with his wife into American-controlled territory, before they slowly made their safe return, he debated with himself about ‘what work [he] should turn to first’ (Klemperer 2000: 263). His near-future role was not a foregone conclusion.

There is a kind of logic evident in Klemperer’s experiences at the start and end of the Hitler period. While still able to teach and suffering persecution only ‘in a very mild form’, he turned away from the myriad instances of the LTI all around him and ‘buried [him]self exclusively in academia’ (Klemperer 2000: 10, 263). But when he lost his post and was denied all library access, he took on the LTI as his ‘essential tool’ and ‘paramount interest’ (Klemperer 2000: 10). At the war’s end, when a degree of normality had been restored and it was ‘only a question of time before [he] would be able to return to [his] job’ (Klemperer 2000: 263), he was once again able to contemplate the topics he had taught before 1935.

However, while remaining loyal to his ‘Eighteenth Century ... Frenchmen’, Klemperer (2000: 263) also wished to acknowledge his preoccupation ‘with things to do with the Hitler period, which had transformed [him] in so many ways’, as well as his belief that the observations and experiences he had noted in his diary ‘could teach one a thing or two’. From an academic standpoint, he ponders, ‘Had I too also [sic] once thought too readily about THE German and THE Frenchman, rather than keeping in view the diversity of the German and the French?’ (Klemperer 2000: 263). His considered conclusion was a merging of the two roles – philologist and teacher – and his subject matter became the LTI. The *LTR* and his subsequent lectures and seminars enact his view, recorded in his diary during those last months, of the necessity of ‘tell[ing] future teachers in detail about the characteristic features and the sins of [that language]’ (Klemperer 2000: 244).

Friedrich von Schiller<sup>51</sup> (in Klemperer 2000: 14) puts forward the idea of a “cultivated language which writes and thinks for you”. To the individualistic, autonomous ear of the 21st century, this may sound ominous enough; to Klemperer (2000: 14) it can be taken in ‘purely aesthetic and ... harmless terms’. The damage is done, as Klemperer (2000: 14) extends the idea, when the language ‘increasingly dictates [your] feelings and governs [your] entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously [you] abandon [yourself] to it’. Such language is poison. ‘Borne by the drinking water of the LTI’ (Klemperer 2000:

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<sup>50</sup> The metaphor is based on the following ‘old Berlin anecdote’: “Father,” a young boy asks in the circus, “what is the man up there on the tightrope doing with that pole?” – “Silly boy, it’s a balancing pole, and it’s what’s holding him steady.” – “Oh dear, father, what if he lets go of it?” – “Silly boy, he’s holding it steady, of course!” (Klemperer 2000: 8–9).

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), German dramatist, poet and literary theorist.

87), like arsenic, words can be administered in ‘tiny doses’, ‘they are swallowed unnoticed, appear to have no effect’, but then cause a ‘toxic reaction ... after all’ (Klemperer 2000: 14).<sup>52</sup>

Even after the war, even from the mouths of the ‘passionately anti-fascist’, Klemperer (2000: 13) heard countless references to ‘innate qualities of “character”’ and ‘the “aggressive” nature of democracy’, two terms that he locates at the heart of the LTI. ‘Language reveals all’; ‘language brings everything to light’, Klemperer (2000: 10, 146) believes, but he also witnessed again and again how the same language could ‘speak for’ a person, could subjugate those who had until a moment before appeared to be rational, educated and able to think for themselves. It is the attempt to enlighten such people and others to come in this matter that supported Klemperer in his post-war work.

In brief digression, in an essay titled ‘Politics and the English Language’ that he wrote just after the end of the war, George Orwell (1968: 128) expresses almost exactly the same concern, about the English language, which he deplores for having become ‘ugly and inaccurate’ owing to English people’s thoughts being ‘foolish’. The source of the problem is politically and economically based – ‘in our age there is no such thing as “keeping out of politics”’ – and ‘politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia’, comments Orwell (1968: 137). He makes the informed guess that German, Russian and Italian have all similarly deteriorated, as a result of dictatorship (Orwell 1968: 137).

It is easy to be lazy, Orwell (1968: 134) points out, and to use ‘ready-made phrases’ rather than ‘hunt[ing] about for words’; scrupulous writers will ask themselves certain questions about each sentence that they write, while others shirk going to such trouble by ‘simply throwing [their] minds open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in’ – the phrases ‘will construct the sentences for [them] – even think [their] thoughts for [them], to a certain extent’ (Orwell 1968: 135). In a pamphlet about conditions in Germany that he received on the day he wrote this essay, Orwell (1968: 137) finds many examples of the stock phrases that, despite having benevolent intent in this case, ‘anaesthetise a portion of one’s brain’.

But the damage, in Orwell’s eyes, is not permanent. Recognising that ‘the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language’, English people should also see that they ‘can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end’ (Orwell 1968: 139). These people generally assume that they ‘cannot by conscious action do anything about’ the situation of ‘the English language [being] in a bad way’, Orwell (1968: 127) notes. He suggests that on the contrary the ‘bad habits’ that spread through modern English ‘by imitation’ *can* be avoided, with some effort (Orwell 1968: 128).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> French-born American literary critic George Steiner (1929–) (1967: 101) would concur, proposing as he does that ‘to use a language to conceive, organize, and justify Belsen’ is to cause ‘something of the lies and sadism [to] settle in the marrow of the language. ... the cancer will begin, and the deep-set destruction’. For Klemperer the language is used as an agent of infection, while for Steiner the language itself is poisoned. The distinction exists, but in this context it is negligible; the destructive force is equally powerful in both instances. Indeed, this seems to be an instance of the vicious circle the English novelist, essayist and critic George Orwell (1903–1950) (1968: 127) is referring to when he describes an effect becoming a cause, ‘reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form’.

<sup>53</sup> In his essay, Orwell (1968: 127–40) provides some examples of problematic language and several more examples illustrating ways in which to go about fixing it.

Though the quotation that is given in the early pages of Chapter 3<sup>54</sup> in this doctoral thesis seems to reflect an intense pessimism on Klemperer's part, he may well have agreed with Orwell. His intentions are also directed towards continual, if not constant, awareness of the tiny doses of poison that people were still absorbing after the war, and he too humbly puts forward some ideas of how to go about remedying the matter. Understandably, given their professions, Orwell's solutions are addressed to journalists and the common people, Klemperer's to the teachers of the near and further future. But both stress clarity and honesty. Orwell's (1968: 139) opinion that 'political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind' may just as accurately have been Klemperer's.<sup>55</sup>

Returning to the primary discussion, Klemperer's (2000) coining of the phrase 'language of the Third Reich' seems to imply that the Nazis created a new language. This is not the case. Though Klemperer (2000: 10) calls the LTI 'philologically unique', he proposes that the Third Reich coined few words at all, if any. Rather, the Reich used German to promote anti-Semitism in three ways. First, they did so by 'chang[ing] the value of the words<sup>56</sup> and the frequency of their occurrence' (Klemperer 2000: 14), for example the unique Nazi usage of the terms 'fanatical' and 'fanaticism'. Thinkers of the French Enlightenment used them as terms of censure, evoking strong antipathy; indeed, 'prior to the Third Reich no one would have thought of using [them] in a positive sense' (Klemperer 2000: 54). They were completely transformed by the Nazis into 'a virtue', Klemperer (2000: 53) suggests. From their faith, their beliefs, their journalism and creative writing, to their everyday conversations, their behaviour and even their pets<sup>57</sup> – their approach to all of these had to be and was taken fanatically. The Third Reich did not invent these words, Klemperer (2000: 14) points out, 'it just changed their value and used them more in one day than other epochs used them in years'.

Second, they did so by making 'common property out of what was previously the preserve of the individual' (Klemperer 2000: 14). In Klemperer's (2000: 17) view, the publication of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1925 'literally fixed the essential features' of the LTI; and when the National Socialist German Workers' Party (the Nazi Party) came to power in 1933, 'the language of a clique became the language of the people', infiltrating every 'realm of public and private life'. And third, they did so by 'commandeer[ing] for the party that which was previously common property' (Klemperer 2000: 14). Only members of the Reich's Literary Chamber could 'make [their] voice[s] heard', and 'the entire press' could publish only 'what [was] served up by the central office', which allowed it a minimal amount of freedom in the slight variation of wording of text that was 'binding for everyone' (Klemperer 2000: 19–20).

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<sup>54</sup> In the quotation, Klemperer (2000: 14) expresses the belief that while certain words used in the Nazi period could be disinfected in future, there were certain words that would *never* be freed of the taint of oppression. (See Chapter 3, page 114.)

<sup>55</sup> As we see in Chapters 2 and 4, Michaels would most likely concur with this opinion as well. (See, for example, Chapter 2, page 79, and Chapter 4, pages 183–4.)

<sup>56</sup> As we see in Chapter 3 (page 122), through personal experience, concentration camp and torture survivor Jean Améry (in Langer 1995: 121) provides two pertinent examples of this.

<sup>57</sup> A monograph of Reich Marshal and Nazi Party leader Hermann Göring (1893–1946) 'extolled the man for being, amongst other things, a "fanatical animal lover"' (Klemperer 2000: 55).

Bourdieu (1991: 84) would likely concur with the pervasive and restrictive nature of the LTI, as presented by Klemperer (2000), for he suggests that

as one rises in the social order [at the pinnacle of which the Nazis placed themselves], the degree of censorship and the correlative prominence given to the imposition of form and euphemization increase steadily, not only on public or official occasions ... but also in the routines of everyday life.

Klemperer (2000: 20) proposes that in a sense Joseph Goebbels,<sup>58</sup> Hitler's Propaganda Minister, was the sole person 'who determined what was linguistically permissible'.<sup>59</sup> Able to express himself more clearly than Hitler and continuing to speak as Hitler gradually grew silent, Goebbels was also the man who founded the weekly newspaper *Das Reich* in 1940, with the intention of contributing an article to each issue (Klemperer 2000: 17 fn 1). In the latter years of the war, it was customary for Goebbels's *Reich* article to be broadcast on Berlin Radio the evening before its publication, thereby dictating each week 'the intellectual content of all the newspapers in the National Socialist sphere of influence' (Klemperer 2000: 20). Along with 'a vast amount of [Nazi] literature of all kinds' (Klemperer 2000: 17), *Das Reich* was published even in the last days, when Germany was in ruins.

Through Klemperer's eyes, we see that one of the fundamental aspects of the LTI was its rhetorical character. In line with Aristotle's (in Abrams & Harpham 2009: 311) definition of this manner of communication, as orators Hitler and Goebbels sought to 'achieve the ... emotional effects on [their] audience that [would] persuade them to accede to [their] point of view'. And persuade them they did. 'Instead of turning away in nauseated disbelief, the German people gave massive echo to [Hitler's] bellowing' (Steiner 1967: 99).<sup>60</sup> The *LTR* provides several examples of people's unwavering faith in and support of Hitler and Nazism, from the start of the Third Reich to long past the stage where Hitler's defeat was a certainty.<sup>61</sup>

This faith was very much an emotional expression, not one based on any kind of understanding. In the village of Unterbernbach, shortly to be occupied by the Americans, Klemperer (2000: 102) listened to an exchange between four German soldiers from different units. Three of the soldiers expressed bitter recognition of defeat in contrast to the fourth, confident soldier: 'The 'Yanks', the Russians, the 'Tommys' and the French had all 'broken through' there, 'surely even a child could understand that it was the eleventh hour' (Klemperer 2000: 102). The fourth banged on the table with his fist and argued that "understanding has nothing to do with it, ... the Führer ... has always found a way when others have said there is no way out[;] no, ... understanding is useless, you have to have

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945), Minister of Propaganda for the Third Reich, and also doctor of German philology (EB 2008).

<sup>59</sup> John W Young (2005: 53) contests this assertion, suggesting rather that 'Goebbels fell short of exercising "absolute authority"'. Owing to the manner in which Hitler arranged the 'lines of administrative jurisdiction', Goebbels was ever involved in 'bitter rivalries' and never 'gain[ed] for his ministry a monopoly on propaganda and public communications', Young (2005: 53) elaborates.

<sup>60</sup> Améry (1980: 19) extends this argument even further, believing that not only 'all of Germany' but 'the whole world nodded its head in approval' of the Jews being abused, ostracised and murdered, 'even if here and there' the nods were accompanied by 'a certain superficial regret'.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, 'Ch 18: I believe in him' (Klemperer 2000: 97–111, 219).

faith” (Klemperer 2000: 102). This seems a logical result of Hitler’s call to the Germans’ emotions rather than their intellects, as we see below.

Even from a person who was against Nazism came assertions of Hitler’s apparently inexplicably persuasive power (Klemperer 2000: 50). Yet there was also evidence to the contrary. Klemperer (2000: 13) certainly does not believe that ‘the most powerful Hitlerian propaganda tool’ was any one of Hitler or Goebbels’s speeches. On many and varied occasions he instead saw that these speeches either bored or were not even understood by the masses, that when the newspapers reported the entire population as having hung onto every broadcast word at least some of the people had in fact been playing cards and loudly discussing meat and tobacco rations and the latest film (Klemperer 2000: 13). Moreover, Klemperer (2000: 47) identifies a possible ‘distrust of public speakers intrinsic to the German national character’. This is based on the fact that there is only one adjective in German that corresponds with the terms ‘speech’ and ‘to speak’, namely, ‘rhetorical’ (Klemperer 2000: 47). And if something is described as rhetorical, it is lent a poor ring: ‘A rhetorical achievement is always open to accusations of being merely hot air’ (Klemperer 2000: 47). At least a part of the existing audience of German people, then, seemed capable of discernment. Acutely aware of the paradox, Klemperer (2000: 49) professes himself as never having been able to (fully) understand how Hitler managed to have such a powerful impact.<sup>62</sup>

But in the *LTR*, Klemperer (2000) provides some suggestions for the reasons behind such success. He believes that, given the man’s absolute authority as Hitler’s Propaganda Minister, Goebbels was able to exert linguistic influence so thoroughly across ‘the entirety of German-speaking lands’ partly because the LTI saw no difference between the written and the spoken (Klemperer 2000: 20). The Minister’s speech-giving style was the style that he used in his texts. Thus, ‘everything was oration’, everything ‘had to be address [and] exhortation’ (Klemperer 2000: 20). Only in this way, or most effectively in this way, could he reach and take hold of a large and widespread group of people. As we have seen above, ‘everything that was printed or spoken in Germany was standardized to conform to the official party line’ (Klemperer 2000: 11). Just as speech and text were the same in the LTI, so were the private and the public. In fact, there was no private – ‘everything remain[ed] public’, as Hitler would have it, and ‘anything which deviated in any way from the accepted pattern did not [even] make it into the public domain’, Klemperer (2000: 20–1, 11) adds.

Moreover, according to Klemperer (2000), there were noteworthy distinctions between the Nazi leader, Hitler, and Mussolini, leader of the type of fascism on which Klemperer persuasively argues that Nazism was based.<sup>63</sup> Declaiming, the Duce spoke smoothly, swimming ‘with the resonant flow of his native language’; the Führer had a ‘raucous voice’ and used ‘crude, often un-Germanically constructed sentences’ (Klemperer 2000: 49). Mussolini was ‘free of strains and cramps’; Hitler ‘screamed, convulsively’ (Klemperer 2000: 49). It is not surprising, then, that the adjective ‘aggressive’ or ‘belligerent’ (*kämpferisch*), which until 1933 had been ‘new and rarely used’, became one of the LTI’s ‘favourite words’ (Klemperer 2000: 4–5), denoting ‘that taut frame of mind and will which in any situation

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<sup>62</sup> Klemperer (2000: 82) wonders, for example, how Nazism could have thrived as it did in Berlin, where the people had such a ‘discerning sense of humour’ and ‘ability to appreciate the dubious side of things’.

<sup>63</sup> See ‘Chapter 8: Ten years of fascism’ (Klemperer 2000: 45–51).

[was] focused on self-assertion through defence or attack, and which refuse[d] to countenance any form of compromise' (Klemperer 2000: 5).

Furthermore, a testament to Hitler's cunning and to the fact that he was deeply familiar with, and thus able to exploit, the 'psyche of the unthinking masses' (Klemperer 2000: 236), in the early days of the Nazi movement chanting was prevalent. Soldiers marching, civilians demonstrating – everyone was encouraged to take part in giving voice to loud and wordless sound in a way that was 'much more powerful and brutal than communal singing' (Klemperer 2000: 230). Chanting, according to Klemperer (2000: 231), is 'more artificial' and 'more rehearsed', and 'promotes its cause more violently than song'. It 'hits out with a bare fist at the good sense of the addressee, and endeavours to subjugate it' (Klemperer 2000: 230); there is no discernible language in chanting and therefore no expression of thought. Once assured of their position, the Nazis were able to dispense with it, but it was (eerily) to be heard again when the Russians invited the Germans to surrender – the 'soldiers on the very front line' responded by chanting, 'reaffirming their unshakable faith in Hitler and their mission' (Klemperer 2000: 230).

Klemperer (2000: 50) concurs with 'the widely held psychiatric explanation' for Hitler's magnetism being rooted in his 'never-ending [inner] conflict between excessive megalomania and delusions of persecution' – a disease that Klemperer believes also infected a German nation 'weakened and spiritually shattered by the First World War'. He adds a philological explanation: Hitler was so effective exactly because his rhetoric was 'as un-German as the salute and uniform copied from the Fascists ... and as un-German as the whole decorative embellishment of the [Nazis'] public occasions' (Klemperer 2000: 50). Based on an infection 'caused by foreign bodies', the disease nevertheless became 'a specifically German disease', 'bestial' where fascism had been 'criminal', in Klemperer's (2000: 51) view.

A further purpose of the *LTI* is evident in Klemperer's identification of a point of departure from the Aristotelian definition of rhetoric. The ellipsis in the above citation of Aristotle's definition stands in place of the term 'intellectual'.<sup>64</sup> While the Classical rhetorician sought to stimulate the audience's intellect, Hitler's aim was quite the opposite – his 'constant stream of new expressions' revealed his 'fear of the thinking man and [his] hatred of the intellect' (Klemperer 2000: 3).<sup>65</sup> In *Mein Kampf*, while discussing principles of education, Hitler presents these principles in a three-tiered hierarchy: First and by far foremost, physical training takes precedence; second and leading from the first, the character is developed; third and by far the last comes the intellect, which is despised and held in suspicion by Hitler (Klemperer 2000: 3).

Klemperer (2000: 167) proposes that *Mein Kampf* precisely and insistently 'preaches not only that the masses are stupid, but also that they need to be kept that way and intimidated into not thinking'. The intellectual person can and certainly does think, and in doing so is far

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<sup>64</sup> Thus the quotation is as follows: 'In his *Rhetoric*, ... Aristotle defined rhetorical discourse ... and focused his discussion on the means and devices that an orator uses in order to achieve the intellectual and emotional effects on an audience that will persuade them to accede to the orator's point of view' (Abrams & Harpham 2009: 311). (See also above, page 48.)

<sup>65</sup> By contrast, Orwell (1968: 128) proposes that 'to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration'.



more likely to question or point out faults of logic and sense in what they are told. Logical thought, according to Klemperer (2000: 134), was Nazism's 'most deadly enemy'. Moreover, thinking about something not only meant 'delays and scruples', 'it could even lead to criticism, and finally to the refusal to carry out an order' (Klemperer 2000: 141). In order for his aim of Aryan domination to be achieved, Hitler needed to be obeyed, not necessarily agreed with.

In the factory in which they worked, Klemperer (2000: 220) and the other Jewish labourers were permitted by their boss to spend their lunch half-hour in the 'workers' room' or 'hall' (*Gefolgschaftssaal*), which at all other times was 'cleared of Jews' and reserved for use by the Aryan *Gefolgschaft* (the 'workforce' or 'entourage'; literally: 'group of followers'). His daily observation of the former term painted on the wall of the hall hammered home to Klemperer (2000: 221) 'the whole emotional mendacity of Nazism, the whole mortal sin of deliberately twisting things founded on reason into the realm of the emotions, and deliberate distortion for the sake of sentimental mystification'. Collectively entitled *Gefolgschaft*, Hitler's workers were 'burdened', Klemperer (2000: 221) proposes, with 'old Germanic tradition', 'turned ... into vassals, into weapon-bearing liegemen forced to keep faith with their aristocratic, knightly masters'; it was an expression that led directly to the character portrayed by the sentence displayed 'on every banner: "Führer, command and we will obey {*folgen*}!"

According to Klemperer (2000: 227), the word that the Nazis used most powerfully and frequently to engage their audience's emotions was 'experience' (*Erlebnis*). In normal usage, the word implies a difference between everyday events and the fewer, more emotionally intense 'real experiences' that people have (Klemperer 2000: 227).<sup>66</sup> The LTI deliberately drew everything into the realm of experience. The provincial head of the Reich's Literary Chamber instructed people to "'experience"' *Mein Kampf*, while a headline claimed that "'young people experience [a performance of Schiller's drama] Wilhelm Tell"' (Klemperer 2000: 227). We have seen above how, for the Nazis, everything had to be approached from a fanatical perspective; similarly, everything was deemed 'historic' (Klemperer 2000: 40). From every speech delivered by Hitler (despite the tendency of subsequent ones to repeat the content of the preceding one), to the victory of a German racing driver, to the opening of a new motorway – 'every single day' of the life of the Third Reich was viewed as *historisch* (Klemperer 2000: 40–1). But what happened once Hitler had engaged the audience's feelings, once he had convinced the German people of the value of their 'fanatical', 'historical' lives? He dulled their senses and turned them into robots of a kind, using a range of terms borrowed from the fields of technology and mechanics.

In late 1933, Klemperer (2000: 30) recalls, he recorded in his diary that the otherwise 'thoroughly moderate and decent' publisher of a philological journal, following a directive that came from "'factory cells"' within the publishing house, requested him not to seek publication for an article that he had submitted. This seems to have been Klemperer's first encounter of a combination of mechanical and organic terms that became more heavily weighted in favour of the mechanical and technical, as illustrated by the following examples,

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<sup>66</sup> So confirms American-English poet, playwright, literary critic and editor TS Eliot (1888–1965) (1963: 191–2) in the poem 'Burnt Norton': '... surrounded/ By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,/ *Erhebung* [upliftment] without motion, concentration/ Without elimination, both a new world/ And the old made explicit, ...'.

among many others: Klemperer (2000: 144) noticed the occasional use of the term ‘power currents’ (*Kraftströmen*) with regard to a leader’s magnetic personality. For quite some time before the SS<sup>67</sup> came into being, its symbol was ‘painted in red on electricity substations’ along with the warning “‘Danger – High Voltage!’” (Klemperer 2000: 63).

Furthermore, the term ‘wind up’ (*aufziehen*) has had differing uses for many years. In the past it has indicated literally the action one uses to make a clock keep the correct time and to make a mechanical toy perform tricks, and has indicated metaphorically the teasing and light abuse of a person (Klemperer 2000: 42). In more modern times the word has also come to mean ‘to set up’ or ‘to construct’, and has brought with it a pejorative aspect: An advertising campaign that is deemed ‘impressively set up’ is acknowledged as commercially effective, but disdained for its ‘element of excess’, for its ‘sales patter which [does] not precisely match the real value of the thing on offer’ (Klemperer 2000: 42). In Goebbels’s hands, however, the phrase seemed to lose this negative connotation and meant simply what it said. In his statement that the Nazi Party had “‘set up {*aufgezogen*}<sup>68</sup> a massive organization involving millions of people and bringing together all kinds of activities’”, the term was used ‘honest[ly]’ and did not cause people to associate with it any kind of advertising (Klemperer 2000: 43). A text translated from English into German in 1935 – *The Autobiography of a Japanese Publisher* – expresses the author’s intention of constructing “‘an exemplary organization’” (Klemperer 2000: 43). Klemperer (2000: 43) sees these examples as illustrating ‘one of the foremost tensions within the LTI: While stressing ‘organic and natural growth’, the language was at the same time ‘swamped by mechanistic expressions and insensitive to the stylistic incongruities and lack of dignity in such combinations as “a constructed organization’”.

Characteristically thorough, Klemperer (2000: 142) is quite aware that the rapid and increasingly important spread of technology has been leading to the growth of technical terms used ‘by all languages of the civilized world since the beginning of the nineteenth century’; he feels that the point, once acknowledged, needs to be put aside in the context of the discussion. He speculates whether the abovementioned examples and others he had identified were peculiar to the LTI, and concludes that, because many of them had been in evidence since the Weimar Republic<sup>69</sup> or even before, they were not. However, there was a significant element that the LTI brought to its usage of such terms, as implied in the above reference to people as robots.

During the Weimar Republic, the technical terms ‘to anchor’ and ‘to crank’ were transported into the common language, and Klemperer (2000: 143) points out that they were only ever used to refer to ‘objects, situations and activities, never to people’ – ‘the explicit mechanization of the individual himself [was] left up to the LTI’ (Klemperer 2000: 144). The pivotal expression carrying out this aim was ‘to force into line’ (*gleichschalten*) (Klemperer 2000: 144). Once again, as with ‘fanatical’ and ‘historic’, the scope and the audience of the term was widespread. Everyone – from teachers to judiciary and tax employees to members

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<sup>67</sup> The SS was Hitler’s Protective Echelon (*Schutzstaffel*) (EB 2008), translated by Brady (in Klemperer 2000: 63) as the ‘Elite Guard’.

<sup>68</sup> *Aufgezogen* is the past tense form of the term ‘*aufziehen*’.

<sup>69</sup> The Weimar Republic was the form of German government in existence from 1919 to 1933.

of the *Stahlhelm*<sup>70</sup> and SA<sup>71</sup> – was brought into line (Klemperer 2000: 144), a state to which they preferably yielded without argument, in other words, blindly.

The term ‘blindly’ (*blindlings*), according to Klemperer (2000: 141), was one of the ‘linguistic pillars’ of the LTI, used almost as frequently as ‘fanatical’. The term denoted ‘the ideal manifestation of the Nazi spirit with regard to its leader and respective subordinate leaders’, and the nature of such a spirit was one of unquestioning obedience – submission, in military training for example, to ‘the inculcation of a series of automated movements and actions’ (Klemperer 2000: 141). The Nazis apparently did not want ‘to encroach upon the [Aryan] individual personality’, in fact seemed to seek ‘to reinforce’ it, but saw no difficulty in mechanising it at the same time (Klemperer 2000: 141–2). Goebbels proclaimed himself “recharged” by the ‘unshakeable heroism’ of the victims of some bombed west-German cities in whom he had initially intended to ‘instil courage’ (Klemperer 2000: 144–5). The tendency to ‘degrad[e] people to the status of machines’ – evident, for example, in the Minister’s simile of the governor of Hamburg “working like a motor which always runs at full tilt” – was extended to the full limit of the metaphor when Goebbels portrayed people as having *become* machines: “In the foreseeable future we [‘the totality of Hitler’s Germany’] will be running at full tilt again” (Klemperer 2000: 145).<sup>72</sup>

In this way, each (non-Jewish) man and woman seems to have been allowed to retain their individuality while working ‘*in majorem gloriam* of the Führer principle’ (Klemperer 2000: 141), that is, robotically serving their superiors and ultimate leader while being in control of the robots who worked under them. Goebbels enthusiastically related how “everything is back on track”<sup>73</sup> after the bombing of a German city because ‘everyone is “working to their full capacity”’ (Klemperer 2000: 145). Klemperer (2000: 142) feels, however, that ‘this construction disguise[d] universal enslavement and depersonalization’.

These examples, among many others, illustrate ‘not only the *de facto* disregard of individuality, something purportedly valued and nurtured, but also ... the will to subjugate the independent thinker, the free human being’ (Klemperer 2000: 146). Similarly, the arousing of emotion in his military and civilian followers was Hitler’s means, not his intended end – emotion had to suppress the intellect, but then it also had to be suppressed, reduced to ‘a state of numbing dullness without any freedom of will or feeling’ (Klemperer 2000: 228). ‘How else would one have got hold of the necessary crowd of executioners and torturers?’ argues Klemperer (2000: 228).

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<sup>70</sup> The *Stahlhelm* was the ‘Nationalist ex-servicemen’s organization formed in 1918’ and from which ‘all members under the age of 35 had to join the SA’ from the end of 1933 (Klemperer 2000: 29 fn 1).

<sup>71</sup> The SA was Hitler’s Assault Division (*Sturmabteilung*), otherwise known as the Storm Troopers (EB 2008), translated by Brady (in Klemperer 2000: 3 fn 1) as the ‘Storm Detachment’.

<sup>72</sup> Orwell might have seen Goebbels in the same light. He presents the ‘broad truth’ of all political writing being ‘bad writing’, devoid of a ‘fresh, vivid, home-made turn of speech’, and describes watching ‘some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases’ and having the feeling that ‘one is watching ... some kind of dummy ... [a] speaker who has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine’ (Orwell 1968: 135–6). ‘This reduced state of consciousness’, Orwell (1968: 136) concludes, is ‘favourable to political conformity’. Orwell explores his preoccupation with this situation in detail in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), in which he envisages the premises of totalitarianism taken to their logical end.

<sup>73</sup> The expression is taken from ‘the field of automobile construction ...: the wheels on a vehicle stay on the right track’ (Klemperer 2000: 145), and interestingly has remained a part of figurative language in the Western world up to the present day.

One can imagine that in the face of discrimination and persecution, the sufferers – in this case, Jewish people – may try to find some way of rebelling, of maintaining their independence. In a situation in which you are literally and figuratively branded for all to see, where you have little personal freedom and no human rights, the only place where you may retain some form of self is in your thoughts and feelings. Klemperer seems to have managed to do this, while suffering increasingly severe physical and emotional abuse and facing the possibility of death every day. The *LTR* presents us with the picture of the balancing pole, in which the hands that held it are also sketched, but from which ‘the mass of other things’, that is, most of the events and experiences recorded in his diary, has been separated (Klemperer 2000: 265).

Yet even in this more ‘academic’ text Klemperer is revealed as stable, independent-thinking and -feeling, lucid, never melodramatic yet unafraid to express anger and derision, unembittered but at the same time highly affected and enlightened by his and his wife’s experiences. In all, he seems to have survived with his sense of humanity, his spirit and his rationality intact. The same cannot be said of every Jewish person. How humiliating it may well have been for Klemperer (2000: 155) to be pointed out to a child in the street as being “‘to blame for everything’”, to be spat at and further insulted in various ways, and to have to remain silent;<sup>74</sup> perhaps how more ethically and philosophically harrowing it may have been for him to witness the third and final stage of the poison, the ‘toxic reaction’, flourishing wherever he and Eva were housed and, later, independently went.

For one of the major themes running through the *LTR* is the fact that the LTI pervaded Jews’ Houses<sup>75</sup> and conversations and beliefs – Jewish *minds* – just as much as it did that of the Nazis, the Aryans and the other non-Jews. In the first years of the Third Reich, when Klemperer (2000: 11, 10) was working in the factory and receiving regular visits at home from Clemens (the Hitter) and Weser (the Spitter), ‘the principal torturers of the Jews in Dresden’, he was already aware of the lack of any differences to be discerned between ‘how the workers in the factory talked, how the beasts from the Gestapo spoke’ and how the Jews expressed themselves – ‘without a doubt, supporters and opponents, beneficiaries and victims all conformed to the same models’.<sup>76</sup>

The Nazi propagandists’ ceaseless repetition seems to have paid off: Whether the language was printed or spoken, came from the mouths of the educated, the uneducated, the ‘mortal enemies of National Socialism’ and the Jews alike, ‘it was always ... the same clichés and the

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<sup>74</sup> See, for example, ‘Ch 25: The star’ (Klemperer 2000: 155–9).

<sup>75</sup> In Nazi Germany, Jewish people were crowded together in isolated houses, which were nevertheless situated in Aryan districts and shared with Aryans (Klemperer 2000: 157). Before the wearing of the star was introduced in September 1941, the outside of these houses bore a sign designating their nature, while other, exclusively Aryan, houses bore the declaration “‘This house is free of Jews’” (Klemperer 2000: 157). With the advent of the Jewish star such signs and declarations were no longer relevant, as each Jew was forced to carry ‘his own Ghetto with him like a snail with its shell’, and to affix the star above his name on the front door of the house he inhabited (Klemperer 2000: 157).

<sup>76</sup> Klemperer was also not immune. He acknowledges catching himself using two LTI terms: Hiding out in the rural Saxon village of Falkenstein in the last weeks of the war, he was plagued by the fear that someone from the Gestapo would come and ‘take him away’ (Klemperer 2000: 254); and after the war, while writing the *LTR*, he speaks of ‘organizing’ some tobacco for himself (Klemperer 2000: 96). In Auschwitz, the latter term even became a proper noun – ‘Organisator’ – thus gaining ‘savage elegance’ in Primo Levi’s (1960: 95) eyes.

same tone' (Klemperer 2000: 18). In 1933, over coffee, Klemperer lost his temper with some acquaintances. Prepared for the wife's parroting of 'the latest tittle-tattle or current opinion', he was less able to stomach the same sentiments from the husband, whom he had until then considered to be 'tolerably sensible' (Klemperer 2000: 34). This is just one example of the political 'fog' that seemed to have enveloped everyone, including 'intellectuals ... [and] quiet and independent thinkers' (Klemperer 2000: 34).

Klemperer (2000: 87–8, 168) encountered and at times experienced similar instances throughout the war years, from the Aryan woman who gave him an apple to take home to his sick wife while expressing surprise that Eva was German, to the young pharmacist – well educated, strongly against the war in general and not a supporter of the Nazis in particular – who simultaneously argued for equality between her Lithuanian heritage and that of the 'pure German' and against the 'somewhat different case' of the Jews, people who 'gave [her] the creeps'.

Time and again Klemperer (2000: 177) came up against – or, as he describes it, was continually 'slap[ped] in the face' by – the 'language of the victor'. The former academic assistant Elsa Glauber declared that she wished her children to become 'fanatical Germans', this being the 'only way' that '[their] Fatherland' could be cleansed of 'this current un-Germanness' (Klemperer 2000: 178). Even when he pointed out that her use of these expressions was evidence of the language of his and her 'mortal enemies', Klemperer (2000: 178) failed to convince her that she was thereby 'admitting defeat and putting [her]self at their mercy and thus betraying that very Germanness of [hers]'. At first compliant, she agreed with his point and promised to improve, but in a subsequent conversation not only used the same terminology but also added more. This time, she defied Klemperer's (2000: 179) reproach, again using the LTI, calling him 'a purist, a school teacher and intransigent' and 'a fanatic'. He goes into some detail in the *LTR* over this case because he wishes it to serve both as a tribute to Glauber's 'courageous intellect', from which he benefited,<sup>77</sup> and as an indictment of an intellectual, Jewish person's subjugation to the victor's language (Klemperer 2000: 179).

Such subjugation could go to extreme lengths. One of Klemperer's (2000: 180–1) factory foremen, who in pre-war times had been a medical doctor, regarded Nazism as 'a delusion or an illness' that would pass relatively harmlessly. In his new role, the man bitterly appropriated Hitler's anti-Semitic terminology and used it so often and with such conviction that Klemperer (2000: 181) believes he could 'no longer judge to what extent he was ridiculing [Hitler] or himself, or whether this self-deprecating way of speaking had simply become second nature'.<sup>78</sup> For example, the man always addressed each member of his Jewish work group with the prefix 'Jew' – "Jew Mahn, here is your medical certificate for the tooth Jew [the dentist]" (Klemperer 2000: 181). Most of the workers responded to this tendency either with a sense of humour or with resignation, which symbolised for Klemperer (2000: 182) 'the whole subjugation of the Jews'. However, one man responded with a fury that was ironically articulated in a 'posh foreign expression', a favourite of Hitler's: "I won't let you

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<sup>77</sup> See below, page 58, footnote 86.

<sup>78</sup> Later, having had the opportunity to study *Mein Kampf* in detail and notice that certain statements seemed 'very familiar', Klemperer (2000: 181) realised that he had indeed heard them earlier, and therefore that the foreman must have known 'long sentences of the Führer's by heart'.

defame me {*diffamieren*}” (Klemperer 2000: 182).<sup>79</sup> Even in opposition, the poison was revealed.

To Klemperer (2000: 182) it was understandable that this language infiltrated everyday speech – ‘one [was] less careful about what one sa[id] ... [was] more dependent on what [was] constantly in front of one’s very eyes and ringing in one’s ears’ – whereas he was less able to reconcile its prevalence in the Jews’ printed language, which was subject to checking and correction. In the ‘specifically Jewish modern literature’ that was available in the Jews’ Houses, Klemperer (2000: 182, 184) came across one book that adopted the language of the victor with an ‘obsequiousness’ that repeatedly ‘use[d] the characteristic forms of the LTI’ and another that he felt had the LTI at its ‘very core’ (Klemperer 2000: 184). Broadening his disillusioned view, from the various Aryan literary texts to which he gained access in his host’s private library in Falkenstein, Klemperer (2000: 250) perceived betrayal – of ‘education, culture and humanity’, by ‘a multitude of literary figures, writers, journalists [and] academics’ – ‘as far as the eye can see’.

Ignoring the bounds of culture and religion, the LTI also spread across time and land. Klemperer (2000: 36) believes that ‘everything which was later to emerge in terms of National Socialist attitudes, actions and language was already apparent ... in the first months’ of the Third Reich. And in the Klemperers’ journey through Saxony and Bavaria at the end of the war, from the mouths of people ‘of all classes and ages, of every imaginable educational background or lack of it’, of ‘every shade of enmity towards [or] resolute faith in the Führer’, he heard ‘exactly the same LTI’ that he had heard at home in Dresden (Klemperer 2000: 241). A little later, when he was among the refugees and local inhabitants of the rural villages of Unterbernbach and Piskowitz, where ‘there was no longer anyone who believed there was even the slightest chance of victory or of Hitler regaining power’, Klemperer (2000: 260, 261) found that the LTI continued to feature: These people ‘cursed Nazism and did so using its own expressions’.

The dual nature of Klemperer’s (2000: 12) text – a ‘report on lived experience’ and the ‘framework of an academic study’ – is evident almost as soon as one opens the book. Knowing as we now do the decisive conclusion to which Klemperer came at the end of the war as to the subject matter of the work he would resume, it is significant and logical that the *LTR* begins with a dedication to his wife, Eva. When he says that the book would not have come into being, and the author would have ceased to exist long ago, were it not for her (Klemperer 2000: ix), his words are not metaphorical – it is likely that without his Aryan wife

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<sup>79</sup> Here two presumably personal experiences lead to conflicting thoughts. Supporting his argument with evidence from personal communication with Marion Nobel, whose ‘expert assistance and knowledge’ he acknowledges and which appears to be based on first-hand experience, Rob K Baum (2006: 110 fn 3, 102) proposes that ‘the most obvious reduction in language [in the Third Reich] was renunciation of *Fremdwörter* [foreign words], including terms that had been absorbed into German’. Nobel’s (in Baum 2006: 102) examples of *Armee* (army) becoming *Wehrmacht* and *Auto* (car) becoming *Kraftwagen* are credible, yet in contrast Klemperer (2000: 14) finds that ‘in many cases [the] Nazi language point[ed] to foreign influences’. Also citing several examples, Klemperer (2000: 234–6) highlights an apparent ‘predilection for resonant foreign words’ on the part of Hitler, Goebbels and other speechmakers. ‘In every speech and every bulletin the Führer delight[ed] in two entirely superfluous foreign words which were by no means widespread or generally understood: *diskriminieren* [discriminate] ... and *diffamieren* [defame]’ (Klemperer 2000: 235). Hitler ‘kn[ew] the psyche of the unthinking masses’ ‘frighteningly well’, Klemperer argues, and ‘a foreign word impresse[d] all the more the less it [was] understood; in not being comprehended, it confuse[d] and stupefie[d] ...’ (Klemperer 2000: 236).

he would have suffered the fate of most of the Jews in the camps. The love and gratitude, and perhaps a certain amount of guilt or regret,<sup>80</sup> infusing his dedication is given shape when he discusses, in the first chapter, the word 'heroic'.<sup>81</sup>

From Hitler's point of view, Klemperer (2000: 2) explains, *heroisch* wore 'three uniforms' and was never seen 'in civilian clothes'. First, at the start of the period of the Third Reich, the "brown Storm Troopers" were Hitler's 'first heroes', his 'true allies in the battle for the hearts of the people' (Klemperer 2000: 3).<sup>82</sup> Second, in the mid-1930s, the 'most memorable and widespread image of heroism' was found in 'the masked figure of the racing driver' (Klemperer 2000: 4).<sup>83</sup> Third, in 1939 'the racing car was replaced by the tank, the racing driver by the tank driver', and from this time to the end of the war 'anything and everything heroic on land, at sea and in the air wore a military uniform' (Klemperer 2000: 4). The insidious popularity of the term was evident in the fact that after the war, once again teaching, Klemperer (2000: 2) continually came across young people – men recently returned from the field or from POW camps; women unfamiliar with any aspect of military service – who clung to 'Nazi thought processes' even as they strove 'to fill the gaps and eliminate the errors in their neglected education'. Taking part in discussions of humanitarianism, culture and democracy, these young people became lost in 'the fog of Nazism' as soon as they mentioned the concept of heroism, and revealed that they had a 'most dubious notion' of its meaning (Klemperer 2000: 2).

Klemperer (2000: 5) recalls explaining, in response to their polite arguments, that there was more to being heroic than being brave and willing to die – the original Greek Hero was 'someone who performed [often dangerous] deeds which benefited mankind'. Moreover, to his mind heroism was humble and quiet; while acknowledging that 'even in Nazi Germany there must undoubtedly have been a handful of true heroes amongst the sportsmen and soldiers', he remained unconvinced by a heroism that involved 'so much vanity, so much gladiatorial triumph',<sup>84</sup> so many awards ceremonies, wreaths, medals and promotions (Klemperer 2000: 5).<sup>85</sup> For him, true heroism was displayed by 'the many brave people in the concentration camps', and by others 'who recklessly committed illegal acts' (Klemperer 2000:

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<sup>80</sup> Klemperer (2000) never states the matter outright in the *LTR*, but the tone of several descriptions of their experiences at the hands of the Nazis implies his awareness that while his wife saved his life in many ways, he endangered hers.

<sup>81</sup> See 'Heroism (instead of an Introduction)' (Klemperer 2000: 1–7).

<sup>82</sup> Characteristic of Hitler's methods, their presence was not as engaging as the description may imply – their task was 'merely to exercise brute force, to assault political opponents at the rally and throw them into the streets' (Klemperer 2000: 3).

<sup>83</sup> Following his fatal crash, the driver Bernd Rosemeyer gained a place in 'the nation's popular imagination' almost as exalted as was that of Horst Wessel (Klemperer 2000: 4), a member of the Storm Troopers who was killed in a brawl in 1930, possibly by communists, and elevated by Nazi propagandists to martyrdom (*EB* 2008).

<sup>84</sup> The Third Reich set 'much store' in 'covering up [the] difference' between 'a game of sport and the deadly seriousness of war', Klemperer (2000: 215) believes. To this end, as well as to the end of speaking 'the language that the people underst[ood]', Goebbels most frequently addressed Berliners in the Sportpalast, using images he gathered from sport (Klemperer 2000: 217). To him 'the gladiator [was] both warrior and sportsman', for him 'the gladiator [was] the epitome of heroism' (Klemperer 2000: 217).

<sup>85</sup> As Baum (2006: 102) puts it, the myth of one people [the Nazis, the supreme Aryan race] was born, in large part, from a political rally – in Nuremberg, 1934 – whose uniform marching signified disciplined obedience rather than collective belief. Political pageantry displaced the historical record, birthing a new "chosen people".

6).<sup>86</sup> They too were part of an army, he suggests, ‘with a firm and unshakeable belief in the ultimate victory of their cause’ (Klemperer 2000: 6). But to him the most important form of heroism, one with which he was personally familiar, was a ‘wretched and much less audible’ one, neither part of any army or political group nor hopeful of ultimate triumph (Klemperer 2000: 6). It was displayed by ‘the handful of Aryan wives’ who ‘resisted every pressure [manifesting in intense physical and emotional trauma] to separate from their Jewish husbands’ (Klemperer 2000: 6). Thus it is unmistakably to Eva that he is referring when he concludes his dedication with the mention of heroism.

Immediately evident, the *LTR*’s dual nature is furthermore observable up to the book’s last page. From time to time Klemperer (2000) recalls the asides he made in his diaries concerning points that he should and wished to verify once he had regained access to other sources of formal and informal literature – re-established access that he seems by no means to take for granted. And more than once he suggests that a point under discussion could lead to significant and substantial academic study, beyond the scope of his book (Klemperer 2000). The final chapter (preceding the Afterword)<sup>87</sup> is perhaps the richest example of the text’s dual nature, detailing as it does the Klemperers’ varied experiences in the last months of the war as well as, among other literature that was available to him, a close reading, with examples, of two texts whose large print runs implied to Klemperer (2000: 244) their status as ‘privileged and highly influential textbooks’. They serve as samples of the abovementioned educational and cultural betrayal, and as such should be banned, in his view (Klemperer 2000: 244). The chapter also provides the last new expression,<sup>88</sup> further use of two perennial expressions,<sup>89</sup> and the possibly final military coinage<sup>90</sup> of the LTI that Klemperer recorded at the time.

In April 1945, Klemperer (2000: 261) came to the conclusion that the LTI ‘really was total, it truly encompassed and contaminated the whole of Greater Germany in its absolute uniformity’. His final chapter closes with a description of the ‘two visible signs’ of the end of the LTI’s reign: On 29 April, the day that a German surrender document was signed while

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<sup>86</sup> Two such people were Elsa Glauber, who honestly but nonetheless riskily highlighted the Jewish backgrounds of many classic German texts’ editors, thereby having the books allocated to the ‘Jewish library’, to which Klemperer (2000: 177–8) had access, and the Aryan man who crossed the street to shake Klemperer’s (2000: 155–6) hand and stress his opposition to the current anti-Semitic ‘measures’. Interestingly, Reiss (1998: 85) sees this latter ‘act of sympathy’ as equally ‘humiliating’ for Klemperer ‘as verbal abuse from the Nazis’. Perhaps Klemperer expresses as much in his diary of that time; I can find no evidence of such a source of shame in the *LTR*.

<sup>87</sup> See ‘Ch 36: Putting the theory to the test’ (Klemperer 2000: 241–62).

<sup>88</sup> The last new expression was ‘people’s pest control’ (*Volksschädlingbekämpfer*), in reference to the many ‘Gestapo officers and military police’ who had been deployed to find and apprehend the ‘soldiers on leave who had become deserters’ and the ‘civilians who were evading service’ (Klemperer 2000: 242).

<sup>89</sup> The two perennial expressions were as follows: Watching the ‘swarms of silver arrows’, the Allied aeroplanes, fly by, ‘every time, without fail, one of the onlookers would remind everyone, “And Hermann [Göring] said his name would be Meier, if a single enemy plane reached Germany!” And someone else would add, “And Adolf wanted to wipe out {*ausradieren*} the English cities”’ (Klemperer 2000: 258). These two pronouncements, originally made by Göring and Hitler, were repeated frequently and ironically throughout the Hitler period (Klemperer 2000: 119–20). ‘The Führer and his Reich Marshal never summed themselves up more succinctly or more accurately’ than with these two expressions, ‘the one in his true nature as megalomaniac criminal, the other in his role as the people’s comedian’ (Klemperer 2000: 120).

<sup>90</sup> The possibly final military coinage was ‘overrun’ (*überrollen*), used in reference to the swiftly approaching American troops (Klemperer 2000: 260).



Hitler was still alive (*EB* 2008), Klemperer (2000: 261) writes, he found on the floor of the lavatory the two halves of a torn piece of paper – their landlord’s ‘certificate of allegiance’ to Hitler, drawn up in Munich nine years earlier almost to the day. And in the week that followed the appearance of the Allies, in the attic of the newly emptied administrative building, the Klemperers warmed themselves at a fire liberally fuelled by wood and cloth from portraits of Hitler, Nazi wall banners, flags and wooden swastikas (Klemperer 2000: 262). Cathartic as the chapter’s conclusion may be to the reader decades later, one does not easily forget that it is often difficult to distinguish between the life and the study. How much more difficult it was likely to have been for Klemperer at the time. He relied on the *LTR* as his balancing pole, but as such it must also have been an ongoing reminder of the fact that he and his wife were teetering high up on a tightrope.

### *Defending Klemperer*

As the above discussion shows, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate Klemperer’s study of the Nazi use of the German language from his life and experiences before, during and just after the Second World War. Indeed, as some critics may argue, to do such a thing would be detrimental to his body of work. An assumption underlying the approach of several critical essays and articles<sup>91</sup> on Klemperer is that the *LTR* is inextricably linked with his diaries, autobiographies and academic texts,<sup>92</sup> and thus with his life and standpoint in general. It is beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis to explore in depth the ways in which the authors of these essays and articles take him to task for contradictions and hypocrisies that they find in his texts,<sup>93</sup> not to mention some criticisms they make of his personality and behaviour – this thesis simply touches on the issue here with regard to one article, as being typical of the group of articles, through taking up the challenge of some of its debatable statements.

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<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Baum (2004), Reiss (1998), Watt (2000; 2001; 2003) and Young (2005). For some views on Klemperer that are more supportive, see, for example, Baum (2006), Mazower (2000), Mieder (2000), Press (2005), also Reiss (1998), also Watt (2001), and also Young (2005).

<sup>92</sup> As well as the *LTR*, these texts include, for example, his two-volume autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae. Erinnerungen 1881–1918* (1989); the Third Reich diaries *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years 1933–1941* (1998) and *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years 1942–1945* (1999); the ‘Communism diary’ *So sitze ich den zwischen allen Stühlen. Tagebücher 1945–1959* (1999); the newspaper article ‘Sprachlicher Patriotismus’ (1952) and the extended essay ‘Zur gegenwärtigen Sprachsituation in Deutschland’ (1954).

<sup>93</sup> These are the texts Klemperer wrote during and after the Second World War. Some examples of the criticisms are as follows: ‘To participate in public life and to qualify as a “victim of fascism,” with the special benefits conferred by that legal status, Klemperer had to join one of the four political parties sanctioned by the Soviet authority’ (Birken 1999: 63–64 fn 27). In other words, he (reluctantly) became a communist in post-war East Germany. Roderick H Watt (2003: 133) believes that Klemperer joined the German Communist Party and then the Socialist Unity Party ‘in the desperate hope, rather than total conviction, that Communism alone offered a bulwark against a renascent Fascism’. Quickly disillusioned, however, Klemperer also found that his hands were tied; he was ‘compelled to make more and more compromises in his public statements if he wished to ensure that they would pass the censor and thus gain a wider hearing by being published’ (Watt 2003: 133). In Klemperer’s abovementioned extended essay, Watt (2001: 262) finds ‘much of Klemperer’s argument’ in conflict with ‘the analyses and conclusions of his [*LTR*]’. Moreover, he accepted the omission of a certain chapter – ‘Zion’ – from the second edition of the *LTR* in 1949, but had it reinstated in the third edition in 1957. Such to-ing and fro-ing serves as an example for Watt (2003: 141) of Klemperer’s opportunism, his learned ability to ‘cultivate and maintain his personal and professional profile as an academic in the German Democratic Republic ... by adapting to and ... exploiting the exigencies of a foreign and domestic policy effectively dictated by the USSR’.

Having extended Schiller's view of language that writes and thinks for you to that which infiltrates the German people's lives like poison, invisible but infused, in the water system, Klemperer 'commits the anthropomorphic fallacy', in Roderick H Watt's (2000: 427) view, 'of attributing to language an autonomous power, quite independent of human intention, to influence language users'. By contrast, language, Watt seems to be arguing, has no such power, and is not independent of human intention. He does not acknowledge it outright, but this way of thinking seems to bring his position in line with that of other academic linguists whom he describes as having become, 'since the early 1960s', 'increasingly sceptical about the theory, promulgated in Germany particularly strongly by Klemperer, that language can somehow be subject to ideological infiltration or contamination' – 'from the strictly linguistic perspective, it is argued [as he seems to be arguing], language has an essentially value-free function in a communicative relationship' (Watt 2000: 431).

Certeau (1984) (from a variety of critical standpoints), Ricoeur (1977; 1992) (from philosophical and hermeneutical standpoints) and Bourdieu (1991) (from a sociological standpoint), not to mention writers and critics such as Abrams and Harpham (2009), Berger (2001), Murdoch (1970) and Young (1988), may well disagree with this notion of language as being value-free.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, I do not think that Klemperer is committing such a fallacy; he does not seem to see language as independent of human intention. He always provides evidence of the person behind the utterance, be it Hitler, Goebbels, other Nazis, or any one of his colleagues or fellow factory-workers.

It is not language that attempted to rid the world of Jewish people, but Hitler and his followers. They used that language to this aim, and thus we call language that comes from the mouth of a person who wishes to make known their animosity towards Jews 'anti-Semitic language'. But this is not to be taken literally, as perhaps Watt and the other academic linguists do – the *language* is not the anti-Semite, the *person speaking such language* is the anti-Semite. The cases of the anti-Nazis and of the Jewish people themselves that Klemperer (2000) noticed speaking the LTI illustrate not that the LTI existed as an autonomous, powerful entity that controlled these people, but rather that with the aid of the LTI, anti-Semitic users succeeded, partly,<sup>95</sup> in their aim of turning the German people into an unthinking mass. Behind the LTI were Hitler and Goebbels and all the rest – '*diffamieren*' was a favourite word of Hitler's (Klemperer 2000: 182), not one that arose independently of a user.

Watt (2000: 426 fn 10, 435) feels that Klemperer's extension of Schiller's theory shows Klemperer as taking at face value and reinforcing the 'Nazi claims about their success in manipulating [the German] language'.<sup>96</sup> But perhaps Watt is again being overly literal. While

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<sup>94</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 78–9.

<sup>95</sup> They may have been partly successful, according to Klemperer (2000), but Michaels seems to have an oppositional view: In Chapter 3 (pages 114–15), we examine her demonstration of how the Nazis' manipulation of the German language did not totally succeed in portraying the Jews as sub- or non-human (*FP* 165–6) – in other words, in fulfilling their anti-Semitic aims.

<sup>96</sup> Watt (2000: 435) briefly discusses, without translating the German quotation he provides in this regard into English, Heidrun Kämper-Jensen's 'study of official linguistic self-awareness in Nazi Germany', which, he believes, corroborates such claims. Watt (2000: 453 fn 30) provides the study's reference as "'Spracharbeit im Dienst des NS-Staates", *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik*, 21 (1993), 150–83'.

Klemperer (2000) indeed found evidence of the LTI uttered by Nazis and Jews alike, this does not mean he was consciously or unconsciously endorsing the Nazis' claim. As we have seen above, he was equally aware of people playing cards and discussing food rationing instead of listening to 'the Führer or one of his henchmen ... carrying on interminably' in speeches that were being broadcast on the radio nearby (Klemperer 2000: 13).

Moreover, while Klemperer's (2000: 261, 13) conclusion is that the LTI had 'contaminated the whole of Greater Germany in its absolute uniformity', he is nevertheless able to argue that the Nazis' speechmaking, 'their rabble-rousing against the Jews', could not have been defined as 'the most powerful Hitlerian propaganda tool'. He does not state outright what he feels *could* have been defined as the most powerful tool, but certain points that he makes and examples he provides in subsequent chapters of the *LTR* perhaps indicate that the 'tool' was a collection of things working together rather than one specific thing acting alone – such as the dulling of the people's intellect, the encouragement of their base emotions, Hitler's acute understanding of those people and his glorification of the Aryans as world leaders.

Furthermore, there is no evidence in the *LTR* of such claims made by the Nazis. If, as is highly improbable, Klemperer could have gained access to 'the academic publications on the German language that were published in Nazi Germany' that Watt (2000: 435) believes contain such claims, he would certainly have referred to them in the *LTR*. Admittedly, Watt (2000: 426 fn 10) does not attribute the error of endorsement directly to Klemperer – he qualifies Klemperer's apparent role in the error as unwitting rather than deliberate – but he also thereby comes as close as possible to accusing Klemperer of the error (seeing as he does that in doing one thing, Klemperer 'effectively' does the other thing).

Had he been aware of the claims, Klemperer would probably not have taken them at face value, because several times in the *LTR* he recognises the falsity of other claims made by the Nazis. He exemplifies the Nazi tendency to concealment and lies, to portray themselves in military despatches as 'fighting valiantly' when in truth they were 'having a terrible time' (Klemperer 2000: 7), to report in September 1941 that '200,000 people were trapped in Kiev' and a few days later that '600,000 captives were freed from the same encircled area' (Klemperer 2000: 202). As Klemperer (2000: 202) explains,

the bulletins of the Third Reich ... start off in a superlative mode from the very outset and then, the worse the situation, the more they overdo it, until everything becomes literally measureless, twisting the fundamental quality of military language, its disciplined exactitude, into its very opposite, into fantasy and fairy-tale.

Even in December 1944, when the German army was near defeat, a special announcement stated that "“after brief but intensive preliminary fire ... [the] first American position [was] overrun”" (Klemperer 2000: 208). To Klemperer (2000: 208), this was nothing but a 'desperate bluff'.

In Watt's (2000: 435) view, Klemperer is guilty of inconsistency and contradiction when he asserts that 'German Jews living in Nazi Germany were somehow impervious or immune to the linguistic determinism of Nazi propaganda and indoctrination that he claimed to see influencing their fellow Germans'. Watt (2000: 435, and 435 fn 31) cites the *LTR*'s Chapter 28 ('The language of the victor') in this regard, without providing a specific supporting

quotation but referring the reader to ‘the more detailed study of this issue’ in another article of his.<sup>97</sup> Rob K Baum (2004: 607–8) also briefly takes up this point, endorsing Watt’s criticism and providing Watt’s quotation of Klemperer as follows: ‘No, even if everywhere in the houses reserved for Jews, people had accepted the language of the victor, that was surely only an unthinking enslavement, it certainly did not represent a recognition of his ideology, a belief in his lies’.<sup>98</sup> The contradiction, Baum (2004: 607) proposes, is in Klemperer’s again unwitting portrayal of Jews speaking ‘a language uncorrupted by the Nazi bureaucratic language that inflected German speech during the Third Reich’ and thereby ‘ironically reforc[ing] Nazi racist theories about inherent linguistic differences between Aryans and Jews’ (see also Watt 2000: 435).

But this passage shows no such contradiction. Klemperer (2000) states and exemplifies more than once in the *LTR* that Jews, himself included, were just as guilty of speaking the LTI as were anti-Semites, thus from a linguistic point of view they were certainly not immune to Nazi propaganda’s linguistic determinism (Watt).<sup>99</sup> And his view of this issue, of the linguistic enslavement it illustrated on the part of the Jews as being an *unthinking* enslavement, is in line with his argument that one of the Nazis’ primary intentions was to suppress the people’s intellect.<sup>100</sup> Albert, a factory co-worker – ‘rather better at thinking’ than was the kind but prejudiced Aryan woman who sent an apple home with Klemperer (2000: 88) for his sick wife – who ‘harboured his own political opinions’ nevertheless disappointed Klemperer in voicing confidence in the German army with regard to ‘a veiled report of the success of the Allies somewhere in Italy’. “‘We are invincible; they can’t break us because we are so fantastically well organized’”, he asserted (Klemperer 2000: 88). ‘The use of words associated with Nazism,’ John W Young (2005: 53) comments, ‘does not by itself prove that the user is either a Nazi or the dupe of Nazi propaganda.’<sup>101</sup> While Albert’s political opinions

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<sup>97</sup> The other article to which Watt refers, ‘Victor Klemperer and the Language of National Socialism’, appears in *The German-Jewish Dilemma: From the Enlightenment to the Shoah* (1999, edited by A Hammel and E Timms).

<sup>98</sup> Baum (2004: 608) cites the source of this quotation as ‘Watt, 1999, p 200’. In the edition of *LTR* used as a secondary source reference for this doctoral thesis, the quotation indeed appears in Chapter 28 (‘The language of the victor’) and reads as follows:

No, even if everyone had adopted the language of the victor in the Jews’ Houses, it was merely an unthinking enslavement, and certainly didn’t amount to an assent to their teachings or a belief in their lies. (Klemperer 2000: 186)

<sup>99</sup> See Klemperer (2000: 10, 18, 34, 96, 177–8, 254). Young (2005: 52) also notes Klemperer’s use of the LTI terms, acceding that ‘in many instances he employs them in parody or with deliberate irony’. But he questions, referring to several examples, Klemperer’s use of ‘biological and pathological metaphors’ – by implication, without such ironic awareness – ‘to characterize [the Nazis] corruption of the German language’ (Young 2005: 52, 63 fn 13). If Klemperer’s extension of Schiller’s notion is correct, argues Young (2005: 52), ‘then his use of such typically Nazi terminology strongly suggests a mind tainted by Nazism’. Young seems to see this as an indictment of Klemperer. With an air of defending Klemperer, or out of a desire to criticise more accurately, in answer to his subsequent question of whether anyone would ‘assert that the author of the *LTI* fell even unconsciously under the sway of his subject’, Young’s (2005: 52) reply echoes Watt’s proposal: Instead, ‘Klemperer erred in assuming the autonomous power of language’. In contrast to Young (2005) and Watt (2000), I suggest that it is logical that, as a Jew, Klemperer’s mind was indeed tainted by Nazism. The effect of his journey ‘through the Inferno’ (Young 2005: 62), however, was not to have made a hypocrite of him, but rather to have turned him even further against the Nazis. His awareness of the sway of his subject (Young) seems complete and continual rather than partial, and this makes all the difference.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Klemperer (2000: 146).

<sup>101</sup> Young (2005: 53) sees Klemperer’s awareness of this point as being merely ‘intermittent’.

were indeed ‘in no way supportive of the government, nor were they militaristic’ (Klemperer 2000: 88), his strong belief in the army shows that he was in fact duped.

In Michaels’s novel *Fugitive Pieces* (166), the first narrator, Jakob, feels that ‘there’s a precise moment when we reject contradiction’. He sees this ‘moment of choice’ as ‘the lie we will live by’ (FP 166), thus indicating at least some degree of consciousness on our part – in order to make the choice, we must be aware of the contradiction as contradiction. By contrast, Klemperer seems to suggest that, overall, the absorption of the LTI into Jewish people’s conversation – which implies a noteworthy social and ethical contradiction – was unintentional. While those who ‘cursed Nazism’ may or may not have been vaguely conscious of the irony in ‘using its own expressions’ (Klemperer 2000: 261), there is little to indicate that they were fully conscious of it. Glauber seems to have been one of the few examples of those who deliberately chose to use the LTI; in other words she rejected the contradiction and lived by the lie (Michaels) of her version of Germanness – the lie of a Fatherland-cleansing ‘fanatical Germanness’ that so frustrated and saddened Klemperer (2000: 178).

Finally, Watt (2000: 436) suggests that Klemperer was unable ‘to develop and maintain an objective and critical distance to his experiences’. An objective distance is certainly unattainable for someone experiencing the Jewish restrictions and abuse first-hand;<sup>102</sup> however, a critical distance seems to be just what Klemperer managed to attain. Many Holocaust diaries may provide evidence of the LTI in passing or perhaps even unintentionally, but few, if any other than Klemperer’s, contain the makings of such a detailed, meticulous and interpretive study of the language that is his *LTR*.

Young’s (2005: 62) belief that ‘to praise Klemperer’s book does not exempt it from criticism’ seems to sum up many of the critics’ mixed attitudes towards Klemperer’s work. Even in his predominantly reproachful article Watt (2000) pays Klemperer a few compliments. Thus the general approach seems to be one of taking Klemperer’s texts and theories with a pinch of salt. Be that as it may, I suggest that it is useful to attempt in the coming chapter to employ just what is relevant of Klemperer’s philological study in illuminating Michaels’s use of figurative language, partly in the Holocaust context.

Certeau, Ricoeur, Bourdieu and Klemperer each provide differing perspectives on the ways in which language behaves and can be made to behave by those who use it. In the next chapter, we use these theories to gain a better understanding both of Michaels’s grasp of the functions of language and of her methods of employing those functions.

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<sup>102</sup> Watt (2000: 436) does seem cognisant of this point, describing Klemperer, in the same paragraph in which he makes the abovementioned criticism, as ‘the persecuted Jew’.

## Chapter 2

### Michaels's figurative language – applying the theory

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

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

#### Certeau – the practices of writing and reading

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 17–18.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 36–7.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1, page 18.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 141–3.

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



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

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

Narrowing our focus somewhat, we can apply the principles that we have mentioned above and have discussed in Chapter 1 to the products, the texts, as well. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob is both reader and writer. The many hours that he spends listening to his guardian and saviour, Athos, reading, while they hide out on the island of Zakynthos during the war, constitute for Jakob the processes of learning-to-decipher<sup>9</sup> Greek and English and reading Greek and English for meaning.<sup>10</sup> Arriving in Greece for the first time Jakob sees ‘signs in a fluid script that from a distance looked like Hebrew’; as they draw closer he sees that ‘the words were strange’ – he has ‘never seen Greek letters before’ (FP 16). But he becomes familiar with them. Athos’s stories and textual readings form the cultural memory through which Jakob gains the strategies of semantic questioning of which the expectations are clarified by the deciphering of a written text (Certeau). Athos’s great friend Kostas Mitsialis gives Jakob his own ‘cherished copy’ of a slim volume of Greek poetry, thereby ‘planting rows of words in [Jakob] that would grow for the rest of [his] life’ (FP 85). Jakob’s early years in Canada are spent partly at school learning more practical Greek and English – the education he has gained from Athos equips him to hold his own in

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

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1, page 22.

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

conversations about the earth sciences, but leaves him mystified by some everyday vocabulary, as we see in Chapter 3.<sup>11</sup>

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

Ben is also a reader and a writer. As a teenager he 'wrenched money from [his] mother in order to collect the illustrated versions of literary masterpieces. ... edifying essays on a variety of topics ... brief biographies ... the plots of famous operas' and 'arcana' (both from *FP* 226) that he never forgets. As a student of literature, following the suggestion of Jakob's close friend, Maurice Salman, a former student of Athos's who becomes a lecturer himself,<sup>13</sup> Ben manages to combine his interests in weather and biography by writing a thesis on Dostoyevsky<sup>14</sup> that he later turns into a book (*FP* 211). And thus his reading act is a form of what Ricoeur calls subjective appropriation:<sup>15</sup> His interests are fuelled or perhaps inspired by

*The Tempest*, the blasted heath in *King Lear*. Camus's<sup>16</sup> sunstroke in *The Stranger*. Tolstoy's<sup>17</sup> snowstorm in "Master and Man." [Jakob's] *Hotel Rain* poems. ... The snowstorm that detained Pasternak<sup>18</sup> in a dacha, ... Madame Curie refusing to come out of the rain when she heard the news of her husband's death. The Greek summer heat while the war boiled out of [Jakob] like a fever. Dostoyevsky's] ... brutal convict march to Siberia .... (*FP* 213)

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

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 3, page 130.

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 1, page 26.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Camus (1913–1960), French novelist, essayist and playwright.

<sup>17</sup> Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Russian author.

<sup>18</sup> Boris (Leonidovich) Pasternak (1890–1960), Russian poet and author.

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

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

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

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

### Certeau – the practice of walking

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

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

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

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

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 22–4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 1, page 36.

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

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

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

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

### **Ricoeur – metaphor at work**

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

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 174, 175 and 182.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 1, page 24.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

One of metaphor's primary characteristics, Ricoeur feels, is its dual nature.<sup>31</sup> When interpreting, we must see that each metaphor contains the possibility and impossibility of being, the 'is' and 'is not'. Burdock is a plant; it is not the tower of a mosque. The difference is evident. But the plant has a stem, a tangible support that helps it to stand up straight out of the ground, as does a tower. That is the similarity. Trees are plants; they are not the strip of porous material up which fuel in the form of wax is drawn to the flame in a candle (COED 2004). But in winter, when some trees are bare of leaves, and we can see only their branches, against the sky these branches can indeed resemble 'black [candle] wicks' (4). The sky is the sky, made of oxygen and other chemical elements; it is not white or light-coloured calcareous rock (COED 2004) (14). The sun is a star; it is not made of iron oxide (14). Yet iron oxide can stain something, can tinge it red-orange-yellow<sup>32</sup> – and that something could be a winter sky, light-coloured as travertine. At 'twilight' (18), the sun often stains a cloudless sky these hues. According to Ricoeur, we need to apply this principle of duality to each metaphor if we wish to perceive metaphorical truth.

*Fugitive Pieces demonstrates Ricoeur's notion of the hermeneutical arch*

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

This horizon, too, serves 'always as a background'; 'in each situation there is something which is not chosen' (Ricoeur, in Reagan 1996: 107). As David Lodge<sup>35</sup> (2002: 13–14) confirms, 'historiography can give us selective accounts of events in selected human lives, but ... the more

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 1, page 32.

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

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 32–3.

<sup>34</sup> There is an echo of this idea in Berger (2001: 452):

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

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

<sup>35</sup> David Lodge (1935–), English novelist, literary critic and editor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### *Fugitive Pieces as an example of Holocaust literature*

When Theodor Adorno<sup>37</sup> expressed the opinion, in the late 1950s or early 60s, concerning the barbaric nature of poetry after Auschwitz, he planted the seed of a literary debate that continues into the 21st century.<sup>38</sup> The questions posed in the debate include the following: Was the Holocaust so horrific that it should be responded to with complete silence, and not be aggrandised or aestheticised in creative writing? Would literary portrayal of it inevitably misrepresent the events and thus disrespect all those who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, or is there a legitimate, respectful way of writing Holocaust fiction and poetry? If there is, what is that method?

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

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

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

<sup>38</sup> Adorno and this literary debate are discussed in detail in Ristić (2005).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thus these critics may, and do, not only argue that by its nature Holocaust writing must be – is – figurative, they also uphold poetic, fictional, literary Holocaust representation as being able to shed valuable light on the events. Adrienne Rich<sup>42</sup> (1993: 137–8, emphasis added), for instance, believes that survivor poet Irena Klepfisz<sup>43</sup> succeeds in the ‘considerable risk’ she takes ‘of trying to bear witness to ... her history without compromise and without melodrama’ because she is ‘a poet, *not only* a witness’. Terrence des Pres<sup>44</sup> (1977: 5), on whose text *The Survivor* Michaels partly relied for the factual background to *Fugitive Pieces* (Michaels 1996: acknowledgements), suggests that fiction ‘provides images whose formal purity brings some part, at least, of the world’s confusion into focus. ... Through fiction, ... some framework [can be] fixed which mediates the difference between [the world of the survivor] and ours’. Moreover, Young (1988: 91) explains that by making the mistake of leaving the Holocaust ‘out of metaphor’, we would leave it ‘out of language altogether’ and thereby mystify the Holocaust just as the Nazis mystified it.

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

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

<sup>42</sup> Adrienne Rich (1929–), American poet, scholar, teacher and critic.

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

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

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

actually stating that Michaels should not have written *Fugitive Pieces* because she did not live through the Holocaust, he ignores the many texts she acknowledges as useful research material, and seems unaware that her subsequent merging of fact and fiction generates exactly this mass of experience. Cook (2000: 16) similarly proposes that the novel's 'poetic narrative often falters upon misconstruals and evasions'. She rejects Michaels's simile of the Zakynthos Jews<sup>46</sup> hiding in the hills like coral – 'half flesh, half stone' (*FP* 40; in Cook 2000: 16) – because she feels that by 'metaphorizing their fate' Michaels 'conceals the decidedly unpoetic nature of genocide' (Cook 2000: 16).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In line with their apparent preference for factual, objective reports, Henighan (2002: 147) and Cook (2000: 16) accuse Michaels of using 'lush' metaphorical language<sup>50</sup> that is in disturbing juxtaposition with the shocking nature of her chosen topic. She is not alone in receiving such criticism<sup>51</sup> – many other critics have accused many other Holocaust texts of aestheticising the events, making 'beautiful' and acceptable what is, in reality, morally 'ugly' and unacceptable. But here again their views can be refuted. In her portrayal of a group of slain people's 'lost lives'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Michaels removes herself*

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

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

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

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

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

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

From this perspective, the nature of Michaels’s authorial identity is narrative, not autobiographical. She ‘took a lot of pains to write [*Fugitive Pieces*] in a certain way’, and she did not ‘want that to be sidetracked by anyone saying, “Oh, well, it’s her story and nobody else’s”’ (Michaels, in Grossman 1998). Her audience is universal and her production, her words, hold universal relevance. ‘Because, you know, it’s not about me,’ she confirms a decade later (Michaels, in Crown 2009). ‘You spend your time when you’re writing erasing yourself. The idea is to get out of the way,’ she reasons (Michaels, in Crown 2009). Thus, she may agree with the suggestion of Antjie Krog<sup>59</sup> (2010) that the more writers *appear* to be telling a story that is unique and intimate, the less the story actually is so, because as soon as they *are* being unique and intimate they fail to provide elements with which their audience can identify, and thus they fail to engage their audience. ‘What is originally interior and private,’ Scarry (1985: 284) elucidates, is made ‘into something exterior and sharable’, and conversely ‘what is now exterior and sharable’ is reabsorbed ‘into the intimate recesses of individual consciousness’. In sum, the writer’s thoughts and perceptions are formed into a poem or a novel and are received and taken in by each reader.

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

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

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<sup>59</sup> Antjie Krog (1952–), South African writer, poet and academic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 4, page 173.

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

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

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

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

#### *Ricoeur’s view of people acting and suffering*

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

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

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

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

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

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

At first Jakob experiences some relief from his emotional pain, ‘a finger of light ... flood[s] the clearing’, but gradually his depression and sense of isolation return, the finger ‘poked down, ... illuminating nothing’ (both from *FP* 139), and he finds himself again in a silent world, under water. At this stage he is both protected and frustrated, in Ricoeur’s (1992: 145) terms. Then, many years later, in his narratorial role he enters the ‘field of evaluations’, where he ‘appears as the beneficiary of esteem’, with Michaels serving as ‘an agent ... who distributes rewards’ (Ricoeur 1992: 145): Eighteen years after he had moved back to the house on Idhra, on one of his annual visits to Toronto, Jakob meets Michaela. Michaela empathically identifies with Jakob, his parents and Bella, and shares myriad details of her own childhood with him. Both actions serve as essential aids in Jakob’s emotional recovery, as we see in Chapter 3.<sup>67</sup> At this stage he is both protected and rewarded, in Ricoeur’s (1992: 145) terms.

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

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

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

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

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 151, 152, 153 and 154.

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

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

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

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

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

Blixen suggests in ‘Blue Vigour’ (99) that

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

Jakob, Ben’s parents and countless others like them have lived through a war. Blixen was born and grew up in Denmark, but managed her coffee farm in Kenya for many years of her adult life. Whatever the origin of Lunia Czechowska’s birth was, there is no indication that she was French, but she was one of Modigliani’s models and possible mistresses, and since he lived in France she must have lived there too. Thus, she and Blixen, as well as Mandelstam and Doebelin, as we have seen above, all made their home in a country other than the place of their birth. Moreover, Finch Hatton was the ‘one man’ that Blixen seems to have loved during her time in Africa. Following Blixen’s divorce Finch Hatton lived with her when he was not on safari, but they never married or made further commitments<sup>69</sup> – she had to ‘learn’ to love him, perhaps, because he seems to have been extremely independent and possibly accepted her love only by remaining unconventionally committed to the relationship. If we respond to Ricoeur’s above-quoted questions in the affirmative as well, we are proclaiming with Michaels and Ricoeur (1992) the value and efficacy of fiction and poetry in presenting alternatives of human experience to and for ourselves.

### **Bourdieu – domination, and the bodily hexis**

*The dominators and the dominated*

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

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

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

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 1, page 34.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### *The characters’ bodily hexeis*<sup>74</sup> in *Fugitive Pieces*

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

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

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

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

<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 37–40.

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

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

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

Ben's case is different from Jakob's case, but his habitus and bodily hexis are also powerfully, negatively influenced by the effects of the Holocaust. Ben's father cares for him too little while Ben's mother cares for him too much, and both ways of behaving are most likely the result of their camp experiences. Ben's body is organised through the practical schemes (Thompson) of neglect and overprotection. For example, the external guiding factor of being held by his father to an impossibly high standard in playing the piano, and the internal guiding factor of yearning for the man's approval, lead Ben to avoid practising when his father is at home and to perceive his piano lessons as 'a kind of futility' – 'all [his] sincere efforts only succeeded in displeasing [his father]' (*FP* 219). We can see this situation as an example in embryonic form of the concept of the 'double bind', which originated in the field of clinical psychology and is described by Chris Bohjalian<sup>78</sup> (2007) in his novel of the same name. In a double bind situation a parent 'consistently

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 1, page 38.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 1, page 40.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Aram Bohjalian (1960–), American novelist.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>79</sup> Gregory Bateson (1904–1980), British anthropologist, social scientist, linguist, visual anthropologist, semiotician and cyberneticist (en.wikipedia ... Gregory\_Bateson).

<sup>80</sup> See also Chapter 3, page 133.

<sup>81</sup> See also Chapter 4, page 193.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1, page 38.

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

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

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

I started to drape the sheets over the furniture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### *The characters' bodily hexeis in Michaels's poems*

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

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

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 150–4.

<sup>89</sup> See the Introduction, pages 5–6.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Gubar – empathic identification

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

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

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

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<sup>92</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Austrian-born English philosopher.

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

Martha Nussbaum<sup>93</sup> is the originator of the term 'empathic identification' and Dominick LaCapra<sup>94</sup> of the term 'empathic unsettlement' (Gubar 2002: 253). Empathic identification is 'the temporary act of identification' that means 'one is always aware of one's own separateness from the sufferer' (Nussbaum, in Gubar 2002: 253). Empathic unsettlement involves 'a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place' (LaCapra 1999: 722; in Gubar 2002: 253). There is little to distinguish the definitions, but Gubar seems to believe that they are not the same. In her view, Bella's 'practicing, memorizing, and playing the music of Chopin and Brahms' in *Fugitive Pieces* is an example of empathic identification, because Bella 'takes the music's measures into her own being, while simultaneously giving its creator a new vehicle of expression' (Gubar 2002: 257).<sup>95</sup> And as she sees it, empathic unsettlement takes place 'explicitly inside the fictional world' of the novel and 'implicitly through its creation' (Gubar 2002: 254).

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

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

Jakob is certainly a 'weak' tactician-consumer, literally and figuratively. He insinuates himself into the worlds, he addresses the worlds, displayed by the biographies of Marco Polo, Clusius and Sibthorpe,<sup>96</sup> and by the poetry of Solomos, Keats and Masefield<sup>97</sup> (*FP* 28–30). Like Ben, his

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

<sup>94</sup> Dominick LaCapra (1939–), American historian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Fuss – corpse poetry

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

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

<sup>98</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 34–6 and 42–3.

categorises corpse poetry according to five ‘registers’, the comic and the religious registers being the principle vehicles for the poetry in the 19th century, and the political, historical and literary registers being the principle vehicles for the poetry in the 20th century. Writers of corpse poetry over the centuries include Dickinson, Hardy, Jarrell, Wright and Pagis<sup>99</sup> (Fuss 2003: 1).

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

*Michaels’s poems as political corpse poetry*

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

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

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

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

<sup>100</sup> See also the Introduction, pages 5–6.

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

The suffering that Doebelin receives at the hands of the Nazis, as portrayed by Michaels in ‘Sublimation’, is far less physical than it is emotional. Like Mandelstam, Doebelin experiences exile, though he does so voluntarily, unlike Mandelstam. And while he is out of Germany, the country that after many years away he still regards as ‘home’ (Sublimation 68), he does not have his usual facility with language, that essential authorial instrument. The words he carries around inside him are ‘useless’ and ‘meaningless’ (Sublimation 67). This issue and its consequences for Doebelin are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.<sup>101</sup> In exile, his anxiety is mirrored by the moon, which ‘calls out in its bad sleep above the earth’ with a ‘chilling scream’ (Sublimation 70, 69). After the war, Doebelin decides to return to Germany, regretfully aware that this will separate him from Niclas, as Germany is ‘the one place [she] won’t [go to]’ (Sublimation 68). Doebelin’s conviction that he is ‘living proof/ we don’t stop wanting/ what we can’t have’ (Sublimation 71) may refer both to his imminent separation from the loved one who has given him essential aid – in exile he has ‘written nothing without [her] help’ (Sublimation 67) – and to his imminent return to a country whose atrocities preclude any return to its former glory.

### *Michaels’s poems as historical corpse poetry*

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

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter 3, page 119.

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

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

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

### *Michaels’s poems as literary corpse poetry*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>111</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 132, 153–4.

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

In ‘Lake of Two Rivers’ (7), the narrator recalls her father telling two stories on the drives that the family take on their Algonquin holidays. One story is of his life – his train-ride ‘across Poland in 1931’ (Lake of Two Rivers 7),<sup>114</sup> for example. The tale conjures ‘spirit faces’ of ‘unknown cousins’ (both from Lake of Two Rivers 7) around the windows of the car in which the narrator and her family travel. The narrator learns how the photograph – ‘the face’ – of her father’s ‘cousin Mashka .../ floated down the River Neman<sup>115</sup> [concealed] in [her] father’s guitar’ (Lake of Two Rivers 8). The river played a role in the extermination of the Jews, and the narrator figuratively aligns herself with this event: As a young adult, perhaps visiting the site, she ‘drowned in the River Neman,/ fell through<sup>116</sup> when [she] read that the bone-black from the ovens/ was discarded there’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11), the ‘bone-black’ presumably referring to the ashes of the cremated prisoners. ‘Part of you waits up for them’ (Lake of Two Rivers 11), like a parent awaiting the return of their child, she comments, implying that she feels implicated in memorialising the Jews.

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

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

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

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

<sup>115</sup> The River Neman

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

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

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

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

She senses the presence of the cousins acutely, cannot but ‘feel they’re [t]here,/ in the strange darkness of a thermosensitive sky’ (What the Light Teaches 120).<sup>117</sup> Michaels furthermore deals with oppression as exercised by the Soviets in this poem, an aspect that we explore in Chapters 3 and 4.<sup>118</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 119–21, and Chapter 4, pages 177–80 and 187.

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

ghettos' whose 'boat was refused at every port' – in other words, the Jews who 'had no place' (all from 'The Hooded Hawk' 169–70) any more, as homeless as are the refugees to whom the narrator refers at the end of 'What the Light Teaches' (both from 129) – those for whom 'language is the house to run to' because they 'have no other place'. These people are not forgotten; Wiseman was ever 'with them' ('The Hooded Hawk' 173), as we see in Chapter 4.<sup>120</sup>

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

### Michaels – living-poems

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

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

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

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<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 4, page 187.

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

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

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

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

In the light of the empathic identification we see her performing in all her writing, however, Michaels’s legitimate imposture<sup>123</sup> is even more legitimate than Bourdieu suggests – she does not in all good faith take herself to be something she is not, her awareness of herself and of the distinction between herself and her subjects is always in effect. Her qualification is that ‘no writer speaks for her tribe, but only from her [unique] place in it’ (Michaels 1992: 99). ‘What gives power to ... [her] words is not, for example, her attempt to sum up a corrupt political system by speaking on behalf of a particular group, but instead to say simply: this is what I see’ (Michaels 1992: 99). Like *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels’s living-poems serve as mediating stages, in Ricoeur’s terms, in the process of communication (Michaels and us), of referentiality (Michaels and world), of self-understanding (Michaels and herself).

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

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<sup>122</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 34–6 and 42–3.

<sup>123</sup> See Chapter 1, page 43.

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

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

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<sup>124</sup> See Chapter 1, page 35.

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

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

### Chapter 3

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

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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).<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, as interpreted by Ricoeur (1992), sees the characteristic of morality or immorality as inherent in our dispositions.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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,<sup>5</sup> 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),<sup>6</sup> 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,<sup>7</sup> there are critics who baulk at the idea of endowing language with power, of seeing it as

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, page 42.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1, page 37, footnote 35.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2, page 79.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4, pages 183–4 and 187.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Chapter 2, page 84.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 44–59.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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)<sup>10</sup>*

### *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).

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 2, page 79.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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,<sup>11</sup> 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’, Athos<sup>12</sup> 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,<sup>13</sup> 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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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.)

<sup>13</sup> 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-expressed<sup>14</sup> 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).<sup>15</sup>

Another way in which Hitler did this is through names and naming, a subject to which Klemperer (2000) devotes a chapter in the *LTR*<sup>16</sup> 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 1945<sup>17</sup> 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'.<sup>18</sup>

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

<sup>14</sup> 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'.

<sup>15</sup> 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).

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 13 'Names' (Klemperer 2000: 69–77).

<sup>17</sup> The bombing of Dresden took place between 13 and 15 February 1945.

<sup>18</sup> 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 Kanada<sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>19</sup> ‘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).

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 40–1.

naming.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.

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<sup>21</sup> 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).

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 108–10.

Russian capital, Petrograd (previously St Petersburg), was renamed Leningrad in honour of the recently deceased Lenin<sup>24</sup> – it was one of the ‘whole cities’ that were ‘razed with a word’ (What the Light Teaches 125)<sup>25</sup> – 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).<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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,<sup>28</sup> 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)

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<sup>24</sup> 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).

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

<sup>26</sup> 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).

<sup>27</sup> 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).

<sup>28</sup> 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’.<sup>29</sup> JM Coetzee<sup>30</sup> (1991: 72, 81 fn 3) confirms the possibility of the suggestion made by Shirazi (2003: 209)<sup>31</sup> 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’<sup>32</sup> 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

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<sup>29</sup> 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.

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

<sup>31</sup> 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).

<sup>32</sup> 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 essays<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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,<sup>35</sup> 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,

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<sup>33</sup> 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).

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

<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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).<sup>37</sup> 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,<sup>38</sup> 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

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<sup>36</sup> 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).

<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> 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’.<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> some other of those elements did not,<sup>42</sup> 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

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

<sup>40</sup> 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).

<sup>41</sup> ‘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).

<sup>42</sup> 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).<sup>43</sup> 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,<sup>44</sup> 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’,<sup>45</sup> he tells us, ‘stone-carriers were forced to haul huge blocks of limestone endlessly, from one mound

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<sup>43</sup> 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).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Chapter 2, page 91.

<sup>45</sup> 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,<sup>46</sup> one which Klemperer would surely have supported, as he notes the descent of fascism into bestiality in the hands of the Germans.<sup>47</sup> 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',

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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).

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

<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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-

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<sup>48</sup> 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),<sup>49</sup> 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,<sup>50</sup> Kalvos<sup>51</sup> and

<sup>49</sup> 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'.

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

<sup>51</sup> 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).<sup>52</sup>

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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup>

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’.<sup>55</sup> 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 2<sup>56</sup> 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

<sup>52</sup> ‘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).

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

<sup>54</sup> 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).

<sup>55</sup> 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).

<sup>56</sup> 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',<sup>57</sup> 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

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<sup>57</sup> 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'<sup>58</sup> 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

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<sup>58</sup> 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).<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> 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.'<sup>61</sup> 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

<sup>59</sup> 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.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 2, page 81.

<sup>61</sup> 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);<sup>62</sup> 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

<sup>62</sup> 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 Hindemith<sup>63</sup> 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 Casals<sup>64</sup> 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*,<sup>65</sup> 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 'modern<sup>66</sup> 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,<sup>67</sup> '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).

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<sup>63</sup> 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).

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

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 2, page 91, footnote 71, and pages 93–4.

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

<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps her journals – her writing that was both personal and intended for empathic ears<sup>69</sup> – 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"'<sup>70</sup> (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).<sup>71</sup> 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

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 2, page 98.

<sup>69</sup> 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).

<sup>70</sup> 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).

<sup>71</sup> 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:<sup>72</sup>

... 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,<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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).

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<sup>72</sup> (Sidonie-Gabrielle) Colette (1873–1954), French writer.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), Jewish-German literary critic.

<sup>74</sup> 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).<sup>75</sup> 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.

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<sup>75</sup> 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).<sup>76</sup> Pierre's death leads Marie to conclude

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<sup>76</sup> 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 we<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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.

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

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter 2, page 100.

For while pain is involved in destruction, imagination is involved in creation.<sup>79</sup> ‘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.<sup>80</sup> 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.

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<sup>79</sup> 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).

<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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,<sup>82</sup> 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

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 1, pages 16 and 21.

<sup>82</sup> 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 Ruskin<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.

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

<sup>84</sup> 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’.<sup>85</sup> 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)

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<sup>85</sup> 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.<sup>86</sup> 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,<sup>87</sup> 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,<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup>

*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

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

<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 4, page 180.

<sup>89</sup> 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:<sup>90</sup> 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 his<sup>91</sup> 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:

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<sup>90</sup> 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.

<sup>91</sup> 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’<sup>92</sup> – 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’.

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<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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).<sup>94</sup>

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 hers<sup>95</sup> 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'.<sup>96</sup> 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,

<sup>93</sup> 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.

<sup>94</sup> 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.

<sup>95</sup> 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.

<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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

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<sup>97</sup> 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).<sup>98</sup> 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,<sup>99</sup> 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).<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> 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).

<sup>99</sup> 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).

<sup>100</sup> 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:<sup>101</sup> 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

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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).

<sup>101</sup> 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),<sup>102</sup> 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).<sup>103</sup> 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,

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

<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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

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<sup>104</sup> 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 judgement<sup>105</sup> 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,<sup>106</sup> 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,<sup>107</sup> 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’.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the poems ‘The Day of Jack Chambers’, ‘Depth of Field’, ‘Another

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<sup>105</sup> See Chapter 1, page 37.

<sup>106</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 78–82.

<sup>107</sup> 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.

<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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.<sup>110</sup> 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

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<sup>109</sup> 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).

<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup>

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’.<sup>113</sup> In this way,

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<sup>111</sup> 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.

<sup>112</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 85–7.

<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup>

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'<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup> 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 2<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>114</sup> 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.

<sup>115</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 84–7.

<sup>116</sup> 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).

<sup>117</sup> See also Chapter 2, page 107.

<sup>118</sup> See Chapter 2, page 87.

<sup>119</sup> 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 hunger<sup>120</sup> 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).<sup>121</sup> 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

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<sup>120</sup> 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).

<sup>121</sup> 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.<sup>122</sup>

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

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<sup>122</sup> 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).

## Chapter 4

### Michaels's poem 'What the Light Teaches' – learning the lesson of the light

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*Poems are gifts to the attentive.*  
(Celan 2003: 26)

In Chapter 2 we have examined the use of metaphor in Holocaust literary representation, and see that several noteworthy critics and writers believe that metaphor plays a highly significant and useful role therein. For Michaels, metaphor is essential in *any* creative writing.<sup>1</sup> She explains that if we think of a poem as 'attempting to clone an emotional, intellectual and visceral event, then it's the metaphor that serves as the genetic key to the whole organism' (Michaels 1992: 96). By extension, perhaps we can think of a novel as 'attempting to clone' (Michaels) a series of such events. One of Michaels's striking metaphors is of language as a home, and the poem from which it comes, 'What the Light Teaches', embodies her successful 'attempt to clone' an instance of the accomplishment of a lesson – the lesson of the 'light' in the poem's title – towards which the poem's narrator progresses through a collection of emotional, intellectual and visceral 'events',<sup>2</sup> as we see below.

Michaels presents the metaphor in the following verse:

Language is the house with lamplight in its windows,  
visible across fields. Approaching, you can hear  
music; closer, smell  
soup, bay leaves, bread – a meal for anyone  
who has only his tongue left.  
It's a country; home; family:  
abandoned; burned down; whole lines dead, unmarried.  
For those who can't read their way in the streets,  
or in the gestures and faces of strangers,  
language is the house to run to;  
in wild nights, chased by dogs and other sounds,  
when you've been lost a long time,  
when you have no other place. (What the Light Teaches 128–9)

In the present chapter, we explore whether the idea of language as a home features also in *Fugitive Pieces*, in some of Michaels's other poems, and in the life and work of the Romanian-born Jewish poet Paul Celan. Unlike Michaels, Celan experienced the Second World War first-hand;

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<sup>1</sup> Michaels finds figurative language useful also in non-fiction, as some of her short essays or articles demonstrate. In 'Cleopatra's Love', for example, she describes 'the metaphor' as 'electric as a filament' in its 'join[ing] [of] disparity' (Michaels 1994: 14).

<sup>2</sup> I intend the quotation marks enclosing the word 'events' to indicate that we should not take the term too literally. Moreover, the *COED* (2004) defines 'visceral' as either 'to do with the viscera', the main internal organs of the body, or as 'relating to deep inner feelings rather than to the intellect'. Because Michaels (1992: 96) already listed the adjective 'emotional', it would seem that by 'visceral' she intends the first definition, implying all things (accurately) related to the inner workings of the body. However, Michaels has a particular interest in the relationship between the body and the mind and the heart – the physical, the intellectual and the emotional – that precludes a clear distinction between these three aspects of people as human beings, and thus the few examples of visceral events that I suggest can be found in the poem, which we explore in the course of the present chapter, are not literally visceral.



although the language he uses in his poetry is as figurative as is Michaels's, his form of identification is often more sympathetic than empathic, whereas her form of identification is wholly empathic, as we know. While there are some similarities between Celan and Michaels's approach to writing poetry, and between his life and that of some of her narrators, in the present chapter he is used primarily as a foil to Michaels and her fictional and poetic characters.

### Paul Celan – the foil

Paul Celan was born in 1920 in Czernowitz, the main city in the province of Bukovina that was governed initially by the Austrian empire, then by the Romanians and ultimately by the Soviet Union (Felstiner 1985: 44). At the express wish of his father, Celan was brought up to speak pure German, and at school was educated in Romanian, French and Hebrew (Felstiner 1985: 45). The Soviet occupation of Czernowitz in the early and again in the final stages of the war facilitated his acquisition of Russian (Felstiner 1985: 45). Throughout the war, Celan was put into forced labour in various places around his home city, and by chance he escaped a 1942 Nazi round-up in which his parents were transported into the German-occupied Ukraine, where they were killed a few months later in a Nazi labour camp (Felstiner 1985; Hamburger, in Celan 1995; Langer 1995). Celan learned Yiddish from his fellow labour camp inmates, and took up English studies, particularly the work of Shakespeare, towards the end of the war (Felstiner 1985: 47). Just after the war, he earned a living by translating the texts of Russian writers into Romanian, and later by producing German translations of Romanian, French and English texts (Felstiner 1985: 47, 48). He moved from his home city, by then officially part of the Ukraine, to Bucharest and then across Hungary to Vienna. He finally settled in Paris, where he lived until his suicide in 1970.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, while Jakob hides from the Germans in the Biskupin forest, orphaned and homeless, he has 'no other place' (What the Light Teaches 129); and when he finally approaches Athos, he has 'only his tongue left' (What the Light Teaches 128): His use of his tongue – his cry of 'dirty Jew' (*FP* 13) in the three languages he can speak – convinces Athos that he is a living boy and not a mud-caked golem (*FP* 12). His 'home' has not been literally 'burned down', but in being saved by Athos and smuggled into Greece he indeed has to 'abando[n]' his 'country' (What the Light Teaches 128). The 'whole line' of his 'family' is 'dead' (What the Light Teaches 128), with the exception of himself and possibly an aunt he had never met, who is mentioned once in the story (see *FP* 59). He does not remain 'unmarried' (What the Light Teaches 128), but he and Alex do not have children, and because Michaela dies soon after he does, while she is pregnant with their first child, his entire family line is indeed cut off.

However, the brief literal and figurative 'homelessness' of his childhood does not persist. Athos becomes Jakob's guardian, and for many years it is with him that Jakob lives, in more than one house. For the most part, while Jakob's education and his subsequent work and writing are intricately concerned with language, he has more than 'only his tongue left' (What the Light Teaches 128). Language certainly helps to save Jakob, but it is not the only thing that saves him. Ben supports this view; he had 'wanted to believe [that] language itself' (*FP* 207) was the instrument of Jakob's release, but the night that they meet he realises this is not so. By contrast, Ben himself is neither orphaned nor homeless, and though his father infuses the family's world with silence, language is not the remedy for his emotional problems. This is bearing in mind, of course, that it is through language – so skilfully handled by Michaels – that we have learned of

the nature of Jakob's eventual recovery, in Chapter 3,<sup>3</sup> and of Ben's partial achievement of emotional balance, in Chapter 2.<sup>4</sup>

Both poets and translators, and learning to work in languages other than their mother tongue, the historical Celan and the fictional narrator Jakob may have had similar literary experiences. Indeed, they both seem to be aware of a separation between themselves and language and between themselves and the rest of the world, at certain times in their lives. A 'heavy black outline' (*FP* 95) separated everything from its name for Jakob while he learned English and Greek, as we have seen in Chapter 3.<sup>5</sup> The outline becomes a seal for him much later in life,<sup>6</sup> but for Celan the division persisted – 'there is a veil between him and nature, between him and everything' (Waldrop, in Celan 2003: vii). His poems and certain of his prose texts seek to 'fill the gap and include the other side' (Waldrop, in Celan 2003: viii). His existence, his place in the world, was not assured: 'Reality is not simply there, it must be searched [sic]<sup>7</sup> and won', believes Celan (2003: 16).

Like Jakob, as a result of the war Celan was orphaned and made homeless. Unlike Jakob, Celan had no guardian and saviour. He had nothing. Stripped of material possessions, parents and a home, the only thing Celan had left was language.<sup>8</sup> He *was* one of the dispossessed who had 'only his tongue left', who had 'no other place' (What the Light Teaches 128, 129). German was his mother tongue but also the language of the men who killed his parents and destroyed the world as he knew it. The related dilemma – Celan's inability to be either reconciled with or free of the language – informed his literary production for the rest of his life. By now familiar to critics and students of Celan's work alike, and frequently quoted, Celan's words best acknowledge the situation: In 1958, accepting the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen in a public speech, he identifies language as the 'one thing' that remained 'secure among all the losses'; it was language that 'had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech' before it could 'resurface, "enriched" by it all' (Celan 2003: 34). Jakob experiences something similar, as he moves back to the house on Idhra following his divorce precisely in order to 'press to tearing certain questions', the type of questions that as yet for him have no answers and thus 'must be asked very slowly' (*FP* 159).

For Celan, then, language was much more than merely a tool of expression, it seemed to be his means of attempting to re-establish the innermost element that was missing: himself, in the world. His war-time experiences may have had a similar effect on him that torture had on Améry. Améry (1980) lost his trust in the world at the first blow;<sup>9</sup> Celan (2003: 35) saw such loss

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 132 and 150–6.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 95–7.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 3, page 130.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 132–3.

<sup>7</sup> I do not suggest that Celan made this slight grammatical error. It seems to be a typing error, because in her introduction to a selection of Celan's prose works, Rosemarie Waldrop (in Celan 2003: viii) includes the missing preposition that makes the sentence grammatically correct: 'Reality must be searched for and won'.

<sup>8</sup> In descriptions of himself and his Holocaust experiences, Celan does not seem to acknowledge that he had his animate body as well, which is something that holds paramount importance for Michaels, as we have seen in Chapter 2 (page 89, footnote 68). His parents and many other Jews died, but he remained alive. Michaels (2009) confirms: 'When one is dispossessed of everything – home, country, landscape – what is left? Language, memory, one's own body'. However, as Fuss (2003: 19) explains, 'recent trauma theory reminds us that one might survive an unthinkable atrocity like the Holocaust and yet still not feel alive'. Perhaps this is what Celan felt (or, strictly speaking, did not feel); perhaps his living body was an insufficient or unfulfilling remnant of the war, a view that his suicide may be seen to support.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 3, page 125. And like Améry, Celan had changed his name. In the two years that Celan spent in Bucharest, 'adopt[ing] the custom of adopting a pseudonym as a writer', he used the name 'Paul Aurel', then 'A

as well: Other, younger poets of the time were ‘unsheltered even by the traditional tent of the sky, exposed in an unsuspected, terrifying way’. Like them, he had been ‘racked by reality’ and remained ‘in search of it’ until his death; like them, he strove to ‘carry [his] existence into language’ (Celan 2003: 35).

As proficient as he was in various languages, Celan nevertheless believes that ‘only in one’s mother tongue can one express one’s own truth. In a foreign language the poet lies’ (Chalfen 1991: 148; in Roditi 1992: 13). We have no more than a few lines of evidence provided by Michaels,<sup>10</sup> but because Jakob writes poetry in Hebrew, English and Greek, and not in Polish or Yiddish, he appears to disprove that notion. Though Edouard Roditi (1992: 13) calls Celan’s comment, perhaps rather imperceptively, ‘absurd’, it resonates with a search for truth that Celan also expresses elsewhere. ‘Craft’, the condition that Celan (2003: 25, 26) sees as ‘the condition of all poetry’, means ‘handiwork, a matter of hands’. And it is ‘only truthful hands [that] write true poems’ (Celan 2003: 26).

Michaels may equally uphold the value of sincerity and honesty, but is at the same time aware of the possibility, as critics have long debated on the topic of Holocaust literary representation, of the Holocaust’s unrepresentability, of the events perhaps being too horrific to be contained or restrained in language – she is aware, as the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ (125) explains, that ‘the truth is why words fail’. As his writing developed, Celan, striving to make his words as truthful as possible, was frustrated by conventional words and words that were tainted by the oppressors. The new words that he formed made his language at once less and more truthful – less truthful in the context of the language existing at the time (the LTI, in Klemperer’s (2000) terms) and more truthful because it came much closer to the truth that he tried to express. Michaels feels ‘we can only reveal by outline, by circling absence’ (What the Light Teaches 125). In his poems, Celan seems instead to have delved into the centre, to inhabit and paradoxically to enact absence. ‘Indeed, speaking in the voice of the dead [as we see Celan doing, below] provides a way for poetry to make present a certain kind of absence,’ suggests Fuss (2003: 25).

‘Reveal[ing] by outline, circling absence’ is ‘why language/ can remember truth when it’s not spoken’ (What the Light Teaches 125). Perhaps Michaels is alluding in these lines, through her narrator, to the beneficial kind of remembrance that Jakob eventually learns, as we have seen in Chapter 3,<sup>11</sup> in this case remembrance of the truth rather than of the dead. Some truths are so dreadful that they slip out of language’s grasp; they cannot or should not be spoken. Some are so dreadful that they dissolve language altogether. But it is also language that can restore truths – lost among the dreadful ones (as some words are lost among ‘the noise of other words’ (What the Light Teaches 125)) – that deserve to be remembered, and be presented perhaps in another way.

If we extend to truth or truths Jakob’s realisation that ‘*to remain with the dead is to abandon them*’ (FP 170), saying, thus, ‘to remain with truths is to abandon them’, it would mean that trying to use or present truths simply as they existed before the Holocaust implies staying with them

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Pavel’ and finally settled on ‘Paul Celan’ (Roditi 1992: 13). Unlike Améry, whose change of name constituted an openly defiant act, Celan seems to have selected his new name for more practical reasons: He did not wish to antagonise the Romanian audience of his first poems, who ironically enough may have found ‘Antschel’ at once ‘too German and too Jewish’ (Felstiner 1985: 47).

<sup>10</sup> Ben’s narrative is threaded with the occasional italicised phrase, line or few lines that the surrounding context suggests are quotations from Jakob’s poems. In the paragraph following his mention of Jakob’s volume *Groundwork*, for example, Ben describes discovering one of the ‘clues of the life [Jakob] and Michaela shared’ – ‘stubs of candles, hard pools of wax in shelters of rock in the garden where [they] must have sat together at night, no doubt [Jakob’s] *cleft of stone opened by flame*. [His] images were everywhere’ (FP 266).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 132 and 153.

sympathetically, the way Jakob tries to remain with Bella to the point that she accompanies him through his adolescent and young adult life. To remember the dead properly, to let them go without abandoning them, implies remembering them empathically, the way Jakob learns to know that he and Bella are different – he is alive, she is dead – and that, with the help of Michaela’s empathy, he can learn how to love Bella differently. In order for truths to be remembered empathically, they need to be given new meaning. As we have seen in Chapter 3<sup>12</sup> and as we see below, Michaels suggests that the old words can still be used, but must be used in a new way, enriched with memory and metaphor.

In his poetry and prose, Celan seems to remember truths both sympathetically and empathically, as we now see in examining his oeuvre, which reflects his life in complex ways. Translator Michael Hamburger (in Celan 1995: 19) believes that Celan’s work ‘confronts us with difficulty and paradox’, and over the years many other critics have attributed a hermetic quality to his poems as a matter of course.<sup>13</sup> If the term is applicable, the quality could have resulted partly from Celan’s connections with surrealist poetry as a medical student in France just before the war broke out and later as a translator of some of the early French surrealists’ work (Felstiner 1985: 45; Glenn 1977: 522). Celan himself refused the description – for example by inscribing Hamburger’s copy of his volume of poetry entitled *Die Niemandrose* with the phrase ‘*ganz und gar nicht hermetisch*’ (‘not in the least hermetic’) (in Klink 2000: 2; attested to by Hamburger (in Celan 1995: 29)) – and certain critics defend his work against the implied accusation. Hamburger (in Celan 1995: 25, emphasis added), for example, argues that ‘if Celan *had* set out to write hermetic poems, his work would have been less difficult than it is, because it would not require us to make the kind of sense of it that we know it can yield’.

Joanna Klink (2000: 2) defines the term ‘hermetic’ in relation to Celan’s work as ‘self-referential’, ‘veiled’ or ‘deliberately concealed’, in other words, ‘verse which seems to turn away from the world, which has the markings of a private language’. ‘To call a poem hermetic’ is to imply that ‘it is not ultimately concerned with including you in its meaning’, she explains (Klink 2000: 2). In his Bremen acceptance speech Celan (2003: 35) makes it clear, on the contrary, that his poems are directed at a reader or receiver: ‘Poems are *en route*: they are headed toward ... something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality’.

John Felstiner (1984: 38) suggests that Celan’s writing ‘bears the mark of [his] experience’ of exile,<sup>14</sup> in Paris, in the second half of his life – it shows the ‘strain of reaching out to find fit listeners’. This is echoed by Berger’s (2001: 452) suggestion that ‘to break the silence of events ... to put into words, is to discover the hope that these words may be heard’. Celan certainly wanted his words to be heard, particularly in the post-war years, the earliest of which were characterised by ‘numbness, repression, denial, apathy, or expedient forgetfulness’ (Felstiner 1985: 49). Facing neo-Nazism and ‘unregenerate’ anti-Semitism (Felstiner 1985: 54) in the 1960s, Celan (in Felstiner 1985: 54) contemplated putting an end to his writing, but decided against it, knowing what it would be like for him as ‘a German-language author who has lived through the Nazi terror ... to be cut off a second time from his language’.

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3, page 137.

<sup>13</sup> Felstiner (1985), Klink (2000) and Langer (1995) attest to the critics’ tendency to view of Celan’s work as hermetic; see also Felstiner (1986b), Glenn (1972) and Roditi (1992), among others.

<sup>14</sup> However, Celan may have lived nomadically, like Doebelin in Michaels’s ‘Sublimation’, more by choice than enforcement. Edouard Roditi (1992: 15) describes him as living in Paris ‘as a willing expatriate, having left Soviet-occupied Czernowitz, then communist Romania, and finally postwar Austria without ever being exiled’.

The first poem Celan published, in 1947, soon became famous. His powerful ‘*Todesfuge*’ (‘Death Fugue’)<sup>15</sup> was originally named ‘*Todestango*’ (‘Death Tango’) and was published not in German but in Petre Solomon’s<sup>16</sup> Romanian translation ‘*Tangoul Mortii?*’ (Felstiner 1986b: 252). Its well-known first stanza tells us the following:

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown  
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night  
we drink and we drink it  
we dig a grave in the breezes<sup>17</sup> there one lies unconfined  
A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents he writes  
he writes when dusk falls to Germany ...  
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are flashing he whistles his pack out  
he whistles his Jews out in earth has them dig for a grave  
he commands us strike up for the dance (Celan 1995: 63)<sup>18</sup>

### Celan – the corpse poet

Sympathetic and partially empathic, Celan can also be seen as a, perhaps subversive (certainly not typical), writer of corpse poems (Fuss 2003: 1–30), which we have encountered in Chapter 2.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, his ‘Death Fugue’ is a corpse poem: ‘We’ makes it a first-person utterance, ‘we drink’ indicates that it is written in the present tense, and in being narrated by the Jews in the camps who ‘dig ... grave[s]’ and who ‘will rise into the air’ as smoke, it is indeed ‘spoken in the voice of the deceased’ (Fuss 2003: 1). The poem evidently seeks to redeem the dead, and thus it can be categorised as a redeeming political corpse poem (Fuss). Poems in this category ‘make strong moral statements about the cruelty of the living’, Fuss (2003: 13, 14) proposes. The blue-eyed man who ‘writes ... to Germany’ is undoubtedly cruel – he ‘whistles his Jews out’ exactly as he ‘whistles his pack [of dogs, presumably] out’ – and these Jews are made to drink ‘black milk’ (all from Death Fugue 63), which could signify death in contrast to the nourishing qualities of white milk.

On the other hand, despite ‘Death Fugue’ neatly fitting in with Fuss’s definitions of corpse poetry, Celan is a Holocaust poet, according to Fuss (2003: 19), for whom any kind of ‘resurrection is a lost hope’ and for whom ‘the speaking corpse [is] an indecorous and cruel fantasy’; she also presents the Holocaust as ‘mark[ing] the historical limit beyond which the corpse poem hesitates to venture’.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, while being separated, like Michaels, by the ‘distance’ of time and circumstance from the Jewish people who did die in the camps, Celan nevertheless seems unprotected, unlike Michaels,<sup>21</sup> by the ‘emotional buffer’ that should ‘shield

<sup>15</sup> John Felstiner (1986b: 249) sees this poem as ‘probably the pre-eminent lyric to have emerged from the European Jewish catastrophe’.

<sup>16</sup> Petre Solomon (1923–1991), Romanian writer and translator; friend of Celan (Felstiner 1985: 47).

<sup>17</sup> In a later poem, Celan refers to the Jews – ‘the human beings-and-Jews’ – as ‘the people of clouds’ (Tabernacle Window 217).

<sup>18</sup> This poem is translated into English slightly differently by Felstiner (1986b: 250), who produces the phrase ‘grave in the air’ rather than ‘grave in the breezes’, for example. The extracts from Celan’s poetry that are quoted in this doctoral thesis come from either a secondary source, which is acknowledged in each case, or from Celan (1995), and thus henceforth the source acknowledgement for the latter is given simply as the poem’s title and the relevant page number in Celan (1995).

<sup>19</sup> See also Chapter 2, page 105.

<sup>20</sup> In support of her argument, Fuss (2003: 19) cites Celan’s ‘Psalm’: ‘No one kneads us again out of earth and clay,/ no one incants our dust./ No one’. However, the subsequent line of that poem challenges the conventional meaning of the pronoun ‘no one’. ‘Praised be your name, no one’ (Psalm 179) suggests that ‘no one’ is a person. And a person can do something – thus, the poem’s narrator(s) are indeed ‘knead[ed]’ and their ‘dust’ is indeed ‘incant[ed]’, by someone, that is, the so-called No one.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 2, page 107.

the poet', as Fuss (2003: 26) clarifies, 'from the contamination and contagion [that] ... proximity to the dead inevitably entails'. Counting himself among the dead, as we see him do below, Celan appears to be immersed in rather than 'shielded from' such 'contamination and contagion' (Fuss).

In fact, Celan seems driven by emotion. His mother's death devastated him in particular, and while his subsequent bouts of depression may also have had a biological cause, his wartime trauma had clear emotional repercussions, such as the depression itself, his paranoia, his persecution mania and his ongoing sense of alienation. 'The corpse poem, when it moves the reader, moves us through social outrage or philosophical argument, rarely through raw emotion,' Fuss (2003: 26) suggests. Celan's outrage at the abuse and destruction of the Jewish people, which he communicates in images like blood spurting from eyes, mouths or ears (With a Variable Key 91), and black milk and breezy graves inhabited by drifts of smoke that once were living beings (Death Fugue 63, 65), is more personal than social, and though some of us may not be moved by his raw emotion, Celan himself does not seem to feel it any the less. Thus, Celan's poetry appears to escape conclusive definition. 'Death Fugue' fits into the category of political corpse poetry of the redeeming kind, but its tone lacks the characteristic emotional distance. We must conclude, therefore, as we have concluded with Michaels's poems,<sup>22</sup> that 'Death Fugue' is and is not a corpse poem.

By the time Michaels comes to depict the Holocaust, its facts and statistics have become well known around the world. This was not the case at the time of the event, when the distribution of reports and photographs had yet to spread around the world. The criticism that Michaels has received for her Holocaust-related metaphors in *Fugitive Pieces* was that much greater a possibility for Celan and his Holocaust-related metaphors. In immediately post-war Europe, when Germans in particular were trying to move on (Felstiner 1985), Celan's Romanian editor was aware that 'reality can swell to metaphorical excess and defy belief' (Felstiner 1986b: 252). Thus he appended a note to '*Tangoul Mortii*' confirming that the poem was based on fact, that, for example, 'in the Nazi camps some of the condemned were [indeed] forced to play music while others dug graves' (Felstiner 1986b: 252, 262 fn 10).

In 1948, in Vienna, Celan published the poem in German as the concluding section of his first volume of poetry *Der Sand aus den Urnen* (*The Sand from the Urns*). He changed the title of the poem to 'Death Fugue', referring to the musical composition favoured by Bach<sup>23</sup> rather than to the Argentinian dance, thereby drawing attention to the 'artfulness' (Felstiner 1986b: 253) of the poem's lines. Despite Celan's (in Felstiner 1986b: 254) efforts at both figuratively and accurately representing what had so recently been reality – he even emphasised that his 'grave in the breezes' metaphor constituted 'neither borrowing nor metaphor' – such artfulness was to the poem's detriment, to Celan's intense dismay, as the poem was soon being used in German schools to educate students not about its content, that is, the plight of Jews such as Celan's parents, but about its structure and prosody (Felstiner 1986b: 254). He believes, by contrast, that a poem's form and patterns of rhythm and sound are given – 'craft', as we know he has suggested, 'is the condition of all poetry' (Celan 2003: 25) and thus need not be privileged over (truth-striving) content.

Moreover, just as Cook (2000) and Henighan (2002) condemn Michaels for what they see as the beauty and reality-obscuring nature of her metaphors in *Fugitive Pieces*,<sup>24</sup> critics in this case praised Celan's metaphors for their beauty. They also saw them as obscuring reality, though this was not

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 102–10.

<sup>23</sup> Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German composer.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 79–82.

necessarily a bad thing in their view – German critics seemed to assume that, living in Paris and influenced by the French surrealists or symbolists, Celan would logically shift his focus to fantasy (Felstiner 1985: 49). One German critic hailed Celan’s ‘glittering arrangements’ (Felstiner 1985: 49); another his ‘music’, his ‘fantasy’, his ‘playful freedom’ (all from Felstiner 1985: 49); while others suggested that his metaphors ‘actually screened off reality’ (Felstiner 1986b: 254), removed ‘everything concrete’ and were romanticised (Felstiner 1985: 49).<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, while so obviously opposing Michaels, Henighan (2002: 149) is equally clearly on Celan’s side, defending the poet as the truly ‘courageous’ respondent to Adorno’s famous injunction about poetic barbarism in the face of any critic who hails Michaels as such. Using heavily metaphorical language himself, he praises Celan’s ‘stark’ collection *Fadensonnen* (*Threadsun*)<sup>26</sup> for doing what he sees Michaels failing to do, that is, ‘hauling concealed meanings out of common expressions, exposing the hidden cargoes sheathed by metaphorical language’ (Henighan 2002: 149). It seems both mystifying and typical that in this way Henighan disparages the poet and author who uses metaphor as a mechanism for bringing us the truth, and endorses the poet and author who uses metaphor to produce meanings that are, by almost all other accounts, ambiguous at best and incomprehensible at worst.

By the time Adorno elaborated on his injunction in 1962, saying on the radio that ‘aesthetic stylization could transfigure the horror of Auschwitz’, people generally took him to be referring to ‘Death Fugue’ (Felstiner 1985: 49). When Adorno made the original statement that was to become so well known he seems to have had no knowledge of Celan,<sup>27</sup> but when he did become aware of Celan’s work in the early 60s, ‘he recognized in [it] the very qualities he stipulated for authentic literature’ (Felstiner 1985: 49).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as Felstiner (1986b: 258) points out, for all the misinterpretations of ‘Death Fugue’s’ metaphors by the critics over the years, the poem remains ‘for many European Jewish survivors ... the quintessence of whatever understanding they can voice after the catastrophe’ – both Améry and Levi, for example, use the ‘grave in the air’ metaphor in their own texts, in 1976 and 1982 respectively (Felstiner 1986b: 256).

For his part, Celan refuted the critics’ appraisals of his work as anything but reality-based. In response to a question about his own work in progress, he proposes that the language of German poetry in the late 1950s

wants to locate even its “musicality” in such a way that it has nothing in common with the “euphony” which more or less blithely continued to sound alongside the greatest horrors.<sup>29</sup> ...

<sup>25</sup> In mid-1944, Celan read ‘Death Fugue’ to his friend and fellow poet Alfred Kittner, a survivor of the labour camp in which Celan’s parents had died (Felstiner 1986b: 251; Hamburger, in Celan (1995: 20)). According to Felstiner (1986b: 251, 261 fn 4) Kittner, too, found that ‘measured against the terrors [he] had barely escaped’, the poem was ‘all too artful, too accomplished’, and he told Celan as much. Fuss (2003: 26) proposes that there is ‘not a single corpse poem in which the poet ventriloquizes the voice of a deceased ... friend’. Kittner had survived the Transnistrian camp, but perhaps he found Celan’s ‘we’ in ‘Death Fugue’ too close a self-approximation to those who had not survived.

<sup>26</sup> In Ristić (2005) I state that there is no collection by that name. This is incorrect – Celan (1995) published a volume of poetry entitled *Fadensonnen* in 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Shira Wolosky (2001: 655) would disagree, proposing that ‘Adorno’s famous remark ... in fact made special reference to Celan’. Her subsequent discussion portrays Adorno’s reactions to Celan’s work as negatively critical (Wolosky 2001: 655).

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Felstiner (1986b: 255) explains that Adorno’s editor Rolf Tiedemann told him ‘that it was Celan’s poetry itself which led Adorno in 1966 to recant specifically his famous dictum’.

<sup>29</sup> In the case of ‘musicality’ Celan may have used quotation marks in sardonic reaction to the emphasis that a critic for an ‘influential German journal’ put on the ‘music’ of ‘Death Fugue’ (Felstiner 1985: 49). In the case of ‘euphony’ Celan may have used quotation marks in reference to the music that was played during the Holocaust while extermination camp prisoners were forced to march to the crematorium, and possibly in reference to the post-war

This language ... is concerned with precision. It does not transfigure or render “poetical”; it tries to measure the area of the given and the possible. ... [This is] the working ... of an “I”<sup>30</sup> who speaks from the particular angle of reflection which is his existence and who is concerned with outlines and orientation. (Celan 2003: 15–16)

Celan’s later work reflects such precision, believes Hamburger (in Celan 1995). Structurally, the poems are characterised by “‘darkness’ ... leaps and bounds ... haltingness and ... silences’, but it is not these aspects that make them difficult to understand (Hamburger, in Celan 1995: 21). There is nothing ‘slapdash or vague’ about them, nothing in them is ‘meaningless’, ‘nothing has been left to chance or to merely emotive gestures’ (Hamburger, in Celan 1995: 21). It is the context in which they are set – where, as we know, ‘milk is black [and] death is the all-encompassing reality’ – that makes them so powerfully confront our understanding (Hamburger, in Celan 1995: 21).

In using the first person ‘we’ in ‘Death Fugue’, Celan speaks not for the Jewish victims but ‘through them’, and he uses the present tense in figuratively describing an action (‘we drink’) that took place in reality in the past (they suffered abuse and murder) – thus it is evident that he was never able to break free of ‘the Jewish fatality’ (Felstiner 1985: 44). Moreover, the lines ‘Render me bitter./ Number me among the almonds’,<sup>31</sup> from the untitled, final poem in the volume *Mohn und Gedächtnis (Poppy and Remembrance)*, demonstrate that in the subsequent 18 years Celan remained ever ready to count himself ‘among the Jewish dead’ (Felstiner 1985: 48). In terms of Michaels’s expression of these concepts, Celan, refusing to ‘cut out [his] tongue’, tried to ‘cleave it with new language’ (What the Light Teaches 124).<sup>32</sup> Listening closely to ‘a language of the dead’ (What the Light Teaches 124), Celan reiterates that language in ‘Death Fugue’.

In contrast to Michaels’s empathic identification, this is sympathetic identification – Celan is putting himself in the position of the Jews who died in the camps without sustaining the essential difference, without bearing in mind that he and each of them are not one and the same person. Indeed, if Felstiner’s (1985) view is accepted, Celan goes so far as to represent himself as dead at the hands of the Nazis. This deathly existence seems ‘real’ or literal to Celan just as his ‘grave in the breezes’ metaphor is not, to him, metaphorical and just as the ‘word’, to him, the tool of his craft, can be simultaneously personified and aligned with death, that is, can become a ‘corpse’ (Nocturnally Pouting 93), as we see further below.

However, Celan’s form of identification is not always sympathetic; he fleetingly seems to approximate empathy as well. For example, in 1942 he received a letter from his mother during her internment, telling him of his father’s death and asking for a shawl to ward off the cold. Thereafter he wrote the poem ‘Black Flakes’, in which a mother (perhaps his mother) asks her child (perhaps Celan) for ‘a shawl/ to wrap [her]self in ... when the snowdrift sifts/ [his] father’s bones’ (Celan, in Felstiner 1985: 46). Immediately following this potentially sympathetic identification is an empathic identification, in which Celan (in Felstiner 1985: 46) refers to

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‘music’ (the denial or blocking-out mechanisms) that continued to be ‘played’ (exercised) by Germans wishing to forget the recent horrors.

<sup>30</sup> The ‘I’ is ‘a unique, mortal soul searching for its way with its voice and its dumbness’ (Celan 2003: 26). Berger (2001: 450) also sees poetry, in contrast to the ‘vast territory’ that is prose, as concentrating on ‘a single centre, a single voice’.

<sup>31</sup> Celan uses the almond to symbolise Jewishness (Felstiner 1985).

<sup>32</sup> It seems at times, however, that Celan felt his attempts to be futile even as he made them, because the earth-filled diggers of one of his poems ‘thought up for themselves no language’ (There Was Earth Inside Them 157).



historical events that he could not have experienced first-hand: the massacres of 1648 and the Cossack ‘Hetman with all his troop’, whose horses’ ‘hooves crush[ed]/ the Song of the Cedar’.<sup>33</sup>

This is not to define empathic identification as *any* kind of vivid and imaginative portrayal of events in the past that the poet or author is too young to have experienced first-hand, and, correspondingly, to define sympathetic identification as such a portrayal of events that the writer could have experienced personally. Rather, while in their poems Michaels and Celan, in their different ways, *speak as* real people, the verb can be refined with regard to Celan. When Michaels speaks as Brueghel in ‘January’, for example, she speaks *as if* she were Brueghel – just as a sign can designate absence,<sup>34</sup> and as meaninglessness is a derivation and therefore an indication of meaning, as we see shortly, the ‘as’ implies the distinction of the person of Anne Michaels from the person of Pieter Brueghel. But when Celan speaks as one of the exterminated Jews in ‘Death Fugue’, for example, the ‘as’ can drop away – Celan speaks. He truly believes or deliberately decides to believe that he is one of them, but he is palpably not dead when he writes the poem, and therefore he too achieves Ricoeur’s (1977: 255) metaphorical truth: He is and is not one of the murdered Jews. He submits to an exhortation of one of his narrators, to be found in his poem ‘Speak, you also’ (101): He ‘speak[s]’, and ‘keep[s] yes and no unsplit’.

Furthermore, in his speech on receiving the Georg Büchner<sup>35</sup> Prize in 1960, Celan (2003: 48) claims that while the poem ‘speaks only on its own, its very own behalf, it has ‘always hoped ... to speak also on *behalf of ... the other, ... perhaps an altogether other*’.<sup>36</sup> Therefore Celan can refer to two forms of ‘I’, of his self: the ‘I’ he was before the war, and the traumatised and fragmented ‘I’ that the Holocaust forced him to become. Logically, and as Felstiner (1985: 44–5, emphasis added) explains, the ‘destruction’ – cultural, racial, familial destruction – that was ‘thrust upon Celan, among countless other Jews of his generation, ... constituted a destiny and *an identity* he would never have realized within a Europe free of the twelve-year Reich’. This situation may apply equally to Levi in real life, and to Jakob and Ben’s parents in *Fugitive Pieces*. Like Celan, these people became different versions of themselves – Jakob fictionally as a child; Ben’s parents fictionally and Levi genuinely as adults – as a result of their war experiences. Ben, however, is not included in this category because his life did not change so drastically over time. He is affected by his parents’ trauma from birth: ‘History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. ... [He] lived there with [his] parents [in that] ... hiding place, rotted out by grief’ (FP 233).

By writing the early poem ‘Death Fugue’ in the still recognisable German of the oppressors, Celan performs sympathetic remembrance of the truths about the Jews facing death moment to moment in the camps. At this point in the poets’ literary development, both Celan’s poetry and Michaels’s poetry are figurative and imaginative. But the traits of their work then diverge. Michaels remains steadfastly imaginative, as her subsequent poetry and latest novel also show; the ways in which she uses figurative language do not alter markedly. Celan, by contrast, increasingly finds language inadequate for what he has to say. He seems to understand, as does Michaels, that language can become meaningless in its attempt to achieve meaning. While at university in the still-foreign city of Toronto, unsettling enough a situation as it is, Jakob is embroiled in dealing with his childhood trauma. He describes his inability to explain why or how

<sup>33</sup> The Song of the Cedar is a ‘late-19th-century Zionist anthem’, and its mention indicates on Celan’s part ‘a painful grasp of Jewish persecution and endurance’ (Felstiner 1985: 46).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 2, page 70.

<sup>35</sup> Georg Büchner (1813–1837), German dramatist.

<sup>36</sup> Here too is an echo of Ricoeur’s (1992: 3) suggestion that the self, a person, ‘implies otherness to such an intimate degree’ that he or she seems to be made up of two, albeit inseparable, entities. (See also Chapter 1, page 32, footnote 28.)

he at first saw, on that momentous day, only that his parents were dead and not that his sister had vanished: In his own eyes he is the ‘touch-typist’ who produces ‘meaningless’ and ‘garbled’ words (*FP* 111).

By writing ‘in code, every letter askew’, Jakob imagines making ‘loss’ both ‘wreck’ and ‘become’ the language (*FP* 111). He contemplates, in other words, what Celan actually carries out, that is, making language describe and embody its own destruction, as in this extract from ‘Nocturnally Pouting’ (93):

A word – you know:  
a corpse.

Let us wash it,  
let us comb it,  
let us turn its eye  
towards heaven.

Being with Alex temporarily assuages some of Jakob’s pain, as we have seen in Chapter 2,<sup>37</sup> but after a few years their lack of mutual understanding becomes plain, albeit represented as it is in metaphor: Having initially ‘flooded the clearing’, the ‘finger of light poked down ... [and] illuminat[ed] nothing’ (*FP* 139). In Celan’s terms, ‘the way’ for Jakob ‘led nowhere’ (‘There Was Earth Inside Them 157’). Once again, as he did while hiding from the Nazis, he ‘stand[s] under water, [his] boots locked in mud’ (*FP* 139). Celan was also trapped. In 1963, one of his narrators (still) had ‘earth inside’ him, he was still digging; he ‘heard nothing more’, he ‘did not grow wise’, he ‘invented no song’; he digs and his addressee digs and ‘the worm digs too’ (‘There Was Earth Inside Them 157’). For the narrator, and by extension for Celan, the way would never lead anywhere, it would always lead nowhere.

Yet Celan continued to make the attempt – to search for the truth, to speak on behalf of others, to place himself among them and speak, and to reach for an approachable reader or addressee. Perhaps his search for new language was also motivated by a sense, articulated by the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ (122), that ‘all change is permanent’. Anti-Semitism did not end with the cessation of the war – the words in the German language, such as ‘number’, ‘oven’, ‘Final Solution’ and so on, that the Nazis used to such negative effect will always carry those meanings when used in reference to that context. Indeed, the combination of the words ‘tattoo’ and ‘number’ in almost any context has the potential to bring to mind the image of the prisoners entering the camp bearing this mark.

As we know from the epigraph of the section on the destructive power of language in Chapter 3, Klemperer (2000: 14) feels that it will take a long time for certain words to be cleansed of Holocaust-related meaning, and some words will never be cleansed. In this light, perhaps Celan along with the narrator and her sister in ‘What the Light Teaches’ (122) ‘need words to raise [them]selves/ to new meaning’. His message becomes ‘more urgent’ but also ‘more reticent’; he conveys it in newly coined compound words, split words whose separate syllables gain new weight, fewer words altogether (Hamburger, in Celan 1995: 25) and title-less poems. His revised language is ‘at once probing and groping, critical and innovative’,<sup>38</sup> and as he becomes more

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 2, page 88.

<sup>38</sup> As we have seen earlier in the present chapter, this is the new language that stems from Celan’s insistence on the ‘gap between him[self] and the world’, and that he uses in the hope that it ‘can fill the gap and include the other side’ (Waldrop, in Celan 2003: viii).

resourceful and familiar with it, he begins ‘strictly ... [to] confine [it] to the orbit of his most urgent concerns’ (Hamburger, in Celan 1995: 29).

In thus testing the boundaries of language, taking it to a complete completeness (Berger 2001, see below), in his later poetry Celan seems to approach a more substantial form of empathic remembrance. Ironically, he thereby received a less favourable response from his contemporaries – in using his new language he strode ahead of puzzled and misapprehending audiences. With his suicide he left them even further behind. The suicide, moreover, confirms the provisional nature of his empathic remembrance, his continued reaching towards rather than reaching, or achieving, it. He may have taught himself to use the German language differently – to remember it empathically – but up to the time of his death, unlike Jakob, he has not learnt to love the dead differently (Michaels), in other words empathically, knowing that they are dead and he is alive, and he has not learnt to use language differently to the point that he is saved by it, as Jakob has learnt to do and partly by which he is saved.

Celan does not quite ‘reach/ what breaks in [him]’ and thus cannot ‘penetrate heaven’, as described by the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ (125). Jakob, seated at Athos’s desk in the house on Idhra shortly after his divorce, ‘moved closer inside [him]self, didn’t turn away. [He] clutched the sides of the desk and was pulled down into the blueness. [He] lost [him]self, discovered the world could disappear’ (FP 157). But he is not lost forever. Whereas he and Celan have both been ‘clamped/ into [their] deepest part’, only Jakob manages to ‘climb out of [himself]/ for ever’, as one of Celan’s narrators demands of the addressee in his poem ‘Illegibility’ (329). Celan (2003: 52) strove and Jakob is able to ‘take art with [them] into [their] innermost narrowness’, but only Jakob manages to ‘set [him]self free’ (Celan 2003: 52). After years of anguished contemplation, Jakob ‘fall[s] apart’ but also achieves a moment of ‘pure belief’, which is his knowledge that his ‘*brokenness has kept [Bella] broken*’ (FP 169). And then, with Michaela’s aid, Jakob achieves freedom, finally feeling ‘safe above ground’ (FP 189).

We have concluded that ‘Death Fugue’ is and is not a corpse poem. But what of Fuss’s (2003: 30) general conclusion that *all* poetry is a form of corpse poetry, because ‘every literary utterance [is] a speaking corpse, a disembodied voice detached from [the] living, breathing body’ of the poet? In May of 1960, Celan (2003: 25) still believes, ‘in principle’, that the poem and the poet are totally distinct, that ‘once the poem is really *there*, the poet is dismissed, is no longer privy’, thereby conforming to the ideas of the New Criticism, still prevalent at the time. But he seems to revise this idea in October of that year, stating that while the poem is ‘*en route*’, that is, as it moves again and again towards its ‘approachable you’, ‘the author stays with it’ (Celan 2003: 49).

As we see below, on the one hand, Michaels appears to subscribe to the New Criticism approach as well; but on the other hand, I argue, Michaels does not separate herself entirely from her texts. She ‘stays with’ (Celan) her poems and novels in their journey towards her ‘approachable’ (Celan) audience because she seems to be driven by a three-fold obligation: to her personal role in exploring social concerns in writing, to the historical material she is writing about and reproducing, and to her readers. First, in terms of her personal role, Michaels (1992: 99) fulfils in her writing a lesson she learned from her mother, that is, the value of a combination of ‘action and words’ as a form of social aid. Thus, for her, ‘writing is one kind of giving’ (Michaels 1992: 99), or as we have seen James (1937: 347) expressing the function of writing in Chapter 3:<sup>39</sup> ‘To “put” things is ... to do them’. The aspect of social awareness infused in Michaels’s writing stems from her engagement with what she calls ‘the dilemma of the witness’, who questions ‘Who am I to say?’ as well as ‘Who am I, if I don’t say[?]’ (Michaels 1992: 99).

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 3, page 149.

Second, in terms of the material, as we have seen in Chapter 2<sup>40</sup> Michaels refuses to be seen as having written about the Holocaust in *Fugitive Pieces* purely out of personal interest. The personal element plays a significant role, but it is facilitative rather than dominant – it leads Michaels to address the issues that affect more lives than just her own life. For ‘the more deeply you examine your own life, the more deeply you enter your times, and from there, history’, Michaels (1992: 99) suggests. The Second World War was directly ‘a formative event’ for anyone of her generation – ‘when we were born, everyone had just come back from the war, or lost someone in the war, or emigrated because of the war’ – but she feels, too, that the events were of such magnitude that, even indirectly, they pertain to everyone: ‘We should *all* be interested’ in them, ‘no matter where we come from, or who our parents are’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009).

Third, in terms of her audience, as a result of the success of *Fugitive Pieces* Michaels (in Crown 2009) was ‘suddenly confronted with [the] idea of a readership’, and the fact of the readership being both ‘an amazing gift’ and ‘a huge responsibility’. Now, she does not want ‘to disappoint those readers who’ve trusted [her]’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009).<sup>41</sup> With her second published novel *The Winter Vault*, Michaels (in Crown 2009) intends to offer her readers ‘a place for their own concerns’, to ‘make a safe place to talk about things that aren’t safe’. And all her published work<sup>42</sup> has ‘an unassailable argument for hope’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009).<sup>43</sup>

We have established in Chapter 2 that because ‘What the Light Teaches’ is not narrated in the voice of a deceased person, it cannot be a corpse poem. But like all other poems, this one does reach us in the ‘disembodied voice’ (Fuss) of the narrator, whose identity and roles in life we can only surmise. While most of the poem appears to achieve the emotional distance advocated by Fuss (2003), the following verse seems temporarily to bring the poem more in line with the raw emotional quality of Celan’s ‘Death Fugue’:

Remembering, we learn to forget.  
The kind of forgetting that stops us, one foot  
in the spring soil of your farm,  
the other in mud where bits of bone and teeth  
are still suspended, a white alphabet.  
The kind of forgetting that changes  
moonlight on the river into shreds of skin.  
The forgetting that is the heart’s  
filthy drain,  
so fear won’t overflow its deep basin. (What the Light Teaches 120)

A personal tone infuses the poem in general, but in this verse in particular the tone of the narrator’s words seems to stem from her own life and family history rather than being intended as expressions of ‘social outrage’ (Fuss 2003: 26). As we have seen above, Celan had little or no ‘emotional buffer’ (Fuss). Michaels’s narrator, too, appears if not utterly bereft then at least *less* ‘at a secure remove from the emotional maelstrom of personal bereavement’ than Fuss (2003) believes is necessary for genuine corpse poetic writing.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 85–6.

<sup>41</sup> Her dedication was evident in her practical writing practice. She wrote *The Winter Vault* in the early hours of each morning, ‘from 1am to 5am’, when her two small children were ‘asleep’ and ‘safe’, and she could ‘disengage [the maternal] part of [her] brain’, and ‘be fully present’ in the writing (Michaels, in Crown 2009).

<sup>42</sup> In the more than 12 years she took to write *The Winter Vault*, Michaels (in Crown 2009) also wrote several shorter books, which she still intends to publish, and five children’s books.

<sup>43</sup> Most likely, remembrance features so powerfully in Michaels’s work because, as Israeli poet Yehudi Amichai (in Michaels 1994: 15) suggests, “‘to remember is a kind of hope’”. Moreover, ‘when memory evokes consideration of what might have been or been prevented, memory becomes redemptive’ (Michaels 1994: 15).

We can also notice in this verse that though Michaels's narrator's emotions are slightly more tempered than Celan's (and his narrator(s)), they are powerful nevertheless. Fear *is* powerful, and for the narrator it is the primary negative emotional event of the poem. In the years immediately following the loss of his family, Jakob cannot conceive of any stronger emotion (*FP* 19), and while they did not experience the war themselves, the narrator and her sister are affected by it, because 'everywhere the past juts into the present' with the force of 'mountains burst[ing] from one era into another,/ or crumpl[ing] up millennia, time joining at its ends' (*What the Light Teaches* 120), as we learn from the verse preceding the one that has been quoted above. The narrator and her sister likewise 'pleat time' (*What the Light Teaches* 120); figuratively, they simultaneously inhabit the past and the present, just as Celan does. And like Celan, it is their preoccupation with the chilling details of the past, of the sufferings of Holocaust victims both known and foreign to them, that grips them in the inappropriate kind of remembrance.

It perhaps bears repeating here that in *Fugitive Pieces* we learn how, for many years, Jakob is also thus afflicted. In his desire to make up for at first not noticing Bella's absence he resolves never to forget her, but this is the inappropriate kind of remembrance. His acute sense of her presence, his near obsession in finding out what happened to her and his projections of himself into her concentration camp experiences, themselves creations of his imagination – all of this keeps him too close to her, too sympathetic towards her, as he thereby obscures the distinction between himself and her. The narrator and her sister in 'What the Light Teaches' are, in the above-quoted verse and in one or two other instances, too close to the Jewish dead in the same way – they too are more sympathetic towards the dead than empathic, which makes them also a little closer to Celan than to Michaels at this moment.

By now the mass graves of the Holocaust are well documented – long afterwards the earth continues to reveal the durable bodily elements, the bones and teeth of the Nazis' victims. The narrator portrays herself and her sister as standing with one foot in the present, in the farm's 'spring soil', and one foot in the past, in the bone- and teeth-revealing 'mud' (*What the Light Teaches* 120). Equally familiar to some of us may be the idea of certain Nazi doctors, almost too macabre to comprehend, of using human skin in the form, among others, of lampshades. The narrator also sees the present change into the past, the reflection of the 'moonlight' broken by the rippled surface of 'the river' appears as 'shreds of skin' (*What the Light Teaches* 120). Thus the narrator dovetails historical facts with her and her sister's own, post-war lives, just as Celan dovetails the camp experience with his own, post-war life. Michaels and Celan's authorial processes here are mirror images: Michaels's narrator brings the past forward into their present; Celan takes himself back into the (for him) recent past.

Their proximity with the dead frightens the narrator and her sister just as it terrified Jakob. This proximity embodies the kind of remembrance that actually makes them 'forget' (*What the Light Teaches* 120), or fail to bear in mind, the true nature of the dead, which is their difference, being deceased, from the living and their desire, as Fuss (2003: 25) helps us to understand, to remain dead, not to be made to live again. The heart is portrayed in the above-quoted verse as having 'a deep basin', and thus as being capable of feeling (containing) a great deal of emotion. But even a deep container has a rim, over which whatever the basin holds can eventually flow – in other words, even a heart has a limit beyond which whatever emotion it is feeling (containing) can flow. If we push the metaphor slightly further, we can see the heart as filled to bursting, and a burst heart in turn signifies 'death', an end to itself. In order that this does not happen, in order for the narrator and her sister's hearts not to burst with fear and anguished recollections, their hearts have devised a 'drain', made 'filthy' by the fear that flows through it, and this drain is precisely the 'forgetting' (all from *What the Light Teaches* 120), the inappropriate kind of

remembering, that they and Jakob in *Fugitive Pieces* are practising at these specific stages of the poem and the novel.

In contrast to humans, the earth does not judge – it does not ‘care’ whether the corpses it receives had been good or bad people, moral or criminal, able to remember appropriately or inappropriately. It is the ‘naturally existing external world’, which is ‘wholly ignorant’ of our “‘hurtability’”, in Scarry’s (1985: 288) terms. Michaels personifies it nevertheless, “‘making it’ as knowledgeable about human pain as if it were itself animate and in pain’ (Scarry 1985: 289): The earth ‘mourns’ the ‘contortions of disorder’ (What the Light Teaches 119) that it has undergone over millennia,<sup>44</sup> vast physical shifts that are mirrored by the literally smaller, in implication and consequence just as vast, ethical and social upheavals that have occurred during the 20th century. The expansive image we receive in the lines ‘Continents torn in half and turned into coastlines,/ call for themselves across the sea’ (What the Light Teaches 119) is echoed in comparative minutia in the lines that portray Germany summoning Doebelin in ‘Sublimation’ (70), for example, though he had torn himself from her, his homeland: ‘the church bells in Heidelberg ... calling [him] back to the place’.

We humans mourn the atrocities of the Holocaust just as the earth mourns its ‘flux’ (What the Light Teaches 119). We are confused by our fellow man’s murderous and oppressive actions, as the earth is confused ‘in its upheavals and depressions’, and just as our hearts are capacitive, so the earth ‘has room in its heart’ for us when we are dead (What the Light Teaches 120). It stores us; and because it is a living thing in which cells procreate, develop and die, it ‘replaces us’, ‘carefully, part by part’ (What the Light Teaches 120). Characteristically slow-moving itself, it allows us time to de-compose: ‘Gently, so [our] bones may embrace a little longer,/ [the earth’s] mud replaces [our] marrow’ (What the Light Teaches 120). This is the most literal instance of the visceral ‘events’ that we can find in the poem; it is an earthly element of the lesson learned by the narrator.

While it seems, then, as we have seen in Chapter 2,<sup>45</sup> that Michaels’s living-poems are something like, but something other than corpse poems, Michaels would understand a primary impulse that drives corpse poetry, as Celan could have also. The title of Roy Fuller’s poem ‘Ghost Voice’<sup>46</sup> is ‘an especially apt title for describing the spectral utterances of any corpse poem’, observes Fuss (2003: 23). The narrators of ‘Death Fugue’ are ghosts – much as Celan takes himself back into the recent past, making it the poem’s present at the time of writing, and takes his readers there with each reading, the narrators voices are ethereal, utterly separate from their once ‘living, breathing bod[ies]’ (Fuss), and they were so even when Celan first conceived their words.

‘Ghosts enter the world’ through language, we learn from ‘What the Light Teaches’ (121). With his ever-troubled and -troubling German, and by joining them, Celan takes the existing world back to the deceased Jews. The as yet blank page on which Celan will soon write ‘Death Fugue’ is ‘the white field’, perhaps, in which he invites the dead to ‘gather’ (What the Light Teaches 121). In order to do so, the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ (121) elaborates, they must ‘twist into awkward positions/ to squeeze through the black spaces’, which in *Fugitive Pieces* (95)

<sup>44</sup> Humans cannot see or watch the earth’s movements taking place. In a single moment, in a day or even over a few years, we see those movements as ‘frozen acrobatics of folding and faults’ (What the Light Teaches 119). Geographical history has taught us, as Michaels (1992: 96) herself knows, that this apparently ‘static surface is an illusion’, which ‘actually reveals all the earth forces that forged and continue to forge the present geological moment’.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 102–10.

<sup>46</sup> Roy Fuller (1912–1991), British poet and novelist ‘best known for his concise and observant verse chronicling the daily routines of home and office’ (EB 2008). ‘Ghost Voice’ comes from his volume *New and Collected Poems 1934–84*.

serve to separate things ‘from their names’. From the page, from the field, the ghosts ‘look up’ at Celan, ‘waiting for [him]/ to write their names’ (What the Light Teaches 121–2). However, in ‘Death Fugue’ Celan names them only with the first person plural pronoun, ‘we’, and not with their actual names; he focuses on the camp experiences, not on the (hopefully happier) lives of the prisoners before the war. Thus, in Michaels’s terms, he fails to remember them appropriately; he never manages to transform them from ghosts into spirits.

Among all of Michaels’s poems, six narrators are concerned in varying degrees with language. Doebelin, in ‘Sublimation’, laments the loss of his mother tongue, the language he uses to write his novels, while he lives outside of Germany. Blixen presents language as a bridge between herself and Finch Hatton in ‘Blue Vigour’. Marie Curie used a private journal, which presumably supported Michaels’s composition of ‘The Second Search’, to witness her bereavement. ‘Ice House’ shows us how Scott treasures her husband’s Antarctic journals.

The narrator of ‘Words for the Body’ searches for the ‘perfect word’ as her close friend searches for ‘perfect sound’ (Words for the Body 44, 43). After ‘twenty-five years’ of their separate but similar endeavours, ‘every love poem/ says how [the friend’s] music and [the narrator’s] words are the same: praising ... memory’ (Words for the Body 46). In ‘The Hooded Hawk’ (172) the narrator talks about the manuscript that Wiseman wrote and ‘pushed ... across the table’ to her ‘without comment’. ‘Abandoned’ for some time, the ‘pages’ (The Hooded Hawk 172) constituted the autobiographical novel that was published in real life. Thus in ‘Words for the Body’ and ‘The Hooded Hawk’ we find language upholding and performing the memorialising function of words, respectively, that Michaels endorses, as we see below. However, none of these six people have lost so much of the contents of their lives, both material and emotional, that language is the only thing that remains in their possession.

### ‘What the Light Teaches’ – real-life subjects

In the preceding discussions we have investigated whether Michaels’s metaphor of language as a home, introduced to us in ‘What the Light Teaches’, also features in *Fugitive Pieces* and her other poems. By finding that it does not do so, I do not intend to imply that Michaels is being inconsistent. Rather, she applies the metaphor in a specific context, which differs from the contexts of her other works. In ‘What the Light Teaches’, as we know, the narrator interweaves memories of her relationship with her sister and parents with references to real people who had been robbed by their oppressors of almost everything they owned and cared for – people such as certain nameless Holocaust victims and the Russian poets Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Akhmatova.<sup>47</sup> This is the reason, moreover, for ‘The Weight of Oranges’ possibly being the single exception to the above-stated ‘rule’ of all of Michaels’s poems failing to utilise the language-as-a-home metaphor. Mandelstam admits in this poem that his language, his subversive poetry, is the cause of his exile and separation from his wife. And ironically, it seems to be the only thing that remains in his possession at this last stage of his life – as the epigraph of the poem indicates, his ‘life’ is ‘far away’ (The Weight of Oranges 34).<sup>48</sup> He inhabits language, or

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<sup>47</sup> By focusing on these real-life people, Michaels thereby combines, in this poem, the historically oppressive backgrounds of ‘The Weight of Oranges’ and ‘Sublimation’.

<sup>48</sup> The complete epigraph reads as follows:  
Now I lodge in the cabbage patches  
of the important ...  
Not much sleep under strange roofs  
with my life far away ...  
Osip Mandelstam

language houses him, as he writes the letter he ‘always write[s]’ (The Weight of Oranges 37) to Nadezhda while in exile.

Along with Mandelstam and Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941) is considered to be among the leading 20th-century poets in the Russian language. Her work is known for its ‘staccato rhythms, originality, and directness’ (*EB* 2008), as well as for the ‘extraordinary precision and technical skill’ with which she executed it (Bayley 1984: 156). She seems to resemble Celan, slightly, in that she too played with the structure of words – ‘cutting prefixes, changing endings and one or two vowels’ – in a search just as much for their truth as for the ‘essence and authenticity of emotions’ (Slonim 1972: 124). Moreover, like Celan, this aspect of her poetry was misunderstood by her contemporary audience – her “‘game of phonemes” irritated [her] many detractors among émigré critics[,] who contended that her manner had degenerated into mannerism, linguistic tricks, and metric acrobatics’ – and like Celan she refused to consent to the judgement (Slonim 1972: 124; see also Stock 2001: 763).

Growing up mainly in Moscow, Tsvetaeva was well travelled and studied at the Sorbonne. As her husband, Sergei Efron, was a member of the White army that countered the Russian Revolution of 1917, many of her poems at that time praised the anti-Bolshevik resistance (*EB* 2008). Mandelstam was in love with her, too, and unsuccessfully pursued her for some time (Bayley 1984). Leaving the Soviet Union in 1922, and living briefly in Berlin and Prague, in 1925 she settled in Paris, where she published several volumes of poetry, some essays on the creative process and some literary criticism. In her last cycle of poems, ‘Verses to the Czech Land’ (1938–9), she reacts intensely to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia.

However, she was not well received by the émigrés in Paris, who seemed to perceive a stubbornly revolutionary element in her poetry: ‘In the emigration they began (enthusiastically!) publishing [her], then, on reflection, they withdrew [her] from circulation, sensing [that her poetry] was not in-[their]-line but from-over-there’ (Tsvetaeva, in Bayley 1984: 159). In the 1930s Tsvetaeva’s poems demonstrated her increasing homesickness and disaffection with her immigrant life. At this time her husband had begun to absorb communist ideals, and he returned to the Soviet Union with their daughter. There he was linked with the murder of the son of Leon Trotsky,<sup>49</sup> and was arrested and shot during the purges (Bayley 1984). The daughter was sent into the Gulag. Tsvetaeva and her son followed them in 1939; they settled in Moscow, where she made a meagre living translating poems. They were evacuated during the Second World War to Yelabuga (or Elabuga) (see below), where they were without social and financial support. She committed suicide there in 1941 (en.wikipedia ... Yelabuga).

With her husband, Nicholas Gumilev, and Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) founded the Acmeist school of poetry, which upheld ‘beautiful clarity’, according to the anti-Symbolist Russian poet Mikhail Kuzmin (in *EB* 2008), who was also a member. To the Acmeists’ demand for ‘concrete representation’, ‘precise form and meaning’ and ‘a broad-ranging erudition’, Akhmatova contributed ‘elegant colloquialism’ and ‘sophistication’ (*EB* 2008), as well as ‘elemental force’ and ‘haunted’ utterance (Bayley 1984: 138). She and her husband had a son, Lev, but did not remain married. Initially, her principle theme was frustrated and tragic love. Her early work quickly became famous, her generation taking her poetic voice as representative of their experience (*EB* 2008). During the First World War and Russian Revolution of 1917 she added some ‘civic, patriotic, and religious motifs’ (*EB* 2008) to her work, and became technically more proficient.

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<sup>49</sup> Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), communist theorist and agitator, and leader in the Russian Revolution of 1917. He lost the power struggle that attended Lenin’s death to Stalin, and was exiled and then assassinated in Mexico.



However, the communists claimed that Akhmatova's work was "bourgeois", "aristocratic" and overly focused on 'love and God' (EB 2008). Her position was further threatened by Gumilev's 1921 execution, allegedly for participating in an anti-Soviet plot. In the 1920s she fell poetically silent. Mandelstam's 'dearest friend' (Shirazi 2003: 199), she was present when he was arrested in 1934, and in 1936 she wrote a poem to him in his subsequent Voronezh exile (see further below), where,

in the room of the banished poet  
Fear and the Muse stand watch by turn,  
and the night is coming on,  
which has no hope of dawn. (Akhmatova 1997: 87)

Akhmatova's son and her third husband, Nicholas Punin, were arrested in 1935 for political subversion. Though they were both released soon after, Lev was arrested again in 1938 and spent five years in the Gulag. Rather unexpectedly, some of Akhmatova's current and earlier poems were published in 1940 in a monthly literary journal, but as with Tsvetaeva, they were then withdrawn from sale and distribution (EB 2008). During the Second World War Akhmatova was evacuated from her home, Leningrad, to Tashkent, in Uzbekistan, where she was able to read her poetry to wounded soldiers and published several war poems. She returned to Leningrad at the end of the war and her poems began to appear in local magazines and newspapers.

Akhmatova's popularity 'became an embarrassment to the authorities' (Bayley 1984: 142), however: She was indicted in 1946 for political indifference, among other things, and her poetry was seen as "alien to the Soviet people" (EB 2008). Her work was put out of print for three years, and she was subjected to 'increasing degrees of persecution, including constant escort by the secret police' (Bayley 1984: 142). Lev was arrested again in 1949, and this time exiled to Siberia. Logically, the tone of the elegies she wrote about Stalin at this time in an effort to regain her son's freedom was quite different to the 'Requiem' (1935–40), the 'moving and universalized lyrical cycle' (EB 2008) that she had written in reaction both to Lev's earlier Gulag imprisonment and to the sufferings of the people under Stalin's rule.

'Requiem' is the work that Michaels (1992: 99) cites as an example of a poet speaking *from* 'her place' within 'her tribe', rather than *for* her tribe – in this poem, Akhmatova is saying: 'This is what I see'.<sup>50</sup> During the Yezhov<sup>51</sup> purges, Akhmatova spent 17 months waiting in long and freezing prison lines to find out more about her son's fate (Akhmatova 1997: 99; Bayley 1984: 141). On one occasion, a woman nearby whispered to her: 'Can you describe this?', to which she responded that she could (Akhmatova 1997: 99). 'A hundred million people shout' through '[her] tortured mouth' (Requiem, in Akhmatova 1997: 115). Such identification with 'fellow-spirit[s] in suffering' is perhaps partly the result of her poems frequently featuring the idea of a mirror image (Bayley 1984: 139). As a friend of hers confirms: 'Whatever has happened to her or in her proximity – great or petty – she always senses through her cares [for] the country and the world' (Lydia Chukovskaya, in Gifford 1989: 128).

Akhmatova was slowly and partially rehabilitated following Stalin's death (Bayley 1984: 142; EB 2008). In the 1960s she was awarded a prestigious literary prize and an honorary doctoral degree, and her work was widely translated and published, without the Stalin elegies at her specific

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<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Henry Gifford (1989: 138) believes that with this poem Akhmatova 'unmistakably assumed the role of a national poet'.

<sup>51</sup> Nikolay Ivanovich Yezhov (1895–some time after January 1939), Russian Communist Party official who, while chief of the Soviet security police (NKVD) from 1936 to 1938, administered the most severe stage of the great purges, known as *Yezhovshchina* (EB 2008).

request (poets.org). Exemplifying Michaels’s notion that we are saved by what we save (What the Light Teaches 121), Akhmatova ‘survived through her poetry’ (Gifford 1989: 128). She died in Leningrad. During her life, Akhmatova also wrote, among several other non-fiction texts and translations, ‘sensitive personal memoirs’ (EB 2008) on Modigliani, with whom she is said to have had an affair when both were in their 20s (see further below), and on Mandelstam.

Osip Mandelstam (1891–presumably 1938) infused his poetry with drops of ‘friendship and literature, history and idea’; his ‘configuration of intimacy with other poets from Pushkin to Akhmatova’ is ‘dense’, ‘homely’ and ‘direct’ (Bayley 1984: 150). As in the work of Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova, his poetry demonstrates ‘excellent craftsmanship’ (Strakhovsky 1947: 62). And he, too, suffered censorship and oppression. In the few years between his two exiles, for instance, his work was rejected by Soviet publishers (Struve 1971: 19). Indeed, his wife saw him as ‘a foreign body’ – a “nomad” – in Soviet literature from its beginning (Struve 1971: 21). While he was in Voronezh (see further below), his name could no longer be printed in the papers even in denouncement (Shirazi 2003: 208).

According to Sidney Monas (1975: 522), Acmeism was a social as well as a literary movement in Russia – ‘it brought a reinvigorated moral force back into Russian poetry’. We may therefore assume that Mandelstam’s poetry contained at least a degree of morality. And Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova were both moral people. Tsvetaeva’s poetry was controlled by her ‘strong moral convictions’; her ‘passions, hatred of injustice, anarchy and corruption, [and] profound admiration for duty, honour, loyalty, and trust’ infused her creations as much as they guided her behaviour (Bayley 1984: 157). Akhmatova’s deeply religious stance was implied by the significant role that conscience played in her work (Bayley 1984). She was sure that Leningrad was ‘her place’:

I cannot be parted from you,  
My shadow is on your walls,  
My reflection in the canals (Poem Without a Hero, in Gifford 1989: 135)

And this certainty ‘served as a moral anchor’ for her (Gifford 1989: 135). Demonstrably a moral writer,<sup>52</sup> Michaels does not surprise us in presenting these morally guided poets as subject matter and as transmitters of her view on the significance of memory in the process of the appropriate form of remembrance, as we see in the following section.

### ‘What the Light Teaches’ – a close reading

Light and water are crucial images in ‘What the Light Teaches’.<sup>53</sup> The river on the sister’s farm, like language, as we see shortly, is a repository of memory, and the river, rain and light are vehicles for memory-making and conveyors of negative and positive aspects of historical and personal life. The title of the poem not only alerts us to the idea that light can be instructive, it also suggests, by commencing with the pronoun ‘what’, that the poem contains the lesson that the light is capable of teaching the narrator and us. We determine the meaning of the lesson in the following close reading, in which we explore these images and their implications, the references to the Russian poets and many pivotal verses and lines.

We are introduced to the images of water and light, and the attendant pointer to memory, in the first two (short) verses of the poem. Their deeper significance becomes known as the discussion ensues. We can make an initial assessment here, and return to the verses a little later. The river

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 150–61.

<sup>53</sup> A transcript of the poem is provided in Appendix 2.

traversing the sister's farm appears in the poem's opening line. 'Countless times [it] has been bruised' (What the Light Teaches 117) by the narrator and her sister's bodies, indicating at the superficial level that as girls and now as women the pair have enjoyed frequent swims in the river. But the narrator also presents their bodies, in the second line, in the much more complex image of 'liquid fossils of light' (What the Light Teaches 117). The term *fossils* suggests something ancient but also preserved; the word *liquid* could be used here to match the form taken by the bodies with the form of the body of water through which they move; and the word *light* could be the first hint of the lesson of the light that the narrator and we learn from the poem as a whole.

The narrator and her sister 'shed [their] ghost skins in the current' in the second verse and 'climb the bank, heavy and human' (FP 117). In the river, the women's bodies are buoyant and insubstantial, as are ghosts. On land, their bodies are subject to the force of gravity and thus they must accept the solid reality of their human forms; they cannot pretend, as they may have done while in the water, that they can change shape or form. The river, being part of the sister's farm, is one of the locations that will serve as a meeting place for the pair 'when there are no places left for [them]' (What the Light Teaches 117) – in other words, when they have died.<sup>54</sup> There, they will listen to their river 'humming between closed lips' as attentively as Tsvetaeva, the sister's 'favourite poet', 'who listened with the roots of her hair' (What the Light Teaches 118).<sup>55</sup> It seems that water, as well as light, has advice to impart.

The narrator and her sister are troubled by their father's trouble. Here again the narrator's main emotion is fear. Sometimes she is 'afraid to touch him', fearing that her 'hand would go right through him' (What the Light Teaches 119) as it would go right through a ghost, who is also a (deceased) person for whom 'memory' would be 'only skin' (What the Light Teaches 124), nothing below or behind the surface, if he and his life would remain unnamed after his death. But he is not dead. 'He is alive' and conscious, and he feels, living as he does 'in a history made more painful by love' and being beset by recollections he would perhaps rather not entertain (What the Light Teaches 119). As the narrator of 'The Hooded Hawk' (169) sees it, 'history is the love that enters us/ through death; its discipline is grief'.<sup>56</sup> The *history* in which the father lives is most likely that of the Second World War, and his *love* for his family is presumably threatened by the fact of such events having happened and by the possibility of their repeated occurrence. Growing up in this context, the narrator and her sister 'float in death' (What the Light Teaches 119). Michaels thereby suggests that the image of water can carry or convey the image of history that is metonymically presented as death. She also provides, here, the first hint of a remedy, conveyed in the images of light and water:

the ordinary world holds together  
like the surface tension of water,  
still and stretched, a splash of light. (What the Light Teaches 119)

The world, in and of itself – not that of history, but instead *ordinary* in existing in the present time and being engaged with the mundane details of life – holds a key to dealing with the deathful past. We return to this point shortly.

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<sup>54</sup> See also Chapter 3, page 137.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Russianness of Tsvetaeva's poetry and prose ... consists in an obvious authenticity of the emotions. Everything is felt instantly and strongly; everything is ... terrible and joyful' (Bayley 1984: 156). In one of her memoirs, Nadezhda Mandelstam (in Bayley 1984: 158) writes of Tsvetaeva that 'she could never have reined herself in, as Akhmatova did', that 'what she always needed was to experience every emotion to the utmost'.

<sup>56</sup> Moreover, as the narrator explains, in dreams the hooded hawk symbolises 'sometimes/ love, sometimes death' (The Hooded Hawk 172).

Then comes the verse about the heart's 'filthy drain' (What the Light Teaches 120), which is the inappropriate kind of forgetting that we have explored above with reference to Celan. In this state of mind, immersed as they are in *death*, the women are unable to avoid sensing the presence of the Jewish and familial 'cousins', whom we first met in the poem 'Lake of Two Rivers'. 'They're here' in 'strange darkness', yet

light gushes over rocks  
and the sun drips sweet fat the colour of peaches  
over fields. ... (What the Light Teaches 120–1)

Light takes on the same macabre aspect as the *bits of bone, teeth* and *shreds of skin* in the earlier verse. Light *gushes* as blood gushes from a wound, by implication perhaps the penetrative wounds inflicted on the Jews by the Germans; the sun *drips ... fat* as the crematoria of the camps could have dripped with the melting tissue of its burning victims. In this way, Michaels emphasises the negative quality of the aforementioned forgetting, and continues to do so by locating this scene at the farm's river and presenting water as conveying a chilling message. It is the river whose 'noise' masks the sound of 'a mother giv[ing] birth in a sewer' and 'soldiers push[ing] sand down a boy's throat' (What the Light Teaches 121). These are sounds in the form of voices that the narrator and her sister 'hear' by being aware of such happenings during the Holocaust, but 'can't hear' perhaps because when these things did happen the new mother, the boy and the soldiers most likely did them as quietly as possible so as not to be discovered (What the Light Teaches 121). Similarly, the narrator and her sister *can't bear* the silence of the

parents rounded up in a town square,  
who stopped their tongues in time,  
saving children by not  
calling out to them in the street (What the Light Teaches 121)

and thus shielding them from the German soldiers' attention.

Michaels proposes an antidote to the inappropriate kind of forgetting, which is the appropriate kind of remembrance, in preserving the memory of the pre-war past. Because the narrator and her sister are their 'father's daughters', possibly Jewish too, they 'try to withstand memory/ with memory ... [of] before' (What the Light Teaches 121). They try, in other words, to withstand the memory of the places where Jews suffered intensely – the sewer, the site of the choking, the town square (all from What the Light Teaches 121) – with the aid of memory of the places of the earlier past, where Jews, perhaps like their parents and grandparents, were happier and safer, that is, the 'dacha in the high forests of Kochtobel',<sup>57</sup> the banks of the Moyka River in Petersburg, and the 'wooden sidewalks of Kiev' (What the Light Teaches 121).

We have seen above how, during their practise of the inappropriate kind of forgetting, the sisters bring the past into the present, conflating the cousins' presence with their own presence on the farm (What the Light Teaches 120). But as Michaels (1992: 97) points out, the 'present moment is *not ... a gate to the past*', or as in Celan's case the present moment is not a bridge to the past. We should not simply allow the past to become part of the present. Rather, Michaels (1992: 97) explains, the present 'takes its [rightful] place in a significant, mysterious narrative'. The appropriate kind of remembrance entails returning to the past, to the time before the events that

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<sup>57</sup> Kochtobel, or Koktebel, is a small resort town in the southeastern Crimea, in the Ukraine (en.wikipedia ... Koktebel). Russian poet Maximilian Voloshin (1877–1932) lived in Kochtobel and entertained guests such as Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Symbolist theorist and poet Andrey Bely (the pseudonym of Boris Nikolayevich Bugayev (1880–1934)), who 'all wrote remarkable poems' there (en.wikipedia ... Koktebel). Tsvetaeva also met her husband there (Bayley 1984).

caused the injury and/or death that necessitated remembrance, and gathering memories and meanings from it there; furthermore, it involves keeping the past where it should be, in the past, bringing the gathered memories and meanings with us into the present and using them to devise new meanings, which will be of benefit in the future. Michaels's (1992: 97) summary of the process – 'Reaching back, like looking at stars, the poem is illumined by forward light' – is confirmed by the narrator of 'Miner's Pond' (56): 'At Miner's Pond we use the past/ to pull ourselves forward'.

The sister also takes herself and the narrator back using language that predates the war by many years; she 'read[s] poems in the old language/ [that] [their] parents can't speak' but that sounds as 'natural' (all from *What the Light Teaches* 121) in her mouth as if it were spoken by their ancestors. In this way, 'language' also 'remembers' (*What the Light Teaches* 122); in more literal terms, language also serves as a repository of memory.

Michaels's faith in the benefit of naming, with which we have become familiar in Chapter 3, also comes into focus here as the narrator presents the verse about ghosts 'gather[ing] in the white field .../ waiting' (*What the Light Teaches* 121–2) for their names to be written. The narrator is perhaps referring not only to the ghosts of the cousins, but also to the ghosts that she and her sister will become when they have died, who will wait to be named as well. Above we have seen, and shortly below we see, how the pair learn to practise the appropriate form of remembrance – of their ancestors, their grandparents and parents, and of their own lives. The naming process seems to imply that their children and other relatives of the next generation should also learn to overlay memories of the distant and recent past, both familial and historical, in order to remember *them*, and themselves, appropriately.

Here the deeper meanings of the poem's first two verses become clearer. In their potentiality to be no longer alive and as yet unnamed, the sisters take the form of ghosts when they swim in the river. Their ghostly boundary is *only skin* – skin is the only thing that they (have to) shed upon climbing out of the river. In other words, without being remembered (yet), they are lacking the spirit-forming substance that, as we have learned in Chapter 3,<sup>58</sup> they can gain through being named and appropriately remembered. However, in water they themselves have the potential to be, as water has the potential to be, a storehouse of memory. Moreover, as their *father's daughters*, they are physical 'records' of him and his life – this is the additional fossil-like characteristic that they have of embodying that which they seek to remember and strive to do appropriately. The image of the sisters as fossils *of light* suggests that their method of remembrance has the capability of being appropriate. But when the living women do stop swimming, when they are no longer immersed in that which holds memory, they must shed their ghostly skins and take on their human form. On land, they are weighty with life and with the potential to remember inappropriately.

Like the river, *language remembers*. Words such as 'number' and 'oven' (*What the Light Teaches* 122), for example, ordinary and indistinct in the pre-war world, come to the fore during the Second World War. When they 'take [their] place/ in [the] history' (*What the Light Teaches* 118) of the Holocaust they are associated with anguish, deprivation and death. The words are euphemisms, like the euphemism 'energy release',<sup>59</sup> and the Germans commit an immoral act – trying to 'render the immoral, moral' (Michaels 1994: 15) – in using them to conceal the horrific truth of dehumanisation and extermination that they carried out on a vast scale. In retaliation,

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 3, page 137.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 2, page 79.

other obscure words can engender ‘new meaning’<sup>60</sup> (What the Light Teaches 122) – positive, and by implication moral, words like ‘tea’ (What the Light Teaches 122), when it is used to recall the ‘tins of Russian tea .../ lining [the narrator’s sister’s] shelves’ that are so ‘familiar’ to the narrator (What the Light Teaches 118); like ‘dacha’ (What the Light Teaches 122) when it is used to recall the Kochtobel dacha (What the Light Teaches 121); and like ‘river’ (What the Light Teaches 122) when it is used to bring to mind ‘the Moyka [River] in [their] mother’s silvery photo of Petersburg’ (What the Light Teaches 121) and, by extension, the river running through the sister’s farm. In this light, Michaels reveals the capacity of the image of water to convey a positive message.

A domestic scene that the narrator then recalls contains two moments of realisation for her, two events that feature a mixture, typical of Michaels, of the three aspects of human beings – the body, the mind and the heart – mentioned at the start of the present chapter. In the first event, she was ‘stopped’ at the sight of her mother ‘lean[ing] her head on her father’s shoulder –/ familiar, and full of desire’ (What the Light Teaches 122).<sup>61</sup> In other words, at the intellectual level, she was startled into seeing her parents as people in their own right rather than as parents. The trigger of this realisation occurs at the emotional level: The narrator perceived the two people at ease in their mutual love and desire.

The couple were wandering through their garden, ‘look[ing] at a nest .../ inspect[ing] strawberries’ (What the Light Teaches 122). The narrator’s sister was ‘reading by the open door’, and nearby ‘the sound of a lawn mower made everything still’ (What the Light Teaches 122). The tranquillity of the scene was silently disrupted for the narrator by a note of warning, which reintroduces the element of fear and which she relays to us in a series of images: Her mother’s dress was ‘the colour of the moon’ (What the Light Teaches 122), in their garden either she or the ‘night cereus’<sup>62</sup> was (or both were) ‘death in her white dress’ (What the Light Teaches 123), its scent was ‘alarm[ing]’ (What the Light Teaches 123); the sister’s face was ‘suddenly so like’ (What the Light Teaches 123) their father’s face; the ‘glaze of [the] summer light [that day]/ [was] hardening into crust’ (What the Light Teaches 123). All these signs contribute to the second event that the narrator experienced intellectually, emotionally and viscerally: To the ‘accustomed sadness/ of what [they]’d lost’ must then be added the knowledge of ‘what [they] were losing’ (What the Light Teaches 123). The narrator perhaps realises the fact of her parents’ ageing. This understanding takes the form of a ‘new [emotional] injury’, and as ‘a gash/ bleeding into

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<sup>60</sup> There is a fine distinction to be made here: Michaels’s narrator refers to ‘new *meaning*’ (What the Light Teaches 122, emphasis added), not to ‘new words’. As we learn from Klemperer (2000: 14), the Nazis did not invent a new language, they used the existing German language, in three major ways, in promoting their anti-Semitic policies (see also Chapter 1, page 47). Further on in ‘What the Light Teaches’ (124), the narrator lists ‘new language’ as a positive alternative to the existing oppressive language, but I suggest that here she is not speaking literally; rather, she uses the specific words in the phrase as a contrast to the ‘language of a victim’ that she had identified slightly earlier. In order to be free of oppression, imposed partly in the oppressor’s language, one must use language that is ‘new’ in being free, itself, of the oppressor’s influence.

<sup>61</sup> We cannot be certain that the woman who leans her head on the narrator’s father’s shoulder is indeed the narrator’s mother. While the narrator mentions her father as ‘father’ three times, in praying to ‘the sky .../ to deliver him from memory’, in referring to herself as her ‘father’s daughter’ and in ‘look[ing] out at [him] in the yard’ (What the Light Teaches 119, 121, 122), she specifically mentions her mother only once, in relation to her ‘silvery photo of Petersburg’ (What the Light Teaches 121). The narrator’s use of the word ‘she’ instead of ‘our mother’ in the lines ‘I looked out at our father in the yard and saw/ how she leaned her head on his shoulder’ (What the Light Teaches 122) is slightly surprising in its contrast with the specific mention of the father. However, I choose to assume that the woman being referred to is indeed the narrator’s mother, as I think that if she were someone else, another wife or some other woman loved by the father, Michaels would have made this relationship clearer in the poem.

<sup>62</sup> The night-blooming cereus, also called the ‘moon cactus’, is ‘any member of a group of about 20 species of cacti ..., ... known for its large, usually fragrant, night-blooming white flowers’ (EB 2008).

everything’ (both from *What the Light Teaches* 123) it also takes the form of a metaphorically visceral event.

The narrator’s response is informed by her awareness of the value of the *ordinary world*, a *splash of light* whose myriad elements hold together, as we have seen above, *like the surface tension of water*. This is part of the lesson of light and water: ‘When there are no places left’ for her and her sister – when they have died – they will ‘still talk in order to make things true’ (*What the Light Teaches* 123). They will describe to each other, overlaying memories with memories, the smallest details of everyday life: the ‘shadow pattern of leaves’ that plays over the sister’s ‘bare legs’ (both from *What the Light Teaches* 119) while she sleeps deeply on the couch, ‘as if [she]’d waited years/ for a place to close [her] eyes’ (*What the Light Teaches* 118); ‘the simple feel of an apple in the hand’, ‘the look of the table after a meal’ (*What the Light Teaches* 123). To this group of examples that the narrator gives for the primarily intellectual process of talking-to-make-true, Michaels adds visceral and emotional aspects. The example of ‘nights of tastes’ is literally visceral, of sleep disturbed by ‘the twister of desire’ is emotional, and of ‘drowning in the shadow of your own body’ (all from *What the Light Teaches* 123) is less literally visceral.

Memory being carried by language and memory as preserving language plays an equally important role in the lives of the Russian poets, for as Michaels (2001: 190) explains, relatives and friends often learned these poets’ ‘complete poems’ by heart so that they ‘would not be lost to censorship, enforced exile, and imprisonment’. Mandelstam’s own memory must have been prodigious, as ‘he composed in the mouth, carrying poems there for weeks or months together’ (Bayley 1984: 149). While he may have been the primary source of his meanings – his wife ‘didn’t always see the hidden meaning, and M never explained it to [her], in case [she] should ever be interrogated’ (Nadezhda Mandelstam, in Coetzee 1991: 81) – he was not the only source of his poetry: Nadezhda also memorised and thus preserved many of his poems (Michaels 2001: 190).

And as it is, these poets’ work took many years to resurface – Russian writers born between the 1920s and 50s were ‘starved of literary memory’, ‘large tracts of Akhmatova, ... Mandelstam, [and] Tsvetaeva’, among others, were ‘forbidden, unprinted, unavailable’ (Wesling 1992: 100). Following her death, Tsvetaeva’s family controlled ‘the publication of her work and the dissemination of information about her life’ – once Tsvetaeva’s daughter had provided ‘selections from Tsvetaeva’s personal archive for the first Soviet edition of her work’, she ‘ordered the archive closed until the year 2000’ (Ciepiela 1996: 432 fn 1). This order seems to have been disobeyed, however, as by 1957 ‘it became known abroad that manuscript copies of her poems were being circulated throughout Russia’, and being memorised by the youth (Slonim 1972: 117). Akhmatova’s ‘Requiem’ was published in Russia only in 1989,<sup>63</sup> with her longest, perhaps greatest, work, ‘Poem Without a Hero’ (1940–62) having been published there in 1976. While Donald Wesling (1992: 109) believes that Mandelstam ‘still remains largely unpublished in the Soviet Union’, other sources (see, for example, *EB* 2008) suggest that his work was published again in Russia once Stalin had died.

In brief diversion, as stated above there are two other poems of Michaels’s that demonstrate the significance of memory, namely, ‘Words for the Body’ and ‘The Hooded Hawk’. In the former poem the narrator and her close friend learn from Casals the idea of playing ‘what’s not on the page’ (*Words for the Body* 41). Perhaps she means playing the composer’s intentions, a

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<sup>63</sup> Bayley (1984: 141) notes that the poem was ‘committed to [Akhmatova’s] memory and to the memories of friends’ during the time she composed it, and that it was first published outside Russia in 1963 ‘without [her] consent’.

suggestion that would be supported by the poem's epigraph, which presents Landowska's<sup>64</sup> angry retort in an 'argument on interpretation': "You play Bach your way, and I'll play him his way". In the light of this idea, the narrator and her friend decide that 'music is memory,/ the way a word is the memory of its meaning' (Words for the Body 41). Bach's music, for example, 'is memory' in terms of containing all that the composer does not 'say' outright,<sup>65</sup> of being preserved for posterity by the musicians who come after him and of being re-animated every time one of his pieces is played.

A memory is something that we remember. An event occurs or an experience is had at a point in time, and if we think about it again at a later point in time we remember it – our subsequent thought or interconnected series of thoughts becomes a memory of the original thing. As the narrator sums up later in the poem: 'Any discovery of form is a moment of memory' (Words for the Body 46). Thus in the second line of the above quotation the narrator seems to be claiming that a meaning came into existence at one point in time and, later, a word came into being that had and has that meaning and recalls or reanimates that meaning every time it (the word) is used. The word 'remembers', represents the meaning, continually. In other words, whether something is expressed in music or in language, that thing is repeated and affirmed every time the piece of music is played or the pieces (the words) of language are used. Both mediums of expression – music and language – are to be commended for this capability, because as Michaels (1994: 15) suggests, 'memory, like love, gains strength through restatement, reaffirmation'.<sup>66</sup>

The benefit of memory, of repetition, is confirmed throughout the poem. In one particular example, the narrator's friend explains how 'the fear of forgetting notes disappears' when 'the fingers have a memory of their own' (Words for the Body 43). Prodiges aside, this can happen presumably only when the musician has practised long and hard – repeated the playing again and again – and has thereby become deeply familiar with the piece of music they are playing. Another, more general example occurs in the poem in the form of the narrator enacting the retelling of *ordinary world* (What the Light Teaches 119) happenings in the past, and thereby overlays meaning with new memory, which we learn from the narrator of 'What the Light Teaches' is essential in the appropriate form of remembrance. 'We grew up ... together', the narrator begins, and cements the remembrance by highlighting significant events in her and her friend's lives that they share at the ages of 14, 16, 18 and 20 (Words for the Body 41, 41, 43, 44). Moreover, the narrator encourages her friend to recall their 'fifteen-year-old' (Words for the Body 45) selves in the following manner:

Remember the way we walked each other home –  
one block further, one block further –  
the way we skated in the ravine,  
...  
Remember climbing the hill, ...  
...  
how we'd enter your parents' warm house  
...  
Remember once, mauve and yellow tulips on the dining room table,

<sup>64</sup> Wanda Louise Landowska (1879–1959), Polish-born harpsichordist. Up to the beginning of the Second World War, she remained 'the principal exponent of 17th- and 18th-century harpsichord music, particularly that of JS Bach' (EB 2008).

<sup>65</sup> In 'Sublimation' (all from 67–8), Döblin presents this form of saying-without-saying in the 'overtone' of another composer – Hindemith – that 'connect each bar', the 'sounds [listeners] can't hear' but which form 'harmonics' that 'guide [them] through the music' nevertheless.

<sup>66</sup> As we learn in *Fugitive Pieces* (40), the Jews of Zakynthos hiding coral-like in the hills, for instance, 'tell their children what they can, a hurriedly packed suitcase of family stories, the names of relatives'.



remember the music when we said  
*play those colours* (Words for the Body 45–6)

In this poem, there is no mention of death; the remembrance is not of a deceased person. It is instead an homage both to the longstanding and close relationship that the narrator and her friend enjoy, and to the value of the body as a vehicle for memory and as that which can itself be remembered.

The narrator of ‘Words for the Body’ has a good memory – her portrayal of her relationship with her friend is evocative and touching. Wiseman’s memory, as presented in ‘The Hooded Hawk’, seems to be equally strong. She ‘never forgot’ (The Hooded Hawk 169) even the things that she did not experience herself. Growing up in Winnipeg, Canada, Wiseman was 11 years old in 1939 when with her father she heard radio reports of the ‘floating ghettos’, the ship full of Jewish refugees that was refused asylum ‘at every port’ (The Hooded Hawk 169, 170). She was ‘with them’, recalling them in her novel, *Old Woman at Play*, while normal (and tough) life went on around her – streetcars carried commuters, ‘sewing machines and wooden steaming blocks/ thudded all night’, while listening to her mother ‘tell of her/ [own] escape across the river’, and while she and the poem’s narrator ‘spoke of/ exiled Walter Benjamin’, ‘devoure[r]’ of books (The Hooded Hawk 170).

‘So much of [her] life/ [was] given to ghosts,’ (The Hooded Hawk 172) the narrator declares. Even while afflicted with cancer herself, Wiseman continued to think of others, the narrator points out: ‘After another stage of illness[,] all the years were with [them]’ (The Hooded Hawk 171). Furthermore, two years after Wiseman’s death, for the narrator

... sorrow magnifies  
through the generations, each human’s part  
heaped upon the next, [and] in this way [their] griefs  
are joined. ... (The Hooded Hawk 172)

The details of the story that make up *Old Woman at Play* were stored in Wiseman’s memory for so long – ‘longer than [the Jews] were stranded/ on that boat, on the verge of war[;] longer than the war’ (The Hooded Hawk 172) – but the book was eventually published. According to Belkin (2008), the novel embodies Wiseman’s ‘attempt to know and integrate her mother’s life – and death’, and functions, as do *Fugitive Pieces* and certain of Michaels’s poems, as ‘a way of offering something valuable for others out of the continuity and the loss that are part of [all] human families’.

We return now to the main discussion. While language, facilitating memory and facilitated by memory, may serve as a beneficial and moral repository for the work of the Russian poets and the texts of Holocaust victims and survivors, Michaels provides further evidence of language as a carrier of immoral meaning in connection with these people as well. By now we are familiar with the implications of Michaels’s idea – presented as an intellectual realisation on the part of the narrator – that a victim’s language reveals only his or her namer or oppressor (What the Light Teaches 124). Michaels suggests certain answers to this dilemma, as we have seen above in relation to Celan and in Chapter 3:<sup>67</sup> silence, or new language, or recollection and usage of the language that is too old for the oppressors, as well as the narrator’s parents, to have learned (What the Light Teaches 125). We have examined Michaels’s attendant point – another intellectual realisation – about truth causing words to ‘fail’ (What the Light Teaches 125), in other words, some truths being too horrific to be described, at the start of the present chapter.

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 3, page 120.

Celan (2003: 50) believes that ‘attention is the natural prayer of the soul’. Michaels would likely agree. For her narrator

prayer is the effort of wresting words  
not from silence,  
but from the noise of other words. (What the Light Teaches 125)

At the more literal level, the narrator is picturing ‘the double swaying’ of the Jews in ‘prayer’ as they are transported ‘on the trains’ to the camps (What the Light Teaches 125). They had to *wrest* their pleas and their hopes for aid from the noise of *other words*, the mixture of terrified, angry, anguished, outraged, argumentative or resigned words presumably uttered by the other Jewish people around them.<sup>68</sup> At the more figurative level, poets such as Celan and Michaels *wrest* the attentive and truthful words of their poems from the silence that some survivors, critics and theorists feel should shroud the subject of the Holocaust, from the other words voiced and written by everyone after the war who wished to forget and move on, and from those who, many years later, refuse to address the past events.

Holocaust testimony, as valuable as Russian poetry, could also be lost, we learn in *Fugitive Pieces*’s prologue: ‘Diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts ... were lost’ through being ‘deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens’ and remaining unrecovered after the war. A writer ‘buried his testimony’ in ‘What the Light Teaches’ (all from 126) – ‘trusting that someday earth would speak’, that his words would be uncovered and read – but while they rested in the earth ‘no one knew the power of his incantation’. When buried, and un-exhumed, ‘words are powerless’ (What the Light Teaches 126). Moreover, ‘words are powerless as love’ is powerless and overridden by fear when the narrator, and we, remember inappropriately; when she and we abandon the dead by remaining too close to them. ‘Only by taking us as we are’, the narrator explains in an intellectual-emotional realisation that mirrors Jakob’s realisations about Bella in *Fugitive Pieces*, can ‘words’ and ‘love’ be ‘transforming’ (What the Light Teaches 126). In other words, only when we accept the dead as dead and ourselves as living can our *words* and *love* help us to remember appropriately. Luckily, however, ‘other stories [were] concealed in memory’ already and then revived, and others still were ‘recovered, by circumstance alone’, such as Ben’s chance discovery of Jakob’s notebooks and Michaels’s recovery of the survivor stories of people such as Jakob and Ben’s parents (*FP* prologue).

The narrator and her sister ‘cried together’ over Tsvetaeva’s letters to a friend, perhaps identifying with her sentiment that that friend is “‘the only one [she] had left’” (What the Light Teaches 126). The sharing of tears and understanding engenders a sense of mutual closeness that is linked with and surpassed in intensity only by the closeness that the narrator ‘still feel[s]’ towards her sister at night, ‘even in [their] distant bedrooms’, because she knows her sister is ‘awake too,/ if not this night, then another’ (What the Light Teaches 126).

‘For years’, on trips by car to visit her sister, the narrator has Tsvetaeva’s poems ‘on the seat beside her’ (What the Light Teaches 127). Again, the images of light and water feature here: ‘Spring rain’ heralds these journeys, and blurs the headlights and brake lights of the many cars on the road that the narrator takes – sitting in the ‘slow traffic’, the narrator is guided by the

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<sup>68</sup> Levi (1960) confirms that this is the case. In the packed cattle train to Auschwitz, he realises that there are few men who know how to go to their deaths with dignity ... Few know how to remain silent and to respect the silence of others. Our restless sleep was often interrupted by noisy and futile disputes, by curses, by kicks and blows blindly delivered to ward off some encroaching and inevitable contact. (Levi 1960: 24)

‘caravan of swinging lanterns’ (What the Light Teaches 127) formed by the car lights ahead. The rain has wet the paper wrapped around flowers that the narrator brings to her sister and facilitates memory by causing the ‘hard seeds’ in her ‘heart’ to ‘soften and swell as [she] think[s] of [her sister’s] kitchen’, and of Mandelstam, who claims that proximity to a river is necessary for one’s new home, if one ‘must leave the city’ (What the Light Teaches 127). The kitchen has a ‘stone floor/ like a summerhouse in Peredelkino’ (What the Light Teaches 127), which is the writers’ village near Moscow where the poet Pasternak<sup>69</sup> is buried (moscow-taxi.com). The rain thus aids the narrator in combining memories of personal and historical elements – the sister’s kitchen, the death-place of a contemporary of Mandelstam, thus Mandelstam himself and his historical emphasis on a river that holds personal significance for the narrator and her sibling as well.

Mandelstam comes to mind earlier in the poem when we read again, as we have done in the Introduction to this doctoral thesis and in Chapter 3,<sup>70</sup> that ‘poets promised to meet’ in Petersburg to speak “‘the blessed word with no meaning’” (What the Light Teaches 125–6). The narrator’s sister, intentionally or otherwise, has followed Mandelstam’s advice by living ‘near a river’ (What the Light Teaches 127). To this maxim the narrator adds the statement that Mandelstam was ‘exiled to Yelabuga on the Kama’ (What the Light Teaches 127). The location of Mandelstam’s first exile was initially Cherdyn – ‘a small place in a remote northeastern corner of European Russia’ (Struve 1971: 19) – but following a period in hospital and a suicide attempt, he and his wife were given permission to move to the central Russian city of Voronezh (*EB* 2008; Shirazi 2003; Struve 1971). The second time, he seems to have been exiled somewhere near Vladivostok, in southeastern Russia (*EB* 2008; Struve 1971). Yelabuga is a town in the Russian republic of Tartastan, on the right bank of the Kama River (en.wikipedia ... Yelabuga). As we know, it is the location of Tsvetaeva’s suicide, but the only link between that place and Mandelstam seems to be that the town of Perm Velikaya had existed on the bank of the Kama River ‘since the 14th century’ and is now called Cherdyn (*EB* 2008).

The spring rain accompanying the narrator is not a gentle rain, it is a ‘thunderstorm’ that in ‘becom[ing] other thunderstorms’ again interweaves scenes, this time of unrevealed personal significance – the ‘darkness ... above Burnside Drive’, ‘the night on High Street’, and of historical significance – ‘young’ Akhmatova and Modigliani under their ‘black umbrella/ reading Verlaine<sup>71</sup> in the Luxembourg’ (What the Light Teaches 127–8). Akhmatova (Akhmatova & Austin 1989) recorded this scene in a brief memoir about the artist. Sheltered from the ‘warm summer shower’ by Modigliani’s ‘enormous, ancient black umbrella’, the two of them ‘took great joy from knowing the same things’ – such as Verlaine – ‘by heart’ (Akhmatova & Austin 1989: 29).

Even with ‘all the languages they spoke’, ‘their lovemaking was with roses!’ (What the Light Teaches 128), the narrator concludes. The languages they spoke at the time were indeed Russian, Italian and French, as the narrator lists (What the Light Teaches 128), but it seems that they did not both speak all of these languages. In Akhmatova’s (Akhmatova & Austin 1989: 30) memory, Modigliani did not speak Russian – he ‘very much regretted that he could not understand [her] verses’ – and at the time she did not speak Italian, because of which he ‘never recited Dante to [her]’. The source of their rose-accompanied lovemaking is likely to be the ‘mix-up’ that occurred

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<sup>69</sup> According to Akhmatova (in Kembal 1983: 128), Pasternak proposed marriage three times to her, and sources present him as one of the literary contemporaries that did and did not shun Tsvetaeva towards the end of her life (see Bayley 1984, and Wesling 1992 respectively). Bayley (1984: 162) believes that he regretted his ‘less than forthcoming’ treatment of her; if so, he made amends by stating in 1957 that “‘the publication of [Tsvetaeva’s] works would be a great triumph and a great discovery for Russian poetry’” (Pasternak, in Slonim 1972: 117).

<sup>70</sup> See the Introduction, pages 6–7, and Chapter 3, pages 119–20.

<sup>71</sup> Paul(-Marie) Verlaine (1844–1896), French lyric poet who became a leader of the Symbolists.

between the two (Akhmatova & Austin 1989: 30): Happening to have ‘an armful of red roses’ with her, Akhmatova at first waited for Modigliani to return when on one occasion she went to visit him and found him not at home. The studio doors were locked, but seeing that a window was open, she impulsively threw the flowers through it. At their next meeting, Modigliani seemed convinced that she must have somehow gained entrance, for when he had opened the studio door he saw the flowers lying there ‘as if they had been arranged’ (Akhmatova & Austin 1989: 30).

While Akhmatova does not actually use the words ‘love’ or ‘affair’ or even ‘relationship’ in reference to herself and Modigliani in the memoir, there are a few hints that that is the type of relationship that they had (Akhmatova & Austin 1989: 29–30).<sup>72</sup> She suggests that ‘one central point’ that neither of them seems to have understood at the time was that ‘what was happening between [them] was for each of [them] a provisioning of [their] lives: his a very short one, [hers] very long’. ‘There was no one like him in the entire universe. The sound of his voice has stayed with [her] forever’. ‘He never told tales about past affairs’. Modigliani painted Akhmatova 16 times and gave the paintings to her; almost all of them were ‘lost ... during the first years of the revolution’, and the remaining one ‘least of all captured the feeling of “[them]”’.

The narrator concludes that the fact that Akhmatova and Modigliani could speak more than just their mother tongues – presumably they communicated mostly in French – does not help them: ‘Language [was] not enough/ for what they had to tell each other’ (What the Light Teaches 128). The emotional intensity implied in these lines is sustained in the subsequent lines, in which the narrator describes the emotional event of the ‘joy’ she feels at ‘driving to one who awaits [her] arrival’ (What the Light Teaches 128). At last the negative emotion of fear that has predominated in the poem up to this point is being replaced by a far more positive emotion – happiness – that also serves as a foretaste of the positive nature of the poem’s imminent conclusion.

The narrator will reach her sister’s porch soaking wet, ‘dripping with [the] new memory’ that the visit to come will create, for the ‘May rain’ that has escorted her is ‘rain that helps one past grow out of another’ (What the Light Teaches 128). Thus, the rain *facilitates* memory-making, in slight contrast to the river, which *holds* memory – like language, ‘the river will remember’ (What the Light Teaches 124). The narrator is absorbing and interpreting the messages of the water, in its carrying forms, and the lesson of the light. She understands that she should combine her and her sister’s knowledge and memories of the lives of the Russian poets and their like with their personal memories, and should overlay these different memories with ever new recollections in order to practise the appropriate kind of remembrance.

This scene is followed by the verse, quoted at the start of the present chapter, that presents the narrator’s intellectual-emotional realisation of language’s capacity to be figured as a home. The image of water is put to one side for the moment (but reappears at the poem’s end), and the image of light comes to the fore. Language is not simply a house in this verse, it is a house ‘with lamplight in its windows’ (What the Light Teaches 128) that those in need can see from some distance away. Here, light carries the positive message of welcome and refuge.

In ‘The Hooded Hawk’ (171), Michaels furthermore suggests that home ‘is in the mouth’ in the form not only of language, but also of food – more importantly, food that has roots, that comes from the homeless or exiled eater’s original home or birthplace. She presents this idea in

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<sup>72</sup> Akhmatova and Modigliani’s relationship, if it did involve love, would have been an ‘affair’. She and Gumilev met Modigliani for the first time in 1910 when they were on honeymoon, and she was still married to Gumilev the following year, when she spent more time with Modigliani alone (Nathanson 2008), that is, the time to which ‘What the Light Teaches’ refers.

reference to the poet Heine,<sup>73</sup> whom the narrator of the poem feels had such an understanding about home, language and food. Just as language can be a surrogate meal of *soup* and *bread* (What the Light Teaches 128), home can be found by people like Heine in ‘carp in raisin sauce, lamb/ with horseradish and garlic’, though they may be ‘in Paris, surrounded by *cuisine*’ (The Hooded Hawk 171). Heine moved from Germany to Paris in 1831 in a kind of voluntary exile from his wealthy uncle and benefactor’s society, from which he had been outcast (EB 2008). While his early years in Paris were enjoyable – he soon became well known and praised for his literature, and he mixed in prominent circles – his later years there were troubled in various ways (EB 2008). His socially critical and satirical writings were not well received by the Germans, and at the end of 1835, ‘the Federal German Diet tried to enforce a nationwide ban on all his works. He was surrounded by police spies, and his ... exile became an imposed one’ (EB 2008).<sup>74</sup>

Celan would have failed to share the understanding with Michaels and Heine. His poetry features few references to food, much less in the form of the appreciation of food and of food’s literally and figuratively restorative potential. Moreover, critics do not agree on possible signs of influence of Heine’s poetry on Celan.<sup>75</sup> Be that as it may, there is an image at the end of Celan’s poem ‘Tabernacle Window’ that appears to overlap with Michaels’s presentation of language as *the house with lamplight in its windows* (What the Light Teaches 128). The narrator of ‘Tabernacle Window’ (217) describes ‘something/ – a breath? a name? –/ [that] moves about over orphaned ground’ and is pelted by ‘the black hail that/ fell there too, at Vitebsk’.<sup>76</sup> ‘Those who sowed it’, that is, the black hail – presumably the shower of death and destruction hurled by the Nazis – also ‘write it’<sup>77</sup> away with/ a mimetic anti-tank claw! (Tabernacle Window 217). In the early 1960s, as we know, Nazi sympathisers and neo-Nazis were intent on ‘writing away’ the details of the Holocaust while keeping anti-Semitism alive.

The ‘something’ – the moving, searching self described by the narrator – then ‘goes to the ghetto and Eden, .../ ... musters the letters and the mortal-/ immortal soul of letters,/ goes to Aleph and Yod’ (Tabernacle Window 219). In other words, the searching self ‘comes upon the Hebrew alphabet’ (Felstiner 1985: 52), which is also Michaels’s ‘alphabet’ (What the Light Teaches 124) – ‘mortal’ (Tabernacle Window 219) when it is the mere skeleton of the traditionally rich ‘old language’ (What the Light Teaches 124); ‘immortal’ (Tabernacle Window 219) when it is the entire ‘old language’ (What the Light Teaches 124)<sup>78</sup> that can be traced all the way back, Celan implies, to the story of the Garden of Eden. *Aleph* is ‘the primal unvoiced letter ... which also begins God’s first commandment’, and *Yud* (or *Yod*) is ‘the smallest letter, which begins the

<sup>73</sup> Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), German poet whose ‘international literary reputation and influence were established by the *Buch der Lieder* (1827; *The Book of Songs*), frequently set to music’ (EB 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Thus there are parallels between Heine’s life and those of Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva. By contrast, although Akhmatova was moved around by the authorities within Soviet Russia, she never went into exile, willingly or unwillingly. She was ‘deeply loved and lauded by the Russian people in part because she did not abandon her country during difficult political times’ (poets.org). Moreover, according to Bayley (1984: 144), she was ‘proud’ not only of her ‘refusal to emigrate’ but also of her ‘power to bear witness in the time of terror’. As she states in her poem ‘Requiem’, “not under the vault of a foreign/ sky, .../ I was with my people then” (Akhmatova, in Bayley 1984: 144).

<sup>75</sup> According to Roditi (1992: 11, see also 19), while Celan’s earlier poetry appears to be influenced by the work of various German writers and poets, it shows ‘no influence of any readings of Heine’ – a ‘curious reticence’. However, other sources suggest that from 1958 to the early 60s, ‘Judaism pervades [Celan’s] poetry: ... [including] an epigraph from ... Heine’s bitter “To Edom”’ (Felstiner 1984: 39; see also Felstiner (1985: 52)). The epigraph presented Heine’s use of the word ‘Edom’ as ‘an easily decipherable code word for Germany’ (Lyon 2006: 137).

<sup>76</sup> Vitebsk is a city and administrative centre in northeastern Belarus that was destroyed by, among others, the Germans in the Second World War (EB 2008).

<sup>77</sup> In the two instances of the word ‘it’ in this verse, Celan seems to be referring not to a single thing but rather to the black hail in the first instance and to Vitebsk in the second instance.

<sup>78</sup> See also Chapter 3, pages 119, 128 and 137.

tetragrammaton [the Hebrew four-consonant name for God] and in German also means “Jew” (Felstiner 1986a: 121).

The searching self ‘stands/ beside’ these words, ‘beside everyone: in you’, and it seems that ‘you’ is

Beth, – that is  
the house where the table stands with  
  
the light and the Light. (Tabernacle Window 219)

*Beth* is the Hebrew word for ‘house’ and ‘the first letter of Genesis’ (Felstiner 1985: 53). ‘Celan’s tact and sparseness [in this poem] preserve for the Sabbath its original, redemptive force’, Felstiner (1985: 53) proposes, furthermore suggesting that with this poem Celan ‘gives a home’ to words of ‘Judaic experience ... whose untranslatability marks them also as unassimilable by the German reader’ (Felstiner 1986a: 121). The *lamplight* in Michaels’s house of language is *visible across fields* (What the Light Teaches 128), welcoming all deprived travellers who approach it, whereas Celan’s double-lit house is specifically Jewish, in terms of both race and religion, referring as it does to Genesis: the first book of the Old Testament, which ‘narrates the primeval history of the world ... and the patriarchal history of the Israelite people’ (EB 2008). Michaels’s poem does not contain religious references; there is no indication, for example, of the house being a church or a temple. Nevertheless, the ‘house’ and ‘light’ references in both poems pertain to language that offers refuge, presenting a metaphorical house or home that bids welcome to those in need.

This is the clearest meaning of the metaphor, behind which lie further meanings. Berger (2001: 450) believes that ‘words’ can hold ‘the totality of human experience’, and to an extent Michaels (1992: 96) seems to believe so too, as she suggests that ‘cloned from the single cell of a present moment’, the poem ‘can seem to contain “everything”’. Language ‘even allows space for the unspeakable’, Berger (2001: 450) elaborates. Going a step further, for Gubar (2003: 181) ‘the Shoah [serves] as a test case for poetry and ... for the imagination as a vehicle for conveying what it means for the incomprehensible to occur’. Michaels may well agree with this view, and with Berger’s (2001: 450, emphasis added) conclusion that language ‘is the only dwelling place that cannot be hostile to man’.

For anyone who can do nothing but speak, *soup*, *bay leaves* and *bread* (What the Light Teaches 128) are words, articulated in language, that serve as their *meal* (What the Light Teaches 128); it is their (substitute) *country*, *home* and *family* (What the Light Teaches 128). Language is thereby ‘*potentially ... complete*’ (Berger 2001: 450). Involved as he was in battles and reconciliations with his mother tongue, Celan seems to have expanded language to near-completeness. However, ultimately, the German language did not house him – his relationship with it was too troubled; it was rather a relationship of coexistence (Steiner 1992: 409). He lived with it, not in it. The same can be said of Jakob, in *Fugitive Pieces*.

And the idea can be repeated in application to the narrator of ‘What the Light Teaches’ and her sister. For the three Russian poets, language was quite possibly *the house to run to* (What the Light Teaches 129).<sup>79</sup> The women have not been dispossessed as the poets had been, and thus they do not need language to provide quite the same type of refuge. Yet also for them language, and

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<sup>79</sup> It proved to be a house of some substance, for as Nadezhda Mandelstam (in Coetzee 1991: 79) relates in her memoir *Hope Against Hope*, when Akhmatova visited Mandelstam in Voronezh, he told her that ‘poetry is power’ (because if the Soviet communists ‘killed people for poetry, then they must fear and respect it’).

memory, serve as forms of solace. At the end of the poem, the narrator admits to being fearful still, at times. Earlier, she explained that she feels closest to her sister ‘in the hours reserved for nightmares’ (What the Light Teaches 126). At the poem’s end, she describes further ‘nights’ of ‘panic’ in ‘the forest of words’

when I’m afraid we won’t hear each other  
over clattering branches, over  
both our voices calling. (What the Light Teaches 129)

Typically, this forest is made up of various kinds of ‘trees’ or words. Some are useless by themselves, like James’s (1937: 339) ‘standing terms’ that we have discussed in Chapter 3,<sup>80</sup> that is, the statements of the general social principles and rules that are necessary but insufficient in producing the kind of empathic, morally responsible writing that Michaels produces and the responses of the same nature that we can learn to provide. Some can be worse than useless: They can be damaging. Thanks to Klemperer (2000) and *Fugitive Pieces*, we see how destructive language can be in the hands of the Nazis, and thanks to Nussbaum (1985) we see how ‘obtuse’ standing terms have the potential to be.

Above, we have learned about the power of fear. Fear is so strong that it confronts the narrator even when she is armed with the knowledge of the ways in which to combat it. Her ‘heart/ listens through the cold stethoscope of fear’ (What the Light Teaches 129). Sometimes the emotion is strong enough to serve as the very instrument with which she perceives the world. In an interesting figurative twist, Michaels represents fear as a *stethoscope* that does not transmit messages of the state of being from a patient’s heart to an attentive doctor, as would occur in conventional medical practice, but as transmitting messages of a lack of wellbeing from the world to the narrator’s heart and thence to her whole person. Her unease is located climatically and again in a two-fold image of water and light that supports the negative quality of the emotion: She is frightened ‘in winter, in the hour/ when the sun runs liquid then freezes’ (What the Light Teaches 129), presumably at sunset.

But in the midst of ‘panic’ (What the Light Teaches 129), the narrator is reminded of the light’s lesson. Some words can be of great use and benefit; they can be the ‘right words’ (Nussbaum) and in this capacity they can facilitate the transformation of the narrator’s negative emotion. She hears her sister’s voice ‘in [her] head’ (What the Light Teaches 129). Perhaps she is recollecting or re-hearing the sister reciting poems *in the old language* (What the Light Teaches 121). Thereby she enacts Michaels’s (1994: 15) belief, which we have encountered above, in memory and love being strengthened by repeated avowal. The sister’s voice seems to melt the frozen sunlight, which has become moonlight at this later hour, and confirms the light’s lesson, because ‘slowly [the sister] translate[s] fear into love,/ the way the moon’s blood is the sea’ (What the Light Teaches 129).

The final line perhaps constitutes the last of the events that the narrator experiences viscerally, in that we are presented with an image that includes *blood* (albeit as a metaphor), which is not an organ of the body as such but is equally vital to survival. The poem concludes with this triple image: First, the moon is personified as having blood; second, that blood is metaphorised as the sea; and third, there is the attendant astronomical fact of the moon exerting a gravitational force on the sea’s tides. We humans should feel such an effect too, partly because our bodies are made up of about 60 per cent of water. Perhaps Michaels is combining these factors and suggesting that the power of the sister’s voice is as great as the power of the planets; it succeeds in transforming a highly debilitating emotion (fear) into a highly beneficial one (love), just as blood

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<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 147–8.

has the power to keep us alive, and just as the moon causes the oceans to surge and recede. Here we see that Michaels has extended the image of water-as-river that pervades the poem to present the image of water-as-sea. The event that the narrator experiences in the last line adds a layer to Michaels's all important personal–universal alliance by being, in this way, universal as well as visceral – figured in the body, in the world and in the universe.

In their differing yet overlapping ways, both Michaels and Celan seem to use their poetry to incite the caring in their readers that Berger (2001: 450) believes poetry elicits from language in general, as we have seen in Chapter 2.<sup>81</sup> Celan achieves a startling 'intimacy', which is the 'result of the poem's labour' (Berger 2001: 451), with the child narrator and his mother in 'Black Flakes', and with recently deceased Jews in 'Death Fugue'. In each case he labours – an activity that seems always in Celan's life to be strenuous – to bring together that which the 'violence' of anti-Semitism 'has torn apart' (Berger 2001: 450): perhaps himself and his mother, and himself and his parents and the Jewish community, respectively. Originating from a source of emotion, the poems seem emotional (caring) also in their intention. Nevertheless, by the end of his life, Celan seems to have been, like Jakob for many years in *Fugitive Pieces*, unable to extricate himself from the practice of a predominantly sympathetic form of remembering his dead. Had he learned the lesson of the light, perhaps, he would have been able to remember his parents and fellow Jews in the appropriate manner.

Michaels's caring is as insightful, profound and figurative as is Celan's, though less personally motivated; her caring is far more conventional than Celan's in terms of remaining within the accepted bounds of grammatical correctness, and thus is more open to interpretation; and her caring encompasses a wider selection of subject matter than does Celan's. She is the originator of the lesson of the light; it is from her that we can learn the appropriate manner of remembrance. Thus, in contrast to Celan's painful and only partially successful engagement with caring, caring in Michaels's hands is a success and a balm.

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<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 2, page 83.



## Conclusion

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*Even among the supremely good ... there is an ideal beauty of goodness  
the invoked action of which is to raise the artistic faith to its maximum.  
Then truly, I hold, one's theme may be said to shine.*  
James (1937: 309)

Henry James makes the above pronouncement in reference to his novel *The Ambassadors* (1903), which he considered to be his best work. Felicitously and perhaps not too surprisingly, there is evidently much in James's belief that resonates with the ideas of other writers that we have encountered in preceding chapters and also that we can apply to the work of Anne Michaels. The 'supremely good' to whom James refers is represented by some of the subjects of his novels, the potentially real people whom he presents as his characters. I suggest that Athos in Michaels's novel *Fugitive Pieces* is one such character, and Michaela is another; the narrator's sister in Michaels's poem 'What the Light Teaches' is a third.

Athos does a great deal of good. His manuscript *Bearing False Witness*, for example, not only records the injustice of the Nazis' destruction of Biskupin and murder of his colleagues, it holds deeper significance as well. If we recall from Chapter 2 Michaels's expression of belief in the moral nature of memory – what we tend to remember deliberately is what our conscience remembers (Michaels 1994: 15) – we see that Athos's manuscript particularly exemplifies (moral) memorialising because, in Jakob's view, it '*was his conscience*' (FP 104, emphasis added). Athos writes the manuscript in order to prevent the Nazis' murderous actions from 'steal[ing]' from each of those men 'his life' (FP 120). Furthermore, he saves Jakob literally as a child, and gives him invaluable instructions for saving himself as an adult. He teaches Jakob about doing good. He helps Jakob immeasurably.

Michaela understands Jakob; her world view is similar to his (Nussbaum) and she shares her own memories with him. She grasps the import of his orphaned and sibling-less life, and she accepts his close connection with his sister Bella, whom she helps him to see as a spirit rather than as a ghost. She participates in loving dialogue (Nussbaum) with him, and indeed one of her final instances of communication – her note about her pregnancy (FP 278–9) – is the promise of the fulfilment of one of his treasured dreams. She helps Jakob immeasurably.

The sister in 'What the Light Teaches' shares her farm with the narrator, her sister, as she shares her knowledge about the Russian poets. Accompanying the narrator on her journey through the inappropriate kind of forgetting (Michaels), she also joins her in returning to the past by remembering happier times, before the horror and sorrow of the Holocaust, and by reading poems in the untainted language of old. She, too, lies awake at night like the narrator, 'watching [her] husband's sleeping body/ rise with breath' (What the Light Teaches 126). The sister anticipates her sister's arrival at the farm with joy; when the narrator at last appears, the sister 'fl[ies] out of the darkness at [her]' (What the Light Teaches 127). Most important of all, with her voice the sister replaces fear with love for the narrator. She helps her sister immeasurably.

With regard to Athos and Michaela, it seems that morality is genuinely ingrained in their habitus (Bourdieu), that is, unconsciously. They behave morally simply by being themselves. Jakob, by contrast, may have embodied an incipient morality before the war (though it is difficult to tell, as scenes of his childhood reach us through the filter of his adult eyes), but his traumatic loss

perhaps dislodged him from his normal path and for many years has made his behaviour unnatural (Thompson and Bourdieu), to such an extent that he must learn, or re-learn, how to be moral. His life is a deeply painstaking, but eventually fully achieved, lesson in empathic identification (Gubar) and perceptual acuity (Scarry). The sister's case in 'What the Light Teaches' is slightly different; she seems to stand somewhere between Athos and Michaela at one side and Jakob at the other side. She, too, at first practises the inappropriate kind, the sympathetic kind, of forgetting, and it is not she but the narrator who gives us each item constituting the lesson of the light – it is the narrator who knows these items – but it *is* she (the sister) who causes the intensely negative emotion of fear to be converted into the intensely positive emotion of love for the narrator, and it is she who 'remind[s]' (What the Light Teaches 129) the narrator of how to practise the lesson of the light herself.

Athos, Michaela and the sister, and towards the end of their stories Jakob and the narrator, are at the pinnacle of the assembly; they are among the 'supremely good' alert winged creatures (James) that Michaels portrays. James feels that these characters can embody or enact goodness that itself will be ideal and beautiful. In this light, Michaels's characters at the pinnacle furthermore serve to support Scarry's faith in the attribute of beauty as being worthy of attention and of possession. In other words, there is usefulness in a thing, an object, being beautiful and attracting people's attention because of that beauty. Such usefulness is moral in that the beauty can cause Michaels to forget about herself (cf. Murdoch, Ricoeur), and us to forget about ourselves; the beauty can cause all of us to pay greater attention, through the process of communal or international regard, to other objects or things that also deserve our attention (Scarry). Equally deserving are our own loved ones, who may be deceased or dislodged from their normal path, as well as those in need around us, such as the disenfranchised who form the subject matter of Michaels's second novel, *The Winter Vault*, more of which we see below, and anyone else familiar or foreign to us who suffers the various forms of oppression.

By 'invok[ing]' the 'action[s]' of these characters, in James's terms, Michaels seems to 'raise [her] artistic faith to its maximum' in two senses. On the one hand, it may be safe to assume that her faith in humanity has been gradually rebuilt as Jakob's faith is restored in finding moments of goodness within the apparently overwhelmingly evil context of the Holocaust, ranging from the discovery that the moment filled with despair is also the moment suffused with grace (*FP* 168) to the realisation that an action that in peacetime seems insignificant in impact and in meaning can save someone's life in wartime (*FP* 162). As Michaels (in Watson 1996) explains, in the face of 'large forces' such as 'history', the 'small individual act can be incredibly powerful'. Michaels (in Watson 1996) may also believe, as she describes Jakob believing when he has examined the 'pyramid' photograph, that the faith exhibited by the bodies of the prisoners in the gas chamber is 'not reductive', but 'miraculous'.

On the other hand, perhaps we may surmise that any faith in humanity Michaels may have been awarded has affirmed her faith in her intentions as an author as well as in the medium in which she has chosen to write. The epigraph of the Introduction to this doctoral thesis cites Adam Gopnik's<sup>1</sup> plainly expressed view on faith in the fictionality, but also in the value, of fiction. 'Knowing something's made up while thinking that it matters is what all fiction insists on,' Gopnik (2006: 158) suggests. Having invented the stories comprising her novels and poems Michaels of course knows that they are 'made up'; she also thinks that they (her texts) 'matter' and that 'it' (their fictional nature) 'matters'.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Gopnik (1956–), American writer, essayist and commentator.

Like Scarry, in other words, Michaels values the artefacts of creation while upholding the act of creating. If we remember, Scarry (1985: 307) describes the text – the poem or the novel – as a ‘freestanding artifact’. The author projects her perceptions into the artefact, which serves as a lever in reciprocating the perceptions to us, the readers. We can now state the conclusion that we have begun to move towards in Chapter 4. Michaels appears to add another dimension to the situation presented by Scarry. In line with Michaels’s treasuring of metaphor as a vital component of the artefact, perhaps we can see metaphor in her work as an artefact itself. We can analyse the notion in this way: Michaels projects her perceptions about the world, about the way people behave in the world and about what our behaviour means into the artefact of the metaphor, which in turn serves as the lever in reciprocating her (metaphorically presented) perceptions to us. In fact, with specific regard to Michaels’s work we can see metaphor as *the* artefact. Scarry identifies the poem or novel as the artefact, but the poem or novel written by Michaels would not exist without metaphor – thus, the poem or novel *is* metaphoric, metaphor *is* the poem or novel. In this light, it is even less possible to entertain the reproaches concerning the use of metaphor in Holocaust literary representation made by critics such as Henighan (2002) and Cook (2000).

The preceding part of the discussion has focused on Michaels’s Holocaust-related novel and on one of her poems that contains references to Holocaust, and Soviet, oppression. However, as has been suggested in the Introduction and confirmed in Chapter 2 of this doctoral thesis, we cannot accurately categorise Michaels as a Holocaust poet, not least of all because only four of her poems feature Holocaust-related references. Moreover, we should not define her as a Holocaust novelist simply because *Fugitive Pieces* is set during and following the Second World War and explores the effects of the myriad occurrences that constitute the ‘event’ of the Holocaust. We have found in the Introduction that Michaels (in Ogden 2004) firmly believes in using a ‘major historical event’ as the basis of a story’s plot and as an instrument for ‘shaping [the] characters and their relationship to the world around them’. Thus in Michaels’s work the Holocaust is an example of such a historical event, rather than being the subject matter that drives (all of) her work. Indeed, she ‘would hardly categorise [her]self as writing out of that experience as [her] primary source’ (Michaels 1996: 18).

These assertions are supported by the subject matter of Michaels’s second novel, *The Winter Vault*. The novel was published in 2009, at the time when the writing of this doctoral thesis was well under way, and thus we examine it here briefly. The reconstruction of the Abu Simbel temple and post-war Warsaw, and the building of the St Lawrence Seaway are the major historical events that provide the history to and setting of the story of Avery Escher, a civil engineer, and Jean, his botanist wife. The couple meet in Canada on the banks of the St Lawrence River during the Seaway construction, and Jean then accompanies Avery as his wife to Egypt, where he oversees the reconstruction of the temple. Their relationship suffers as a result of the loss of their child, who was stillborn, and they return to Toronto separately. While Avery immerses himself in graduate studies at the School of Architecture, Jean becomes the lover of Lucjan, a Polish artist who is preoccupied with the war-time destruction of Warsaw and the subsequent rebuilding of its Old City. Avery and Jean remain emotionally connected, however, and the novel ends with suggestions of a reconciliation between them.

The Second World War is referenced at times in the novel, but it is not the crux of the novel’s subject matter. The war is not, as Crown (2009) suggests, Michaels’s ‘confirmed territory’. Rather, according to Michaels (1996: 18) herself, the war was an ‘entry point’ for her ‘close examination of history in general, the meaning of history’. With regard to *Fugitive Pieces*, she elaborates that ‘the two things that ... concern [her] very much are the whole idea of unseen

forces (the events, cultural or historical, which shape us but which we do not live ourselves) and the issue of faith in the broadest use of that word' (Michaels 1996: 18). She explains:

War must be one of the most horrendous experiences one can live through. It forces people to carry things that are not only personal but much larger than themselves. I wanted to look as closely as I could at how people carry on, or how they perhaps can not only carry on but carry an event with them and still move towards a place of love in the world. (Michaels 1996: 18)

As I have sought to demonstrate in this doctoral thesis, Michaels's 'territory' (Crown) is wider, her concerns are broader and more philosophical. The Second World War, we have seen above, is an 'entry point' that, Michaels (1996: 18) acknowledges, is 'personally close to [her]', and it 'provided a very powerful doorway into many larger issues, philosophical issues, moral issues'. The themes of loss and dispossession, of recuperation and restitution, and of destruction and re-creation certainly arise in considerations of the war, but they also arise in other situations. Michaels (1996: 18) has 'banged [her] head against other large events as well'. Concomitantly, while there are developments in Michaels's oeuvre that suggest change in her thinking, other thematic developments in her work point to congruency rather than difference. There is a specific shift, for example, in her portrayal of the act of falling in love: In *Fugitive Pieces* (267) Ben identifies 'the one moment' a person 'bring[s]' their 'life entire to another', whereas in *The Winter Vault* (8) Jean realises that love 'is not the moment of bringing your whole life to another', but 'is everything you leave behind[,] at that moment'. However, Michaels's (in Crown 2009) three volumes of poetry 'were always intended to speak to one another', and the idea seems to hold true for her novels also, as she reasons:

I think one book washes you up on the shore of the next one. ... I started writing *The Winter Vault* before *Fugitive Pieces* was published; the second book came out of the first because it had led me to think more deeply about the notion of disenfranchisement. In the case of the Nubians [whose ancestral lands were washed away by the damming of the Nile], everything is taken from them. The question of how we commemorate that sort of loss runs through [*The Winter Vault*], alongside the notion of false consolation, which we see in the relocation of Abu Simbel and the rebuilding of Warsaw. Even if you replace something with the same thing – which is such an understandable impulse – it's still just that: a replication. Something essential has been lost. (Michaels, in Crown 2009)

Michaels's omniscient narrator expresses this idea at the start of the novel:

Avery knew that once the last temple stone had been cut and hoisted sixty metres higher, each block replaced, each seam filled with sand so there was not a grain of space between the blocks to reveal where they'd been sliced, ... the perfection of the illusion – the perfection itself – would be the betrayal. (*WV* 4)

Such thoughts do not contradict Michaels's faith in the value of restatement and reaffirmation that we have encountered in Chapter 4. The thoughts highlight the difference between replication and restatement, between attempting to recreate something anew exactly as it had been (however many centuries or just hours) before, and repeating something, such as a story or a memory through the generations, or the act of doing good. 'We think that when the moment of choice occurs, we will do the right thing,' Michaels (in Watson 1996, emphasis added) points out, 'but ... human integrity, human values have to be constantly practiced[,] so that when the moment calls for it, we *will* be able to respond.' As Jakob confirms in *Fugitive Pieces* (162): 'Good is proved true by repetition'.

In Chapter 3, we have learned that Michaels demonstrates Scarry's (1985) notion of imagination presenting and maintaining the fundamental moral distinction between hurting and not hurting.

In *The Winter Vault* Michaels (in Crown 2009) goes a step further, attempting to say, among other things, that ‘it is not enough not to do harm; one must also do good’. Despite the apparently irreparable damage that Jakob sustains in *Fugitive Pieces*, and despite Ben’s similar trauma, both men are saved – Jakob fully and Ben partially. Avery and Jean seem to gain equally favourable treatment in Michaels’s hands. ‘Regret and shame are not the end of the story’ of *The Winter Vault*, Michaels (in Crown 2009) points out; ‘they are its middle’. For much of the novel, Avery and Jean are victims of her disesteem, as Ricoeur (1992) puts it, but at the end they participate in ‘redemption ... of a very subtle nature’ (Michaels, in Crown 2009) and thus become beneficiaries of her esteem.

Let us summarise the contents of the preceding chapters, before bringing this doctoral thesis to a close. In Chapter 1, we have learned of the workings of language more generally from the language theorists Certeau (1984) and Bourdieu (1991), while the language theorist Ricoeur (1977, 1992) has demonstrated for us the ways in which metaphor, more specifically, functions. By presenting language as inherent to the relationship of domination in which they see people existing and by regarding language as biased in terms of ethics or lack thereof, these theorists show their awareness of the subjective nature of language – an awareness, we have learned in subsequent chapters, that Michaels shares. Through the detailed account provided by the philologist Klemperer (2000), we have discovered the effects of language in the hands of the Nazis as one particular group of producers-dominators, who sought and deplorably managed for a time to dominate the entire European Jewish race, the vast group of consumers-dominated.

The theoretical basis provided by the first three writers has helped us in Chapter 2 to begin exploring Michaels’s creative language. In this chapter, with the aid of Ricoeur, we have discussed Michaels participating through her novel *Fugitive Pieces* in the Holocaust literary debate that continues to demand attention long after Adorno’s famous injunction and subsequent clarifications. We have learned that Michaels’s initial hesitancy in revealing details of her personal life to us, her readers, has deepened into a conviction that our grasp of literary texts is obstructed by the creator’s personal circumstances. Nonetheless, we have found evidence to suggest, not so paradoxically, that Michaels’s personal motivation is an essential component of her writing practice. We have traced elements of social and physical domination suggested by Bourdieu that are not Holocaust-related in her work as well. The notions of empathic identification (Gubar) and the corpse poem (Fuss) have further illuminated for us, at times by contrast, the nature of her prose and poetry. Finally, we have explored her technique of standing in for some of her real-life poetic subjects, which presents similarities to and differences from Bourdieu’s notion of the spokesperson.

In Chapter 3, we have established that Klemperer’s account of the Nazis’ use of the German language confirms and clarifies Michaels’s views of language in general, and metaphor in particular, being manipulated by Nazi and Soviet oppressors to immoral ends. We have seen how, in *Fugitive Pieces* and in her extended poem ‘What the Light Teaches’, Michaels demonstrates the devastatingly destructive effects of the producers’ domination, taking place partly through their enforcement of the ‘legitimate’ language, on the dominated. Scarry and Berger’s (2001) thoughts on the act of torture, illuminated by the case of victim of Nazi torture Jean Améry, further assert the harm that language can suffer as well as demonstrate its abilities and failures with regard to the expression and consequences of the experience of physical pain.

It is understandable that as a persecuted German Jew, Klemperer found little hope in his Holocaust experiences. Michaels, by contrast, presents a powerful case for the beneficial, restorative function of language, as we have seen in Chapter 3 is demonstrated in several of her texts. We have learned that Scarry’s portrayal of the attributes of the act of imagining or creating

underscores and finds parallels with Michaels's approach in this regard. We have also found that examples of domination of a linguistic nature, as described by Bourdieu, are evident in Michaels's work, in both negative and positive forms.

Finally, in this chapter we have applied an idea presented by Nussbaum (1985) about the moral nature of writing in general, and Henry James's writing in particular, to Michaels's work and her role as an author. Using characters and certain scenes of *Fugitive Pieces* as Nussbaum uses characters and certain scenes of James's novel *The Golden Bowl*, we have demonstrated conclusively that Michaels is a moral author who produces moral literature and elicits the enactment of morality in us.

Chapter 4 constitutes the forum in which we have explored a particular metaphor presented by Michaels in her poem 'What the Light Teaches', using the Holocaust poet Paul Celan as a point of comparison. The image of language as a home seems directly applicable to the dispossessed Celan, and perhaps even to the similarly traumatised Jakob, but, as we have learned, for differing reasons Celan did not inhabit, nor does Jakob inhabit, language in the way that the narrator suggests refugees can do. Our discussion of Celan as a corpse poet has brought to light other similarities and differences between his creative approach and work and those of Michaels. We have established furthermore that the language-as-a-home image does not apply to any of Michaels's poetic subjects, with the single possible exception of Mandelstam as presented in 'The Weight of Oranges'. The metaphor, then, has emerged as applying specifically to people such as the three Russian poets Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam and Akhmatova and certain unnamed Holocaust victims whom Michaels highlights through the narrator and her sister in 'What the Light Teaches'.

In the second half of the chapter, we have briefly explored the biographies of the Russian poets, and then have carried out a close reading of the poem that includes engaging with Michaels's references to them therein. We have emphasised, in the reading, the images of light and water that occur throughout the poem, and have discussed how Michaels utilises the image of water, along with language, as a repository of memory, and the images of water and light as facilitators of memory and message-bearers of positive and negative aspects of personal and historical life. By the end of the close reading, we have divined the lesson of the light. Michaels (1992: 96) believes that without metaphor the poem, and we can extend the idea to encompass the novel, 'remains mired in the self; the lights are out, the poem stays dark'. Thus richly, 'nourishingly' figurative language proves illuminating in conveying to us the light's lesson.

Perhaps I can summarise the lesson in language that avoids being flat, toneless and lifeless (Nussbaum) by virtue of being the very standing terms (James) of Michaels's lyrically splendid (Nussbaum) language: Michaels teaches that the appropriate kind of remembrance, and by extension the appropriate kind of celebration of life, entails the broad process of naming. This process is divided into the more specific processes of re-'naming' plain words – that is, the reiteration of words from the past that have not been tainted by an oppressor – in order to give new meaning to those who utter them in the present, of voicing the actual names of the deceased and the yet living, and of carefully preserving the memory of the deceased and the living-memory of the yet living through the description and re-description of ordinary personal/particular and historical/international facts and opinions, pieces of knowledge and feelings.

In conclusion, I have sought to show in this doctoral thesis that Anne Michaels is a particularly thoughtful and imaginative writer; her poetry and prose are highly evocative, the reading of them

an especially sense-stimulating experience. Her creative output to date spans more than 20 years<sup>2</sup> and a vast number of hours in which she has steeped herself in the practices of detailed factual research, interpretation of people's behaviour through the centuries and the consequences thereof, and imaginative, empathic, moral portrayal of real-life and realistic people known and unknown, both to her and to us. Michaels (in Watson 1996) is courageous in having 'some kind of relationship' with the fact that 'the whole first half of the [20th] century was dominated by war'; she is courageous in contemplating and trying to find the answers to specific haunting questions (Michaels, in *Gazette* 1997); and she is courageous not only in facing 'things that aren't safe', 'enormous things', but also in providing a safe space in which her readers can consider these things (Michaels, in Crown 2009). She does not dress horror up in attractive clothing, and she does not conceal tragedy. She is not afraid to serve as an agent who distributes punishment, in Ricoeur's terms, to the victims of her disesteem. Like real people, her characters suffer. But like real people they also act and are compensated; Michaels is ever an agent who distributes rewards to the beneficiaries of her esteem (Ricoeur).

Thus, if we were to go back in time and attend one of Michaels's Creative Writing courses, we would receive the advice she gave to her students then. But her instructions are put into practice in her texts, and thus we have no need of travelling back in time. We must strive, in the present, to avoid obtuseness and to be people on whom nothing of life is lost (James). If we pay close and moral attention to Michaels's poetry and prose, if we strive to exercise perceptual acuity (Scarry), we stand a better than usual chance of producing, if we so wish, our own decent poems and novels. We can write texts that demonstrate our awareness of the precise manner in which metaphor works (Ricoeur) and that use metaphors effectively, texts that enact empathic identification (Gubar), texts that privilege the recuperative power of language over its destructive power, texts that use standing terms judiciously and present alert winged creatures (James).

If we have no such creative impulse, we can still prove worthy of Michaels's moral achievement on our behalf (Nussbaum): Our moral attention to moral texts like Michaels's can facilitate our practice of moral living; our whole conduct can represent our lucid engagement with and interpretation of our social experiences (James). It would never be a selfish but always a selfless act, for as Scarry (1985: 324) explains, 'multiple artifacts collectively continue' the work of reducing sentience's aversiveness and enhancing its acuity – our 'culture' becomes the lever or object that, in boomerang fashion, facilitates our 'evolution' as humans. Guided by a moral author like Michaels, then, we learn to develop our moral selves and perpetuate the well-lived life (Nussbaum). Some of the shine (James) of Michaels's themes can rub off onto us, and perhaps we too will shine.

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, she declares that she had 'the beginning and the ending' of *Fugitive Pieces* in mind 'as early as 1980' (Michaels, in Watson 1996).

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## Appendix 1

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### Wild Horses

Minarets of burdock  
clang in the copper marsh, the grapes'  
frozen skins flood with sweetness.  
Winter trees burned to black wicks.

Harnessed, longing cuts  
with every turn. Time has one direction,  
to divide. Invisible, it casts shadow  
canyons, tools furrows into leather fields,  
carves oxbow rivers of birds  
into cold November skies.

Then, the first stars' faint static,  
the sacred transmissions, the hair's  
breadth of the intimate  
infinite. Iron-oxide sun stains travertine sky,  
sudden colour like the ochre  
horses of the Dordogne, stampeding into lamplight.  
Liquid grasses overflow like dark ale.  
Twilight is a cave, pungent  
with wet hides, torches of resin.

Under the pulling moon, the strap of river  
digs into the flesh of field.

Michaels (2001: 145)



## Appendix 2

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### What the Light Teaches

*“I break open stars and find nothing and again nothing,  
and then a word in a foreign tongue.”*

Elisabeth Borchers

1

Countless times this river has been bruised by our bodies;  
liquid fossils of light.

We shed our ghost skins in the current;  
then climb the bank, heavy and human.

The river is a loose tongue,  
a folk song. At night we go down to listen.  
Stars like sparks from a bonfire.  
We take off what we are,  
and step into the moon.

2

When there are no places left for us,  
this is where we'll still meet.  
Past the white fountain of birches,  
green helmets of willows.  
Past the boulder that fastens the field  
like a button on a pocket.  
Here, where trees that you planted are now twice our height.

In winter we'll haunt your kitchen, our love  
an overturned bowl, a circling lid.  
We'll visit the creaking bog with its sunken masts;  
fly over a death mask of snow  
and the frozen pond striped with grass –  
to our river, humming between closed lips.  
Attentive as your favourite poet,  
Tsvetaeva – who listened with the roots of her hair.

3

Birds plunge their cries like needles  
into the thick arm of the afternoon.

Beyond the closed window, soundless pines –  
a heavy green brocade; and the glowing, stiff  
brushcut of the corn.

Wands of wild calla.  
Lilies tall as children.

You're sleep on the couch, head up, as if in a bath;  
summer heat turns thin white sleeves  
pink against your skin.  
Sleeping as if you'd waited years  
for a place to close your eyes.

Everything familiar:  
dishes and smells, faces in oval wooden frames,  
tins of Russian tea  
with their forest scenes, their borders of black and gold,  
lining the shelves.

We float in death,  
the ordinary world holds together  
like the surface tension of water,  
still and stretched, a splash of light.  
The shadow pattern of leaves,  
a moving tattoo on your bare legs.

4

Sometimes I am afraid to touch him,  
afraid my hand would go right through him.  
But he is alive, in a history  
made more painful by love.

I prayed to the sky to lift our father's head,  
to deliver him from memory.

I wished he could lie down  
in music he knew intimately, and become  
sound, his brain flooded by melody so powerful  
it would stretch molecules, dismantle thought.

5

Suspended in flux, in contortions of disorder,  
in the frozen acrobatics of folding and faults,  
the earth mourns itself.  
Continents torn in half and turned into coastlines,  
call for themselves across the sea.

Caves, frantic for air, pull themselves up  
by the ground, fields collapsing into empty sockets.  
Everywhere the past juts into the present;  
mountains burst from one era to another,  
or crumple up millennia, time joining at its ends.

We also pleat time.



Remembering, we learn to forget.  
The kind of forgetting that stops us, one foot  
in the spring soil of your farm,  
the other in mud where bits of bone and teeth  
are still suspended, a white alphabet.  
The kind of forgetting that changes  
moonlight on the river into shreds of skin.  
The forgetting that is the heart's  
filthy drain,  
so fear won't overflow its deep basin.

Even in its own confusion,  
in its upheavals and depressions,  
the earth has room in its heart.  
Carefully, part by part, it replaces us.  
Gently, so bones may embrace a little longer,  
mud replaces marrow.

The dogs slip like mercury through the long grass.

How can we but feel they're here,  
in the strange darkness of a thermosensitive sky,  
even as light gushes over rocks  
and the sun drips sweet fat the colour of peaches  
over fields. Here, in the noise of the river,  
a mother gives birth in a sewer;  
soldiers push sand down a boy's throat.

Theirs are voices we hear  
but can't hear, like the silence  
of parents rounded up in a town square,  
who stopped their tongues with time,  
saving children by not  
calling out to them in the street.

Our father's daughters, we can't dream ourselves  
into another world, see things differently.  
Instead, we try to withstand memory  
with memory, to go back further, to before;  
back to the dacha in the high forests of Kochtobel,  
to the Moyka in our mother's silvery photo of Petersburg,  
to the wooden sidewalks of Kiev.  
You read poems in the old language  
even our parents can't speak –  
what we save, saves us –  
and in your mouth the soft buzzes are natural as cicadas,  
the long "ayas" like bird calls.

Language is how ghosts enter the world.  
They twist in awkward positions  
to squeeze through the black spaces.  
The dead read backwards,



as in a mirror. They gather  
in the white field and look up,  
waiting for someone  
to write their names.

Language remembers.  
Out of obscurity, a word takes its place  
in history. Even a word so simple  
it's translatable: number. Oven.

Because all change is permanent,  
we need words to raise ourselves  
to new meaning: tea and dacha and river.

6

It stopped me, the first time  
I looked out at our father in the yard and saw  
how she leaned her head on his shoulder –  
familiar, and full of desire.

Together they looked at a nest in the bushes,  
inspected strawberries.  
Although the air was humid with lilacs,  
heavy with insects and rain,  
she was cool in a dress the colour of the moon.

You were reading by the open door.  
The sound of a lawn mower made everything still.  
Then a moment like night cereus  
that blooms only in the dark, waking us  
with its alarm of scent.

It wasn't seeing your face so suddenly like his,  
or the sight of death in her white dress;  
or the glaze of the summer light  
hardening into crust. Not the accustomed sadness  
of what we'd lost,  
but a new injury, a gash  
bleeding into everything  
what we were losing.

7

When there are no places left for us,  
we'll still talk in order to make things true:  
not only the years before we were born,  
not only the names of our dead,  
but also this life.  
The simple feel of an apple in the hand.  
The look of the table after a meal, *en déshabillé*,  
rings of wine like lips staining the cloth,



the half-eaten fish in its halo of lemon and butter.  
Nights of tastes, of different smoothnesses;  
nights when the twister of desire touches down  
and tears up sleep;  
of drowning in the shadow of your own body.

But if memory is only skin,  
if we become dervishes spinning  
at the speed of the world, feeling  
nothing,  
we spend hours by the river, telling everything.  
So that when we are gone, even our spirits  
weighed down with stones,  
the river will remember.

8

It was a suicide mission, to smuggle language  
from mouths of the dying  
and the dead; last words of the murdered mothers –  
Germany, Poland, Russia.  
They found that what they'd rescued  
wasn't the old language at all;  
only the alphabet the same.  
Because language of a victim only reveals  
the one who named him.

Because they were plucked from the centre,  
because they shared the same table, same street,  
there was no idiom to retreat to.

What was left but to cut out one's tongue,  
or cleave it with new language,  
or try to hear a language of the dead,  
who were thrown into pits, into lakes –  
What are the words for earth, for water?

The truth is why words fail.  
We can only reveal by outline,  
by circling absence.  
But that's why language  
can remember truth when it's not spoken.  
Words in us that deafen,  
that wait, even when their spell seems  
wasted;  
even while silence  
accumulates to fate.

Prayer is the effort of wresting words  
not from silence,  
but from the noise of other words.  
to penetrate heaven, we must reach



what breaks in us.  
The image haunts me:  
the double swaying  
of prayer on the trains.

9

Whole cities were razed with a word.  
Petersburg vanished into Leningrad, became  
an invisible city where poets promised to meet  
so they could pronounce again  
“the blessed word with no meaning.”

A writer buried his testimony  
in the garden, black type in black soil,  
trusting that someday earth would speak.  
All those years of war and uncertainty after,  
no one knew of the power of his incantation,  
calling quietly from its dark envelope.  
From his notebook grew orchids and weeds.

Words are powerless as love,  
transforming only by taking us as we are.

Reading letters from Tsvetaeva to a friend  
we cried together in your barn;  
“you’re the only one I have left.”

After all these years I still feel closest to you  
in the hours reserved for nightmares,  
even in our distant bedrooms.  
Because I know you’re awake too,  
if not this night, then another,  
watching your husband’s sleeping body  
rise with breath.

10

For years I’ve driven towards you in spring rain,  
storm sky of green marble,  
slow traffic a caravan of swinging lanterns,  
windshield wipers like clock hands.  
Poems by Tsvetaeva on the seat beside me,  
flowers in wet paper.

As the hours pass, the hard seeds in my heart  
soften and swell as I think of your kitchen  
with its stone floor  
like a summerhouse in Peredelkino,  
and of Mandelstam, exiled to Yelabuga on the Kama;  
“if you must leave the city,  
it’s best to live near a river.”

You fly out of the darkness at me,  
twisting open the tin sky.

The thunderstorm becomes other storms:  
darkness steeping like tea above Burnside Drive,  
with its slippery crease of rusted leaves;  
or the night on High Street, rain  
streaming like milk down the windshield  
the moment the streetlights clicked on.  
I think of young Akhmatova,  
under a black umbrella with Modigliani,  
reading Verlaine in the Luxembourg.  
All the languages they spoke –  
Russian, Italian, French –  
and still, their lovemaking was with roses!  
Language not enough  
for what they had to tell each other.

Never to lose this joy,  
driving to one who awaits my arrival.

Soon I will be standing on your porch, dripping  
with new memory, a thin dress soaked in May rain.

Rain that helps one past grow out of another.

11

Language is the house with lamplight in its windows,  
visible across fields. Approaching, you can hear  
music; closer, smell  
soup, bay leaves, bread – a meal for anyone  
who has only his tongue left.  
It's a country; home; family:  
abandoned; burned down; whole lines dead, unmarried.  
For those who can't read their way in the streets,  
or in the gestures and faces of strangers,  
language is the house to run to;  
in wild nights, chased by dogs and other sounds,  
when you've been lost a long time,  
when you have no other place.

There are nights in the forest of words  
when I panic, every step into thicker darkness,  
the only way out to write myself into a clearing,  
which is silence.  
Nights in the forest of words  
when I'm afraid we won't hear each other  
over clattering branches, over  
both our voices calling.



In winter, in the hour  
when the sun runs liquid then freezes,  
caught in the mantilla of empty trees;  
when my heart listens  
through the cold stethoscope of fear,  
your voice in my head reminds me  
what the light teaches.  
Slowly you translate fear into love,  
the way the moon's blood is the sea.

Michaels (2001: 117–29)