# Chapter Six: Inheriting Trauma

## Family Bonds and Memory Ties in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*

> "The dead leave us starving with mouths full of love."
> (ANNE MICHAELS, "MEMORIAM," *THE WEIGHT OF ORANGES*)

> "It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener which makes possible something like a repossessing of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth."
> (DORI LAUB, "AN EVENT WITHOUT A WITNESS")

"During the Second World War, countless manuscripts – diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts – were lost or destroyed. Some of these narratives were deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors – by those who did not live to retrieve them" (x). With these opening sentences, the preface to Anne Michaels's 1996 novel *Fugitive Pieces* immediately embeds the text in discourses of testimony, raising questions about acts of bearing witness. Is it possible to bear witness to one's own traumatic experiences? How do we remember, narrate, and share trauma? Can we act as witnesses for a witness who can no longer speak or write his or her testimony – and is it our ethical duty to do so? *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels's debut novel, is a Holocaust and trauma novel that explores, through the perspective of two autodiegetic narrators, the complexities of experiencing and remembering, of inheriting and transmitting trauma. The Jewish poet Jakob Beer, a survivor who lost his parents and sister in Poland during World War II when he was seven, narrates the first part of the novel, relating his life-story from his childhood spent in hiding to his experiences of exile and his gradual development as a poet. The second part of the novel is narrated by Ben, a survivors' child, whose child-

hood is haunted by his parents' experiences in the concentration camps and by the death of his siblings. In the light of contemporary psychological perspectives, Jakob can be read as a victim of "traumatic grief," while Ben's story participates in discourses about the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

*Fugitive Pieces* has been discussed extensively in terms of its relation to Holocaust literature as well as its politics of place and poetics of landscape. The protagonists' relationship to the larger narrative of Jewish history, including narratives of dislocation and exile, is a central critical concern. However, other key aspects of the novel have so far not received sufficient attention; indeed, the overall direction of the criticism on *Fugitive Pieces* is symptomatic of literary trauma studies' tendency to privilege the historical over the private and familial. I suggest, then, that even though the novel is concerned with the historical and the political, its enactment of processes of remembering, narrating, and witnessing foregrounds the personal and the familial.

The novel revolves around ruptured families and the protagonists' desperate attempts to (re-)create family ties – ties that transcend both the boundaries of biological kinship and the boundary between the living and the dead. In different ways, both Jakob and Ben are haunted by the dead and by the unsettling silences surrounding their deaths, yet it is precisely this feeling of being haunted that drives their need to connect with the dead. I read *Fugitive Pieces*, then, as a novel about traumatic loss and mourning that puts particular emphasis on connectedness: the protagonists display a pressing need for what I call "intermemory," a sense of intersubjective connectedness achieved through empathetic sharing and mutual assimilation of memories, as well as for "transmemory," which builds, through transmitted or imagined memories, a sense of connectedness with someone who is dead. The main sites where processes of intermemory and transmemory are enacted in *Fugitive Pieces* are family relationships, relationships with surrogate parents, and love relationships – with the latter, perhaps, being represented somewhat sentimentally. Ultimately, the novel privileges memory over history. I argue that for both Jakob and Ben, history essentially functions as an instrument that helps them survive their personal struggles with memory. At the same time, remembering emerges as an ethical duty owed to one's intimates, whether dead, living, or not yet born, and this duty is throughout the novel performed through various acts of writing. *Fugitive Pieces* is a highly self-reflexive novel that emphasizes the importance of forging intersubjective connections in the face of traumatic loss and mourning, through bonds of family and love, memory and writing.

## HAUNTED BY THE DEAD: TRAUMATIC GRIEF AND INCESTUOUS FANTASIES

Like Godwin's Mandeville, Jakob loses both his parents to murders that are part of larger, genocidal structures of violence – in this case, the Nazis' attempted extermination of Jewish people. Michaels's representation of this core childhood trauma, however, puts even more emphasis than Godwin's on the impossibility of witnessing for the child who is present at the site of his parents' death. At the moment of murder, Jakob is in his "hiding place," "behind the wallpaper in the cupboard" (6), which allows him to hear, though not see, what happens:

> Since those minutes inside the wall, I've imagined that the dead lose every sense except hearing.
> The burst door. Wood ripped from hinges, cracking like ice under the shouts. Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. Then silence. My mother had been sewing a button on my shirt. She kept her buttons in a chipped saucer. I heard the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor. I heard the spray of buttons, little white teeth. (7)

This traumatic moment is represented as an experience of death-in-life that Jakob – in spite of his fragmentary aural recollections – perceives as a missed experience. It is a moment of unfamiliar and disturbing sounds that are, paradoxically, intensified and simultaneously rendered meaningless by his suffocating blindness. In retrospect, Jakob writes: "I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind a wall, from underground" (17).

These passages literalize Cathy Caruth's notion of trauma as an event that cannot be fully witnessed by the one who experiences it.[1] As Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience*, what essentially characterizes trauma is "its very unassimilated nature," that is, "the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance" (4). Godwin's *Mandeville* and Shelley's *Mathilda*, as mentioned previously, also represent the moment of trauma as too emotionally overwhelming to be "known" as it is experienced. *Fugitive Pieces*, however, pushes the trauma victim's crisis of witnessing and the idea of "unclaimed experience" even further. When Jakob leaves his hiding place, he is confronted with the sight of his parents' bodies, drenched in blood – the relentless visual evidence of their death. Fleeing from the sight of horror as quickly as possible, Jakob only realizes his main failure as a witness with spatial and temporal distance: "Then I felt the worst shame of my life: I was pierced

1 Anne Whitehead similarly emphasizes that this passage of the novel "encapsulates Caruth's notion of 'missed' or 'unclaimed' experience" (*Trauma Fiction* 48).

with hunger. And suddenly I realized, my throat aching with sound – Bella" (9). The belatedness of his realization that he momentarily forgot about his older sister Bella, because he neither saw nor heard what happened to her, marks a moment of shock and profound shame. As Adrienne Kertzer writes, Jakob's trauma is "occasioned by what he does not see, and more significantly, by what he does not hear" (205). It is this visual and aural void around Bella's disappearance that turns out to be particularly traumatic for Jakob – even more traumatic than the partial witnessing of his parents' death. Jakob's loss of his sister takes to an extreme the Caruthian idea of "unclaimed experience," of the impossibility of witnessing, which is, to a varying degree, inherent in the structures of traumatic experience.

*Fugitive Pieces* depicts Jakob's reaction to these traumatic losses in terms of a complex pathology of mourning. One of the most striking aspects of his immediate response to his family's murder is his sense of the dead being literally within his body:

> I knew suddenly my mother was inside me. Moving along sinews, under my skin the way she used to move through the house at night, putting things away, putting things in order. She was stopping to say goodbye, and was caught, in such pain, wanting to rise, wanting to stay. It was my responsibility to release her, a sin to keep her from ascending. I tore at my clothes, my hair. She was gone. (8)

Jakob's "bodily vision" is centred on the act of letting go; however, this moment of feeling the body of his mother within his body is only the first of a number of such experiences. Jakob writes: "Through days and nights I sped from my father and my mother. […] They were yanked right through my scalp" (13). His reaction to his parents' death resembles the psychological response to loss that Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok call "incorporation," which involves "fantasies" based on the act of "[i]ntroducing all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it" (126). As Abraham and Torok emphasize, "incorporation" is most common when the loss is particularly difficult to acknowledge, and it is "inexpressible mourning" that tends to "erect[] a secret tomb inside the subject" (130-31). As the passages above illustrate, Michaels draws on the notion of incorporation; she has Jakob perceive his body as a "secret tomb" for his parents. Michaels represents incorporation as a complex psychological mechanism, depicting Jakob as feeling torn between the desire to keep his parents in this bodily crypt and the urge to expel them.

Moreover, while Jakob's fantasies of incorporation betray the desire to *possess* his parents, he repeatedly implies that he feels *possessed by* them. Thus, Michaels constructs the pathological mourner as feeling a profound ambivalence towards his own acts of incorporation, and she also challenges issues of agency: the text implies that Jakob's fantasies are so real to him that he cannot see he is the agent of these

fantasies. He is blind to his refusal, or inability, to mourn – for this is what incorporation essentially signifies: "[I]n order not to have to 'swallow' a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing" (Abraham and Torok 126). The act of swallowing the dead creates the illusion of presence, the sense that the lost are not entirely lost, and it is this illusion that Jakob needs because acknowledging the finality and irrevocability of his losses would be unbearable.

The pathology of mourning that Jakob displays also needs to be seen in connection with the traumatic nature of his parents' deaths. In contemporary traumatic stress studies, the notion of "traumatic grief," also called "complicated grief," has received increasing attention; it denotes an individual's suffering from the impact of both trauma and loss, from posttraumatic symptoms as well as persistent symptoms of unresolved grieving in response to "the loss of a loved one under traumatic circumstances" (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger 5). The death of Jakob's parents involves "elements of the grotesque, violence, or suddenness," which, as B. Hudnall Stamm stresses, expose the bereaved to an increased risk of developing pathological forms of grief (15).[2] An additional factor that tends to increase the traumatic nature of witnessing a violent, sudden death is seeing the deceased "in a disfigured state" (Stamm 15).[3] Michaels has Jakob record the deeply traumatic moment of seeing his parents' disfigured bodies: "The soul leaves the body instantly, as if it can hardly wait to be free: my mother's face was not her own. My father was twisted with falling. Two shapes in the flesh-heap, his hands" (7). This moment is dominated for Jakob by "horror" even more than "terror," in Adriana Cavarero's sense of the terms. Cavarero associates terror with trembling, fear, panic, and the instinctive reaction of flight, while she primarily relates horror to deep repugnance, a state of frozenness, and paralysis (*Horrorism* 4-9). In *Mandeville*, the main emphasis in the description of the massacre is on the omnipresent threat of death and how Mandeville "was the only one that escaped" (36). In *Fugitive Pieces*, the emphasis shifts to horror. Fear for his life and the instinct to take flight (i.e., the reactions of terror) come second; Jakob's immediate response is paralysis: he stares at his parents' bodies, which have been cruelly stripped of their uniqueness and reduced to a dehu-

2 E. Rynearson and Russell Geoffrey also emphasize the specificities of bereavement after homicide, describing the key characteristics of this kind of dying as follows: "(a) The dying is violent, a forceful, suddenly traumatic act; (b) the dying is a violation, a transgressive act; and (c) the dying is a volition, an intentional act" (112).

3 See also the definition of "childhood traumatic grief" (CTG) by Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger: "When children lose a loved one to an unexpected, violent, or gory death, or when they are exposed to graphic details such as blood, mutilated or missing body parts, or being the first person to discover the body of the loved one, they may develop a condition known as childhood traumatic grief" (15).

manized "flesh-heap," drenched in blood. Cavarero describes the essence of such scenes of horror as follows: "The body undone (blown apart, torn to pieces) loses its individuality. The violence that dismembers it offends the ontological dignity that the human figure possesses and renders it unwatchable" (9). Horror is not merely a reaction to "the end of a human life"; it is a reaction to "the human condition itself," the essential human vulnerability that shockingly manifests itself in "the spectacle of disfigurement" (8).[4] Scenes of death producing horror involve severe *violence* and severe *violation*; they strike to the core of what trauma is about.

*Fugitive Pieces* explores, then, how the sudden and deeply traumatic loss of his parents affects Jakob. He not only displays a number of posttraumatic symptoms – such as repeated nightmares of the dead rising and waiting to turn human again (93) – but he also cannot work through his grief; his intense experiences of horror and terror inhibit him. Jakob identifies "fear" as the emotion that rules his life (19) and seems to feel "'stuck' on the traumatic circumstances of the death," a common reaction of children suffering from traumatic grief (Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger 19). In fact, Jakob acknowledges that he has become fixated on the moment of death: "I couldn't turn my anguish from the precise moment of death. I was focused on that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity – perpetrator, victim, witness" (140). Jakob's fixation on this "historical split second" is an important parallel to Mandeville, whose worldview remains dominated by the deeply traumatic scene of the massacre in Ireland: from childhood, Mandeville compulsively believes that everything is determined by the dynamics between victims and perpetrators. An essential difference between the two narrators is, however, that Mandeville becomes obsessed with the figure of the perpetrator (albeit not the actual perpetrator), while Jakob becomes fixated on the victim, especially his sister Bella.

Indeed, his response to the trauma of losing Bella is especially pathological. Jakob develops an intense and extended fantasy of incorporation about her, one that lacks the profound emotional ambivalence that characterizes his incorporations of his parents: while he claims he tried to escape from his parents, he indulges in the fantasy of carrying Bella with him – or rather, *inside* of him – into his exile in Greece with his rescuer, the archaeologist Athos: "But Bella clung. We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me" (14). Once again, Jakob reverses agency, identifying Bella as the one who does the clinging, failing to see his fantasy and his

4 Cavarero proposes the term "horrorism" to call attention to the pervasive presence not just of terror but also horror in contemporary forms of violence: "This coinage, apart from the obvious assonance with the word 'terrorism', is meant to emphasize the peculiarly repugnant character of so many scenes of contemporary violence, which locates them in the realm of horror rather than that of terror" (*Horrorism* 29). For Cavarero, the politics of this term are also based on the idea that "ideally all the innocent victims, instead of their killers, ought to determine the name" (3).

own act of clinging. With Bella, unlike with his mother, he does not express a need to get her out of his body; he lets her cling the whole way to his new exilic home, the Greek island Zakynthos.

It is only after arriving on Zakynthos that Jakob finally expels her, paralleling the way Athos "plucked" him "[f]rom out of his trousers" (14). However, he "excorporates" Bella not to release her but to turn her into a ghost that secretly lives with him:

> Athos didn't understand, as I hesitated in the doorway, that I was letting Bella enter ahead of me, making sure she was not left behind. I paused when I ate, singing a silent incantation: A bite for me, a bite for you, an extra bite for Bella. […] I felt her presence everywhere, in daylight, in rooms I knew weren't empty. I felt her touch on my back, my shoulders, my hair. (31)

Like his fantasies of incorporation, his perception of Bella's ghost signifies his refusal to let her go, to proceed with the work of mourning. Her persistent invisible presence can be read as another fantasy originating from his need to feel that he has not entirely lost her – even if he is "half comforted, half terrified" by feeling such a "thin wall between the living and the dead" (31). This key passage also revolves around a central paradox: while Jakob thinks of Bella as dead, he simultaneously constructs her as alive by imagining that she still needs to eat and still has the ability to speak and sing and even touch him. He imagines that she can reach out and tear the "gossamer wall" between them (31).[5] The ghost, then, represents Jakob's desire to make Bella live on through and after her death.

Furthermore, Bella's ghost is symptomatic of Jakob's more general psychology of grieving. It is telling that not only his incorporation fantasies but also his fixation on the moment of death are strongest in relation to his sister: "Night after night, I endlessly follow Bella's path from the front door of my parents' house. In order to give her death a place. This becomes my task. I collect facts, trying to reconstruct events in minute detail" (139). This passage indicates one of the reasons why Jakob becomes increasingly fixated on his dead sister. He is obsessed with his lack of knowledge about her death; the profound shame about his failure of witnessing, his "fail[ing] to see Bella had disappeared" (111), haunts him and compels him to re-

5 Jakob's imaginary sharing of food with his dead sister is strikingly reminiscent of an example Abraham and Torok use in "Mourning or Melancholia": "We are reminded here of the unforgettable sight of a man, seated alone at a table in a restaurant, ordering two different meals simultaneously; he ate them both as if he were being accompanied by someone else" (129). This passage and the novel's use of the trope of incorporation fantasies can be read as an indication that Michaels might be drawing directly on this chapter by Abraham and Torok.

construct her death "in minute detail." The text suggests that, in relation to his sister, Jakob suffers from both a trauma of loss and a trauma of guilt.

Yet the novel hints at a second reason for Jakob's fixation on Bella, implying that he develops an incestuous attraction towards her. One pertinent feature of Jakob's narrative in this respect is the sensual, if not erotic, imagery he repeatedly uses to talk about Bella. A recurrent focal point in his descriptions is her hair, her "magnificent black hair like black syrup, thick and luxurious" (6), which is "[s]hiny as black lacquer under the lamplight" (106). His memories and dreams revolve around a few vivid sensual images of her hair and her dress, suggesting that he is obsessed with her beauty. Most strikingly, when Jakob imagines the encounter between Bella and the soldiers who killed his parents, he ruminates about the soldiers' reactions to her beauty:

> [W]hat did they make of her hair, did they lift its mass from her shoulders, assess its value; did they touch her perfect eyebrows and skin? What did they make of Bella's hair as they cut it – did they feel humiliated as they fingered its magnificence, as they hung it on the line to dry? (106)

It is telling that Jakob gets caught up in imagining their reactions to Bella's body and her beauty – rather than thinking about Bella's feelings and thoughts during that horrific moment. Yet the meaning of Bella's hair in this scene is evidently overdetermined. The cutting of hair symbolizes death as well as "the cutting of life, power and strength" and traditionally occurs in combination with rituals of sacrifice (Jobes 710). In this light, Jakob's imagining of how the soldiers cut and dry Bella's hair expresses the vision of a ritualistic preparation for death. Nevertheless, his focus on its "magnificence" and on physical touch suggests that his perspective here is less that of an empathetic brother than of a male subject visualizing a sexualized female body.

Moreover, it is revealing that Bella figures prominently in the chapter dedicated to Jakob's relationship with Alex, a lively young librarian. In this chapter, the novel depicts a pattern of emotion that both resembles and inverts one from Godwin's *Mandeville*. For Mandeville, it is his sister Henrietta's attachment to Clifford that causes his incestuous feelings to reach full force; for Jakob, it is his first sexual relationship that causes his obsession with Bella to erupt with particular power. In both cases, the emergence of a lover or potential spouse for one of the siblings is perceived as a threat to the brother-sister relationship. While Mandeville reacts with raging jealousy, Jakob fears that his relationship with Alex will create a barrier for Bella, his "shadow-bride" (Hillger 36), in her attempts to reach him: "Bella, who is nowhere to be found, is looking for me. How will she ever find me here, beside this strange woman?" (126). Hence, while Jakob's incestuous feelings are, on the whole, depicted in more subtle ways than Mandeville's, which manifest themselves

in compulsive descriptions of his jealousy and fantasies of revenge, the imagery Jakob uses to describe Bella's body and the psychology of his first relationship are powerful indicators that his pathological mourning involves an incestuous attachment.

Both *Mandeville* and *Fugitive Pieces* show how parental loss creates the conditions for the male protagonists to channel their desires towards their sisters. In both cases, social isolation feeds into this process of channelling. In Mandeville's case, one source of his incestuous attachment seems to be that Henrietta is his only surviving close relative. Michaels's novel offers an interesting variant on this topos, depicting how Jakob *turns* Bella into the only other surviving family member through his fantasies. In different ways, both novels signal that the trauma victim's incestuous attachment works as a coping mechanism or survival strategy,[6] in which the agony of loss is transformed into romantic dreams. The last sentences of Jakob's narrative reinforce this reading: "My blood pounded in my chest and I knew my heart's strength would soon be exhausted. I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and replaced my heartbeat with your name" (195). Through the metaphoric image of Jakob substituting his "heartbeat" with the two-syllable sound of his sister's name at a moment of intense agony, the novel sets up an explicit connection between the narrator's psychology of incestuous desire and his struggle for survival. The ending of Jakob's narrative also calls attention to a core issue in the psychology of haunting, suggesting that, ultimately, Jakob is not the passive recipient but the active agent of his persistent sense of feeling the presence of the dead.[7] In this way, both his obsession with Bella and his sense of being haunted figure as key symptoms of his pathology of mourning.

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6 A similar pattern of traumatic loss and brother-sister incest can also be found in Ian McEwan's novel *The Cement Garden*. The story is narrated by 15-year old Jack, who records how he and his three siblings tried to keep their mother's death, which happens shortly after their father's death, a secret, hiding the mother's corpse in the cellar in leftover cement. Soon after the parents' deaths, an incestuous relationship begins to develop between Jack and his 17-year old sister Julie. Similar to *Fugitive Pieces*, McEwan's novel allows us to read the siblings' incestuous relationship in connection with their trauma of parental loss and their struggle for survival. Incest also emerges as a symptom of the teenagers' desperate attempts to reshape the family.

7 In this sense, *Fugitive Pieces* differs significantly from the approach to ghosts that characterizes Toni Morrison's famous trauma and slavery novel *Beloved*. While *Fugitive Pieces* allows us to read the ghost of Bella as existing only in Jakob's mind, *Beloved*, which constitutes a powerful reappropriation and refiguration of the Gothic, constructs the ghost of Beloved as unequivocally real within the diegesis of the novel, staging encounters between the ghost and several of the protagonists.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL LEGACIES OF TRAUMA

The haunting impact of silence and the crisis of witnessing, which play a central role in Jakob's experience of traumatic loss, are refigured in different ways in the childhood experiences of the second narrator, Ben, a child of survivors. Ben's family life is dominated by oppressive silence:

> There was no energy in my family, not even the fervour of an elegy. Instead, our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering in a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking. (204)

Ben perceives that his parents, who were liberated from the camp four years before his birth, are haunted by an "aura of mortality" (204), but the "code of silence" (223), which his father in particular clings to, makes it exceedingly difficult for Ben to understand his parents' enigmatic patterns of behaviour, such as his father's compulsive eating habits and his mother's excessive anxiety about him. As Robert Eaglestone writes, "the 'second generation' dynamic involves bringing to light the specific and often untold stories of the parents who survived, and (as it were) their continuing 'symptoms' of survival" (19).[8] In Ben's case, the stories of his family's past remain untold, and this persistent silence constitutes one of his parents' main "'symptoms' of survival."

Ben's complex relation to his parents' traumatic past can be read in terms of what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory":[9]

8 The novel's focus not only on a child survivor but also on a child of survivors may be seen as part of a general shift in cultural discourses. Michael Rothberg maintains that as both the Holocaust and decolonialization become more distant temporally, "questions of generational transmission – or lack of transmission – take centre stage. In order to address this transformation in individual and collective memory, artists and scholars engaged with the Holocaust in particular have in recent decades been exploring second- and third-generation stories and have sought aesthetic forms and analytic categories for these new memorial phenomena" (*Multidirectional* 276).

9 As Hirsch emphasizes in "The Generation of Postmemory," the – rather controversial – idea that "descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory*" has been discussed by various critics with different terminologies (105-06). Among others, Hirsch refers to Young's "received history," Zeitlin's "vicarious witnessing," and Raczymow's "mémoire trouée."

> In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. [...] Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. (*Family Frames* 22)

Resonating with Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory, Ben's description of his childhood conveys how he feels oppressed by a past he did not witness and fails to understand, a past that is, paradoxically, distant and present at the same time. Being persistently excluded from his parents' traumatic past, the construction of some kind of "postmemory" is rendered exceedingly difficult; the unknown past, whose enigmatic traces make him feel as if he was "born into absence" (233) and make his own story (in Hirsch's terms) seem "belated" and "evacuated,"[10] remains enwrapped in silence.

Ben's father's patterns of behaviour are, however, characterized by a profound tension between his refusal to share his past with his son and a forceful imperative to bear witness, notably, by urging his son to look at photos in books and magazines that testify to the horrors of the past. This "discipline of looking," in combination with his father's reign of silence, which is only occasionally broken by decontextualized verbal fragments such as "kapos, haftlings, 'Ess Ess'" (217),[11] is deeply disturbing for Ben: "Images brand you, burn the surrounding skin, leave their black mark" (218). Ben is forced to bear witness, but his act of witnessing is one that lacks understanding; his father forces Ben to see – with a "ferocity that frightened" him (219) – but keeps him in the darkness of unknowing.

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10 Hirsch contextualizes the idea of "belatedness" inherent in the term "postmemory" with other prominent terms in our "era of 'posts,'" for example, "'post-secular,' 'post-human,' 'postcolony,' 'post-white.'" She emphasizes that "[p]ostmemory shares the layering of these other 'posts' and their belatedness […]. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" ("Generation" 106). Hence, as Hirsch's discussion implies, "postmemory" is a contentious term for a particularly contingent form or structure of remembering.

11 The spelling "Ess Ess" for "SS" signals Ben's lack of understanding and also exemplifies that these disjointed references have subjective, decontextualized meanings for Ben. The words "Ess Ess" point to Ben's distressing memory of being forced by his father, who suffers from pathological eating habits, to eat a rotten apple that he had thrown away. As Barbara Estrin writes, the text here stages "the memory of force-feeding as inverse response to food deprivation during the war" (286).

Michaels deepens her exploration of visual versus verbal testimony by making a family photograph a crucial nexus in Ben's life-story. Two months after his parents' death, Ben finds a photograph showing his parents with two small children. Only then does he find out that he had a brother and sister, Hannah and Paul, who did not survive. It is this photograph that finally disrupts the familial "code of silence," revealing the family's darkest secret. Michaels's use of a photograph to convey the unspeakable secret is pertinent; it resonates with Hirsch's discussion of family photographs as playing a vital role in constructions and self-constructions of the family. According to Hirsch, family photographs traditionally function as "an instrument of its togetherness" (*Family Frames* 7) but also reveal the family's "contingency," its threatened position "in the postmodern moment as fractured and subject to conflicting historical and ideological scripts" (10, 13). For Ben, this specific photograph embodies the core of his family's rupture: "We think of photographs as the captured past. But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future" (251-52). The meaning of this photograph transcends the function of "captur[ing]" the past; rather, it functions as the long-deferred signifier that Ben lacked for understanding his family. According to Hirsch, photographs are characterized by a "simultaneous presence of death and life," and photography tends to "bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant" (*Family Frames* 19-20). Michaels's depiction of the family photograph literalizes this idea: the photo brings to life his dead siblings, who had hovered over his own childhood as a ghostlike, ungraspable presence that manifested in his sense of "absence," and it simultaneously evokes the irretrievability of their death. At the same time, the photograph brings to life his dead parents' past and painfully evokes the sense of an irretrievably lost future.

The novel further underscores the powerful impact of this family photograph by making it the catalyst of a double revelation. When Ben shows the photograph to his wife Naomi, she confesses that she has known the family secret for a long time, albeit without realizing it was a secret for Ben: "My parents, experts in secrets, kept the most important one from me to their last breath. Yet, in a masterful stroke, my mother decided to tell Naomi. The daughter she longed for" (252). For Ben, the painful sense of being excluded is exacerbated by the discovery that his wife was allowed a kind of intimacy with his parents that they denied him. Ultimately, the text constructs the parents' traumatic past, and especially the traumatic loss of their first two children, as the barrier that relentlessly distances them from their third child – whom they did not name, hoping that he might thereby be spared death: "Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely 'ben' – the Hebrew word for son" (253). This refusal to name may be read as symptomatic of the parents' larger failure to fully recognize and engage with their third child. However, through its biblical resonances, the name acquires additional layers of meaning: Rachel, the biblical Benjamin's mother, first named him "Ben-Oni," which means "son of my suffering"

(Oded and Hirschberg 354).[12] Hence, Ben's parents' decision to name their son "Ben" could also be read as symbolizing their attempt to protect their youngest child, to spare him not just from death but also from pain and suffering – in fact, their refusal to share their stories may be part of this urge to protect.

In spite of these protective gestures and omissions, Ben's story dramatizes how powerfully a child can be affected by his or her parents' traumatic past. It forcefully evokes the idea of intergenerational transmission of trauma, which is the notion that "massive trauma shapes the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children" (Danieli, "Conclusions" 670). Studies of second-generation trauma suggest that parents' traumatic experiences sometimes impair their parenting abilities. These studies also note that harm is caused by dysfunctional "patterns of communication" about the traumatic past, ranging "from silence to overdisclosure" (Dekel and Goldblatt 285).[13] Ben's narrative highlights both the harmful impact of silence and the idea of internalization. Just how powerfully Ben is affected by his parents' traumatic past becomes clear when he reflects on his future child:

> Naomi says a child doesn't have to inherit fear. But who can separate fear from the body? My parents' past is mine molecularly. Naomi thinks she can stop the soldier who spat in my father's mouth from spitting into mine, through my father's blood. I want to believe she can rinse the fear from my mouth. But I imagine Naomi has a child and I can't stop the writing on its forehead as the child grows. (280)

This passage encapsulates Ben's anxiety about the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Ben implies that his father's traumas were passed on to him through the body – and in this sense, it did not matter much whether his parents talked or refused to talk about the past. He speculates that the names of his dead siblings might not actually have been enough to fill "the silence of [his] parents' apartment" (280). The text implies, however, that precisely this idea increases Ben's fear regarding his own children: through its close association with the physical, the intergenerational transmission of trauma emerges as a profound threat, as a biological phenomenon that entirely escapes his control, no matter what approach to the family's past he

12 "Ben-Oni" can also mean "son of my vigor," but "son of my suffering" is the meaning that is usually referred to in the context of Rachel and Benjamin, "as her labor was hard and she died in childbirth" (Oded and Hirschberg 354).

13 Rachel Dekel and Hadass Goldblatt outline the problems of parent-child attachment in the context of trauma as follows: "Fathers who have difficulty regulating distance/ closeness from their traumatic memories might also find it hard to properly regulate distance/ closeness from their children" (285). On intergenerational transmission in the context of the Holocaust, see for example Miri Scharf's "Long-Term Effects of Trauma."

will choose with his own children. In this sense, the trope of haunting takes on a particularly dark shape in Ben's narrative. While Jakob's narrative revolves around the idea that the living feel haunted by the dead and experience this haunting in the body, Ben's narrative links the theme of haunting to the disturbing idea that, inevitably, parents physically contaminate their children with the residue of trauma.

The novel's approach to second-generation trauma also needs to be read in the context of contemporary traumatic stress studies. Interestingly, Michaels's novel appeared two years before the publication of the *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. The handbook's editor, Yael Danieli, describes the collection of essays as "represent[ing] a pioneering effort to portray a comprehensive picture of the 'state of the art' in the study of multigenerational transmission of trauma" and as offering an overview of this "emerging field" in traumatic stress studies ("Conclusions" 669). The book forcefully claims that the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission has been proven to exist in a number of different contexts and calls for more research in the field. At the same time, the preface describes the handbook as a "profoundly disturbing book," presenting disconcerting insights: "It is bad enough to see images of children victimized today; that the same images may shape the lives of generations to come, sometimes unconsciously, often by design, is even harder to comprehend, and accept" (xvi). Part X of the handbook also presents initial findings of biological research into the intergenerational transmission of trauma, suggesting that survivors' children may both "*psychologically* and *biologically*" display an increased vulnerability to trauma and that "the 'intergenerational syndrome' may have a phenomenology and *neurobiology* similar to that of PTSD" ("Conclusions" 670).

This handbook, a milestone publication in the emerging field of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, is an important point of reference for understanding crucial aspects of *Fugitive Pieces*. Through Ben's narrative, Michaels evokes an area of trauma research that was just beginning to establish itself at the time she was writing and foregrounds a disturbing phenomenon that, as Danieli stresses, had long been treated as "secondary" ("Preface" xvi). In addition, by evoking the idea that intergenerational transmission of trauma happens not only through psychological but also through biological and genetic transfer mechanisms, the novel resonates with the tentative findings of a particularly new area within this emerging field – and these findings can also be said to represent some of the most disturbing claims of contemporary traumatic stress studies. It is noteworthy that Michaels's novel seems to be directly influenced by these psychiatric discourses.

Yet what strikes me as even more significant is that this novel, which examines the need of the living to feel connected to the dead (a key issue I will discuss in detail later in this chapter), also highlights unwanted and threatening connections with the dead. Ben's fear of passing on his parents' and his own traumas to his children arises from his anxiety about, to speak with Danieli, the "multigenerational legacies

of trauma" – an anxiety that haunts the reader throughout the text in, perhaps, more disturbing ways than Bella's ghost. The notion of physical transmission and contamination that unsettles Ben also resonates with an earlier passage in Jakob's narrative: "When the prisoners were forced to dig up the mass graves, the dead entered them through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation" (52). Hence, Michaels has both her autodiegetic narrators express the fear that the dead can physically enter the living against their will. The text, then, draws on a contentious idea debated in trauma studies – an idea that more recent studies have struggled to corroborate empirically[14] – and represents it through graphic and concrete bodily imagery. This profound anxiety about the dead as a source of contamination needs to be kept in mind as a dark and forceful counterpoint to Jakob's fantasies of incorporation and, more generally, to both Jakob's and Ben's attempts to find ways of connecting with the dead.

## HISTORICAL AWARENESS AND THE PRIMACY OF THE FAMILY

In spite of this anxiety about how the dead and their traumas impact the living, both Jakob and Ben, as well as several other characters in *Fugitive Pieces*, are concerned with finding ways of establishing meaningful connections to the dead. Jakob's rescuer Athos and Ben's wife Naomi are particularly prominent figures in this context, both of them having a special affinity for rituals of mourning. Athos devotedly teaches Jakob a general philosophy of remembering rather than forgetting, reminding him every day: "It is your future you are remembering" (21). Athos also instructs him in the art of memorial rites for the dead. Before Athos and Jakob leave Zakynthos, they perform a "ceremony" for Jakob's parents and for "the Jews of Crete, for all who have no one to recall their names" (75); they throw flowers into the sea and pour in water for the dead to drink. Athos underscores the importance of

14 In their overview article, Dekel and Goldblatt assert that "[w]hereas intergenerational transmission of different kinds of trauma is presently well established in both the empirical and clinical literature, […] the mechanisms by which trauma and/or its symptoms are transmitted are scarcely known and lack empirical base" (284). In addition to psychodynamic mechanisms of transmission, such as "projection" and "identification," the authors also mention the possibility of genetic forms of transmission, but with considerable hedging: "Recent research has introduced a new perspective *suggesting the likelihood* that PTSD is transferred genetically and is not solely a learned and/or psychological response to severe life-endangering experiences" (284, emphasis added).

the ceremony by insisting that "good deeds help the moral progress of the dead" (75) and by affirming that the dead may respond to the living through a "message" sent "on the wings of the birds" (76). The motif of flowers for the dead reappears again with Naomi, whose personal ritual of mourning consists of regular visits to Ben's parents' graves in order to bring them flowers.[15] Beyond that, Naomi believes: "The only thing you can do for the dead is to sing to them" (241). She has a special fascination with the ghetto lullabies that were made up by mothers when their children died – lullabies intended to be passed on to future generations.

Especially for Athos, rituals of mourning have both a personal and a general dimension, addressing loved ones and entire generations. This concern with a general philosophy of interconnectedness is a feature of the novel that has received considerable critical attention, often in connection with the novel's Jewish legacy. Meredith Criglington emphasizes that *Fugitive Pieces* draws on "Jewish conceptions of time and remembrance" as well as the "Hebrew tradition [that] encourages accountability to all our human ancestors as well as our descendants" ("The City" 146). As Annick Hillger asserts, the novel endorses a notion of "history which keeps the past open in memory of the future" (29);[16] accordingly, Jakob regards his memoirs as part of a long Jewish tradition of commemorating a collective past (see Bölling 188). Other critics focus on the novel's emphasis on interconnectedness in relation to issues of place: Dalia Kandiyoti maintains that, in *Fugitive Pieces*, places of exile open up possibilities of "partial belonging" for survivors. She argues that the survivor's consciousness is structured along a dynamics of "superimposition" with regard to place and time, allowing the survivor to place himself within a "multidimensional and relational geography" (316).[17] According to Coral Howells, it is this ability to relate to different times and places, to "mov[e] between cultures, languages and countries, never settling everywhere," that allows us to read Jakob as a "nomadic subject" (110).

15 The motif of flowers is taken up again in Michaels's second novel *The Winter Vault.* After her mother's death, Jean keeps tending her mother's garden, and her passion for botany and plants becomes an extended homage to her mother and a ritual of mourning that gives her the sense of remaining connected to her: "Then planting became a vocation. Suddenly I felt I could keep on loving her, that I could keep telling her things this way" (59).

16 Hillger's article provides a particularly well-founded discussion of the novel's Jewish legacies, relating *Fugitive Pieces* to Benjamin's notion of history, to kabbalism, as well as to the concept of "messianic time" (41).

17 Kandiyoti reads the novel as consciously departing from the notions of "absence-of-place" and "place-as-absence" that are common in Holocaust writing and as mapping out a decidedly "*topophilic* outlook" (302, 319).

Hence, many critics emphasize the ways in which the novel's protagonists, especially Jakob, display a powerful capacity for connecting with larger communities, with different times and places, with dead and future generations. To some extent, the novel may even be said to gesture towards the idea of "multidirectional memory" that Michael Rothberg considers crucial to cultural practices of remembering the Holocaust; he calls attention to the "dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (*Multidirectional* 11). Jakob's and Athos's roaming back and forth along the temporal axis of history and geology could be read as an example of what Rothberg calls a "multidirectional linkage of different eras and different histories" (278).[18] Jakob's narrative is indeed structured according to his physical dislocations, with most of the chapter divisions corresponding to his various dwelling places: Biskupin, Zakynthos, Athens, Toronto, and Idhra. Through Jakob, but also through Ben, the novel weaves a complex web that links these different places and their histories. While the protagonists' historical awareness and their sense of connections that reach across time and place are important aspects of the text's approach to history, memory, and identity, I argue that *Fugitive Pieces* anchors this philosophy of "multidirectional" interconnectedness to the personal and the familial. I contend that Jakob, especially, uses history as a means of coping with memory, that is, he focuses on the collective past in an effort to endure his personal traumatic past.

During his time in hiding on Zakynthos, Jakob eagerly shares Athos's passion for history and archaeology in an attempt to escape or be distracted from his traumatic past. Jakob explains his passion for prehistoric objects as follows: "To go back a year or two was impossible, absurd. To go back millennia – ah! That was . . . nothing" (30). The text suggests, however, that Jakob finds it increasingly difficult to keep the historical separate from the personal. For example, he incorporates processes of mourning for a collective into his personal mourning for his dead fam-

18 Rothberg conceptualizes his notion of "multidirectionality" as follows: "I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative" (*Multidirectional* 3). Rothberg's conceptualization of memory as multidirectional is also inherently political: he challenges the idea of the uniqueness and singularity of the Holocaust and stresses that remembrance in one historical context may well encourage remembrance in other contexts: "[T]he emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the emergence of other histories – some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later, such as the Algerian War of Independence" (6). The multidirectional linking of different places and historical contexts that occurs in *Fugitive Pieces* is even more prominent in Michaels's *The Winter Vault*, where she explores issues of trauma and loss, of destruction and reconstruction in three contexts: the Aswan Dam in Egypt, the St. Lawrence Seaway in Canada, and Warsaw after WWII.

ily when he is confronted with the horrific stories of the Jews of Crete drowning at sea. He deeply empathizes with these Jewish victims, vividly imagining their drowning. Yet this tragedy soon mingles with his own familial tragedy, giving way to persistent visions of his family dying at sea: "These nightmares, in which my parents and my sister drowned with the Jews of Crete, continued for years, continued long after we'd moved to Toronto" (44). Furthermore, a particularly powerful example of how Jakob blends stories of suffering with his family history is in the chapter "Vertical Time," which is focused on Athos and Jakob's stay in Athens. The chapter contains a section about Athos and his friends Kostas and Daphne sharing memories of the awful events that happened in Greece during the Nazi occupation, while Jakob is present as a silent listener. Jakob's listening, however, is punctuated by powerful intrusive memories of his traumatic past. The text switches back and forth between fragments of the adults' stories and Jakob's thoughts:

"We heard sirens, anti-aircraft guns, yet the church bells kept ringing for early Mass."
. . . When they pushed my father, he was still sitting in his chair, I could tell afterwards, by the way he fell.
"Our neighbour Aleko came to the back door […]. It wasn't until evening, when we saw the flags ourselves, and the flag over the Acropolis, that we wept."
. . . I could tell by the way he fell. (63)

As this passage exemplifies, Jakob's response to these stories is dominated by his personal traumas; he seems unable to relate to them except in a freely associative way, returning compulsively to his family. Moreover, as Jakob listens, he becomes increasingly absorbed in his own memories; the narrators of the stories he hears are not identified anymore, their utterances increasingly represented as if spoken by disembodied voices. The text signals that for Jakob, the collective tragedy of the Greeks fades into the background, and his own traumatic past takes centre stage.

The complex relationship between collective and individual remembering, between history and memory, is foregrounded even more in Jakob's obsession with the moment of death. He states, "[h]istory and memory share events; that is, they share time and space. Every moment is two moments" (138). He then imagines specific moments from the perspectives of both history and memory, compulsively returning to scenes of death: "I seek out the horror which, like history itself, can't be stanched. I read everything I can. My eagerness for detail is offensive" (139). The text repeatedly implies that Jakob's obsession with history and historical details originates from his crisis of memory and crisis of witnessing: he reads historical and biographical accounts of death in the hope of somehow filling the disturbing void surrounding Bella's death. A similar mechanism operates for Ben: his increasing passion for biography, which also manifests itself in his research on weather and biography, may be read as an attempt to compensate for his incomplete knowl-

edge of his parents' life-stories. Yet his quest for knowledge is less focused and specific than Jakob's, who explicitly explains that his extensive research into death is an attempt to "remain close to Bella" (167). In other words, Jakob instrumentalizes history for the sake of memory. Interestingly, he assigns memory a stronger ethical value than history: "History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers" (138). Hence, the text signals that while Jakob is deeply interested in history, his ultimate concern is memory. This foregrounding of memory (as well as the familial and the personal) within the novel's discourse on interconnectedness, relationality, and empathy needs to be recognized as a core aspect of the novel. While Criglington is right to claim that "Athos and Jakob transcend racial, linguistic and national boundaries by making connections across time and space" ("The City" 145), *Fugitive Pieces* nevertheless powerfully asserts the primacy of the family, highlighting the devastating impact of broken family connections and the desperate quest for reconnections – even if this quest is embedded in the context of larger communities.

## WRITING TOWARDS "TRANSMEMORY" AND TESTIMONY

The quest to (re)connect with lost family members is a key theme enacted throughout *Fugitive Pieces* in multiple ways, and this quest, as I want to show, goes far beyond the rituals of mourning mentioned earlier. A particularly important example is Jakob's desire for a sense of intersubjective connectedness with his dead sister, but variations of this motif also appear in his response to Athos's death and in the way Ben, in turn, attempts to relate to Jakob after his death. To some extent, these patterns of reaction evoke the notion of postmemory, yet they represent a different phenomenon, which I want to call "transmemory." Postmemory mainly refers to memories of massive trauma that are transmitted from survivors to their children, who have not experienced these traumatic experiences themselves but, through their parents, feel their powerful impact and affective force. However, I suggest that a distinction should be drawn between postmemory as an intergenerational structure of remembering that happens without the subject's active involvement (i.e., not only through narratives of the past but also through posttraumatic symptoms) and transmemory as a condition *desired* by the subject. Transmemory, then, arises from the subject's longing for a state of connectedness with a loved one, even after his or her death, through transmitted or imagined memories. While postmemory mainly refers to the involuntary transmission of a severely traumatic past, transmemory encompasses a broader sense of connectedness, one that may involve both memories and thoughts and traumatic as well as non-traumatic memories. Transmemory also aims at overcoming the sense of belatedness inherent in postmemory, striving for

the illusion of intersubjectivity and bilateral transmission – a desire that is more directly graspable when the longing for connectedness is directed not towards a dead loved one but towards a living loved one. I call this phenomenon (which I discuss in the next section of this chapter) "intermemory," that is, a state of intersubjective connectedness based on a mutual empathetic sharing of memories that reaches so far as to create a sense of the other's memories being assimilated into the self.

Transmemory arises from the subject's desire for connectedness, but *Fugitive Pieces* also represents it as having a strong ethical component. As Criglington points out, Michaels conceptualizes memory "as an ethical act that is located in the individual and collective conscience" ("The City" 141). Jakob's and Ben's quests for transmemory are, then, intimately connected both to a *desire* to remember and the sense of an *ethical duty* to remember. Jakob's quest to penetrate into the void surrounding Bella's death is driven not only by the need to "remain close" to her (167) but also by a sense of responsibility for bearing witness to a death that seems to foreclose testimony. This double motivation for transmemory also applies to Jakob regarding Athos and Ben regarding Jakob, and in both cases, transmemory is closely connected to acts of reading and writing.

Both Jakob and Ben strive for a sense of connectedness that transcends death. After Athos's death, Jakob longs to gain access to his memories and thoughts – but also to feel physically close to him. Indeed, for many nights after his death, Jakob sleeps on the floor of Athos's study. Reading Athos's writing and spending as much time as possible in his place allows Jakob to feel a sense of both mental and physical connectedness: "Working in his study, alone now in our flat, I felt Athos's presence so strongly I could smell his pipe, I could feel his hand on my shoulder" (119). A few years later, Jakob visits Athos's family home on the Greek island Idhra and searches through his old library. This visit can be read as part of Jakob's quest for transmemory, as part of his effort to feel connected to Athos by letting himself be absorbed both by his memories and ideas and by a place deeply inscribed with personal meaning.

Jakob's quest is refigured in the second part of the novel in Ben's quest for a sense of connectedness with Jakob, whom he seems to have chosen as his spiritual surrogate father. Ben's desire for transmemory can be read as an attempt to compensate for the precarious kind of postmemory he experienced through his father, a type of postmemory transmitted not through narratives and stories but only through symptoms of suffering and oppressive silence. Even though Ben only met Jakob once, he displays a strong need to feel connected to the dead poet through transmemory. Jakob's visit to Athos's family house is, then, paralleled by Ben's search for Jakob's notebooks in Greece. In Jakob's house, Ben is deeply affected by the sight of the poet's abandoned objects and feels that the house is "drenched with [his] presence" (265). Ben writes: "I sat on your terrace and looked at the sea. I sat at your table and looked at the sky. I felt the power of your place speaking to my

body" (266). Once again, the text evokes a type of intersubjective memory that is transmitted not only through the mind but also through places and through the body. Moreover, the recurring figure of address (i.e., the way Ben repeatedly addresses Jakob directly as if he were still alive) linguistically and narratively enacts Ben's desire for connectedness – and the chapter titles of Ben's narrative, which repeat Jakob's titles, further underscore this desire.

However, *Fugitive Pieces* conveys that both protagonists' quests for transmemory are motivated not only by their personal longing and their psychology of mourning but also by a sense of ethical responsibility. After Athos's death, Jakob devotedly engages in the task of completing Athos's unfinished work. As Donna Coffey observes, "Jakob's true ritual for Athos is not the burying of the ashes, but the completion of Athos's book *Bearing False Witness*" (35). This "ritual" can be understood as a form of vicarious testimony; it functions a way of preserving and transmitting Athos's work, which Athos himself had regarded as part of his ethical duty towards his colleagues who died at Biskupin (after he had left to take Jakob to Greece). Athos's inscription to *Bearing False Witness* reads: "Murder steals from a man his future. It steals from him his own death. But it must not steal from him his life" (120). Hence, Athos strives to bear witness to his colleagues' lives and their work in a responsible rather than "false" way,[19] and it is this ethical responsibility that Jakob shoulders for the sake of both Athos and Athos's colleagues.

In its exploration of vicarious testimonies, *Fugitive Pieces* addresses the problematics of speaking about and testifying to one's experiences of damage and injury that Jean-François Lyotard discusses in *The Differend*. In this context, Lyotard's definition of a "wrong" is especially relevant:

> This is what a wrong [*tort*] would be: a damage [*dommage*] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase itself is deprived of authority […]. In all of these cases, to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others, and in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal. (5).

Hence, for Lyotard, the defining feature of the "victim" is precisely that he or she does not have the means to prove the damage incurred (9). *Fugitive Pieces* engages with these concerns about victims and wrongs by featuring several victims who are "deprived of life" and thus lose the means to prove what happened to them: Jakob's

19 See also Hillger, who similarly asserts that for Athos, "to bear witness is a moral responsibility he feels towards those who either have not had the opportunity to speak or whose testimony has been erased" (31).

parents, Bella, and Athos's colleagues are particularly prominent examples. Yet Michaels's novel explores how survivors take on the responsibility for the act of testifying on behalf of the victims who can no longer do so – this is what Jakob attempts on behalf of his parents and sister and Athos on behalf of his colleagues. *Fugitive Pieces* suggests that these acts of vicarious testimony may be at least one way of addressing the wrongs that happened and of bringing the damage "to the knowledge of others," in Lyotard's terms (9). Although these victims cannot speak for themselves, for Athos and Jakob, the text implies, to speak for victims to whom they feel intimately connected can be an important way of addressing damage and "wrongs" in an ethically responsible way.

The theme of witnessing and testimony that is repeatedly foregrounded in Jakob's narrative also reappears in Ben's narrative, which, in fact, repeats some of the patterns of bearing witness. Ben's extensive reading of Jakob's poetry parallels Jakob's reading of Athos's writing, and Ben's biographical research on Jakob can, like Jakob's self-imposed mission of completing Athos's book, be read as an act of testimony building on an earlier writer's testimonial writing. Although Jakob's poems are imaginative rather than historical and archaeological writing, they are, as Ben recognizes, infused with a strong ethical imperative. As Hillger writes, Jakob's *Groundwork* "signals the need to address the injustices of the past, rather than dismissing them as casualties of mankind gone berserk, so that the ground for a better future may be provided" (36). Like Jakob writing for Athos, Ben strives not only for a deep understanding but also for the perpetuation of Jakob's writing. Through its three male protagonists, then, the novel reveals its profound concern with acts of testimony and processes of bearing witness, and it is through this extensive negotiation of witnessing that *Fugitive Pieces* expresses the commitment to the documentary, the historical, and the referential that Rothberg in *Traumatic Realism* describes as characteristic of fictional representations of the Holocaust. The novel displays a highly self-reflexive engagement with the "persistence of the problem of reference and documentation," which is, as Rothberg asserts, especially powerful in the context of the Holocaust (99). Employing a self-reflexive, fragmentary, and poetic narrative style that departs from the conventions of narrative realism even more radically than Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, *Fugitive Pieces* nevertheless retains a commitment to the real and the referential through this emphasis on testimony.

Testimony is depicted as especially complex in Jakob's case. For him, writing as a quest for both transmemory and testimonial remembrance extends beyond his writing on behalf of Athos. As Coffey stresses, Jakob dedicates his poetry to his dead loved ones, and his notebooks also revolve around Bella (35). As discussed earlier, his urge to feel connected to his family beyond death is particularly intense regarding his sister. It is essential, then, that during his processes of mourning and remembering Bella, Jakob chooses a kind of writing that is different from the writing he pursues for Athos – for her, he produces different forms of life writing and

fictional writing as well as hybrid forms. He begins by writing short stories, all "in one sense or another, about hiding" (134), and then increasingly turns to poetry. Finally, "half a century" after he first arrived on Zakynthos (18), he writes his memoirs. All these different forms of writing are represented as means of re-confronting and working through the past.

The novel stages Jakob's attempts to write about the moment of Bella's death as a kind of watershed within his processes of writing. As Gordon Bölling emphasizes, Jakob finally gives up the hope of getting any closer to the moment of Bella's death through history and instead resorts to imagination (193). He describes this moment as follows: "I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I blaspheme by imagining" (167). Jakob goes on to imagine in detail the moment when Bella died in the gas chamber; he minutely describes the reactions of the bodies of the dying as well as Bella's thoughts. Yet Jakob also articulates a strong sense of uneasiness about his own act of imagination:

> Some gave birth while dying in the chamber. Mothers were dragged from the chamber with new life half-emerged from their bodies. Forgive me, you who were born and died without being given names. Forgive this blasphemy, of choosing philosophy over the brutalism of fact. (168)

Jakob here expresses his anxiety about the ethics of using imagination to take him where historical facts cannot go, about whether or not he is tampering with the sanctity of death. Nevertheless, the text implies that for Jakob, this is an extremely precious moment, a moment of "pure belief" reached by imagining that Bella might have turned to "faith" as she was dying – a moment that he never could have reached through the "*brutalism* of fact" (167-68, emphasis added). For Jakob, this moment of conciliatory transmemory functions as a moment of healing, providing him with a sense of redemption. Ultimately, however, Jakob's feeling of ambivalence about this moment cannot be fully resolved – and perhaps deliberately so.

This key passage raises contentious issues about the ethics of testimony and the value of imaginative as opposed to fact-oriented approaches to the Holocaust. These issues are also relevant to the poetics and politics of Michaels's novel as a whole, and they have in fact played an important role in the scholarly response to *Fugitive Pieces*. Several critics refer to Adorno's famous statement that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" and read Michaels's novel as participating in more general discourses about what forms of literary expression may or may not be appropriate in the face of massive trauma.[20] According to Susan Gubar, *Fugitive Pieces* voices a "defense of poetry after Auschwitz" ("Empathic Identification" 251). And it is precisely the novel's lyricism, or more generally, the way the novel "aestheti-

20 See for example Nicola King's "Remembering the Holocaust" 96-98.

cizes the Shoah" (Coffey 28), that has provoked discussion and controversy. Through its "lyric voice and engagement with the pastoral," as Coffey further maintains, the novel departs from earlier modes of Holocaust writing (31). While an emphasis on fragmentariness and challenges to narrative order, coherence, and linearity are recurrent features of late-twentieth-century trauma narratives,[21] it is the novel's combination of the fragmentary with lyricism and poetic beauty that challenges established boundaries of trauma and Holocaust representation. For example, Kertzer stresses that she, a survivor's child herself, is reluctant to share readers' determination "to find in this text a celebratory discourse" and feels "resistance to readers' praise of the novel's 'beauty'" (195-96).

Kertzer's uneasiness about finding "beauty" in *Fugitive Pieces* relates to crucial issues about the poetics and politics of representation that scholars working on trauma grapple with. Dominick LaCapra expresses a critical attitude towards trauma narratives that are determined by "an imaginary, illusory hope for totalization, full closure, and redemptive meaning" (*Representing* 192-93), narratives that, as he puts it in *Writing Trauma, Writing History*, "seek facile uplift, harmonization, or closure" (78). According to LaCapra, such trauma narratives tend to elicit a problematic kind of reader response, one characterized not by "empathic unsettlement" but by a sense of consolation and redemption. Does *Fugitive Pieces* allow, or even encourage, its readers to respond to the text in this way, as Kertzer's emphasis on "beauty" seems to suggest?

One important argument in defence of the novel involves its self-reflexivity. Coffey maintains, for example, that Michaels's reinvention of the pastoral is heavily "self-conscious"; Michaels creates a new kind of pastoral that can be called "traumatic pastoral," which, unlike traditional pastoral elegies, does not seek "to fill the hole with new life" but "attempts to keep the hole visible" (30, 33).[22] The novel's self-reflexivity, which aligns it with both trauma fiction and postmodern fiction, is enacted textually through its structural strategy of combining two interrelated narratives, a fact that Bölling also highlights.[23] Ben, the reader of Jakob's

21 For a discussion of narrative features characteristic of trauma fiction, see for example Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* and Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question*.

22 Coffey also discusses in detail how the novel's pastoral, for example Athos's "lyric geology," may be seen as showing unsettling affinities with Nazi ideology; however, through its "traumatic pastoral," the novel consciously departs from Nazi appropriations of the pastoral tradition (40, 42-43).

23 Bölling offers a detailed reading of the complex interrelations between Jakob's and Ben's narratives, highlighting, for example, the parallels between the narratives' beginnings and endings (177-78). Bölling also suggests that Ben could be drawing directly on Jakob's memoirs in the writing of his narrative, a reading that can be supported by the fact that Ben is the one who finds Jakob's memoirs.

writing, addresses Jakob in his own narrative, thereby assigning the dead poet the precarious position of listener and witness. More generally, the novel can be read as a self-reflexive meditation on the psychological and ethical potential of different forms of writing in response to trauma and the Holocaust; it insistently calls attention to acts of writing and reading, of witnessing and testimonial transmission. Nicola King warns us of the danger of "fixing" that is inherent in both non-fictional and fictional narratives of the Holocaust: "If memorials, histories and even survivors' testimonies run the risk of totalising, fixing, 'memorialising', so do fictional narratives or other cultural representations" ("Remembering" 97). *Fugitive Pieces*, it seems to me, alerts us to the danger of "fixing" at a metalevel: it suggests that we should refrain from defining one genre of writing as *the* appropriate response to trauma. In other words, the novel can be read as a plea for diversity and hybridity, demonstrating how different types of writing – historical and archaeological writing, biography, fiction, poetry – can function as ways of bearing witness and as means of working through.

While *Fugitive Pieces* and *A Thousand Acres* both employ strategies of postmodern self-reflexivity, the two novels follow different directions in their explorations of processes of representation, narration, and construction of meaning. *A Thousand Acres* undertakes a typical postmodern project: rewriting a canonical text, here Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in order to challenge "grand narratives" and subvert literary and ideological scripts. In contrast, *Fugitive Pieces* does not respond explicitly to one specific intertext; rather, it explores the politics of representation by examining critically how different genres operate in terms of historical documentation and personal constructions of meaning. What the texts do have in common, however, is that they both challenge totalizing and unifying narratives or histories. Smiley's novel is an attempt to let marginalized voices speak (women who have been branded as evil), while Michaels's novel resists totalizing gestures regarding norms of aesthetic representation and responses to history. It explores the history of the Holocaust through an assembly of multiple individual narratives embedded in the two main narrators' stories. *Fugitive Pieces*, then, approaches history through memory, through little rather than grand narratives, thereby expressing a vision based on multi-perspectivism and fragmentariness.

Michaels's decision to admit the lyrical into her novel, both through the text's lyricism and by making her main protagonist-narrator a poet (like herself), can be read as a deliberate and self-conscious participation in debates about Holocaust poetry. Several critics note that for a long time, Holocaust critics were sceptical of Holocaust poetry, in contrast to Holocaust fiction.[24] However, more recently, Antony Rowland has insisted that the "critical opposition between poetry and testi-

24 See for example Rowland and Eaglestone's "Holocaust Poetry" and Gubar's *Poetry after Auschwitz*.

mony" needs to be "unravelled" in order to explore how poetry can function as testimony (487). As Rowland and Eaglestone assert, "[i]f Adorno's maxim still haunts post-Holocaust debates about poetry […], perhaps the time has come to break the spell" ("Holocaust Poetry" 5). *Fugitive Pieces* anticipates this plea, implicitly claiming that the lyrical deserves its place in Holocaust writing. It suggests that while some writers may find scientific writing particularly appropriate for their acts of testimony (like Athos), others (like Jakob) may need to turn to different kinds of autobiographical, fictional, or lyrical writing.

The idea that Michaels's novel encourages us to see how individuals' generic choices reflect their needs is also supported in its examination of the emotional freight that different languages carry. Jakob, whose native tongue is Polish and who learns Greek from Athos, finally discovers that English offers the kind of "food" he hungers for (92), that is, it is the language that, for him, facilitates writing about his traumatic past. The metaphor of language as food, which appears several times, also illustrates how the novel conceptualizes processes of remembering as intimately connected to the body.[25] English is figured as a kind of food that Jakob can swallow easily because it comes without memories: "[L]ater, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory" (101). In other words, English functions as a linguistic and physical survival tool for Jakob, as a medium with a protective function, allowing him to retain a certain distance from his past: unlike Polish, Greek, or Hebrew, English is not inscribed with his past traumas. In this way, language is another integral aspect of the novel's self-reflexivity.

However, is this pervasive self-reflexivity enough to erase ethical concerns about the novel's practice of expressing severe trauma in a register of poetic beauty? The novel's multi-layered self-reflexivity does convey the author's critical awareness and, simultaneously, encourage readers' critical responses. Yet, in certain passages, the text can indeed be said to employ a lyricism that distracts us from the traumatic horror and the suffering underlying the descriptions. In addition, the novel's visions of transmemory and intermemory come close to expressing the kind of "uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios" LaCapra warns against (*Representing* 78). To illustrate this danger, I want to return to the passage where Jakob imagines Bella's death in the gas chamber. In some ways, this passage is profoundly self-reflexive; the narrator himself problematizes his imaginative testimony by repeatedly framing it as an act of "blasphemy." The text thereby calls attention to the problematic aspects of the act of witnessing performed here. Based on an ex-

25 The image of memory being processed through the body and, specifically, through the mouth reappears in Michaels's poem entitled "Last Night's Moon": "All the history in the bone-embedded hills / of your body. Everything your mouth remembers" (*Skin Divers* 19).

ample from Primo Levi, Rowland argues that there are texts that enact the "concern that it is impossible to witness properly" for someone, while at the same time "engag[ing] with the impossible necessity of trying to do so" (501). And this is precisely what this passage seems to do: it expresses the painful sense of the impossibility of witnessing that has haunted Jakob for so many years and that has finally become unbearable. In other words, this moment marks the culmination of Jakob's quest for transmemory with his dead sister and, simultaneously, constitutes the moment when he experiences with particular intensity this sense of connectedness. The subject's pressing need for transmemory overrides his ethical concerns about the alleged primacy of fact and the sanctity of death. However, as Colin Davis asserts, it is crucial to remember that we "do not participate in or co-own the other's trauma" (20); giving an account of another's trauma should not result in the appropriation of that trauma. In this light, King does have a point in claiming that this passage is "presumptuous" and strikes a "false note" ("Remembering" 106). While Jakob's psychological need is comprehensible, his gesture towards appropriating or "co-owning" his sister's trauma and "participating" in her death, in King's terminology, nevertheless seems problematic.[26]

One reason why the passage retains a disturbing quality in spite of its self-reflexivity is that Jakob's moment of transmemory abruptly shifts from the horrors of the scene to a dream of hope, faith, and redemption. What is at stake for Jakob is his pressing need for consolation, which turns out to be even more powerful than his need for a sense of connectedness with Bella. Hence, this passage can be read not only as a powerful testament to how intense the need for transmemory can get but also as a manifestation of the more ethically unsettling aspects of transmemory. Throughout the novel, the healing and ethical functions of writing are closely connected: the text suggests that writing out of a sense of responsibility towards others contributes significantly to its healing potential. Yet, in this moment, the individual's needs override the ethical demands of bearing witness.

## LONGING FOR INTERMEMORY AND A PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

Transmemory is a key theme in both Jakob's and Ben's narratives. Its counterpart, which also plays a central role throughout the text, is intermemory, the longing for a

26 Imagining another's death is a recurring theme in trauma fiction. For example, in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, the autodiegetic narrator, a nine-year-old boy named Oskar Schell, develops an obsession with his father's death (he died in 9/11). Similar to Jakob regarding Bella's death, Oskar is haunted by his lack of knowledge about how his father died and desperately tries to fill the void.

state of profound connectedness not with a dead but with a living loved one. As structures of desire, transmemory and intermemory are closely related, but intermemory differs fundamentally from transmemory in terms of its basis for reciprocity: its connection does not have to transcend the "thin wall between the living and the dead" (31), while transmemory involves precisely the desire to remove this "wall." It is pertinent how Jakob envisions transmemory in terms of an actual, bilateral "conversation": "All the afternoon conversations that winter on Idhra, with Athos or with Bella, while it grew dark. As in any conversation, sometimes they answered me, sometimes they didn't" (165). The dead, Jakob insinuates, respond whenever they want to respond. In a sense, then, transmemory also figures as the (desire for the) continuation of intermemory after a loved one's death. At the same time, the novel repeatedly depicts the desire for intermemory as particularly intense in response to trauma. It enacts the longing for intermemory primarily with regard to two kinds of relationships, love relationships and family relationships, with a particular focus on surrogate or adoptive parents and children – which further reinforces the text's emphasis on the personal and familial.

Within its depiction of family relationships, *Fugitive Pieces* highlights the close connection between Jakob and Athos, his rescuer and surrogate parent. As Jakob writes, to "share a hiding place, physical or psychological, is as intimate as love" (20). This growing intimacy emerging out of their shared experience of hiding builds on both mental and physical connections. Jakob emphasizes their endless hours of talking, of learning each other's language, and of undertaking mental excursions together into history and geology. Athos insists that Jakob should never forget his past and, at the same time, shares his own family history with him, showing him, for example, the sea charts he inherited from his father and drawing for him "his great-grandfather's trading routes" (20). Jakob soon recognizes his surrogate father's offer of intermemory: "Even as a child, even as my blood-past was drained from me, I understood that if I were strong enough to accept it, I was being offered a second history" (20). Yet their connectedness transcends memory in its more narrow sense; it includes a sense of physical closeness. Jakob stresses his urge to be physically near Athos, refusing to sleep in his own bed and instead "lay[ing] at his feet like a cat" (21). The text depicts a state of intersubjectivity that both Jakob and Athos cling to in their attempts to survive and live on. Athos insistently tells Jakob: "We must carry each other" (22).

The novel's detailed depiction of the relationship between Athos and Jakob also illustrates its concern with broken family lines and the need to (re-)create familial bonds. Through Athos's caring for Jakob, moreover, the novel foregrounds the theme of adoption. Barbara Estrin reads Michaels's narrative of adoption as a foundling story, a form with a long literary heritage. She maintains, however, that Michaels departs from the traditional patterns of the genre by focusing on the period of adoption rather than on the final reintegration of the child into its own fam-

ily (277-80). In this way, as Estrin further emphasizes, the novel departs from an "essentialist reading of parenthood" (280),[27] highlighting that parenthood is not necessarily a question of biology.[28] The novel enacts the motif of adoption in further variations, especially in its depiction of how Ben's parents – who struggle to build a healthy relationship with their biological son – emotionally adopt their daughter-in-law. In turn, Ben can be said to choose the poet Jakob as his imaginary adoptive father. The spiritual son-father relationship between the two narrators Ben and Jakob has biblical echoes: in Genesis, Benjamin is the youngest son of the patriarch Jacob, the second son of Isaac (Gen. 35:16-18). This biblical allusion could be seen as adding a religious dimension to the spiritual adoption performed implicitly by Ben. However, in spite of a number of religious and biblical allusions, God, as Barbara Korte asserts, is only ever a "vague" or "fugitive" presence in Michaels's novel, and religion seems to offer little consolation (522). The scenes of adoption in Ben's narrative, then, complicate the positive, reassuring vision of adoption that Jakob's narrative seems to express. Even in Jakob's case, as Coffey stresses, adoption is essentially built on suffering: "Jakob's ties to his biological family do matter deeply, and he spends the rest of his life mourning them" (37). Yet adoption provides Jakob with a loving father and with the chance to gain a "second history" (20). In Ben's narrative, by contrast, it is the disruption and failure of the biological family that give rise to attempts at emotional and imaginary forms of adoption. Hence, the novel's representation of adoptions is characterized by a deep ambivalence: it strikes a hopeful note by showing how an orphan like Jakob can build a close relationship with a surrogate parent; at the same time, adoption, especially regarding Ben and his parents, remains inextricably bound up with an emphasis on how deeply familial disruptions affect individuals.

One key feature that these different adoptive relationships have in common is that they rely heavily on connections built on memory. This applies not only to Athos and Jakob but also to Ben's parents' adoption of Naomi: the extent of their intimacy manifests itself in their decision to entrust Naomi, the "daughter [Ben's mother] longed for" (252), with their bleakest memory, the death of their first two children. However, *Fugitive Pieces* enacts the theme of intersubjective connectedness not only through such adoptive relationships but also, perhaps even more strongly, through love relationships. The text stages memory, especially the intense engagement with each other's memories, as a core aspect of a fulfilled love relationship. Intermemory emerges as the most precious "gift" lovers give each other,

27 Through its de-essentialist view of family relationships, the novel, as Estrin highlights, also undercuts Nazi ideology's "preoccupation with blood ties" (276).

28 As both Estrin and Gubar suggest, Athos can be read not only as a father figure but also as a mother figure. Gubar argues that the depiction of how Athos rescues the lost child (i.e., by carrying Jakob under his coat) evokes "a sort of male pregnancy" (255).

an idea voiced explicitly by Avery, the male protagonist in Michaels's second novel *The Winter Vault*, once he believes he has lost his wife Jean to another:

> Jean's childhood, her web of memory and unconscious memory, had once been her gift to him. Now it had been given to another. This was the loss that overwhelmed him the most. […] Of all the privileges of love, this seemed to him to be the most affecting: to witness, in another, memories so deep they remain ineffable, glimpsed only by an intuition, by an illogical preference or an innocent desire, by a sorrow that arises out of seeming nothingness, an inexplicable longing. (329)

The intimacy in a love relationship is here explicitly defined in terms of memory.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, the importance of being allowed to "witness" the depths of a lover's memory is performed structurally through a parallel constellation of female characters in Jakob's and Ben's narratives: in each, there is a lover who facilitates access to memory and one who acts as an obstacle to remembering. Jakob's first wife Alex, a lively, even restless young woman, wants Jakob to forget. When he sits in the dark, absorbed in the past, she always turns on the lights – a symbolic gesture that expresses the psychological dynamics between them (144). Jakob recognizes that Alex is trying to help him, but he perceives the pressure to forget, which to him is a form of "brainwashing," as a profound threat to his sense of self: "[E]ach time a memory or a story slinks away, it takes more of me with it" (144). The section on Jakob and Alex demonstrates how much survivors perceive memories, as painful as they may be, as an integral part of their identity and sense of self. Alex, then, demonstrates *ex negativo* Jakob's powerful need both for memory and a sense of intermemory, functioning as a figure of contrast to Jakob's second wife, Michaela, who actively facilitates processes of remembering and mourning. Ben's narrative echoes the contrast between these two female characters: his wife Naomi parallels Michaela, while the American girl Petra, with whom Ben has an affair in Greece, parallels Alex. Petra represents the physical and sexual, while Naomi embodies a connectedness based on shared memory. Through his affair with Petra, Ben comes to recognize the significance of the kind of intermemory that connects him to his wife – "I know what she makes of her memories. I know what she remembers. I know her memories" (285) – and he ruefully and longingly returns to her.

This near-symmetrical structure of relationships, however, seems a bit schematic or even clichéd, and it may also be said to entail a problematic representation of women. Criglington asserts that the female characters are "figured either as vessels of or impediments to memory," and they are reduced to the functions they serve for the male protagonists, while at the same time subjected to an "erotic objectification" that assigns them a "diminished sense of agency" ("Urban Undressing"). The novel indeed perpetuates stereotypical images of the male lover as an explorer of the female body: Jakob compares his "roam[ing]" of Michaela's body to

the act of "an animal outlining territory" (180); Ben, even more strikingly, describes his wife's body as "so familiar a map, folded so often at the same places, tearing along the folds" (256) – so he eagerly explores every line of the yet unknown territory of Petra's body (276). Yet the novel does imply that traditional images of exploration are here reconceptualized: what is at stake is not primarily the desire for erotic pleasure and sexual gratification and possession; rather, the exploration of the lover's body is depicted as part of the male trauma victim's quest for intersubjective connectedness. In the same way the text assigns the body a key role in Jakob's desire for connectedness with the dead (notably, through his fantasies of incorporation and in his desire for closeness with Athos), it also highlights the body in the quest for intermemory in love relationships. Michaela's body enables Jakob to finally feel a sense of home, and he perceives the transfer of memories as happening literally through the body: "I cross over the boundary of skin into Michaela's memories, into her childhood" (184). Nevertheless, even if what is at stake is a quest for memory, a certain uneasiness about the instrumentalization of the female body may still persist, especially from a feminist perspective. Yet, again, it needs to be emphasized that Michaela consciously offers her body to Jakob: "I realize she's entirely concentrated […] she's giving me the most extravagant permission to roam the surface of her" (180). Moreover, Michaela, who functions as the main facilitator of memory in a text so deeply concerned with processes of remembering, is depicted as one of the most powerful figures in the novel and wields considerable agency.

*Fugitive Pieces*, in fact, represents the relationship between Jakob and Michaela as the perfect fulfilment of intermemory. The text suggests that it is primarily Michaela who makes this experience possible, mainly through her extraordinary capacity for listening. The novel thus resonates with Dori Laub's claim that testimony crucially hinges on the listener, on his or her openness and readiness to participate in the joint act of witnessing ("Event" 85). Michaela figures as the embodiment of the empathetic listener, who enables the trauma survivor to talk about his wounds and feel understood. The novel here explores issues that are also important in Romantic trauma fiction: like Godwin's *Mandeville,* the text examines if and how a trauma victim can be healed by a loved one. However, in contrast to Henrietta's attempts to cure her brother, Michaela's attempts to cure her husband invert the dynamics of talking and listening. While Mandeville only ever listens, Jakob first listens to Michaela, displaying a striking "hunger for her memories" (179), but then takes over the role of speaker, and it is Michaela who does the listening that is so essential to Jakob. In other words, the trauma survivor Jakob seizes the chance to talk and be listened to empathetically – something that Mandeville desperately desires yet never experiences.

In this sense, *Fugitive Pieces* resonates more strongly with *The Wrongs of Woman*, with its depiction of the beneficial impact of an empathetic listener, enacted especially through Jemima. Wollstonecraft's representation of a mini-

community of suffering between the imprisoned Maria and the prison guard Jemima (and, to some extent, Darnford) may even be said to gesture towards the idea of intermemory enacted in *Fugitive Pieces*. However, the kinds of interpersonal connections that the two texts depict as resulting from sharing memories are fundamentally different. In *The Wrongs of Woman*, what is at stake is the recognition of parallels between individual women's suffering, and the purpose of sharing is to foster a sense of commonality, solidarity, and mutual sympathy. *Fugitive Pieces* envisions a different kind of connectedness, one that I, like Gubar, read as empathy rather than sympathy. As Gubar writes, *Fugitive Pieces* "dramatizes Michaels's effort to replace the concept of sympathy which supposes affinity among people, with the mechanisms of empathy, with its recognition of disparity" ("Empathic Identification" 253). In other words, empathy does not presuppose the recognition of similarity and shared experience that is so important in Wollstonecraft's novel; empathy transcends difference. Moreover, the kind of empathy depicted in *Fugitive Pieces* reaches significantly deeper than the sympathy depicted in *The Wrongs of Woman* in that it produces a sense of overcoming the boundaries between two individuals. This difference also manifests itself in the specific nature of Michaela's listening. As Jakob stresses, Michaela's entire body seems absorbed in the act of listening: "She has heard everything – her heart an ear, her skin an ear. Michaela is crying for Bella" (182). The image of Michaela listening with her whole body conveys how deeply she immerses herself – mentally, emotionally, and physically – in Jakob's memories, and it is this kind of listening, the novel suggests, that enables the emergence of intermemory.

Hence, while both *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Mandeville* do recognize the importance of empathetic listening, *Fugitive Pieces* expresses far more optimism about the power of such listening, which becomes particularly clear in how Michaela's ability to listen relates to healing. After the intense moment of being listened to and "recognized for the first time," Jakob falls asleep and dreams of Bella talking to Michaela, while "tears stream down Michaela's face," tears that express her deep empathy (182). This symbolic dream is depicted as a profoundly therapeutic experience for Jakob: "Every cell in my body has been replaced, suffused with peace" (182). The moment of waking is figured as the moment when Jakob finally finds his way back into the world; he wakes to sunlight and feels at home next to Michaela's body, amazed at the feeling of having been "saved by such a small body" (183). Through Michaela, the ghost of Bella can finally be laid to rest.

This key moment in the text is written as a moment of intense emotion and beauty – yet is it perhaps *too* beautiful? Does the novel here shift from a mode of cautious optimism to one of sentimentalism? Does it idealize the healing powers of love and empathy? Kertzer's discussion of the novel expresses a strong criticism of any Holocaust narrative that finds "resolution in romantic and redemptive patterns" and that makes the Holocaust problematically "accessible and reparable" (206). *Fu-*

*gitive Pieces* does indulge in such "romantic and redemptive patterns," and it stages the protagonist's central moment of healing in a way that risks reducing it to one of the "optimistic, self-serving scenarios" and "uplifting messages" of which LaCapra is so critical (*Representing* 78). Jakob's recovery is represented as almost too sudden and too comprehensive, with "every cell" of his body having been replaced overnight (182); his wounds seem almost too easily "reparable," in LaCapra's terminology. Michaels does have Jakob deny the possibility of sudden change ("We think that change occurs suddenly. But even I have learned better" 185), which seems to imply that he regards this vital moment only as the beginning of a healing process. And yet the impression of an "uplifting message" about recovery persists through the final pages of Jakob's narrative, which revolve around scenes of domestic happiness and peace, around images that express the (re)integration of the traumatic past and hopeful scenarios about the future.

The endings of both narratives are especially significant regarding the text's approach to recovery. Jakob ends with a meditation on his longing for a child and an extensive prayer for their son or daughter, who would – in a heavily symbolic gesture of testimony to and reconciliation with the past – be named Bela or Bella. Jakob "pray[s]" that his children will understand and internalize their parents' love (195). This ending signals that love may triumph over the destructive impact of severe trauma and that familial ties broken by death may be restored by future generations. The hopefulness of this ending is weakened to some extent by our knowledge of Jakob's accidental death and the fact that he was prevented from reading Michaela's note telling him about her pregnancy. In reporting Michaela's death, who dies two days after Jakob, the novel's preface enacts the abrupt severing of family lines that plays a central role throughout the text. Ben's narrative, however, symbolically closes the circle, or, as Estrin puts it, the novel "closes with a sense of circles enclosing circles" (294). The "circles" that Estrin refers to are the circles of love that are fused through Ben's recognition of the bond of love between his parents, a bond whose strength he has never been able to see before, and through his desire to return to Naomi. Ben's last sentence reads: "I see that I must give what I most need" (294). Yet the ending of Ben's narrative closes even more circles. Ben, who feels profoundly connected to Jakob and who finds Michaela's unread note, symbolically becomes their (adoptive) child, fulfilling Jakob's prayer that his child "suddenly know how miraculous is [his] parents' love for each other" (195). Ben represents the found son in a double sense, and his epiphany about his parents' love and his adoptive parents' love inspires him with hope for his own relationship with Naomi. Thus, Ben learns a philosophy of love from his adoptive father Jakob, who, himself a lost and a found child, had learned this essential lesson – "to make love necessary" (121) – from his own adoptive father Athos.

Through this ending, with its various closing circles, and through climactic moments of transmemory and intermemory, *Fugitive Pieces* confronts us with fun-

damental issues about the ethics of writing and reading trauma. The hopefulness and optimism that dominate the ending of Michaels's novel contrast sharply with the bleak endings of *Mandeville* and *Mathilda*. Like LaCapra, I see trauma narratives that resolve themselves on the extreme poles of optimism or pessimism as involving certain ethical weaknesses. On the one hand, narratives characterized by the "phantasm of total mastery, full ego identity, definitive closure" problematically distract us from the intensity of suffering and the lasting impact of trauma, comforting us too easily; on the other hand, writing determined by "endless mutability, fragmentation, melancholia, aporias, irrecoverable residues or exclusions" risks perpetuating cycles of trauma (*Writing History* 71). A *via media* between these two poles seems most appropriate from an ethical point of view, that is, a trauma narrative that expresses the ruptures caused by trauma and acknowledges that there are elusive aspects that cannot be fully communicated but also gestures towards some understanding of trauma and towards some means of working through.

While I feel uneasy about trauma writing that seems too optimistic or pessimistic, at the same time, my own uneasiness makes me uneasy and raises a number of disconcerting questions. First of all, how do I reconcile my sceptical attitude as a literary critic towards anything that seems idealistic and sentimental, especially in the context of trauma, with my emotional desire as an empathetic reader to see a character who has undergone so much suffering and pain finally find a way to recovery and happiness? More importantly, why do I feel more uneasy about trauma narratives that seem overly harmonizing or redemptive than about those dominated by the unspeakable, the incomprehensible, and inescapable cycles of suffering? This tendency is surprising, given that I firmly believe issues of recovery need to receive sufficient attention in trauma studies. Is it possible that I have stronger reservations about the optimistic patterns of redemption and recovery in *Fugitive Pieces* than in other novels because Jakob is a victim of childhood trauma that is related to his family but, at the same time, involves strong historical and political dimensions? My reaction might be influenced by the prominent idea in trauma studies that visions of healing in the context of massive trauma run the risk of downplaying and distracting from the pervasive destructive impact of that historical event – an anxiety, which, as we have seen, might also have influenced Godwin's decision not to let Mandeville get anywhere near recovery. Yet does recovery not deserve to be given room, irrespective of whether the context is personal or historical trauma or both? And finally, does it make sense to ascribe one type of trauma narrative more (ethical) value than another? Do we thereby gesture towards writing a metanarrative of trauma that is too prescriptive rather than descriptive and that runs the risk of "fixing" trauma writing? These, I think, are questions to keep in mind when reading trauma narratives in order to remain alert to the profound ethical challenges trauma poses to both writers and readers.

Rather than closing these reflections by trying to come up with conclusive answers, I would like to end with a few provisional thoughts. First, it is essential to bear in mind that LaCapra's thinking about trauma is rooted in the discipline of history (even if he gestures beyond disciplinary boundaries), and the ethical expectations we have of historiographical writing about trauma, with its more explicitly factual orientation, do not necessarily have to apply – or at least not to the same extent – to literary writing. Second, as literary critics, we may also attempt to negotiate the two extreme poles of trauma writing critically by engaging with different kinds of trauma narratives, here exemplified by the contrast between *Mandeville* and *Fugitive Pieces*, and by interrogating the different ethical functions as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each.

In this light, it is important to stress that even though I have certain reservations about a few key passages that push the "romantic and redemptive patterns" that Kertzer criticizes rather far, I still read Michaels's novel as a significant and thought-provoking contribution to discourses about trauma and recovery. A seminal aspect of the novel's vision of healing is that it conceptualizes recovery as a process based on connectedness and relationality rather than as a self-centred, purely individual process. After all, Jakob's overnight spiritual and physical transformation is only one aspect of the text's multi-layered negotiation of recovery. The emphasis on the healing powers of love is complemented by an emphasis on the curative *and* ethical functions of different acts of writing, writing that is simultaneously a form of working through and a form of testimony. In that sense, the novel can be said to echo and push further the philosophy of working through embodied by Maria in *The Wrongs of Woman*, whose memoirs originate out of her sense of responsibility towards her daughter and also involve acts of testimonial writing on behalf of other women. Hence, the conceptualization of recovery expressed by *Fugitive Pieces* relies not only on intersubjective connectedness but also on deep empathy and a sense of responsibility towards the suffering of others.

*Fugitive Pieces* is, then, a profound meditation on the complex ways in which individuals are entangled in and respond to each other's traumas. Even though the novel gestures towards a web of connections between trauma in different cultural and historical contexts and between individual and collective trauma, the novel carefully and extensively examines how the legacies of trauma manifest themselves in the private space of the family. It demonstrates how profoundly historical events affect families, foregrounding broken family ties and the traumatic grief of children who have lost their parents and siblings and of parents who have lost their children. At the same time, the novel encourages us to rethink what family means, emphasizing different forms of adoption and relationships built on emotional rather than biological kinship. In its exploration of familial bonds, *Fugitive Pieces* opposes two extremes, represented by the two narrators: the desperate clinging to broken bonds and the suffocating impact of unhealthy, destructive bonds. While Jakob obses-

sively desires to remain connected to his dead parents and especially his dead sister, Ben invests most of his energy in breaking free from his oppressive family environment. In different ways, however, both narratives testify to the deeply formative and persistent impact of family relationships.

These two contrasting attitudes to family ties relate to two diametrically opposed visions of memory. *Fugitive Pieces* characterizes bonds of memory between individuals as both valuable and threatening. When Jakob describes how he spent "half [his] day gnawing through misery" to reach the memory of one single moment (144), he expresses the pressing need for memory, even if that memory may be deeply painful. Memory is here figured as something precious, as something to be restored, preserved, and protected – an attitude towards memory that is intimately connected to the memory crisis of the twentieth century and not present in this way in Romantic trauma fiction. It is the sense of memory's elusiveness, its fragility, its potential to be lost that makes it so valuable. *Fugitive Pieces* hence participates in the "memory project" that Whitehead associates with postmodern fiction (*Trauma Fiction* 82);[29] the novel highlights how the crisis of memory results in a longing for memory, representing bonds of individual and intersubjective memory as highly precious. Diametrically opposed to this pressing desire for memory is the fear of unwanted bonds transmitted from parents to children: Ben fears the intergenerational transmission of trauma as a form of physical contamination carried in his genes and blood. For him, memory figures as a familial legacy that defies control, as a danger haunting a family across generations. *Fugitive Pieces*, then, represents the two extremes of memory's affective power.

Crucially, both these extremes are closely connected to the body. This association applies to Ben's fear of physical transmission, but it also surfaces in the novel's scenes of transmemory and intermemory, which revolve around the desire for a state of connectedness that erases the boundaries between minds and bodies, even beyond death. Fantasies of incorporation, the idea of an intimacy fusing sexual and memory bonds, as well as Jakob's notion of different languages as types of food that make the mouth and the body either remember or forget are primary examples that demonstrate how closely *Fugitive Pieces* connects processes of remembering to the body. This recurring emphasis on the body reinforces Michaels's notion that the forces of memory – both in their most disturbing and most empowering manifestations – are exceedingly powerful.

Besides this emphasis on the body, another key aspect of the novel's approach to memory is that it interrogates the ethics of remembering. *Fugitive Pieces*, as we have seen, negotiates processes of remembering and narrating trauma in the context of testimonial discourses, suggesting that to record and transmit one's own memo-

29 For an excellent overview of the dominant paradigms of memory through history, see Whitehead's *Memory*.

ries and to bear witness to the memories of others should be seen as an ethical practice. The novel responds to concerns about the Holocaust and witnessing, notably, Laub's assertion that "the collapse of witnessing" is at the core of "the Holocaust experience" ("Event" 80) and Lyotard's discussion of victimhood as defined by the impossibility of speaking and testifying (8), yet it chooses a more optimistic approach than these theorists: it explores how survivors, even if they experience profound crises of witnessing, find ways of bearing witness to their own past and to the past of others. Featuring several protagonists that are writers, the novel investigates the functions of different forms of writing for this ethical practice. At the same time, *Fugitive Pieces*, like the trauma narratives by Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, participates in discourses about the healing function of narrative in the face of trauma. The text's vision of narration as therapeutic endorses its overall emphasis on connectedness: many of the forms of writing that the novel explores are oriented towards others. The text pushes this emphasis on connectedness – through memory and through writing – even further, suggesting that there is a means of healing even more potent than narration: love. Through its insistent expression of a philosophy of love in the face of severe trauma, the novel, finally, leaves readers with some of the crucial questions about the ethics of reading and writing trauma that it explores in multiple ways. Expressing a powerful concern with ethics, this self-reflexive novel calls for a critical, self-reflexive, and ethically aware reading of trauma fiction.