

Brygida Gasztold
Koszalin University of Technology

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CANADIAN
MULTICULTURALISM:
FUGITIVE PIECES BY ANNE MICHAELS**

Résumé : La loi sur la citoyenneté canadienne de 1947 a fait ressortir le besoin de se distancer de l'identité britannique et d'en définir sa propre canadienne. De nombreuses théories ont établi les liens entre le concept de canadianité et les caractéristiques d'un territoire donné et ont défendu l'idée de la survie des victimes de la colonisation comme essentielle pour la construire (Atwood, 1972) ou ont indiqué "la mentalité de garnison" (Fry, 1964) comme caractéristique de l'imagination canadienne. Considérer le Canada comme une "nation sur mesure" ("A Nation by Design") (Zolberg, 2006) suppose qu'il existe plus d'une manière d'être Canadien. L'une des variables du discours multiculturel est la notion de récit, qui est non seulement un outil de construction et de transmission du savoir mais également il reflète la structure sociale et conceptuelle dont il ressort. Le roman d'Anne Michaels *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) (traduction française : *La Mémoire en fuite* de 1998) représente tel récit ancré dans l'expérience juive dont le contexte plus global façonne les modèles idéologiques propres à la diversité canadienne. L'auteure associe une perspective ethnique à un lieu culturel du Canada multiculturel et, ce faisant, elle crée un récit représentatif de l'ethnicité juive et de la pluralité culturelle canadienne.

L'auteure de cet article examine la façon dont Michaels emploie les éléments du discours narratif reflétant aussi bien que rejetant la notion de multiculturalisme. Le caractère épisodique du récit et la représentation du temps comme interrompu reflètent le contraste possible entre sa construction et sa représentation ; entre la politique institutionnelle canadienne et sa pratique. Le concept d'adoption ainsi que de famille de substitution défient une histoire linéaire et officielle promouvant d'autres récits que ceux légitimés par la noblesse du sang ou par l'appartenance au groupe dominant.

Les lacunes dans le récit et les histoires inédites révèlent un processus très complexe d'édification d'une nation, qui doit tenir compte des premières

étapes marquées de l'expérience de l'invasion et de la colonisation tandis que les omissions dans le texte et dans le récit révèlent non seulement les difficultés de définition de l'identité canadienne mais aussi d'acceptation des modèles déjà existants.

Early Canadian immigration history is characterized by its exclusionary nature, with the category of race being the primary factor for the denial of entrance, and English and French charter groups central to Canadian history. It was only later that the aboriginals and ethnic cohorts gradually began to gain importance. Present-day Canada struggles with the ways to implement an officially desirable model of society, which recognizes and addresses its transcultural and multicultural agenda. The 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act prompted the need to part with the provisional British identity in order to define a Canadian one. Together with the Multiculturalism Policy (1971) and the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977), the 1988 Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada laid a legislative foundation for the contemporary vision of Canadian multiculturalism. Canada may aptly be referred to as a "nation by design," to borrow Anthony D. Smith's term (99-122), since the officially endorsed shift towards inclusive immigrant policy has become the foundation for the present version of Canadianness. Various theories have linked the concept of Canadian identity (such as that of a Northerner) to the features of a particular landscape, promoted the idea of survival of colonial victims as key to its construction (Atwood), signaled "garrison mentality," as characteristic for the Canadian imagination (Fry), imagined Canada as a 'mosaic' society (Porter), or applied the metaphor of the "borderland" to define contemporary Canada (New). Numerous attempts to grasp the essence of Canadian distinctiveness presuppose more than one way to be Canadian. Multiculturalism, thus articulated, is an idea which tries to address cultural differences in the form of an official policy. It is an ideology which provides an image of a desired national representation.

As a political ideology, multiculturalism "has provided Canada with an identity, and a national distinction from the United States, where the emphasis has been on the idea as well as the practice of a melting pot, where immigrants and refugees become, culturally and linguistically, fully absorbed into the dominant Anglo American ways of life and worldview" (Ghosh and Abdi 105). To account for a variety of ethnic, racial, and religious groups that co-exist in a Canadian model of multiculturalism, Janice Kulyk Keefer provides a metaphor of a "kaleidoscope"; the kaleidoscope

suggests ongoing process rather than fixed and finished product. The user of the kaleidoscope can make out of separate pieces, none of which is more privileged

than any other, a changing and infinitely variable pattern precisely because the shifting parts are held together by the cylinder that contains them. And that cylinder, passed from hand to hand, we may liken to Canada itself, with its wilderness and farms, its towns and cities, its people, and the values enshrined in our Charter of Rights (16).

Through the dialogue between various social groups, at present, as well as with their pasts, multiculturalism must entail the concept of change. Arnold Itwaru draws attention to the mutual interdependence of cohabiting social groups: “No ethnic group existing under the denomination of a macrological cultural power different from itself maintains its traditional uniqueness for very long” (16). It is no longer a dialogue between English and French Canada, but a polylogue, which accounts for stories important for different ethnic communities.

Even though the ideology of multiculturalism has officially been propagated in Canada since the introduction of the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, the ongoing debate queries the existing *status quo*. There are still differences between the two Canadian “solitudes” – Anglophone and Francophone. For example, ethno-cultural minority groups in English-speaking Canada are called “ethnic groups,” and in French-speaking Quebec “cultural communities.” Moreover, “Quebec is the only province to have rejected the federal Policy of Multiculturalism (...), and to have adopted a policy of Intercultural Education” (Ghosh and Abdi 93). A Canadian model of multiculturalism had to tackle the privileged discourse, which addressed only one, the English-Canadian, variant of Canadian identity: “the English-Canadian historiographic orthodoxy was characterized by four aspects: institutional – responsible government; biographic – great makers of Canada; imperialist–British superiority; and gendered and racialized – male and White” (Hoerder 114). At the federal level, one of the common criticisms is that multiculturalism has “endangered the common loss of Canadian culture and has therefore promoted the formation of ghettos and enclaves, (...) removed the possibility of a center for those who wish to escape an ethnicity and assimilate into a national identity” (Spergel 12). By de-privileging the centre, which stands for a prescribed model of national identity, in favour of diversity, contemporary Canadianness fosters all the different ways which represent its multiplicity.

One of the elements of the multicultural discourse is the concept of narrative, which is not only an important tool in the construction and transfer of knowledge, but which also reflects the social and conceptual structure from which it emerges. Works of culture, such as literature, provide a viable medium to express and problematize the nature of national identity, and their examination may help to define this, otherwise, elusive concept. Narratives,

which are written or read, just like stories, which are told or listened to, inform the narrator/speaker/listener and that is why they are important elements in creating both individual and group identity. “Stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the ‘real,’ the official with the unofficial, personal with the professional, the canonical with the different and unexpected” (Dyson and Genishi 242-243). Literature helps us to contemplate and understand changing reality through the lens of an individual and unique experience that is representative of cultural diversity. Homi Bhabha explains the complex nature of this diversity:

The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying *singularity* of the ‘other’ that resists totalization—the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-*to* does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification (312).

By propagating stories that are essential to collective identity, literary texts function as signifiers of national identity. They do not only demonstrate the ways to express the essence of national identity, but also problematize this concept as a cultural phenomenon.

If one heeds the claim that the concept of nation is a construct, one might find similar elements in its construction to those that help build a fictional narrative, where the term “narrative” “refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot” (Hatch and Wisniewski 6).

Out of many one: nowhere has this founding dictum of the political society of the modern nation—its spatial expression of a unitary people—found a more intriguing *image* of itself than in those diverse languages of literary criticism that seek to portray the great power of the idea of the nation in the disclosures of its everyday life; in the telling details that emerge as metaphors for national life (Bhabha 294; italics in the original).

Discursively produced samples of social life tell stories that provide a link between past and present. Narratives do not mimic life, but rather attempt at its construction and reconstruction, a process that elucidates the way in which we choose to order and interpret experience. The construction and reconstruction of personal stories in the form of narratives document human experience at its most personal. Although narrative is illustrative of a single and limited notion of experience, it “pertains to longer-term or large-scale

sequences of actions, experiences, and human events(...) life and historical existence are themselves structured narratively, and the concept of narrative is our way of experiencing, acting and living, both as individuals and as communities, and that narrative is our way of being and dealing with time” (Carr in Webster 2). By imposing a story structure on indiscriminate human experience, we can reclaim it.

As long as ethnic and religious differences remain a viable cultural category, a specifically identifiable ethnic experience will continue to have intellectual relevance. Anne Michaels’ novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) presents a narrative which is located in a specifically Jewish experience, but whose analysis broadens the definition of Canadian diversity. The author marries an ethnic perspective to a cultural milieu of multicultural Canada and, by doing so, produces a narrative that is representative of both Jewish ethnicity and Canadian cultural multiplicity. Canadian multiculturalism and the Jewish diasporical experience both attest to the fact that there is more than one way to be a Canadian, just as there is more than one way to be a Jew. Diasporic Jewish communities must address a similar question that bothers the adherents of multicultural society: how to retain distinct ethnicity and simultaneously avoid its ghettoization. With communal borders becoming more porous, the question of belonging becomes inclusive of any possible racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic configuration; the fact which further obfuscates the relationship between national and group identity.

Anne Michaels’s novel *Fugitive Pieces* is a complex narrative, which addresses a range of issues connected with the concepts of history, memory and an individual’s place amidst the forces one can neither control nor avoid. However general and universal the above statement may sound, Michael’s story does not obfuscate the motive, which lies at the source of the narrative, mainly the need to examine the immense impact the Holocaust still has on future generations. By presenting the topic from different points of view, against different backgrounds, and at different moments in time, the author manages to show its unrelenting sense of gravity in the lives of those affected, directly and indirectly, by the tragedy. The author “reminds us that community is both a synchronic and diachronic entity, comprising not only the living but also the dead who haunt a specific locale, extending down through the strata of time” (Criglington, “Urban” 87). Persistent motifs, such as geology, history, music, poetry, and love, delineate the layers of knowledge and provide narrative paths for the reader’s exploration, which result in the collective vision of history and human life as continuously intertwined. The tension between amorphous history and the particularity of an individual life constitutes the main tenet of the novel, at the nexus of which there are

questions about politics and ethics of the Holocaust memorialization and representation.

Fugitive Pieces introduces two narratives: one of the Holocaust survivor–Jacob Beer, who is rescued by a Greek geologist Athos Roussos, with the two later finding a new home in Toronto, Canada. The other one is told from the point of view of the next generation – Ben is a son of the Holocaust survivors who struggles to understand his parents’ ordeal and, consequently, find his own peace. Thus, Michaels introduces a narrative which does not explicitly refer to the reality of the Holocaust, but which explores the ruptured psyche of the survivor protagonist—the emotional testimony that in itself becomes the representation of the Holocaust. Despite the fact that the second narrative gains access to the actual horrors of the Holocaust indirectly, via accounts related by eyewitnesses, it nevertheless shows the continuous impact which the trauma has had on the next generations. Presented in a chronological order, the two stories are composed of shards of memory, recollections, nightmares, and dream-like manifestations of memory. The past, which returns in the form of flashbacks and imagined episodes, is a source of painful knowledge and a constant challenge for the characters who try to come to terms with it. Michaels’s protagonists do not express their feelings directly but indirectly, through scattered remnants of memory. The abundance of sensual images, which are full of surfaces, textures, scents, and physicality, draws the readers’ attention to the workings of the human mind. Such language becomes both a tool in the construction and an avenue for the protagonist’s interpretation of his experience. By constructing a narrative which re-works the past, the author helps to create a symbolic reality in an attempt to confront the real one.

Michaels employs the elements of the narrative discourse which are evocative of the modern concept of multiculturalism. The fact that Canada began as an invader-settler society accounts for its early stages characterized by experiences of conquest and colonization. Textual and narrative silences signal difficulties not only in defining the Canadian identity, but also in accepting its existing models. The episodic nature of the narrative and the presentation of time as interrupted reflect the potential discord between the construction and its representation; between Canada’s institutional policy and its practice: “when national statements contradict or gloss over people’s experiences, political and social fragmentation is at work” (Itwaru 12). The idea of adoption and a surrogate family defy a linear and official history, promoting stories other than those legitimized by strict bloodlines. Adoption means a meeting point of, at least, two different stories, which begin to overlap producing a new quality. A progressive and linear view of Canadian history, with the British at its helm, is challenged by surrogacy, which embodies “precisely these memories and untold stories that are threatened to

be lost to an allegedly universal view of history” (Spergel 34). Death does not mean the end of the story, as it is picked up by the next character and carried further. The fact that this character is a member of a group different than British, in terms of ethnicity and religion, testifies to the success of the idea of Canadian identity as “comprised of negotiating and interacting relationships that reject the idea of communities as fixed in their meanings and practices” (Spergel 21). Thus, Michaels’s literary representation of the Canadian history emerges as “composed of interrelational and competing pasts belonging not only to the conquering British, but also to the different ethnic, national, linguistic, and cultural groups within Canada” (Spergel 34).

The author’s intentional avoidance of a linear presentation shows human memory as a collection of events, of major or minor status, which obviate the difference between the narratorial and authorial voice. A disjointed narrative, which is full of pauses and silences, lessens the narrative tension and allows the time for the meaning to sink deeper in the reader’s mind. Moreover, “(a) non-linear examination of the past enables Jacob to escape the tyranny of a preordained present and to imagine other possible futures” (Criglington, “Urban” 94). Fragmentation, which is one of the central characteristics in modern studies, endorses a constructed nature of human experience, in which the protagonist must re-create himself and his world. The act of reconstruction points at the belief in the protagonist’s potential to gather what is left and restore his own life. This process is especially important in the context of any traumatic event, hence the novel’s specific focus on the Holocaust may be supplemented by a more general context. “The Holocaust survivor depends on members of succeeding generations both to remember the past and to live anew, to relate to history that has not been directly experienced by them and, also, to create their own individual histories” (Lang 44). The dilemma, however, arises when “(a) postmodern aesthetics of borderblur is more commonly said to celebrate narrative fragmentation and heteroglossia, thus effectively prohibiting talk of personal perspective and authenticity” (Garret-Petts 293). The question is whether one can talk about truth in a postmodern language that presupposes that truth is unknowable. A shift from the uniqueness of an individual experience towards the commonly acceptable “shared vernacular” (Garrett-Petts 294), however,

does not relieve artists (and readers) of the personal responsibility for negotiating provisional (fictional) truths; and in the process they successfully acknowledge in what ways the truths we advocate imbricate other competing interests – rival narratives drawn from our experience of popular, mass, vernacular and high art cultures (Garret-Petts 293).

The metaphoric style of the narrative mirrors the traumatic imagination as it is the trauma-induced memory that works through flashbacks and intrusive bits of memory. Trauma, which in Greek means an open wound, comes with the person's inability to internalize the past events, which is the case of both the victims and the relatives of the Holocaust survivors. A failure to assimilate the past deepens the character's frustration and results in his prolonged and unquenchable suffering. In *Fugitive Pieces*

(t)he memory of trauma as something to be grasped beneath the surface of consciousness is metaphorically represented by repeated references to archaeology, drowned cities, a concept of rebirth, bodily experiences like "bruises" (19), a part of the ghostly story, a bridge between present and past, a double exposure (18), but also partly amnesiac (language without memory) (Anker 58).

Silence becomes a defence mechanism, which is followed by the protagonist's sense of guilt about his own survival. Jacob declares: "(m)y life could not be stored in any language but only in silence" (111). It is easier for him, as a witness, to acknowledge the death of his parents than imagine endless possibilities of what might have happened to his sister Bella. "The not-seeing of his parents' murder and of Bella's lot links Jacob's experience to the very crux of trauma, a response to an unexpectedly wounding event that cannot be grasped at the moment of its occurrence and thus returns in flashbacks or nightmares" (Gubar 255). Hence, Jacob's greatest challenge is to come to terms with the haunting memory of his lost sister: "(w)hile the past can be imaginatively 're-presented' through language and memory, it can never be fully restored; gaps and silences remain; and the longed for reunification of self/other – of Bela/Bella – remains an impossible dream" (Criglington, "Urban" 97). A traumatic event, which can be visualized and verbalized, is easier to deal with than a total lack of knowledge, which only gives way to wild speculations and slowly destroys the character's sanity. Finding words to construct a narrative is for the characters a way to restore order to their fragmented experience and, consequently, helps them to assign meaning to the existence mauled by history.

The questions of home and memory are especially vital in the context of Canadian society, which is mainly composed of immigrants. How memory shapes their understanding of the experience of dislocation has a direct bearing on how they perceive the character of their adopted homeland, as the influence is reciprocal. A private and unique experience, on the one hand, presents a challenge to the otherwise global and anonymous world. On the other hand, a hybridization of individual experiences makes it harder for people to find a common platform that might instigate a nation building

process. In fact, a search for a definition of a coherent national identity is in Canada a work in progress. Such ideological configurations as nation require time and space to take shape, and literature offers a safe environment for testing various patterns in the context of the multicultural policy, which encourages immigrants to live in the present but remember the past. Since the past informs the present and vice versa, there must be a sense of continuity between the two. Paul Carter uses the concept of spatial history to illustrate the idea of multiculturalism: spatial history

does not go confidently forward. It does not organize its subject matter into a nationalist enterprise. It advances exploratively, even metaphorically, recognizing that the future is invented. Going back, it questions the assumptions that the past has been settled once and for all. It undermines the empirical stability of roads and buildings. (...) Its objects are intentions and, suggesting the plurality of historical directions, it constantly risks escaping into poetry, biography (...) It also seeks multiple perspectives in its story" (xxiii).

By replacing a progressive and hegemonic version of history with spatial histories, Carter refuses to accept the linearity of history, thereby allowing other, otherwise subjugated, pasts to surface, mostly those of non-white, non-European, and female authorship.

Language plays a vital role in the construction of a fictional narrative, as well as in the process of developing a sense of self, group, and national identity. The 1969 Official Languages Act made English and French official languages in Canada, thus privileging the two founding groups. The Canadian Constitution, however, gives the provinces exclusive authority over education. Quebec being the only French-speaking part of Canada, the domination of the Anglophone view legitimizes the English language as a tool in the implementation and maintenance of its hegemony. In other words, "(p)ositions of power which determine influence and prestige in Anglophone Canada are obtained in the medium of the English language (Itwaru 16). Cultural conversion through the linguistic medium is an inevitable by-product of any immigrant experience, and the linguistic bifurcation (native versus host language) entails a similar dichotomy of the immigrant's conscience. An official language, English in Anglophone Canada, is a medium of social power, which an immigrant has to learn in order to fully participate in the social structure. Itwaru aptly observes that "(i)n the context of language homogeneity lies a direct contradiction to the claim that difference is a virtue" (18). How well and how soon the immigrant masters the new tongue is often a measure of his or her success. At the same time, the native language is allocated to the unofficial sphere of feelings and emotions and, thereby,

declared less valued. What happens is a linguistic transition, which has a direct bearing on the level of an immigrant's social success.

In Michaels' novel, the importance of language and the therapeutic powers of writing are promoted by the characters' involvement in recording, rewriting, translating, telling, listening, and remembering: Jacob is a poet and a translator, Athos chronicles the Nazi manipulations of archaeology, and Ben—a scholar interested in biography and meteorology, is fascinated by Jacob's poetry. The author shows different strategies in which language is presented as both a positive and negative force behind the trauma. Athos advises Jacob to "write to save (himself)" (165), thereby expressing his hope at a healing power of art, which can restore a shattered life. When, he adds: "someday you'll write because you've been saved" (165), he points at the survivor's responsibility to bear witness in the name of those for whom fate was less fortunate. "You will feel terrible shame for this" (165), adds Athos, signalling the weight of the survivor's guilt, which can be lessened by exercises in creative writing. By foregrounding creative activities as pertaining to a typically male experience, Michaels's narrative follows a gender-specific division of labour, in which female characters "become reified aesthetic objects of diminished autonomy relative to the male protagonists" (Criglington, "Urban" 95). As long as male protagonists find fulfilment through creation – either as writers, scientists, poets or translators—female characters locate their significance in reproduction, or as enablers. Since the direct line of reproduction is broken by the war, "the novel's fundamental structure is based on the non-biological patrilineal transmission of memory from Athos to Jacob to Ben through their work as writers" (Criglington, "Urban" 95).

The affirmative power of language is also revealed through the extensive use of scientific terminology; vocabulary derived from geology, archaeology, paleobotany, navigation, meteorology, and music adumbrates the world of science, whose contours are different from that of the ordinary human experience. Because science is based on solid and unchangeable facts, which are not subject to the fallibility of human memory, it creates a firm ground to stand on and a reliable point of reference in time of distress: something palpable at the time when everything else loses its meaning. The disinterested and objective language of science provides a vivid contrast for the narrative accounts of the personal dramas. The scientific language is devoid of emotions and serves as a vehicle for conveying verifiable information. A rational and methodical mode of expression diverts the reader's attention from the dramatic and emotional to what is graspable and comprehensible, at the same time providing a sense of mooring for a wandering and tormented mind. "Pedagogic episodes reclaiming the virtues of reading and writing (...) insist

on the restorative influence of the fugitive pieces of language that provide Jacob moments of escape, self-protective concealment, and excavation” (Gubar 258). There is, however, a point where the two meet, mainly in a naming activity. Scientific language assigns names to objects and ideas thereby ordering the reality. Labelling has its equivalent in the name reading ritual performed by the survivors; the ceremony, which honours the dead and restores a sense of order to the distorted reality. Just like the language of science talks about confirmable facts, once the dead are named and called out, their memory will not be lost.

Not only does Michaels’s novel demonstrate therapeutic qualities of language, but it shows what happens when words are replaced with silence. Ben’s parents fail to find a cure for their grief because “[t]here was no energy of a narrative in [his] family” (204), only “a code of silence” (223), and frozen metaphors such as “Ess Ess”(225), says Ben. To create a narrative means to construct the past; the activity which involves a shift from the position of a participant to a more detached role of a storyteller. A space created between the two categories is indispensable for the renegotiation of one’s own position vis-a-vis memory. A danger that the narrative will fail to yield the magnitude and depth of its horror mutes the storyteller. Dwelling in the unsaid, Ben’s parents are unable to put their painful experiences into words and, consequently, deny themselves an opportunity to work through the trauma. Instead, their lives remain immersed in the past from which there is no way out. As much as their bodies live in the present, their minds hold on to the past: the situation which results in an emotional fissure, an entrapment which finally compels Ben’s father to commit suicide. It is Jacob’s poetry which supplies Ben with the right words to talk about his parents’ trauma, facilitating the novel’s claim to the significance of a metaphoric language in human expression. *Groundwork*, which is the title of Jacob’s collection of poems, suggests a possibility of a life which starts anew, in accordance with the protagonist’s claim that: “No one is born just once. If you’re lucky, you’ll emerge again in someone’s arms; or unlucky, wake when the long tail of terror brushes the inside of the skull” (5).

The power of language to annihilate is exemplified by Athos’s work on the book entitled *Bearing False Witness* – a revelatory work, which exposes “how the Nazis abused archaeology to fabricate the past”:

In 1939, Biskupin was already a famous site, already nicknamed the ‘Polish Pompeii.’ But Biskupin was proof of an advanced culture that wasn’t German; Himmler ordered its obliteration. It wasn’t enough to own the future. The job of Himmler’s SS-Ahnenerbe—the Bureau of Ancestral Inheritance—was to conquer history (104).

“The destruction of Biskupin epitomizes the idea of the Holocaust as a profound crisis in Western history and in its mode of representation” (Criglington, “The City” 140). Athos’s life work, which is finished by Jacob, aims at restoring truth to the falsified past. Making a connection between the history of the earth and human life: “Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediments” (53), the narrative stresses their reciprocity. There is a special bond, the narrator claims, between people and their surrounding: “The landscape of Peloponnesus had been injured and healed so many times (...) [w]ars, occupations, earthquakes; fire and drought. I stood in the valleys and imagined the grief of the hills. I felt my own grief expressed there.” (60) The metaphor of landscape becomes the source of an essentially inner nature of national identity. The author presents the experience of the Holocaust as disrupting the natural order: “geological processes mirror psychological ones, grief and memory resembling the stratigraphy of a rocky landscape” (Rauch 35). By assigning human attributes to landscape, the narrative establishes a feeling of empathy, which validates their mutual interdependency. Hence, Athos’s book is important not only as a realization of his own responsibility as a witness of the Nazi policy, but it also relates to the duty of all readers who, through the act of reading, must bear witness not only to the victims but also to the land for “everywhere nature remembers” (211).

The Nazi politics of extermination alters language to talk about the fabricated facts in a manner that denies the non-Aryans any merit: they “were never to be referred to as human, but as “figuren, ‘stucke’ – ‘dolls,’ ‘wood,’ ‘merchandise,’ ‘rags.’ Humans were not being gassed, only ‘figurinen,’ so ethics weren’t being violated” (165). The language of annihilation widens a gap between words and the reality they refer to, thereby creating a space in which definitions are stretched and ethics are suspended: “[n]o one could be faulted for burning debris, for burning rags and clutter in the dirty basement of society” (165). As the Nazi rhetoric employs a destructive power of language “to destroy, to omit, to obliterate” (79), to humiliate and dehumanize, Athos’s and Jacob’s creative efforts focus on the rehabilitation of language and the restoration of its credibility. Even though their work involves taking a “great personal risk” (167), the narrative demonstrates what constitutes the core of their endeavour: “never [t] confuse objects and humans,” and remember “the difference between naming and the named” (167).

Anne Michaels’s narrative employs figurative language to convey, in a metaphorical way, the trauma of the Holocaust: excavation refers to archaeology of memory as both involve peeling off layers of matter that obstruct the truth. In this way, the author links a broad historical perspective with an individual experience, a scientific with a personal discovery. “Athos’s fascination with the violent upheavals of the earth is a displacement for his

own grief and is echoed in Ben's interest in natural disasters in the latter section of the novel" (Coffey 36). The metaphor of the "bog-boy" refers to the historical place of Biskupin, where archaeological excavations revealed a civilization covered by layers of river mud. The excavated remnants testify to the site's Slavic origin and refute the Nazi pseudo-historical propaganda. The motif of the "bog people" refers to the continuation of memory, as they do not disappear after death, but are preserved to bear witness: "Asleep for centuries, they are uncovered perfectly intact; thus they outlast their killers—whose bodies have long dissolved to dust" (49). It is by means of scientific discoveries, such as the one in Biskupin, that truth is uncovered and exposed. As archaeologists reconstruct the earth's and human past by uncovering what time covered, on a smaller scale, the testimonies of those who bear witness re-establish the truth, which is often hidden under the layers of lies and fabrications.

As the Holocaust is presented as both a global, historical event and a personal tragedy, the characters elude predetermined definitions about who they are and are open to multiply discourses, which allow diverse versions of human presence. The narrative's historical topography maps distant places affected by the war: Biskupin in Poland, the Greek islands of Zakynthos and Idhra, the capital city of Athens, and Canada's Toronto. The readers are informed not only about Nazi concentration camps, mass murders and Fascists' activities in Greece, which led to the civil war, but they also learn that there are those Nazis who manage to escape justice: when Ben's father goes to get his senior's pension, he is greeted by a man who says that he knows his birthplace well for he "was stationed there in 1941 and 1942" (233), and then he declines his application. This dramatic encounter with the past, which also questions the ethics of Canada's immigration policy, leaves Ben's father devastated and makes him withdraw from the world even more: "father left as fast as he could. But he didn't come home for hours. (...) he wouldn't come out for dinner" and mother would have to "cancel his classes for a few days" (233). An awareness of death permeates the places wherever the characters go, as if their survival was a living reminder of death's unpredictable powers. The war thrives in their memory long after its official ending: Jacob witnesses the death of his parents and speculates about his sister's fate in a concentration camp, Athos experiences a life in a Nazi occupied Poland and Greece, and Ben's father collects information about the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Yet, the most painful is the hidden truth represented by the photograph, which Ben finds only after his parents' death: "On the back floats a spidery date, June 1941, and the two names. Hannah. Paul" (252). Then, he understands that "there had been a daughter; and a son born just before the action" (252) – his unknown siblings. Only then can Ben

realize the full extent of his parents' tragedy and begin to appreciate their attempts to live a semblance of an ordinary life in Canada.

Why the narrative forwards the combination of historical with private is illuminated in the following passage: "History is amoral: events occur. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. History is the Totenbuch, The Book of the Dead, kept by the administrators of the camps. Memory is the Memorbucher, the names of those to be mourned, read aloud in the synagogue" (138). The author brings a personal perspective into the concept of global history and, by means of narrative devices, relates general ideas into particular instances. Anne Michaels calls it the "gradual instant – a meeting place of past and present where the palimpsests of history only becomes fully meaningful when read physically, when it 'touches' us in the vernacular" (Garret-Petts 294). Using a figure of quilting as a metaphor for history, the author shifts the reader's focus: fragments of memories, remembered nightmares, random facts, rediscovered journals, old photographs, and poems give meaning to the historical events by virtue of relating them to particular human beings: "there's no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence. Memory dies unless it's given a use" (193). Human stories, which are subject to evaluation and judgment, introduce moral hierarchy to history, which is otherwise seen as uncontrollable and unpredictable: "The present, like a landscape, is only a small part of a mysterious narrative. A narrative of catastrophe and slow accumulation. Each life saved: genetic features to rise again in another generation" (48). Moreover, a variety of unique, individual accounts prevents the formation of one generally acknowledged approach, which would claim its privileged position over less conventional representations. In a time when there are fewer and fewer eye-witnesses, the memory of the Holocaust becomes a collective element of the whole cultural community. Any attempt at making it an apocryphal and fossilized object of study will restrict access for the next generations and, consequently, reduce its relevance to the understanding of the Holocaust.

Fugitive Pieces shows how human memory blends past together with present, within one personal experience, as well as across generations. A dialogic nature of the characters' experiences needs a space where these negotiations can take place, thus creating a model where there is not only one history, but a multitude of individual histories derived from different pasts. Ben's father never escapes the grip of the Holocaust, whose haunting presence pervades his Canadian life: he prefers to live in an apartment block because "all the front doors look alike" (247). As he forbids any mentioning of the lost family members, the whole family abide by the "code of silence" (223). Father develops an obsession with collecting detailed information about the

Holocaust and expects Ben to share his passion. Years of starvation leave him suffering from an eating disorder: “(t)here was no pleasure, for my father, associated with food” (214), and the only enjoyment he is able to draw comes from music: “(w)atching him listen made (Ben) listen differently. His attention dissolved each piece to its theoretical components like an X-ray, emotion the grey fog of flesh” (215). In his son’s words his “behaviour remained unchanged” (231), as if frozen at one stage of life: “When [Ben] visited he still found him either impatient, looking at his watch with desperation, or immobile, staring at a book in his room – another survivor account, another article with photographs” (231). Ben’s father does not try to forget about the war, nor does he want to start a new life in Canada. Instead, he relives the past horrors over and over again through the photographs and articles he collects; the activity which denies him a peace of mind, but which he regards his duty and responsibility towards the dead. His own wellbeing is unimportant when juxtaposed with the tragedy of the Holocaust, and a realization of guilt about his own survival is what propels his present life. Under such circumstances, a selfish desire to feel happiness would sound like extravagance, which does not comport with the memories of the past. Being unable to find a covalent bond between his past and present, he commits suicide. Although there is a pact of silence in Ben’s household, his family life is saturated by the memories of the Holocaust. His father’s experience of famine has an impact on the boy’s upbringing; Ben is not allowed to leave food on the plate, or throw out leftovers: “My father found the apple in the garbage. It was rotten and I’d thrown it out – I was eight or nine. He fished it from the bin, sought me in my room, grabbed me tight by the shoulder, and pushed the apple to my face” (214). Father’s attempts to teach Ben how to play the piano end in the boy’s tears and his father’s disappointment: “I dreaded my piano lessons with my father and never practiced when he was home. His demand for perfection had the force of a moral imperative, each correct note setting order against chaos, a goal as impossible as rebuilding a bombed city, atom after atom” (219). When other children listen to parents’ telling them fairy tales, Ben hears about “kapos, haftlings, ‘Ess Ess’ dark woods; a pyre of dark words” (217). Father obliges Ben to share his burden showing him the photographs depicting the horrors of the Holocaust: “He passed the book or magazine to me silently. He pointed a finger. Looking, like listening, was a discipline” (218). But it is not the shocking images that frighten Ben but the way father “thrust books at (him) with a ferocity”, claiming that “[he] was not too young. There were hundreds of thousands younger than [him]” (219). During childhood, Ben suffers from his father’s lack of empathy, that is why he is jealous when he sees father’s genuine satisfaction at finding an interesting piece of rock: then the boy felt that he “had less power to please [father] than a stone” (219).

Therefore, Ben remembers his home as “[a] hiding place, rotted out by grief” (233) in which the whole family suffer from insomnia. Ben’s childhood games always involve “ingenious schemes to save (his) parents from enemies; spacemen who were soldiers” (244), even though he himself is afraid of darkness. It is a difficult love in Ben’s family, which must overlook “father’s silence, his crabbed rigidity and rage, his despair; past the diminished piano teacher to the once elegant student conductor in Warsaw” (248). Thus, the narrative shows how the trauma of the Holocaust is embedded in the lives of the children of the survivors. Like his parents, Ben becomes a victim of the past: “My parents’ past is mine molecularly” (280), but he also learns a lesson of responsibility towards the unnamed faces from father’s photographs: “They stared and waited, mute. It was my responsibility to imagine who they might be” (221). The boy realizes that he must continue his father’s legacy, which is to bear witness to those who will never speak again. Locating the action in different places: Poland, Greece, and Canada, as well as presenting the characters from various ethnic backgrounds: Jewish, Polish, German, Greek, and Canadian, *Fugitive Pieces* foregrounds the idea of forced migration, which was the result of World War II. This narrative thread resonates with the Jewish history of dispersion: “old Salonika (...) once a city of Castilian Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian. Where before the war you could hear muezzins call from minarets across the city, while church bells rang, and the port went quiet on Friday afternoons for the Jewish Sabbath” (183). The recurring motifs of mapping, journey, escape, memory and loss rhyme with the diasporic experience. “Partial and fragmentary urban forms remind of a social space in which the shared status of outsider constitutes a fundamental communal bond” (Criglington 93). Jacob Beer is a “nomadic subject” (Howells, “Anne Michaels” 110), a fugitive piece on a post-war map, whose identity is multifaceted: a son of Jewish parents whom he barely remembers, as they are killed by the Nazis, he is raised by a Greek scientist. During his childhood in Poland he learns Yiddish, as well as basic Polish and German. His foster father teaches him Greek, English, and Latin. Finally, they both find an adopted home in Toronto. The problem of displacement evokes a question of home, which no longer denotes a limited, geographical location, but rather a frame of mind: “If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map” (193). Moreover, Jacob’s immigrant status and his activities as a poet and translator testify to his hybridized identity, which mirrors the choice of the narrative style. The fact that Jacob’s first wife—Alexandra is a member of the English-Canadian establishment, with “blue-blood Marxist friends” (132), and a certainty of a person who “had never had the misfortune of witnessing theory refuted by fact” (132), may explain their communicative failure. In her company, Jacob “felt maggots with insecurities;

[he] had European circuitry, [his] voltage wrong for the socket" (132), that is why their marriage failed. His second wife—Michaela—a daughter of Spanish and Russian immigrants, alludes to his own immigrant and hybrid status, as she becomes Jacob's soulmate and saviour. The title of Michaels's novel, *Fugitive Pieces*, refers to refugees and exiles, nomads who collect broken pieces of their shattered lives in order to construct a new possibility of happiness, in accordance with the protagonist's belief, that "[n]o one is born just once" (5).

Fugitive Pieces offers an interesting example of the contemporary representation of Canadian multiculturalism. By recreating collective experience through polyvocal story-telling, the narrative parallels private stories with the master narratives of our times – World War II and the Holocaust. The introduction of Jewish characters seems especially resonant with the requirements of Canadian multiculturalism since "[t]he Jewish Diaspora tells a story comparable to that of multicultural Canada, one where individuals are permitted to feel an attachment to more than one home" (Spergel 28). The adoption of the Jewish orphan communicates that not all that is physically inherited becomes prominent. In this way the novel promotes identities, which are formed through narratives, rather than physical blood-ties, thereby de-essentialising the concept of national identity. The retrieved stories, which were marginalized, forgotten, or misinterpreted by history, then, become part of another person's inheritance. To right the wrong is to allow all stories to be heard, without privileging any. Thus, Michaels' novel is an example of how a subaltern group can claim their active participation in the national narrative-construction. The ideal of cultural multiculturalism would not be successful without integrating the unofficial stories of various minority groups into the official account. Representing an act of cultural inclusiveness, *The Fugitive Pieces* is an example of a contemporary trend in Canadian literature, which Howells claims to be "a larger process beyond (the novels') domestic plots, representing a nation in the process of unearthing deliberately forgotten secrets and scandals, as they share in the enterprise of telling stories that recognize the differences concealed within constructions of identity in contemporary multicultural Canada" (*Contemporary 2*).

Works Cited:

- Anker, Jorgen. "Metaphors of Pain: the Use of Metaphors in Trauma Narrative with Reference to *Fugitive Pieces*." *Literator: Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies* 30:2 (1999): 49-69.

- Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." *Nation and Narration*. Ed. Homi K. Bhabha. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. 291-322.
- Brown, Michael. *Jew or Juif? Jews, French Canadians, and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914*. Skokie, Illinois, USA: Varda Books, 2001. ebook.
- Carr, David. *Time, Narrative and History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay; An Essay in Spatial History*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987.
- Coffey, Donna. "Blood and Soil in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*: the Pastoral in Holocaust Literature." *Modern Fiction Studies* 53.1 (Spring 2007): 27-53.
- Criglington, Meredith. "Urban Undressing: Walter Benjamin's 'Thinking-in-Images' and Anne Michaels' Erotic Archeology of Memory." *Canadian Literature*. 188 (2006): 86-101.
- Criglington, Meredith. "The City as a Site of Counter-Memory in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* and Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 81 (2004): 129-151.
- Dyson, Anne Haas and Celia Genishi. *The Need for Story: Cultural Diversity in Classroom and Community*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994.
- Fry, Northrop. "Conclusion." *Literary History of Canada*. Ed. Carl Klinck et al. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965. 821-849.
- Garret-Petts, William F. *Encounters: the Edges and Edginess of Reading Prose Pictures and Visual Fictions*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000.
- Ghosh, Ratna and Ali A. Abdi. *Education and the Politics of Difference: Canadian Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2004.
- Gubar, Susan. "Emphatic Identification in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*: Masculinity and Poetry After Auschwitz." *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 249-276.
- Hatch, Amos J. and Richard Wisniewski, eds. *Life History and Narrative*. London, Washington, D.C.: The Falmer Press, 1995.
- Hoerder, Dirk. *To Know Our Many Selves. From the Study of Canada to Canadian Studies*. Edmonton: AU Press, Athabasca University, 2010.
- Howells, Ann Coral. *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction. Refiguring Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- . "Anne Michaels *Fugitive Pieces*. Where Are the Voices Coming From?" *Canadian Culture and the Legacies of History*. Ed. Ann Coral Howells. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2004. 107-117.
- Itwaru, Arnold Harrichand. *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imaginary*. Toronto: TSAR, 1990.

- Kulyk Keefer, Janice. "From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope: Out of the Multicultural Past Comes a Vision of a Transcultural Future." *Books in Canada* 20.6 (1991): 13-16.
- Lang, Jessica. "The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory." *Journal of Modern Literature*. 33:1 (Fall 2009): 43-56.
- Michaels, Anne. *Fugitive Pieces*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- New, W.H. *Borderlands: How We Talk About Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.
- Porter, John. *The Vertical Mosaic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.
- Rauch, Molly E. "Geologies of Silence." *The Nation* April 7, 1997: 35-38.
- Smith, Anthony D. "Nations by Design?" *National Identity*. Ethno-nationalism in Comparative Perspective Series. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1991.
- Spergel, Julie. *Canada's 'Second History': The Fiction of Jewish Canadian Women Writers*. Hamburg: Verlag Dr Kovac, 2009.
- Webster, Leonard and Patricie Mertova. "Using Narrative Inquiry as a Research Method. An Introduction to Using Critical Event Narrative Analysis in Research on Learning and Teaching". London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

Brygida Gasztold, PhD, holds an MA degree and a doctorate degree from Gdańsk University, and a diploma of postgraduate studies from Ruskin College, Oxford and Warsaw University (British Studies). She is assistant professor at Technical University of Koszalin, Poland. Her academic interests include American Jewish literature, Canadian Jewish literature, as well as the problems of immigration, gender and ethnic identities. She has published *To the Limits of Experience. Jerzy Kosiński's Literary Quest for Self-Identity* (2008), *Negotiating Home and Identity in Early 20th Century Jewish-American Narratives* (2011) and essays on immigrant literature and ethnicity.