

# Anne michaels' "fugitive pieces": an analysis essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Anne Michaels' " Fugitive Pieces" is a powerful novel about damaged lives and the indestructibility of the human spirit which was empowered through its poignant depiction of the concepts of loss, pain, memory, language, and love

Loss, as one of the main themes in the novel played a very big role.

Everything that had happened to Jakob, as a child, and as he grew old was influenced by the things that had happened to him during his childhood.

Jakob witnessed the murder of his own family. This therefore, affected his whole being. Death of an important person in ones life can sometimes lead to a total destruction of the mind. If it was not handled or adressed properly, Jakob could have experienced the consequences of severe trauma which could have probably led to insanity. " Every human encounter with the death of another person is to some extent a painful reminder of one's own mortality, and every death encounter entails some degree of psychological trauma that results in subtle or profound psychological transformation."

(Henry 3).

However, the situation was obviously handled well by Jakob except for times when he was haunted by the thoughts of his family's murder especially the disappearance of his sister, Bella. The concept of losing someone is a great factor or an important element in the progress of the story. As the story progressed, these consistent thoughts about his family, however, affected his relationship with Alexandra. The girl thought that Jakob could not focus on their relationship because of the fact that he was still haunted by the thoughts about his family. Because of this, Alexandra thought that the

relationship would not grow if he will continuously be thinking of other things than their relationship. Fortunately, with his second relationship, he was totally able to move on and had eventually accepted what had happened to his family. Cleverly, he just named his daughter after his lost sister, Bella. This was probably the only consolation he had for himself for trying to move on with his life without being bothered by the thoughts of his past.

Pain, another relevant theme in the story was poignantly depicted. " Pain is primarily a psychological experience. It is the most pervasive and universal form of human distress and it often contributes to dramatic reductions in the quality of life. "(Hadjistavropoulos and Craig 1). Jakob Beer, obviously experienced a lot of pain. Getting through to living life alone (without a family, for that matter), was never an easy task. Even if he was cared by Athos Roussos, the one who found him buried under the soil, living with real family members is still different. His encounters of having pain were greatly associated with his loss. Again, this has something to do with psychological aspects. Anything that is mentally and emotionally associated is considered as part of the psychological process.

Pain, for that matter, was again an important factor in his life. If we will try to analyze the concept of pain based on how it was used in the novel, we will observe that it not only referred to what Jakob had encountered. It was a common denominator that the people during the Second World War and what Jakob encountered. The novel served as an eye opener which illustrated the real happenings during the Second World War. Many families were tortured and eventually murdered by the Nazi soldiers. Many families

were broken. Many people died. And many suffered more than what is due when they lived alone. Unfortunately, that was what happened to Jakob's family. They were captured by the Nazi soldier and were killed and Jakob witnessed everything. Fortunately, he was able to hide and save himself. However, after that incident, Jakob then was alone and he suffered from that status. That is the real concept of pain.

In the story, Jakob said something very interesting about his perception of memory and history. Jakob said, "History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral" (138). This had something to do with what happened. One's memory can either be reliable or not. What is stored inside the memory is, of course, all true. However, sometimes, when a person tries to remember something, the memory can sometimes betray people and give them inaccurate data. In line with what happened to Jakob, what he had to do is try to forget what had happened to his family. Forgetting, on the other hand, is conceived as a loss of correspondence between the memory report and the actual event. Memory, in Jakob's case, was again, a vital factor in his growth. Memory is moral; what you remember is always right. Memory does not lie. It always provides people with the correct information, unless, however, it tries to betray us by not providing us with what we want to remember. There is nothing bad with retaining things that matter to you.

Memory, for that matter, somewhat served as a guiding principle in Jakob's life. His thoughts about his family kept him going. He tried to live by what happened. He lived a normal life and he did it for his family. He lived his life because his family cannot live theirs anymore. He did so, because in his

mind, remained the thoughts of his family's sufferings. Memory is moral because it supplies the people with the reality and with what is true. Memory cannot merely something that is part of our thinking system. It is an important element that somehow plays a big role in our lives by guiding us. Memory is considered to be about past events. Everything that happened to Jakob in the past; all his encounters, his experiences, his sufferings, his happiness, can be considered as part of his memory. All of these will also come back to his thoughts from time to time. These can affect his total being, either constructively or destructively. Because of these thoughts stored in his memory, his perception of things also changed. When we speak of perception, we refer to the interest that lies between what we know and what is out there. If Jakob's perception of things is not the same how things really are, there will be no coordination with his past and his present condition. All these things still go back to the concept of memory. Without memory, there will be no truth, no reality, no past and neither will there be the present.

" I already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate," says Jakob. " But poetry, the power of language to restore: this was what both Athos and Kostas were trying to teach me" (79). Earlier, in the synopsis, we learned that Jakob, later on, became a writer. He viewed language to be destructive in some aspect. Language, according to him has the power to omit: " It is extremely difficult to understand how communication is possible between human beings who are innovative. This is especially so if the innovation concerns their language. "(Hattiangadi 33) Jakob can be

considered as an innovative person. He became a writer and therefore made something better out of language. He was able to express himself through writing.

He used his writing in order to communicate. Language became an instrument for him to become a better person. Language itself is a constant thread which means that it serves as a line to communication; to interact with other people and to share each other's thoughts. Jakob already learned how to communicate his own pain and to find his way through it through his writing. We can also note that he said that poetry is a power of language to restore. He only meant that through poetry, he can take back what had already been said and done. Poetry can mean many things. Poetry is also a form of communication. Through poetry, he was able to bring out his thoughts as well as his experiences. In one way or another, poetry have helped him get through his bad experiences by bringing them out and trying to reach out to people to make them understand him. Through his poetry, he was able to show who he really was and why he behaved that way; which was primarily because of his experiences. Through poetry, there is a different perspective in treating things. And through the language of poetry, there can be no sadness, loss, nor death.

In Toronto, Jakob had learned a new language. He attended the university where he met Maurice Salzman who became a dear friend. Athos became obsessed with the Nazi falsification of history. This actually became another cause of conflict. Because of the fact that Jakob learned other languages, he then forgot some things from his past. Acquiring different languages means

adapting different kinds of culture. Through this process of acquiring a different language, Jakob then was exposed to a different culture. A culture that is new to him. Because of this, the old culture which he knew was easily replaced by a new one. The more he learned a new language, the more the process continued; he acquired something new then he forgot who he really was. This proves that language can sometimes really be a cultural barrier.

Jakob asked, "Athos, how big is the actual heart?" and Athos answered, "Imagine the size and heaviness of a handful of earth" (113). Athos answered Jakob's question the way a typical scientist, or archeologist, for that matter, would answer that question. A doctor, on the other hand, might reply that, providing it is healthy, it is the size of a human fist. As normal human beings, we merely view the heart as the massive muscle inside our system that beats a lot faster than we think. However, poets and writers, for that matter, might see it as a symbol of love. Love, again, is an important factor in living a healthy life. Jakob Beer tried to live his life with the greatest love he can have.

Knowing how Jakob suffered during his childhood, some may say that he won't be able to go on living his life guided by the real concept of love. "...cruelty, hatred, violence, and injustice can and never will be able to create a mental, moral or material millennium. The only way toward it is the royal road of all-giving creative love, not only preached but consistently practiced" (Chartier). Love therefore, made its way to guide Jakob in his struggle to live life alone without his family. As the story progressed, we learned that Jakob encountered having relationships with two different women. He was able to

demonstrate his love for others. Love has a language of its own, it speaks for itself. Through love emerges communication and therefore understanding. If Jakob did not understand love, he would not have understood the real essence of communication either. It is good that eventually, he was able to give love and he received love in return.

The characters in the story came to understand the implacability of the natural world, the impartial perfection of science, and the heartbreak of history

The main characters, Jakob Beer and Athos Roussos, were both under different struggles. Jakob struggled to live his life normally after his past experience. What he encountered was an experience that affected the whole of him: his personality and his whole life. However, through those experiences, he came to a better understanding of the natural world. He learned that, in life, death is a natural thing. Life comes and goes. However, the only thing that was unfair for his part was the fact that with his own eyes, he witnessed the death of his own family. His loss was an experience which he would definitely not forget. It will forever remain in the corners of his memory. The destruction of his relationship with his family is to be blamed on the Nazi soldiers. However, history created its own story. Jakob's story was a great participant in the making of history. The events that happened to him happened because it was meant to happen. The Nazi soldiers will eventually make people suffer no matter what happened. That was their job. The only sad part about it is that, Jakob's family became part of it.



Athos Roussos, An archeologist in the story, has also issues of his own. He didn't care whether there was a currently occurring war. Yes, there was, nevertheless, he still went digging for things which he needed for research which eventually led him to finding Jakob and rescuing him. Athos was a man of science. When he rescued Jakob, he brought him to Zakynthos with him. There, he introduced Jakob to science. He was a scientist struggling to prove something during his time. However, the natural world, of course, had an effect on him also. No matter how hard he tried to get through with his scientific issues, he still lived his life in accordance with how it should be lived. As a man involved in science, he was also involved in art. He then encouraged Jakob to bring out the artistic side in him. He was Jakob's influence in pursuing his writing career. He believed in the art, and therefore, he believed in poetry, and in the end, he believed in Jakob's writings.

The novel, as a whole, was a great influence and eye opener. It depicted the concept of losing someone or something. As stated earlier, Jakob's experience of losing his family during the early stage of his life affected him a lot. Because of this loss, he was able to acquire new things. He was also able to adopt new surroundings because of the fact that he was found by a stranger, who, eventually, took care of him. Because of the things that happened to him in the past, he also learned new things which resulted to his growth. Best example of this is the fact that afterwards, he became a writer and was able to express himself through print.

Another concept depicted in the novel is the concept of pain or the concept of suffering. Jakob's loss contributed a lot to his encounter of experiencing

great pain. As we concluded, loss and pain were greatly associated to one another in the novel. Loss, in general, is the state of losing someone important. Pain, on the other hand, is the long-term state which a person experiences after a loss. Memory also played a great role in the novel. Jakob's continuous thoughts about the murder of his family and the disappearance of his sister affected his relationship with others. Language, also considered as a dominant concept, was given proof by Jakob's perception towards it. As stated earlier, Jakob viewed language to be constructive yet destructive at the same time. This however, became an instrument for him to be able to express himself. Lastly, love, was also depicted in the novel. Jakob learned that love heals everything. Even if you experienced terrible things in life, like witnessing the death of your own family just as what happened to Jakob, love is the only thing that could cure all your heartaches and sufferings.

#### Works Cited

Michaels, Anne. *Fugitive pieces*. United States of America. Vintage books USA. 1998.

Henry, Vincent E. *Death: Work: Trauma and the psychology of survival*. United States of America. Oxford University Press 2004

Hadjistavropoulos, Thomas & Craig, Kenneth D. *An introduction to pain: Psychological perspectives*. United States of America. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 2004.

Hattiangadi J. N. How is language possible? Philosophical reflections on the evolution of language and knowledge. Open Court. 1987.

Chartier, Myron R. Journal of psychology and theology: Classic study of love. Vol. 34. 2006