

**“THE LIMITS OF MY
LANGUAGE [...]” THE
PARADOXES OF
MEMORY IN ANNE
MICHAELS’S *FUGITIVE
PIECES***

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Abstract

This article deals with the depiction offered by Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* on the impact that trauma has on autobiographical memory, as this limit-experience also illustrates how traumatic memories are stored and processed. More specifically, the present research focuses on the different manifestations exhibited by the protagonist, in order to explore the correspondences and networks between memory, sensory imprints, language and consciousness. This paper aims to develop a framework which may explain how *Fugitive Pieces* contributes to the understanding of the complex interconnections and performances involved in autobiographical memory, particularly when it applies to traumatised subjects.

Keywords: *Fugitive Pieces*, trauma, memory, senses, language, consciousness.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la representación que Anne Michaels lleva a cabo en *Fugitive Pieces* acerca del impacto que ocasiona el trauma en la memoria autobiográfica, al tiempo que esta experiencia límite sirve para ilustrar el almacenamiento y procesamiento de los recuerdos traumáticos. Concretamente, esta investigación se centra en los distintos síntomas que manifiesta el protagonista con el fin de indagar en las correlaciones e interconexiones que se establecen entre la memoria, las huellas sensoriales, el lenguaje y la conciencia. El objetivo último del presente artículo consiste en establecer un marco teórico que explique cómo la novela contribuye a la comprensión de la estructura y el funcionamiento de la memoria autobiográfica, particularmente en lo que respecta a los casos de trauma.

Palabras clave: *Fugitive Pieces*, trauma, memoria, sentidos, lenguaje, conciencia.

Placed within the imaginary realm, literature conveys an exceptional standpoint to mull over significant issues within the context of both the writer and the reader. This paper discusses a distinct variety of literature conceived as “memory texts”, which ponder the process of reconstructing and grappling with the past. More specifically, Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) will be studied in order to explore memory and the psychological effects of trauma. The novel consists of two “pseudo-diaries” concerned with the traumatic aftermath of the Holocaust and its cataclysmic repercussions. According to Barbara Foley, “pseudofactual novels” (1982:331) like Michaels’s are particularly appropriate to deal with the Holocaust owing to their use of nonteleological and nontotalising narrative forms. Furthermore, for the purpose of this article, the fictional mime of the diary is particularly propitious because of the insight it gives into the process of remembering a past shattered by traumatic experiences. Throughout this analysis, the account concerning the life of Jakob Beer shall be examined with the aim of elucidating the different ways in which memory and post-traumatic stress disorder are represented in Anne Michaels’s work.

Through Jakob’s experience, the novel presents a character whose basic cognitive and emotional capacities are altered as a consequence of post-traumatic symptoms. This article deals with the depiction offered by *Fugitive Pieces* as to the impact that trauma has on autobiographical memory, as this limit-experience simultaneously serves to illustrate how traumatic memories are stored as sensory perceptions. This research focuses on the different manifestations exhibited by the protagonist in order to explore the correspondences and networks between memory, sensory imprints, language and consciousness. The intimate relation between language and consciousness displayed by the novel leads us to question how Wittgenstein’s views on language apply to post-traumatic cases. Wittgenstein’s assertion “[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (2001:149) will be reassessed in the light of the conclusions derived from the analysis of Jakob’s story. Within this framework, it is worth mentioning that a number of symptoms suffered by Jakob, such as “belatedness”, the two poles of repression and repetition, melancholia and mourning, “acting out” and “working through”, constitute physical responses related to the subject’s inability to translate memory into speech. As a result, traumatic recollections are organised on a perceptual level. Theorists ranging from Freud to more recent academics, including Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dominick LaCapra will be taken into account when considering the connection between post-traumatic psychological symptoms and the processing and storage of information into memory. Thus, under the interdisciplinary area of trauma theories fiction borrows from other fields of study, but literature also goes a step further. Not only does it shed light on theory, but it also explores its possibilities while raising important issues. To conclude, by showing a limit-experience, this article

demonstrates how *Fugitive Pieces* contributes to the understanding of the complex interconnections and performances involved in autobiographical memory, particularly when it applies to traumatised subjects.

Fugitive Pieces comprises the diary of Jakob Beer, a Jewish boy whose childhood in Nazi-occupied Poland comes to an end when officials burst into his house and kill his family. Jakob's small height allows him to fit through a tiny hole in the wall in which he hides. There he listens how his parents are murdered in cold blood and Bella, his thirteen-year-old sister is captured. Once the Nazis are gone, Jakob manages to escape to the forest where he buries himself beneath the surface of the earth by the river so as not to be spotted. He remains hidden in Biskupin, the archaeological site of an ancient wooden city until he is dug up by Athos, a Greek geologist, who smuggles him out of Poland to take him to Zakyntos, his native island. This episode means a turning point in Jakob's story, constituting the trauma that determines the rest of his life. Anne Michaels's work gives a penetrating insight into the destabilising effects of trauma on the victim's cognitive, emotional and linguistic capacities and how such memories hinder the retrieval, acceptance and transmission of the past. The traumatic event assaults the child's psyche through excessive stimuli that he is unable to grasp at the moment of its occurrence and hence, returns in uncontrollable flashbacks, nightmares, abrupt transitions and depressions. Initial dissociation gives rise to the symptoms that reverberate throughout his whole existence, most of which remain outside of conscious awareness.

Therefore, the re-presentation of post-traumatic stress disorder must be examined exhaustively in order to determine its symptoms and manifestations. Despite controversies surrounding the definition of this term,¹ it is widely accepted that “[t]he pathology consists [...] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth 1995:4-5). As the quotation suggests, the post-traumatic stress disorder is defined by its devastating aftermath. Dissociation at the moment of trauma serves as a way of coping with certain inescapably stressful events, but forasmuch as overwhelming experiences have not been assimilated into familiar cognitive schemas, they remain incomprehensible, resisting integration into consciousness. Hence, the responses to the catastrophic events usually take place in delayed intrusive phenomena Freud referred to as “Nachträglichkeit” (1895), which was translated into English as “deferred action” or “afterwardness”. In this scheme, the “incubation period” tends

¹ Even though there is no definite definition, an interesting approach to this concept is provided by Figley (1985).

to be followed by frantic hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares, etc., that lead the victim to relive the traumatic experience:

Precisely because the violence suffered by Holocaust victims was so extreme [...] it affected those victims as a psychic concision that short-circuited their capacity to “process” the traumatizing event as it took place [...]. On the mind, having “dissociated” consciousness from itself, installs an unprocessed memory-trace that returns unbidden, as delayed effect, in an effort to force the mind to digest this previously kernel of experience. (Foster 2007:273)

This kind of impact originates a survival mechanism that consists of repressing all memories connected to the moment of trauma. Nevertheless, this suppression elicits the unconscious repetition of the occurrence. Therefore, trauma oscillates between the opposing pulls to repress the past and the compulsion to re-experience it. Besides, the obsessive recapitulation is both a symptom and a response to trauma, motivated by two forces. On the one hand, it evinces the wounding of the mental faculties, but at the same time, the vivid intrusions of appalling images and sensations can also be interpreted as attempts on the part of the subject to negotiate with a dreadful past. Thus, dissociation followed by repression is at the heart of the compulsive repetition, which seems to corroborate Assmann’s statement that “[t]hose who cannot remember their past are condemned to relive it” (1995:130).

For Jakob, the bewildering encounter with trauma at such a young age elicits several kinds of pathologies caused by breakdown of basic cognitive capacities. The initial convulsion enables him to detach emotionally from the events witnessed, giving him power to escape from the most immediate danger. Notwithstanding, once he has landed safely on Zakynthos, his mind returns obsessively to the scene of the crime. All the while the ghosts of his parents and his sister haunt him day and night. The novel conforms to Freud’s theory of trauma, inasmuch as it features the child’s fluctuation between repression and repetition. At several points, Jakob confides in his diary his attempts to suppress the memory of trauma by resorting to delusional beliefs in resurrection. The time span, forced displacement and dislocation beguile him into fabricating the illusion of rebirth and regeneration. When Athos conceals Jakob under his jumper to transfer him out of Poland, his image bearing the child resembles a sort of male pregnancy, whose symbolic delivery takes place when they arrive on the island. This figment of the imagination implies that instead of storing the traumatic experience by incorporating it to his memories of the past, Jakob establishes a dividing line between a life shattered by catastrophe and Athos’s adoption, which come to be regarded as two separate lives. This fissure inspires the child to negate his Polish roots, while disrupting his grasp of the past. As a consequence, memory remains highly disjointed and fragmented; hence, discontinuity with the present prevails. Thereupon, not only does Jakob display the frailty of an identity founded on the suppression of memory, but his

experience demonstrates the impossibility of eradicating certain recollections. Particularly, reminiscences of trauma are incessant and perennial on account of the fluctuation between his urge to suppress the past and the recurrent reappearances. Even though during the incubation period Jakob cherishes the delusion that the event has been relegated to a life foreign to the ego, the indelible imprints of trauma remain embedded within the individual's subconscious, threatening to wake up unexpectedly. In fact, repetitive occurrence of intrusive phenomena haunts him while he is hiding on Athos's island, leading the narrator to bewail the fact that his will is invariably betrayed by his subconscious: “I tried to bury images, to cover them over with Greek and English words, with Athos's stories, with all the geologic eras. [...] But at night, my mother, my father, Bella, Mones, simply rose, shook the earth from their clothes, and waited” (Michaels 1998:93).

To start with, the time span from the narration to the narrated signifies a distinction between the “I” that corresponds to the narrative voice and the narrated self. The fifty years that separate these two “chronotopes” (Bakhtin 1982:210) and the diverse stances they endorse account for the discrepancies between the attempts on the part of the boy to forget and the narrator's strong conviction that efforts to escape the past are futile. Besides these two attitudes, the quotation highlights two contrasting operations distinguished by the degree of awareness they entail. Unlike the hallucinations suffered by the child in a numbed state, the creation of new memories in different languages corresponds to a conscious act in which language is involved. Entry into the linguistic realm translates chaotic mental processes into a discernible channel that makes them comprehensible for the subject. However, during that particular stage of his life, Jakob aspires to dismiss from mind all the traces of his Polish past; hence, instead of casting light on his recollections, language is used to conceal. Along with the efforts to start over by constructing a refurbished memory articulated through language (and shaped by it), Jakob is bound to a kind of retentiveness whose shrouds resist distinction. Even though Yiddish seems to slumber beneath the layers of Greek and English, Jakob's ghosts live through it. Thus, the traumatic experience remains outside the domains of language and consciousness due to the fact that his difficulty in processing the traumatic experience undermines his attempts to produce a coherent narrative of his past. Likewise, this is an irrepressible type of memory that defeats Jakob's struggles to exert some control over it. In other words, he cannot choose what his subconscious stores and what is consigned to oblivion.

His failure to erase these memories is closely related to the very crux of trauma, which resides in the oscillation between repression and compulsion. Inasmuch as the initial emotional detachment prevented the protagonist from grasping the situation, he is doomed to go through the scene, which returns with the intensity and vividness of the original. The distinctness of the images and

perceptions, along with the associated sensations suffered, refrain Jakob from identifying these reoccurrences as recollections belonging to the past. Instead, the repressed material is relived during each of these manifestations. While sleeping, he is particularly vulnerable, falling prey to the subconscious without being capable of opposing any resistance. The following quotation puts an emphasis on the excruciating agony that tortures him while he is on the island of Zakynthos:

They waited until I was asleep, then roused themselves, exhausted as swimmers, grey between the empty trees. Their hair in tufts, open sores where ears used to be, grubs twisting from their chests. The grotesque remains of incomplete lives, the embodied complexity of desires eternally denied. They floated until they grew heavier, and began to walk, heaving into humanness; until they grew more human than phantom and through their effort began to sweat. Their strain poured from skin, until I woke dripping with their deaths. Daydreams of sickening repetition. (Michaels 1998:24)

This fragment deals with the sharp intrusions of traumatic images and sensations, indicating how emotions and perceptions are fundamental cues for the retrieval of traumatic recollections. The continual references to sounds and the act of hearing denote the non-visualization of his family's murder behind the wall. Even though Jakob overhears his parents' cries, it is Bella's silence that resounds even louder. He retains the sensations felt inside the hole so his ears are described as open wounds through which the horror of trauma is transmitted to the rest of his body. Recurring remarks on aural aspects reverberate throughout the novel with different connotations. The recollections of the music played by Bella on the piano and the shrieks and yells of his parents when they were murdered populate Jakob's account, but silence above all permeates his memories, being regarded as the most distressing noise due to its association with death. In this case, literature mirrors music on the grounds that silences must be taken into account, for as it happens in melodies they have to be measured according to the prevailing rules that govern the whole work. In fact, they are decisive to such a degree that without them the meaning of the whole composition would be utterly altered.

On the other hand, the quotation cited above also draws attention to the physicality of these ghosts. Their carnality protrudes to such an extent that Jakob refuses to classify them as mere spectres. The numerous references to the corporeal and sensible qualities of these visions endow them with substantial nature. In addition, these phantoms are provided with bodies that conform in every respect to those of living organisms, performing the same functions as human beings that perspire, walk, breathe, etc. To conclude, the quotation gives prominence to the material dimension of these hallucinations and the corporeality of the ghosts of the past in order to foreground what will later be referred to as "the skin of memory." Moreover, the authentic appearance of these visions triggers an intermingling of

fantasy with conventional notions of “reality.” These fantasy formations lead to alterations in his sense of identity, his apprehensions of temporal and spatial categories, etc. His childhood is afflicted by the phantasmagoric companionships of his parents and his sister, which causes him to declare that “It’s no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world” (Michaels 1998:54). Hence, the impairment of Jakob’s mental faculties also prevents him from establishing a dividing line between those alive and those belonging to the realm of the dead. Since the deceased corpses have not been buried and the losses have not been mourned, Jakob’s attempts to confine his family to the domain of death continue to be challenged. As a consequence, these apparitions persevere, pervading his life until he is no longer able to discern between life and death or past and present. The legacy of trauma is incarnated by a past that gobbles up any possibility to envisage the present, whilst the frontiers between the real and the imaginary are blurred. Haunted by the ghosts of his past, the protagonist is shown to be trapped between two worlds and two different times, exhibiting an oscillation of consciousness between yesterday and today, experience and fantasy, life and death.

The emphasis on the physicality displayed by Jakob’s visions can be understood within Charlotte Delbo’s theoretical framework. Charlotte Delbo is a widely respected writer, whose time as a prisoner in Auschwitz was recorded in her memoirs, *Auschwitz and After* (1995). Basing on her own background, Delbo establishes a division between two types of memory: “sense memory,” referred to as “deep memory” as well, and “thinking memory.” “Sense memory” is characterised as a fragmented memory residing in the body that consists of sensory imprints in which language does not play a role. Reminiscences cannot be captured by words, so the trauma is remembered in the form of somatosensory flashbacks. In other words, the body re-experiences the past without being able to comprehend it because memories have not been articulated in words and symbols. “Sense memory operates through the body to produce a kind of ‘seeing truth’, rather than ‘thinking truth’, registering the pain of memory as it is directly experienced, and communicating a level of bodily affect” (Bennett 2005:26). On the other hand, “thinking memory” relies on language to produce narratives of the past. While “sense memory” is concerned with the body, semantic representations emanating from “thinking memory” involve consciousness and likewise knowledge.

With regard to traumatic experience, hallucinations, nightmares and flashbacks can be classified as manifestations of “sense memory.” In fact, Jakob’s intrusive recollections suggest that trauma is organised in the memory on a perceptual level. Thus, the theoretical approach underlying Delbo’s categories is particularly convenient to understand the way memory functions in cases of post-traumatic stress disorders and the significance of the body throughout these processes. According to the etymology of the word, “trauma” in old Greek designated a

wound that affected the body, instead of the mind (Caruth 1996:3). In this scheme, *Fugitive Pieces* highlights how the trauma is re-experienced through the body. More specifically, Jakob is depicted as being trapped by the memory of the senses, which is by definition closely associated with the body.

I long for memory to be spirit, but fear it is only skin. I fear that knowledge becomes instinct only to disappear with the body. For it is my body that remembers them, and though I have tried to erase Alex from my senses, tried to will my parents and Bella from my sleep, this will amounts to nothing, for my body betrays me in a second. (Michaels 1998:170)

This quotation reflects a dialectic struggle between mind and body in which the body is victorious. When emphasising that mental powers are useless without the body, the novel seems to contradict a Western philosophical and epistemological tradition that gave prominence to the mind. The male body in the Cartesian tradition was conceived as a resource for appropriation, an organism for the mind to exert its power. In relation to this, Norbert Elias analyses the construction of the “civilized body” according to the assumption that from the Renaissance “[t]his civilized body also has the ability to rationalize and exert a high degree of control over its emotions, to monitor its actions and those of others, and to internalise a demarcated set of rules about “appropriate behaviour” (Elias 1978:140). This quotation hints at the hierarchical relation that was commonly established between mind and reason, on the one hand, and emotion and body, on the other. Nevertheless, Michaels deconstructs these dualisms by showing that, in critical circumstances as those in which trauma is involved, both body and emotions prevail, overriding the determination of the subject. Reconsidering the Cartesian tradition of “a masculine identity defined in terms of a disembodied conception of reason” (Seidler 1987:96), the novel offers as its antithesis the traumatised subject, whose body seems to be utterly unconstrained by the mind.

The sovereignty of the body is corroborated by the centrality of “sense memory” in Jakob’s diary. While he hides in the refuge of Zakyntos, his mind persists obstinately in blocking traumatic remembrances. Precisely because his knowledge of the episode has been dissociated from consciousness, vestiges of images and sounds are stored as memory perceptions. Since trauma material has not been encoded, Jakob remains trapped by overwhelming shadows that prevent him from “seeing” or identifying his problem. Paradoxically, it was already mentioned that Jakob’s inability to put words to re-live the traumatic events is not synonymous with breaking the bonds that connect him to these memories. Contrary to this, his subconscious pesters him with voices from the past, the most dramatic expressions of post-traumatic stress disorder: “the fluctuation of traumatic flashbacks between a past in which the event was not fully experienced and a present in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” (Stoicea 2006:48). Jakob is

emotionally affected, but his suffering resists being translated into language, causing him to re-experience the responses elicited by the traumatic encounter. This also relates to Piaget’s thesis² based on the argument that when memories cannot be coded through language, they are likely to be organised in somatic sensations. At a subconscious level, Jakob is condemned to revive with extreme vividness the inescapable anxiety that brings to life the traumatic occurrence. Meanwhile, his conscious motivations oscillate between the extremes of retention and his frenzy to forget: “I want to remain close to Bella. I read. I rip the black alphabet to shreds, but there’s no answer there” (Michaels 1998:167). The blackness attributed to the alphabet refers to the darkness that wraps those memories that have not been translated into words. Impairment of the linguistic faculties is also related to the specific configuration of post-traumatic stress disorder between the poles of repression and repetition. Dissociation followed by repression prevents the recollection from being decoded, causing it to remain “wordless” and likewise foreign to the mind. This in turn gives rise to repetition. According to the approach previously explained, recapitulations are not mere symptoms, for they can be regarded as attempts to accept and comprehend the traumatic event: “Our memory repeats to us what we haven’t understood. Repetition is addressed to incomprehension” (Paul Valéry, qtd. in Felman 2000:144). The assumption that language produces consciousness suggests the related conjecture that knowledge is contingent on language. This leads to Wittgenstein’s views on language as they are summarised by his famous statement from his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921:149): “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” Therefore, repression, compulsion to re-enact traumatic experience and “sense memory” form a chain reaction of the recollections that have not been translated into a narrative. Without words to relate the past, the past cannot be envisaged nor critically analysed. This inevitably condemns the subject to re-experience it, going through the same suffering and emotions that were felt the first time.

Trauma disrupts the networks involved in autobiographical memory, all the while thwarting representations of the past. The unsettling consequence of this outburst is both evinced and exacerbated by the absence of a medium through which Jakob’s severe mental and physical pain can be articulated. The subject’s inability to construct a coherent narrative out of traumatic events motivates mental blankness and a great complexity of memory symptoms, most of which are outside of conscious awareness. Susan J. Brison defines the devastation of existing mental faculties as “an epistemological crisis” (2002:50) due to the fact that traumatic experiences were not categorised into a narrative. Along the same line, Jakob’s deranged confluences between the dominions of death and life, past and present,

²See Guidano (1987).

subject and object are dominated by his inability to process the information into narrative memory. The allusions to the ghosts that haunt him throughout his childhood and youth evince his disorder as far as the threshold between life and death is concerned. Regarding temporality, Jakob's past constantly interferes with his present, exposing the correspondences between his numerous difficulties to construct a narrative of the past and his failure to arrange temporal experiences. Temporal disintegration and the inability to construct a narrative to explain traumatic events can also be related to Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* (1983). This work explores reciprocity between these terms, offering an approach that casts light on Jakob's case history. According to the French philosopher, both disorders are related, for historical time (or abstract time) "becomes human time to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (1990:52). This thesis ratifies that all events must be susceptible of being incorporated into a narrative in order to be understood. The urge to tell a story about what happened serves among other ends the purpose of organising the subject's perception of time. Nonetheless, traumatic memories imply that the distortions in time perception presented by Jakob hamper semantic re-presentations of the past. Correspondingly, memory that has not been articulated in words and symbols also disrupts time perception. Post-traumatic syndrome traps the victim into a "sense memory" deprived of the faculty of translating the anguish into recollections governed by language. Additionally, this originates temporal disintegration whereby the present moment becomes isolated from the continuity of past and future time. Since Jakob has not taken possession of his past, the past preys on his present, annihilating potential future projects and aspirations.

Jakob's critical situation also encompasses a commotion that relates to LaCapra's theories of the fusion between loss and absence. Before delving into this issue, it is indispensable to introduce some basic notions regarding LaCapra's theoretical framework. Influenced by Freud's renowned "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), he identifies two responses to pain and sorrow over a loss: "acting out" and "working through," which correlate with "mourning" and "melancholia," respectively. These reactions are mainly triggered by a loss that may refer to a beloved person, a situation or an abstract concept. With regard to Jakob, the loss of Bella and his parents has a direct bearing on the traumatic experience. The ordeal of accepting that the object lost is no longer present implies going through a process in which the bonds connecting the subject with its object are broken. "Working-through" consists of a series of actions aimed at coping with grief, including "mourning" as one of its modalities. These measures culminate with the recognition and acceptance of the loss. Contrariwise, "acting-out" threatens the subject's mental well-being through compulsive dementia, which comprises

what has been termed as melancholia. According to LaCapra, melancholia conforms to Freud’s definition of a process that differs from mourning on the following grounds:

The depressed, self-berating, and traumatized self, locked in a compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life that allows one to begin again. (1999:713)

Therefore, the normal development to recover after suffering the traumatic experience of losing someone or something should commence with identifying the losses, followed by a subsequent process of “working-through” the pain that encompasses different modalities, such as mourning.

Jakob, on the other hand, illustrates how the emergence of dysfunctions or breakdowns at any of the stages places the self in jeopardy. Dissociation during the traumatic events, ensuing extremes of retention and forgetting, “memory sense” and language disorders lead the protagonist to black out the loss of his family. His reluctance to accept the death of his family leaves a gap that is seized by an absence. Thus, his syndrome relates to LaCapra’s theory on the coalescence between absence and loss, in which the following symptoms are highlighted: “one faces the impasses of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted” (1999:698). The fusion between loss and absence applies in a most discernible way to Bella, whose whereabouts after being captured by the Nazis remain unknown. Instead of a loss, Bella represents an absence that restrains Jakob from coming to terms with his sister’s death. As a consequence, he is harassed by an absence that holds him prisoner of melancholia. The mystery surrounding her disappearance constitutes an insurmountable obstacle that inhibits Jakob from going through mourning because of his failure to assimilate this loss.

Furthermore, Bella’s silence impels him to envision images to compensate for the absence of sound. This explains recurring hallucinations in which Jakob tries to reconstruct the details surrounding his sister’s murder. Nonetheless, his ignorance in relation to the factual events following her vanishing frustrates his attempts to imagine the end of her life: “I endlessly follow Bella’s path from the front door of my parent’s house. In order to give her death a place [...] then the world fell silent. Again I was standing under water, my boots locked in mud” (Michaels 1998:139). This reflects the narrator’s obsessive attempts to fill the blank left by his sibling’s death. But every time the critical juncture is about to be imagined, his expectations are shattered, for the enigma remains unsolved. The aftermath of Bella’s

disappearance is made up of silence, an unfinished story that leads to the omission translated into an absence. The image conveyed in the former fragment is highly evocative, as it evinces how the hermetic muteness leaves an unbearable void that awakes memories of the child sinking into the mud before Athos pulled him out. The description underlines a circularity that causes him to return once and again to the traumatic events. Repetition and substitution are part and parcel of his consciousness, whose failed efforts to imagine possible outcomes for Bella impel the boy to hark back to his own past in Biskupin. In so doing, Jakob mirrors genuinely LaCapra's approach to the confusion between loss and absence, along with the detrimental consequences this entails and its relation to melancholia and "acting-out." Unable to assume the loss, the survivor is also restrained from working through trauma, which holds him captive of an everlasting melancholia, for he cannot mourn what has not been regarded as a loss. The fact that Bella has not been laid to rest keeps her alive in Jakob's mind. Furthermore, at certain points in his life course, Jakob comes to identify with his sister. The Russian doll sequential embrace, "I inside Athos, Bella inside me" (Michaels 1998:14), manifests an identity disorder motivated by the fusion between loss and absence and the aftereffects of melancholia. In this sense, one of the threats that melancholia poses on the self lies on the narcissistic identification with the loss object. This symptom has been widely studied by psychoanalysts inspired by Freud, who argued that for the melancholic self, the lost object is withdrawn from consciousness, but retained through identification.

Subjugated to melancholia, the victim's pathological stagnation triggers the alternation between identification with the loss object and endeavors to find substitutes for the dispossession. This obsession persists into adult life, becoming particularly arresting when he expects that his wife Alex may supplant the deceased sister. Striving to cope with grief to overcome the loss, he projects the fantasy that Alex can compensate for Bella's disappearance by usurping her place. However, this unsuccessful placebo is fraught with woes and inconveniences. Unable to exert any self-restraint, these dramatic expressions of post-traumatic stress disorder defy the protagonist. In point of fact, some of its consequences condense the main symptoms originated by the conflation between loss and absence elucidated by LaCapra. To start with, temporal disruption pervades his existence, generating elevated levels of distress. Jakob's compulsive focus on prior life experiences instigates a past temporal orientation, along with the isolation of the present from the continuity of his past and future. Confronted with a ghastly exposure of fracture time, he is betwixt and between a time that is neither present nor past: "Every moment is two moments. Alex's hairbrush propped on the sink: Bella's brush [...] Bella writing on my back: Alex's touch during the night" (Michaels 1998:140). His existence is bisected into two dissociated moments governed by antithetic

circumstances and different temporalities. This spectral bifocality separates marital life with Alex from a past temporal orientation that revolves around his sister. Persistent failures to assume his loss, along with the subsequent lack of a “working-through” process to recover from post-traumatic stress disorder hinder his individual sense of coherence and continuity. Instead of recognising and classifying the loss, Jakob endures the psychic and somatic symptoms elicited by the absence. In addition to the illusory disintegration of time, his powerlessness regarding the acknowledgement of Bella’s death generates mental derangement, helplessness and alienation. Placed at the crossroads between a past temporal orientation and a present without a past, the victim encounters an impasse. Therefore, attempts to repress a traumatic past are unfeasible owing to the verifiable truth that “sense memory” perseveres, materialising through bodily symptoms. This certifies the grave dangers posed by temporal disintegration on a self haunted by misplaced nostalgia and a past that returns as a haunting revenant, but cannot be articulated in words.

Pathological stagnation caused by blurring the boundaries between absence and loss, as well as by melancholia and “acting out,” differs from proper progression towards recovery from trauma, which consists of acknowledging and working through the losses. Furthermore, one of the final stages of convalescing encompasses finding a legitimate way to represent and mourn the losses. In other words, rituals of mourning give a voice to the victims so that they can articulate their own suffering, while the dead are commemorated. Throughout most of the book, Jakob fails to encode traumatic material, which is relegated to a silence that becomes part and parcel of his identity. This harrowing silence penetrates through his consciousness on account of two main reasons. Firstly, the suppression of memory is due to the intensity of the sorrow entailed by the losses. Secondly, the difficulty in processing the experience undermines all endeavors to construct a coherent narrative about the past; hence, the traumatic event resists integration into consciousness. To sum up, silence is both deliberate and a sign of illness.

The survivor most often, nearly invariably, becomes silent about his victimization, though the experience nevertheless in every case remains somehow fundamental to his existence, and to his unfolding or unfolded conception of himself. This silence is an internal one in which the victim attempts to suppress what is recalled [...]. It is external as well: the victim does not tell what she recalls [...] more basically because she simply cannot make the leap to words. (Culbertson 1995:169)

Half-way between amnesia and recovery, Jakob faces a dilemma in which he is caught between a mind refraining from breaking the silence and a body that prompts him to recapitulate the past. In order to be intelligible, human experience must be mediated through a language system, which implies that awareness

depends on translating experiences into a system of words for communication. Thus, the victim has to construct a narrative to make sense of the past. That is, a “story” must be told about what happened.

The main problem represented by Jakob is that information or cognition surpassing the realms of language becomes impenetrable for the mind, whereas the body retains it. This leads us to conclude that the body is bound to re-enact what the brain has not grasped. *Fugitive Pieces* demonstrates how the two memories established by Delbo, “sense memory” and “thinking memory” respond to antithetic logics and are regulated by different standards. Nonetheless, this poses the following question: what happens to “sense memory” when the subject is finally able to talk about the traumatic past? Can these emotions and perceptions be registered? According to the evidences displayed in Michaels’s novel, the answer is negative, for Jakob proves the existence of two memory systems organised into distinct levels revolving around contrastive logics. Roberta Culbertson described these differences in terms of two paradoxes. The paradox of an elusive and unapproachable “felt truth” that escapes language and representation renders sense memory unintelligible. On the other hand, the paradox of language refers to the impossibility of communicating somatic sensations and hallucinatory images. Furthermore, narrative memory necessarily comes after experience, providing a retrospective reflection that involves an emotional detachment from the events told. This estrangement is exposed when considering the split between the “I” that narrates and the “I” narrated, both are separated by time and space. According to Bakhtin, “if I relate an event that has just happened to me, then I as the teller (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred” (1982:256). This is particularly noticeable regarding trauma insofar as traumatic experiences were not initially categorised into a narrative, but they were processed as somatic sensations. The configuration of a narrative allows the subject to examine and revise the events as if they were extraneous, which relates to the restorative influence of language. Nonetheless, the traumatic experience is irreducible to words. Hence, in spite of the healing properties of language, the “truthfulness” of the emotions and perceptions are lost or misplaced through the linguistic transference.

The representation of the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder in *Fugitive Pieces* raises interesting issues concerning the nature of memory. The sharp intrusions of traumatic images and sensations belong to a kind of memory that differs from “narrative memory,” which prompts us to conclude that Jakob’s trauma is organised in the memory on a perceptual level. Jakob oscillates between two types of memory governed by opposing rules and logics. “Sense memory” entails perceptions that are intrusive traumatic recollections of sensations at the time of the original occurrence, but they escape consciousness and language. “Thinking

memory,” on the other hand, constitutes a semantic representation unable to account for the vivid intrusion of traumatic images and sensations. Therefore, when the traumatic experiences that initially resisted integration into a narrative are finally “translated” into language, an emotional detachment takes place, which in spite of being beneficial for the victim’s recovery, also leads to a loss of the truthfulness of the recollections. To conclude, the novel vindicates the significant role played by the subconscious, the body, sensations and perceptions in memory processes, but it also delves into the connection between language and consciousness. Thus, it seems appropriate to close this article with the following quotation from *Fugitive Pieces* in which the importance of language is emphasized: “Language. The numb tongue attaches itself, orphan, to any sound it can: it sticks, tongue to cold metal. Then, finally, many years later, tears painfully free” (Michaels 1998:95).

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