

ANNE MICHAELS FUGITIVE PIECES 1996

1997..... WINNER OF WOMEN'S PRIZE FOR FICTION

1

The drowned city

The stone - carriers

Vertical time

The way station

Phosphorus

Terra nullius

The gradual instant

2

The drowned city

Vertical time

Phosphorous

The way station

Jakob Beer " a man's experience of war never ends with the war . A man's work,, like his life , is never completed "

The drowned city - Biskupin.....bronze age archaeological site in Poland
Gasawka river.....near Poznan,Poland

Tollund man

Grauballe man.....mummified bodies 405 b.c.

Island of Zakynthos.....athos (athanassios roussos) geologist
 Jakob beer 7 year old refugee from poland. 1940

Athos and I stood together on deck and looked across the water at the bright city. From this distance no one would guess the turmoil that had torn apart Greece ... The sea began to darken, and Athens, glowing in the distance, seemed to float on the horizon like a bright ship.

Jakob Beer is seven years old when he is rescued from the ruins of a buried village in Nazi-occupied Poland. He is the only one of his family to have survived the invasion. Adopted by his savior, the Greek geologist Athos, Jakob must steel himself to excavate the horrors of his own history.

Fugitive Pieces is a meditation on the resilience of the human spirit and love's ability to restore even the most damaged of hearts " memories are archaeology and archaeology are memories " .

This is the story of Jakob Beer, a Polish Jew, translator, and poet who, as a child, witnessed his family's slaughter at the hands of the Nazis. Beer himself was found and smuggled out of Poland by Athos Roussos, a Greek archaeologist who carried him back to Greece and kept him there in precarious safety. After the war they emigrated together to Canada. Jakob's story is told through diaries discovered by Ben, a young man whose parents are Holocaust survivors and who is a vessel for their memories just as Jakob is the bearer of his own.

Fugitive Pieces is a book about memory and forgetting. How is it possible to love the living when our hearts are still with the dead? What is the difference between what historical fact tells us and what we remember? More than that, the novel is a meditation on the power of language to free our souls and allow us to find our own destinies.

Anne Michaels uses stunning images while seducing with radiant prose, this brilliant first novel is a story of damaged lives and the indestructibility of the human spirit

It speaks about loss, about the urgency, pain and ultimate healing power of memory, and about the redemptive power of love. Its characters come to understand the implacability of the natural world, the impartial perfection of science, the heartbreak of history.

The narrative is permeated with insights about language itself, its power to distort and destroy meaning, and to restore it again to those with stalwart hearts. During WWII, when Jakob Beer is seven, his parents are murdered by Nazi soldiers who invade their Polish village, and his beloved,

musically talented 15-year-old sister, Bella, is abducted. Fleeing from the blood-drenched scene, he is magically saved by Greek geologist Athos Roussos, who secretly transports the traumatized boy to his home on the island of Zakynthos, where they live through the Nazi occupation, suffering privations but escaping the atrocities that decimate Greece's Jewish community.

Jakob is haunted by the moment of his parents' death?

The burst door, buttons spilling out of a saucer onto the floor, darkness

His spirit remains sorrowfully linked with that of his lost sister, whose fate anguishes him.

But he travels in his imagination to the places that Athos describes and the books that this kindly scholar provides. At war's end, Athos accepts a university post in Toronto, and Jakob begins a new life.

Yet he remains disoriented and unmoored, trapped by memory and grief, "a damaged chromosome" the more so after Athos' premature death

By then, however, Jakob has discovered his metier as poet and essayist and strives to find in language the meaning of his life.

The miraculous gift of a soul mate in his second wife, "voluptuous scholar" Michaela, comes late for Jakob. Their marriage is brief, and ends in stunning irony.

The second part of the novel concerns a younger man, Ben, who is profoundly influenced by Jakob's poetry and goes to the Greek island of Idhra in an attempt to find the writer's notebooks after his death.

Ben is another damaged soul. The son of Holocaust survivors, he carries their sorrow like a heavy stone. Emotionally maimed and fearful, Ben feels that he was "born into absence... a hiding place, rotted out by grief."

Yet when it seems that the past will go on wreaking destruction, Jakob's writings, and the example of his life, show Ben the way to acknowledge love and to accept a future.

As a child, Jacob Beer buries himself in the ground to escape detection in the Holocaust. He is rescued by a Greek archaeologist, who hides him in occupied Greece and then emigrates with him to Canada. Images of burial and unearthing recur throughout the book, whose theme is less the Holocaust itself than the challenge of coming to terms with the past sufficiently to make a life in the present. In the end, Jacob Beer, now a well-known poet, succeeds triumphantly, and joy in life blossoms out of memories of death. Anne Michaels is a poet herself, and at the beginning her style can seem overwrought for its subject. But she has created a novel which approaches its vast subject obliquely through the non-linear accumulation of images, ultimately achieving a liberation of the souls which are touched by the Greek philosophy and its various natural art forms

Other readers have commented on the fact that, three-quarters into the book, when Jacob's narrative ends, another character (Ben) is introduced, whose story has only incidental connections with Jacob's own. It is a risky device, but one that I personally find successful, since it does eventually come to reflect upon Jacob, while at the same time suggesting that his story is not the situation of one unique exception, but more the common experience of all those who have been touched by great trauma and must somehow emerge from its shadow to make new lives.

The first part of the book held me completely. I enjoyed the lyrical prose, the spirituality and the story wound around Athos and Jakob.

Athos is a great character and by far the strongest in this book. He rescues Jakob after the boy has witnessed the murder of his family by the Nazis. Athos is wise in that he doesn't attempt to erase the horrors the boy has witnessed; instead he fills his mind with knowledge and the wonders of the world. It was overall about love and the capacity to heal when surrounded by that love.

This is a very thoughtful story about how the evils of the Nazi Regime affects survivors and their children. What is it like to be fearful of leaving your house without your passport or afraid of being hungry because you can't stop eating until you are sick? The author delves into the minds of people who try to live normal lives while attempting to escape the memory of war and the concentration camps. The book reveals layers of the love of people, the love of knowledge, and the unavoidable lingering terrors. This is a book for someone who wants insight into the ability of people to survive inexplicable horrors. The author reveals her story in a loving, gentle way.