

# Non-Finite Clauses: Fugitive Pieces

by Ann Michaels

## READING TEXT

### The Weekly Book Review

by Roberto Keskin

In the last ten years, Canadian literature has blossomed. More and more writers are receiving international recognition and awards. Like other aspects of Canadian life, Canadian fiction, non-fiction and poetry have been influenced by the influx of immigrants. More and more novels and poems are reflecting the stories of the immigrant life or are enriched by the influences of writers' homelands. One such novel, which explores the questions of displacement, reinvented identity and transformation through loss, is Anne Michaels' spellbinding debut novel *Fugitive Pieces*. Although a first novel, Michaels' book has quickly become one of the most beloved and talked-about books of the last decade.

Michaels, previously a widely regarded poet, has produced a thought-provoking and richly original work. *Fugitive Pieces* is a magically written account of a young poet who escapes Poland during the Second World War. The novel achingly articulates the dreams and hopes that we all cling to when faced with life's extraordinary duress. The story is spiritually harrowing, but in the end, ultimately redemptive.

The novel begins in Poland during World War II. While hiding in a cupboard in his family's home in Poland, seven-year-old Jakob Beer hears, but does not see, the brutal murder of his parents by Nazi soldiers. At the same time, his beloved older sister Bella is abducted. "I did not witness the most important events of my life," Jakob Beer later says of the events he heard that day.

The boy then escapes, terrified with grief, into the forest. He camouflages himself with weeds, grass and mud. Despite his disguise, he is discovered by Athos Roussos, a Greek geologist. Roussos had come to Poland to excavate a prehistoric city now long drowned in the mud of time. Athos smuggles Jakob to his native home, the Greek island of Zakynthos, where he successfully hides the boy from the Nazi authorities.

On Athos's island, Jakob is introduced to a new world of geology, poetry, botany, and art.

### Advanced 3 – Reading Exercise 4 – Non-Finite Clauses: Fugitive Pieces

The gentle Athos feeds Jakob the foods of life: the sun-freckled sounds of Mediterranean life, books, stories and dreams. From Athos, Jakob learns the redemptive power of language, in particular poetry.

Athos also enchants the traumatized boy with stories of buried cities and ancient relics. "To go back a year or two was impossible, absurd. To go back millennia -- ah! that was ... nothing." Haunted by his own terrible history, Jakob is burdened by "images rising in me like bruises", of his parents' murder, of the likely death of his sister and of the suffering of all the victims of the war. But the stories of Athos' ancient history are a magical elixir which help to heal Jakob.

The same imagination that tortures Jakob as a child also becomes his saving grace throughout his adult life as a poet. After the war, Athos and Jakob move to Canada. It is here that Jakob is finally able to transcend the immense tragedy of his childhood. As Jakob gets older, his life and work provide inspiration for the narrator of the second half of the novel, Ben, a young student whose own family has been destroyed and bedeviled by the Holocaust.

*Fugitive Pieces* is both heartbreaking and joyous. Its vivid descriptions of both the external life (the war, the horror, Greece, Toronto, landscapes, lights, books) and the internal life (ghosts, suffering, redemption, hope, despair, love) fully articulate the depth of human experience. Michaels' novel is a testimony of how language has the power to elevate us above the most horrendous of life's moments. Considered by some to be the finest first novel of the last 30 years, *Fugitive Pieces* has become a "must read" of Canadian literature.

*Find at least one example of each type of FINITE CLAUSE in the book review above.*

*Write a sentence with each of the following words and expressions.*

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|----|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. | <b>TO BLOSSOM</b>     | _____ |
| 2. | <b>INFLUX</b>         | _____ |
| 3. | <b>TO ENRICH</b>      | _____ |
| 4. | <b>DISPLACEMENT</b>   | _____ |
| 5. | <b>TRANSFORMATION</b> | _____ |
| 6. | <b>SPELLBINDING</b>   | _____ |
| 7. | <b>TO ARTICULATE</b>  | _____ |

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| 8.  | <b>DURESS</b>        | _____ |
| 9.  | <b>INSPIRATION</b>   | _____ |
| 10. | <b>VIVID</b>         | _____ |
| 11. | <b>HARROWING</b>     | _____ |
| 12. | <b>REDEMPTIVE</b>    | _____ |
| 13. | <b>TO CAMOUFLAGE</b> | _____ |
| 14. | <b>DISGUISE</b>      | _____ |
| 15. | <b>EXCAVATE</b>      | _____ |
| 16. | <b>TRAUMATIZED</b>   | _____ |
| 17. | <b>ELIXIR</b>        | _____ |
| 18. | <b>TO TRANSCEND</b>  | _____ |
| 19. | <b>HORRENDOUS</b>    | _____ |

*Answer the following questions.*

1. How has Canadian literature changed over the last few decades?

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2. What is the storyline of “Fugitive Pieces”?

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Advanced 3 – Reading Exercise 4 – Non-Finite Clauses: Fugitive Pieces

3. What does the reviewer feel are the most outstanding qualities of the novel “Fugitive Pieces”?

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