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Daniela Würtenberger, Franziskanergymnasium Hall in Tirol, 9. Schulstufe, 4,5 Jahre
Spracherwerb

Fugitive Pieces – Anne Michaels

Biography Anne Michaels

Anne Michaels, born on April 15, 1958 in Toronto, studied English at the university of Toronto. She is primarily a poet. Her first collection of poetry, "The Weight of Oranges", won the Commonwealth Prize for the Americas and Canadian Authors Association Award. Fugitive Pieces, her first novel, was published in 1996. In succession Michaels received a large number of prizes and was brought to international attention. The novel was translated into more than 45 languages and in 2006 a film version was produced. In 2009 Anne Michaels came out with her second novel "The Winter Vault". Over the years, she published three more poetry collections. She still lives in Toronto and is a lecturer for creative writing.

Comment

The novel Fugitive Pieces, written by Anne Michaels is about the impact the Holocaust has on the whole life of a person and his family. It convinces with its amazing story, but it is hard to stay interested while reading it.

"Fugitive Pieces" does not just tell a story, it leads one straight into the mind of a sixty-year-old Holocaust survivor. The story is told in such an authentic and realistic way in order that if you look up the protagonist you are surprised that he never existed and just was made up by Anne Michaels.

On the first page we come to know that Jakob Beer, a poet and translator, died in a car accident and that a few months earlier, he had started to write down his experience of war. The novel consists of what Jakob Beer had written down. Anne Michaels managed to make the readers feel like having the notebooks of a Holocaust survivor in their hands.

The plot starts in Poland, where Jacob's family gets killed by the Germans, and ends more than a year after his death. The first chapter does not convey a lot of details. The plot goes fast forward and it is quite easy to read, but after Jacob gets rescued by Athos and they hide out on Zakynthos the story develops slowly. Not much is happening and it seems like the author gets distracted often. Jakob "writes" about several stories his rescuer had told him in this time. This makes it hard to follow because most of the time, these subplots have nothing to do with the actual story.

The author does not manage to bring emotions across. When Athos died it did not feel like something sad had happened. The story just goes on like before and Jacob's grief is almost completely left out.

The biggest part of the novel is about unnecessary subplots. More important things like Jacob's first marriage and Athos' death pass in a few sentences.

Only one time, the reader is able to empathize with the depression the narrator is suffering from. The only moment real emotions come across is when his first wife leaves him and he is not even able to say anything. But every other part the characters just seem to not care about anything.

After two thirds of the story the narrator changes from Jacob to Ben, who is the son of a Holocaust survivor. This change is unsettling because in Jacob's part Ben is never mentioned. The reader struggles to find out who the narrator is and how he is connected to the story. But as soon as it is clear who Ben is, his part gets easier to read than the first part of the book.

Another confusing thing are the frequently appearing passages about a little girl left alone by her parents. Her story suddenly stops and it is never explained who she is and why she is mentioned.

During the time Ben is in Idhra, where Jacob spent the last years of his life with his wife, he meets a woman and it comes to an inappropriate and disgraceful love scene. It does not fit the character of the story and just feels out of place.

Shortly after finishing this novel you don't really know what it was all about. Only after some time thinking about it the reader comes to the conclusion that the plot was quite fascinating.

Personal opinion

I chose "Fugitive Pieces" because I find its topic to be gripping, but I expected it to be mainly about the Holocaust and second world war. Some people might be disappointed because it only shows the psychological impact of the Holocaust on the survivors and their families. But I was pleasantly surprised because it was something totally new for me to look at this topic from this perspective. The idea that it is written like a notebook, which is not meant for any audience just for the narrator to remember his life, really got me interested. It took me a few pages to get into it, but then I enjoyed reading the novel. I was kind of distracted by the many subplots. They disturbed the train of reading for me. Some paragraphs were hard to understand because they referred to geology. Still I was able to follow the plot quite easily. I was bothered about important things not being stressed. I would have wanted more background stories about Jacob's first marriage and Athos' death. Athos was one of the main characters and his death was only described in a few sentences. All in all, I would recommend reading "Fugitive Pieces". Even though it takes some effort and time it's totally worth it.

Quellen:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anne-Michaels>

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