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'Vistas framed by a ruined door': Anthony Powell's Poetics of Ruins

Par une porte en ruine... Anthony Powell et la poétique des ruines

Catherine Hoffmann

- 1 'Imagination, writes Gaston Bachelard in *L'eau et les rêves*, is not . . . the faculty of forming images of reality; it is the faculty of forming images of reality which transcend reality, which *sing* reality' (Bachelard 23).¹ This, I will contend, is what the narrator of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* does in the opening of the fifth novel of the sequence, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, first published in 1960. The narrative in this volume centres on the period 1936–37 and on the early married lives of Nicholas Jenkins, the character-narrator, and his friend, the composer Hugh Moreland who makes his first appearance as a character in the sequence. This late addition to the cast of Jenkins's long-standing friends accounts for the temporal shifts which characterise the first chapter. Most of these are analeptic and relate early episodes of the friendship. The opening paragraph, however, performs a leap forward in time since the narrative begins with Jenkins contemplating, at some unspecified moment after World War II—possibly the late '40s or early '50s—the ruin of a fictional Soho pub, identified on the next page as the Mortimer, the setting of Jenkins's first meeting with Moreland in the late 1920s:

Crossing the road by the bombed-out public house on the corner and pondering the mystery which dominates vistas framed by a ruined door, I felt for some reason glad the place had not yet been rebuilt. A direct hit had excised even the ground floor, so that the basement was revealed as a sunken garden, or site of archaeological excavation long abandoned, where great sprays of willow herb and ragwort flowered through cracked paving stones; only a few broken milk bottles and a laceless boot recalling contemporary life. In the midst of this sombre grotto five or six fractured steps had withstood the explosion and formed a projecting island of masonry on the summit of which rose the door. Walls on both sides were shrunk away, but along its lintel, in niggling copybook handwriting, could still be distinguished the word *Ladies*. Beyond, on the far side of the twin pillars and crossbar, nothing whatever remained of that promised retreat, the threshold falling steeply to an abyss of rubble; a triumphal arch erected laboriously by dwarfs, or the

gateway to some unknown, forbidden domain, the lair of sorcerers. (Powell 2000b, 243)

- 2 The banal function of the place before the bombing, its lack of architectural distinction, and the still recent historical cause of its destruction, would appear to disqualify it as a fitting object of *Ruinenlust*. The idea that 'ruin pleasure' depends on complete temporal disjunction between the observer and the object of contemplation is expressed repeatedly by twentieth-century writers as diverse as Rose Macaulay, whose essay *Pleasure of Ruins* (1953) Powell reviewed for *Punch*, Jean Starobinski or Roland Mortier. *french* 'Quelle émotion (si ce n'est l'horreur) peut inspirer le spectacle des ruines d'une ville bombardée?' (Mortier 227), asks Roland Mortier, while Jean Starobinski asserts that *french* 'Nul ne rêve calmement devant des ruines fraîches qui sentent le massacre: cela se déblaie au plus vite, pour rebâtir' (Starobinski 180). One of the conditions for the poetics of ruins to operate, he goes on, is that no one should have any memory of the building before its destruction. Rose Macaulay, also writing after World War II, agrees that 'new ruins are for a time stark and bare, vegetationless and creatureless; blackened and torn, . . . [and] smell of fire and mortality' (Macaulay 453); yet, like Powell's narrator, she is sensitive to the 'bizarre new charm' originating in the 'catastrophic tippy chaos' of recent ruins (Macaulay 454), which, for the viewer, transforms a drab little house into an object of visual fascination, the stage set for some mysterious drama. Appreciation however requires, if not substantial temporal distance, at least the mediation of art. 'Ruin pleasure', Rose Macaulay argues, 'must be at one remove, softened by art', and she mentions among others G. B. Piranesi, Nicolas Poussin, Claude, Giovanni Paolo Pannini, and Hubert Robert, artists whose work, though not referred to in the opening scene of *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, shape the narrator's vision of contemporary scenes.²

Scenography for a Narrative Beginning

- 3 In the undated jottings of his notebook, Anthony Powell had, on two occasions, hinted at the potential for imaginative development of the views offered by blitzed buildings: the first note mentions 'elaborate mouldings of a room seen through a gap in the wall when the house had been bombed' (Powell 2000c, 39), while the second—'the mysterious feeling of looking through a ruined doorway (? A bomb site)' (Powell 2000c, 63)—reads like a rehearsal for 'the mystery which dominates vistas framed by a ruined door' in the first sentence of *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*. The appeal of ruins for Powell is further attested by his observation, in his review of Rose Macaulay's *Pleasure of Ruins*, that the attraction of ruins 'cannot be entirely explained by moralizing' and that 'there is something inherently beautiful in ruined shapes' (Powell 1953, 768). Nicholas Jenkins, the narrator of *A Dance to the Music of Time*, shares the author's aesthetic fascination, one of the manifestations of the powerful pictorial drive which characterizes the series where visual motifs or scenes are often used as overture to narrative developments. The ruined door provides the narrative frame of the volume, a kind of literary equivalent of Alberti's window, though, in the present case, the opening which frames the *historia* depends for its existence on the destruction of the building to which it belonged. The ruinous state of the public house is of the essence: the enigmatic juxtaposition of fragments—stairs, lavatory door, a 'Ladies' sign, all having lost their practical functions—, sets the observer's imagination in motion and opens up temporal perspectives. In this respect, the Powellian ruin perpetuates earlier aesthetic traditions, going back to Renaissance perspective, which, as Michel

Makarius observed 'permet de déployer un axe narratif qui fait de la profondeur spatiale une profondeur temporelle' (Makarius 26). Jenkins's reminiscences thus attest to what Michel Makarius sees as the mediating function of ruins, which transform spatial contemplation into a meditation on time (Makarius 122). Just as the bomb has removed all separation between interior and exterior, laying bare to the view the recesses of the former building, the remaining fragments of architecture abolish the neat distinction between past and present.

- 4 The ruined door obviously constitutes one of those thresholds which literalize the function and effect of narrative beginnings, as passages between the real, outside world and the story-world. The question of narrative 'priorities, what to tell first', is one that the narrator addresses in another volume of the series at the beginning of the last chapter of *Books Do Furnish a Room* (1971):

For a time I kicked my heels under a colonnade. A bomb had fallen close by. One corner was still enclosed by scaffolding and tarpaulin. Above the arch, the long upper storey with its row of oblong corniced windows had escaped damage. The period of the architecture . . . brought Burton to mind; Burton, by implication the art of writing in general . . .

An important aspect of writing unmentioned by Burton was 'priority'; what to tell first. That always seemed one of the basic problems. . . . For example, even to arrange in the mind, much less on paper, the events leading up to the demise of *Fission* . . . demanded an effective grasp of narrative 'priorities'.

Looking out between the pillars at the raindrops glinting on the cobbles of a broad open space, turning the whole thing over in the mind, much seemed to me inevitable, as always contemplating the past. (Powell 1999, 206–07)

- 5 Although, here, Jenkins looks out between pillars, the view frames temporal perspectives and the retrospective narrative itself much as it does in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*.
- 6 In the opening scene of this novel Jenkins, the character contemplating the ruin, is temporally at some distance from his narrating self, as indicated a few pages later by a parenthetical remark about the Mortimer 'now rebuilt in a displeasingly fashionable style and crowded with second-hand car salesmen' (Powell 2000b, 251), a negative echo to his earlier 'I felt for some reason glad the place had not yet been rebuilt' (Powell 2000b, 243). His temporal vantage point as spectator is not only situated, however vaguely, some time after World War II, as already mentioned, but also after Moreland's death, implied in the sentence 'As an accompaniment to Moreland's memory music was natural, even imperative' (Powell 2000b, 244) and confirmed a few pages later in the reference to 'that professionally musical world which, towards the end of his life, so completely engulfed him' (Powell 2000b, 251).
- 7 Thus, the opening scene with its ruinous scenography does not only justify the introduction of a new character and the narrative of Jenkins's friendship with Moreland, associated metonymically and through alliteration with the Mortimer. Moreland is brought into fictional existence in Jenkins's narrative after his death. The ruins of the pub stand therefore as a shrine to Moreland's memory, appropriate to his early way of life and heavy drinking, and figure a loss echoed in the lyrics of the *Kashmiri Love Song* quoted in the text:

Pale Hands I loved beside the Shalimar,
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell? . . .
Pale hands, pink-tipped, like lotus buds that float
On those cool waters where we used to dwell . . . (Powell 2000b, 244)

- 8 The broken milk bottles and laceless boot lying among the wild flowers, rather than 'recalling contemporary life' may, in this context, fulfil the function of contemporary vanities. Elegiac feeling is, however, carefully kept under control and subdued by the playful description of the modern ruin.

Transforming Rubble into a Mock-Heroic Capriccio and Charismatic Ruin

- 9 The door of the Ladies' lavatory in a bombed out Soho pub would hardly have qualified as ruin in the aesthetic tradition which serves as descriptive model here. The 'ruine' entry of the *Encyclopédie*, quoted by Michel Makarius, states that *french* 'Ruine ne se dit que des palais, des tombeaux somptueux ou des monuments publics. On ne dirait point ruine en parlant d'une maison particulière de paysans ou bourgeois; on dirait alors bâtiments ruinés' (Makarius 95). One may surmise that the author of this entry would also have denied the label 'ruin' to a blitzed public house.
- 10 The aesthetics underlying the *Encyclopédiste's* restrictive definition can, in part at least, be traced back to the late fifteenth century and Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia* (*The Strife of Love in a Dream*)—'the first full-length literary ruin rhapsody' (Macaulay 15), beautifully illustrated with engravings. For about three centuries afterwards, the only ruins worth drawing, writing about or contemplating would be those of ancient or fantastic buildings and monuments, noble ruins recalling 'the stupendous past', whether historical or legendary (Macaulay 40).
- 11 In contrast with this tradition, the emergence of a modern 'ruin' feeling may be detected in a change of attitude to recent ruins of buildings of no particular historical or architectural distinction. Théophile Gautier, in his preface to the second edition of Edouard Fournier's *Paris démolie* (1855), evokes the metamorphosis into fantastic architectural fragments of ordinary Parisian buildings undergoing demolition:
- C'est un spectacle curieux que ces maisons ouvertes avec leurs planchers suspendus sur l'abîme, leurs papiers de couleur ou à bouquets marquant encore la forme des chambres, leurs escaliers qui ne conduisent plus à rien, leurs caves mises au jour, leurs éboulements bizarres et leurs ruines violentes; on dirait, moins le ton noirci, ces édifices effondrés, ces architectures inhabitables que Piranèse ébauchait dans ses eaux-fortes d'une pointe fiévreuse.³ (Makarius 229)
- 12 This passage echoes in many ways Jenkins's description of the ruins of the Mortimer. The appeal of new ruins, for Gautier's and Powell's narrators, originates in the violent defamiliarization caused by destruction: the excision of roofs, walls, and doors annihilates the boundaries between intimate interior space and public space while simultaneously divesting the remaining fragments of any practical functions. Stripped of their privacy and functionality, the buildings' inner spaces become the locus of imaginary projections, a fantastic mental and visual playground. Besides, contemplation in both cases is mediated and enhanced by the viewer's *musée imaginaire*, whether explicit in Gautier's case, or implicit in Jenkins's.
- 13 Thus, in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, the metamorphosis of the familiar haunt caused by bombing gives rise to a verbal transformation of those fragments of modernity into what could be termed 'a mock-heroic capriccio'. The pictorial term is one that Powell used, in his *Memoirs*, to define what he was doing when he invented a Tiepolo fresco, described at

length by the narrator in the penultimate novel of the series, *Temporary Kings*.⁴ In the genre, as practised by Canaletto for instance, the motif of the ruined arch framing a view is a recurrent one, as is the combination of actual urban features with imaginary architectural fragments and diminutive human figures. As for the expression 'mock-heroic', it is used here by analogy with the stylistic mode of the mock epic on the grounds that, in the description of the ruin, the mismatching of the register to the object depicted follows essentially the same principles and achieves the same kind of humorous amplification and stylistic incongruity, as the narrative style of the mock epic.

- 14 The selection of surviving fragments is in keeping with the pictorial traditions already mentioned for which noble ruins constitute eminently desirable objects of representation. It is first necessary to retain recognisable elements of architecture; otherwise what remains of the former building is merely a shapeless pile of rubble, not worth describing or drawing. The fragments are not chosen at random, of course, but for their scenographic function—the arch, in particular—or because of their impact on the viewer's imagination, as in the case of flights of stairs leading either to the sky or to mysterious subterranean regions. Vegetation growing among the stones, creeping through cracks in masonry, crowning triumphal arches forms an essential component of the pictures—whether verbal or visual—not only as a picturesque feature but as a dynamic motif of the poetics of ruins prompting reflections on the vanity of human undertakings, on nature reclaiming the vestiges of art, on life springing in the midst of destruction, etc. Vegetation figures in Jenkins's description in the image of the 'sunken garden' and in the reference to willow herb and ragwort growing through the cracks in the stones. Incidentally, these plants grew indeed with great energy in the fresh ruins left by the Blitz and the V1s. Mention of precise plant names is a sufficiently rare occurrence in *A Dance to the Music of Time*, whose narrator displays a remarkable absence of botanical leanings, to attract the reader's attention. Thus, in the sentence under consideration, the narrator combines a referential detail and a traditional motif of ruins painting and literature. Inscriptions, though optional, are also a frequent ingredient, their enigmatic messages begging to be deciphered, like the hieroglyphs discovered by Poliphili in Colonna's work or the inscription on the tomb found by the Arcadian shepherds in Poussin's painting *french Les Bergers d'Arcadie*. In the present case, the inscription requires no epigraphic skills, though some effort is needed to distinguish the word *Ladies*. That it should be printed or painted in 'niggling copybook handwriting' adds a touch of kitsch to a sign which, in relation to its initial referent, is already an elliptical euphemism or, if one prefers, a euphemistic ellipsis: the trivial function of the lost referent is further attenuated by the fake innocence of the fake handwriting.
- 15 The humble prosaic remains of the pub are playfully elevated to the status of noble ruin by terms of Latin or Italian origin, sometimes borrowed from the vocabulary of art: 'vista', 'vestigial', 'portal', and, possibly the most fertile in artistic associations, 'grotto', a recess not merely dark, but 'sombre', which sounds much grander and more mysterious. Initially a 'grotto' was a picturesque or artificial cave forming or serving as a pleasant retreat: in the description, the vanished Ladies' lavatory is humorously evoked as a 'promised retreat', an expression which also harmonises with the microscopic pastoral enclave of the wilderness of the sunken garden. In addition, the word 'grotto' recalls the 'grotesques' discovered in the Renaissance among Roman subterranean ruins, in particular those of Nero's *Domus Aurea*.

- 16 Just as humble figures appear among the ruins of eighteenth-century Italian or French *capriccios*, the Powellian verbal composition includes a human presence, besides Jenkins: a presence heard before it is seen. Fragments of a once-familiar song now echo through the inanimate fragments of the once familiar pub. Like the other elements of the picture, the street-singer is upgraded to the mock operatic status of 'itinerant *prima donna* of the highways' (Powell 2000b, 243). Her presence, which connects past and present, is, at the diegetic level, instrumental in conjuring up memories of Moreland, and justifies the anachrony of the episode 'years before' when Moreland talked to Jenkins of getting married:

Then, all at once, as if such luxurious fantasy were not already enough, there came from this unexplored country the song, strong and marvellously sweet, of the blonde woman on crutches, that itinerant *prima donna* of the highways whose voice I had not heard since the day, years before, when Moreland and I had listened in Gerrard Street, the afternoon he had talked of getting married . . . Now once more above the rustle of traffic that same note swelled on the grimy air, contriving a transformation scene to recast those purlieus into the vision of an oriental dreamland, artificial, if you like, but still quite alluring under the shifting clouds of a cheerless Soho sky.

(Powell 2000b, 243–44)

- 17 The song also transforms the ruin into what Patrick Parrinder calls a 'charismatic' ruin, by which he means a 'speaking' or 'singing' ruin, which has 'a capacity for ecstatic utterance' (Parrinder 26), an example of which is provided by the ruined chapel in *The Waste Land*. In the same passage, Parrinder notes that charismatic ruins tend to be 'located in a pastoral setting outside the city'. While this is not strictly speaking the case here, the singer appears in what has become, as already observed, a miniature pastoral tract. Besides, the lyrics evoke an exotic natural world far removed from the Soho context in which they are sung.

The Ruin as Threshold to a Fantasy World

- 18 This narrative opening could indeed be seen as a balancing act between history, story, and fantasy. The song which contributes both to the subdued elegiac feeling of the passage and to the enigmatic appeal of the scene was a genuine music hall song, part of a collection, *The Garden of Kama and Other Love Lyrics from India* by Laurence James Hope (1865–1904). Yet, even if one is aware of its existence in 'real' life, its effect in the text is to detach the ruined Soho public house utterly from its spatial and historical context. The *Kashmiri Love Song* encourages free-floating exotic associations not just in Jenkins's mind but by extension in the reader's imagination too. Thus, it adds spatial distance to the stylistic distancing device of treating the ruin as a *capriccio*.
- 19 Powell's narrator does not systematically deal with London ruins in this way, and it is instructive to compare the present scene with the spare, dismal description of the City at the end of the War, in *The Military Philosophers*, the ninth novel of the sequence, published in 1968:

Summer, like one of the new regimes abroad, offered no warmth, but chilly, draughty, unwelcoming perspectives, under a grey and threatening sky. The London streets by this time were, in any case, far from cheerful: windows broken: paint peeling: jagged, ruined brickwork enclosing the shells of roofless houses. Acres of desolated buildings, the burnt and battered City lay about St Paul's on all sides. (Powell 1998, 694)

20 In this extract, Jenkins is seeing nothing but desolation and rubble which Time has not yet transformed or attenuated. In the opening scene of *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, violence has not been totally erased from the text: it is suggested in the prefix 'ex', and in the accumulation of harsh consonants in the words 'cracked', 'broken', 'fractured', 'shrunk'. Absence too is emphasized—'nothing whatever remained', 'laceless', 'floorless', etc.—as is disjunction, not only of the fragments themselves in relation to a whole, but also of signs and their referents (*Ladies*) or objects and their functions (the stairs, the basement). Such disjunction, as we have seen, largely accounts for the appeal of ruins of ordinary buildings to the imagination. The narrator, however, discovers connections, 'secret harmonies',⁵ as implied in the aphorism 'In the end most things in life—perhaps all things—turn out to be appropriate' (Powell 2000b, 244). The fragments and signs may now be devoid of function and meaning but they can be shaped into a coherent, aesthetically satisfying whole: not reconstructed but metamorphosed into an artefact. The temporality of the ruin appears as something of a paradox: on the one hand, the ruined door opens up a retrospective prospect and triggers the analepsis of Nick's first meeting with Moreland; on the other hand the scene floats into a timeless enchanted world peopled by imaginary creatures; the street-singer herself 'hardly altered by the processes of time' (Powell 2000b, 244), seems to glide effortlessly through time and space, like an apparition. A few pages after the scene of the ruined pub, two references to allegories of Time—Bernini's *Truth Unveiled by Time* and Bronzino's *Allegory of Time*—reiterate the temporal theme while freezing it in allegorical representations. The paradoxical nature of the ruin's relation to Time is highlighted by Michel Makarius:

Par définition, la ruine est un fragment... La ruine évoque... l'absence. Et pourtant, dans le même instant pourrait-on dire, par sa présence, la ruine impose son propre univers avec ses couleurs, son ambiance, ses fantômes, et finit par se détacher de son passé comme une feuille du calendrier. (Makarius 167)

21 This may account for the effect of this narrative opening on the reader—on the present reader at least: while it is manifestly intended as a threshold and frame, and transmutes historical destruction into story material, its appeal far exceeds its structural and narrative functions. If anything, the shift to the narrative of the past—here, episodes of Jenkins's friendship with Moreland—feels like an anti-climax, a return to the ordinary experience of reading retrospective narrative fiction. Powell himself, re-reading *Dance* and assessing his own work in a 1989 entry of his journal, observed: 'Good beginning to *Casanova*, but overlong explanatory passages follow, probably unavoidable to establish new characters and changing atmosphere of the period' (Powell 1996, 162). In retrospect, while he is, on the whole, pleased with the openings of individual volumes, he is critical of the 'discursive, relatively rambling passages' which often follow (Powell 1996, 163). In the case of *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, the autonomous presence of the opening scene is such that we feel no desire to go any further: suspended between elegiac melancholy and humorous amplification, between history and fantasy, it engulfs the imagination. In this, the description of the ruined pub resembles the central ekphrasis of *Temporary Kings*, a powerful verbal evocation of the wall-less, roofless architectures of baroque *trompe-l'œil*. The visual/pictorial drive which generates and informs the sequence tends to upset the dynamics of reading, especially when the descriptive set piece forms a narrative opening. In *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, the power exercised by the scene on the reader's imagination may well induce a desire to remain forever absorbed in contemplation on the narrative threshold, thus ruining its purpose.

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NOTES

1. My translation.

2. In *A Buyer's Market* (1952) for instance, the narrator evokes Shepherd Market at dawn in pictorial terms: 'the spot seemed one of those clusters of tumble-down dwellings depicted by Canaletto or Piranesi, habitations from amongst which arches, obelisks and viaducts, ruined and overgrown with ivy, arise from the mean houses huddled together below them. . . . As I penetrated farther into this rookery, in the direction of my own door, there stood, as if waiting to greet a friend, one of those indeterminate figures that occur so frequently in the pictures of the kind suggested—Hubert Robert or Pannini—in which the architectural subject predominates' (POWELL 2000a 387–88).

3. The quotation is at three removes: Michel Makarius quotes Gautier quoted by Walter Benjamin in *Paris, capitale du XIX^e siècle. Le livre des passages* (Paris: Cerf, 2006) 121. The reference provided by Benjamin is: Théophile GAUTIER, *french Mosaïque des ruines (Paris et les Parisiens au XIX^e siècle*. Par MM. Alexandre Dumas, Théophile Gautier, Arsène Houssaye, Paul de Musset, Louis Enault et DuFayl, Paris, 1856, 38–39). It seems, in fact, that Gautier's text appeared earlier and was used as the preface to the second edition of Fournier's *Paris démolie* (1855).

4. Powell, identifying his visit to the Palazzo Labia as the source of his inspiration for the invented Tiepolo, states that this Venitian setting 'was to provide in literary terms for *Dance* what is called in music and painting a *capriccio*; the painting sense being the one I have in mind' (POWELL 1983, 419).

5. The expression is borrowed from the title of the last novel of the series, *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, published in 1975, and comes from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century esoteric writings.

ABSTRACTS

'There is something inherently beautiful in ruined shapes', Anthony Powell observed in his review of Rose Macaulay's *Pleasure of Ruins*, later giving expression in his fiction to the aesthetic delight experienced in the contemplation of ruined buildings. In *A Dance to the Music of Time*, his major post-war work, a favoured visual motif is that of a view framed by pillars, preferably those of ruined doors. Though the narrator's perception of contemporary architectural fragments is shaped and mediated by pictorial reminiscences—especially of Piranesi, Canaletto, Pannini and Hubert Robert—the inevitable temporal implications of ruins also offer a range of narrative possibilities. This article concentrates on the opening of the fifth volume of *Dance*—*Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*—where a bombed-out public house in London provides the scenography for a temporal perspective which leads from a post-war moment of contemplation to reminiscences of a much earlier, pre-war, time. The narrative opening, both threshold and frame, does not only transmute historical destruction into story material: it gives verbal shape to the interaction between visual and temporal perspectives, and, like the roofless, wall-less architectures of baroque paintings, it engulfs the imagination, thus exceeding its obvious structural and narrative function.

« Les formes ruinées possèdent une sorte de beauté intrinsèque » observait Anthony Powell dans sa critique de l'ouvrage de Rose Macaulay *Le Plaisir des ruines*, avant d'exprimer dans sa propre fiction le plaisir esthétique suscité par la contemplation de bâtiments en ruine. Dans *A Dance to the Music of Time*, son œuvre maîtresse publiée après guerre, le narrateur affectionne particulièrement les perspectives encadrées par des piliers, de préférence en ruine. S'il perçoit et décrit les fragments architecturaux contemporains à travers le filtre de réminiscences picturales — Piranèse, Canaletto, Pannini et Hubert Robert, en particulier — les implications temporelles inhérentes aux ruines offrent par ailleurs de multiples possibilités narratives. Le présent article se concentre sur l'ouverture du cinquième volume de *Dance*, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*: les ruines d'un pub londonien, détruit par un bombardement, y composent la scénographie d'une

perspective temporelle qui, partant du moment de leur contemplation après guerre, conduit au récit d'une période antérieure à la guerre. Cette ouverture narrative, à la fois seuil et cadre, n'opère pas seulement la transmutation d'une destruction historique en matériau diégétique: elle donne forme verbale à l'interaction entre les perspectives visuelles et temporelles, et, à la manière des architectures sans toit ni murs de la peinture baroque, elle captive l'imagination, dépassant ainsi sa fonction narrative et structurale manifeste.

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Mots-clés: A. Powell, baroque, contemplation, fragment, Londres, ouverture, plaisir, réminiscence, temps, visuel

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