5

PREFACE
Rummagings, 10: "Because It's Gone": Chorley Park in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*

by D.M.R. Bentley

Towards the middle of Jakob Beer's Memoir in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), Jakob and his godfather Athos emerge from a walk in the Don Valley in Toronto at a spot where they fully expect to see Chorley Park, the magnificent château-style mansion constructed of "the finest Credit Valley limestone" (106)[1] that was built before and during the First World War as Ontario's Government House. To their surprise and dismay, the building has been demolished, however: "[w]e…lifted our heads to emptiness," recalls Jakob; "Chorley Park, built to outlast generations,[2] was gone, as though an eraser had rubbed out its place against the sky" (107). In a novel that borders on being an inventory of the ways and means by which memories are destroyed and preserved and whose core concern, of course, is the Holocaust and its legacies, the Chorley Park episode is by no means unique and in no way central. Yet it does command interest for at least two reasons: (1) it is based on an actual act of artistic "erasure" that deprived Ontario and Canada of a significant component—and (as Jakob's metaphor suggests) a meaningful text—from its past; and (2) it is situated and theorized in *Fugitive Pieces* in such a way as to constitute, especially for Canadian readers, both a warning about the dangers of destroying the material manifestations of the country's past and an example of how, through knowledge and imagination, access to the past may be obtained even—perhaps especially—after the "erasure" of its material manifestations.

In his first "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada* (1965), Northrop Frye identified a "collision" and "tension" between the "sophisticated" and the "primitive" in Canadian literature and culture, the "sophisticated" being the ideas, forms, and practices of the French and English traditions and the "primitive" being the "situation" into which they were and continue to be placed (825). Probably not fortuitously since *Fugitive Pieces* was published thirty years later, this aperçu is echoed in Jakob's

observation that, with its "terraced gardens," "[t]ourelles and pediments, [and] tall chimneys and cornices…perched on the edge of wilderness," Chorley Park "summed up the contradictions of the New World" (106). (The fact that the mansion was modelled on "a Loire Château…[and] built of…Credit Valley limestone" also bespeaks a hybridity that is characteristic of all the arts in Canada and, indeed, Canadian culture as a whole.)[3] Jakob's subsequent observations about "the immense estate" set "spectacularly on the edge of…[an] escarpment" overlooking the Don Valley are neither Frygian, extensive, nor entirely accurate, but they do have the merit of placing its construction, history, and demolition squarely in the context of the provincial and federal politics of the time:

> When Athos and I first discovered…[Chorley Park], it no longer functioned as the lieutenant-governor's residence. There'd been complaints about the cost of up-keep by union-supported politicians. Shortly after city councillors argued over whether or not to let him replace a single lightbulb,[4] the embittered lieutenant-governor abandoned Chorley Park. It was then pressed into service as a military hospital and as a shelter for Hungarian refugees. (106-07)

In fact, the fate of Chorley park was a much more complex intersection of political and economic forces than this necessarily brief description indicates—specifically the economic disaster and the political vicissitudes that accompanied and followed the Great Depression.

Officially opened in 1915 after four years of construction, Chorley Park was designed by the Chief Architect of the Ontario Public Works Department Francis R. Heakes (1858-1930) in the French château/Scottish baronial style that the Château Frontenac (1892-94), the Empress Hotel (1904-08), and the new Banff Springs Hotel (1911-28) had by then made iconically Canadian.[5] During the ensuing decades, it served its purpose brilliantly, but became increasingly associated with privelege and extravagance, so that when the Depression struck it almost inevitably became a focus of debate over provincial spending. Prior to the Ontario election of 1934, the Liberals under the fiscally conservative Mitchell Hepburn had promised to close the mansion, but that did not happen until 1938 after another Liberal election victory and a bitter struggle between Hepburn and the Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who opposed its closing. In subsequent years, Chorley Park served as a military hospital during the Second World War, then as a headquarters for the Toronto R.C.M.P., and finally as a home for refugees from the Hungarian uprising of 1956, three uses that not only altered its material fabric, but also

endowed it with additional meanings that became part of its cultural significance. Partly because of the cost of maintaining it and partly because of the drive towards modernization—the "Ending is better than mending" mentality of the brave, new post-war world[6] that resulted in countless similar acts of architectural vandalism in Canada as elsewhere,[7] Chorley Park was demolished in 1959 and its grounds purchased by the City of Toronto as a public park. Mass recreation, a therepeutic counterpart and crutch of urban industrialism, had replaced elite exclusivity as modernity exercised its "power of elimination" in the name of promoting "efficiency" and "'eradicat[ing] excess'" (Koolhaas 185) with what in retrospect seems a deplorable disregard for the eco-economics of embodied energy (which is to say, the amount of energy consumed in the production, transportation, and assembly of the components of the mansion).[8] A Canadian instantiation of an aesthetic based on "permanence, axialities, relationships, and proportion" had been "erased" but the result was not entirely a "tabula rasa" (178, 187), for, as Henri Lefebvre observes, "[t]he past leaves traces; time has its own script" (37): the building that Fern Bayer suggests "was most likely Canada's most beautiful, self-confident and Romantic Government House" was gone but its "rusticated concrete forecourt remains a memory,"[9] as do numerous images and descriptions of it.[10] In its sheer scale, Chorley Park may also be Canada's most striking example of the phenomenon described by the eponymous protagonist of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*: "outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their own existence as ruins" (19).

While Beyer does not claim that the scant material remnants of Chorley Park provide a means of remembering the structure and history of which they were a part, her identification of its "rusticated concrete forecourt" as "a memory" is evocative of John Ruskin's well-known claim in the "Lamp of Memory" section of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) that "[w]e may live without…[architecture], and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her" (147). For Ruskin, "uncorruptible marble"—even "a few stones left one upon another"—are preferable as prompts and aids to memory than "many pages of doubtful record" (148), a view that conceives of historical memory as singularly responsive to the evocative quality—which is to say, the associations—of old architectural structures and artefacts such as the "rusticated concrete forecourt" of Chorley Park. Of course, the mnemonic process assumed by Ruskin's statement can be either willed, voluntary, or (sequentially and repeatedly) both: a perceiver may respond spontaneously to a "rusticated concrete forecourt" or/and pre-

meditatively. Whatever the case, however, a degree of knowledge and a degree of imagination are essential to the process, for surely there can be no remembering without at least some prior knowledge of what the "rusticated concrete forecourt" might have been part of and some inherent capacity to imagine that entity and, more abstractly, its function and significance. Almost needless to say, curiosity also plays a part in the process and, moreover, motivates the search for further knowledge that leads from an initial encounter with an architectural remnant or even a reference to it in a text to that most sacred of academic activities, curiosity-driven research.

To the very extent that the process thus described must rely to some degree on the knowledge and imagination of a particular person or group, it is inherently unreliable and susceptible to error: the remnants of a whalebone corset in the alluvial soil of the Don Valley might lead to the speculation that Toronto was once inhabited by whales; the "rusticated concrete forecourt" in the nearby park can be an invitation to remember and research or an invitation to invent or even to fantasize to the point that what is imagined—perhaps an ancient Chinese city like the one recently imagined on Cape Breton Island—bears no relation to veridity. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes famously argues and demonstrates that photographs can generate "counter-memories" as well as more-or-less accurate ones (91) and surely much the same holds true for architectural remnants and textual references. Nevertheless, and as Michaels goes to great pains to affirm and illustrate throughout *Fugitive Pieces*, knowledge and imagination are crucial weapons in the war against forgetfulness and inhumanity that must be waged relentlessly and on every front if human beings are to avoid repeating the horrific events of the "unknown past" and, at least as important, the "past we know" (161). What is crucial is not that knowledge and imagination with respect to the past are inevitably limited and error-prone and that, in many instances, material manifestations and residues of the past that can help to make them function are absent; rather, it is that knowledge and imagination, whether prompted by material objects or not, must be used conscientiously and, if they are to rise to the challenges set for them by the genocidal twentieth century, in accordance with moral and spiritual values. So used, they constitute a way of thinking about the past that Michael S. Roth calls "piety" (16) and that Michaels calls "poetic knowing" ("Cleopatra's Love" 15) and gives to Jakob as a means of distinguishing between history and memory: "[h]istory is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers" (138).

9

To Bayer, Chorley Park "was most likely Canada's most beautiful… Government House" and for Athos its demolition is a scandal because it was '"one of the most beautiful buildings in the city"' (107). Since both of these statements went into print, Elaine Scarry has argued compellingly and with obvious relevance to Michaels' unapologetic and near-Keatsian commitment to beauty in *Fugitive Pieces* that things of beauty, whether natural or artefactual, have moral and political implications not only because they display such (classical/neoclassical) qualities as balance and harmony that are analogous to those of a (liberal, specifically Rawsian)[11] democratic society, but also because, when people attend to and think about them, they "give up [their] imaginary position at the centre" (Scarry is quoting Simone Weil) and adopt instead an "adjacent" or "lateral position" of "un-self-interestedness" (111, 113, 114, 117) that encourages them to be, as it were, negatively capable of responding empathetically to the needs of others and working actively for moral and social justice. In this light, the demolition of Chorley Park was akin, though very clearly not of the same magnitude or for the same despicable end, as the obliteration by the Nazis of millions upon millions of human beings and things of beauty, especially, for Jakob, his sister Bella and, for Athos, the remnants and relics of Biskupin, the "Polish Pompeii" (104). Yet even though a thing of beauty that no longer exists cannot be a joy forever or a focus for "adjacent" or "lateral" regard, precisely because it no longer exists it can be an inspiration to action in the cause of moral and social justice. *Fugitive Pieces* is an existing thing of beauty and, to the extent that the Chorley Park episode is a beautifully written textual supplement to the demolished building, the novel asks the reader at the very least to consider all that is actually and potentially lost when any object that might be a catalyst to unselfish thoughts and actions is destroyed.

As Jakob and Athos walk up the side of the Don Valley to where they expect to see Chorley Park (a pattern of ascent that parallels Jakob's own emergence from the trauma of Bella's loss), they engage in one of their many teleological and eschatological discussion, this one on the subject of "religion" (107). '"I asked my father if he believed in God'," recalls Athos, and in reply "[h]e said: 'How do we know there is a God? Because he keeps disappearing."' In this context, Chorley Park can be understood as an entity that exists but can no longer be apprehended with the senses, an absence and a presence, not in the now tired deconstructive sense of absence as presence and vice versa, but in the sense that it has disappeared but remains a certainty in the minds of those who beheld it. That this is indeed the case becomes evident in the final portion of the Chorley Park

episode, where, in response to a question from the "stunned" Athos—'"Jakob, are you sure we're in the right place?'"—Jakob replies: '"[w]e're in the right place, kuombaros [godfather]…. How do I know? Because it's gone'" (107-08). Chorley Park is gone materially, but its physical absence—its de-materialization and dis-appearance—does not mean that it ceases to exist in Jakob's mind or as an aspect of the place in which it stood, regardless of whether a physical remnant of it remains.[12] This is because, in Lefebvre's words again, "what happened at a particular spot…and thereby changed it…becomes inscribed in space" (37): for those with the necessary knowledge, places and spaces are alive not only with memories of things erased from them, but also with the memory of the discovery and impact of their erasure.

That Jakob and Athos possess such knowledge and the imagination needed to bring lost, destroyed, and bygone things, not back *to* life, but back *into* life in a connective way is abundantly evident in their behaviour during an excursion to the Baby Point area of Toronto that Jakob recounts immediately before the Chorley Park episode. Named for James Baby (1763-1833), the Detroit-born member the prominent French-Canadian fur-trading family who settled there shortly after the War of 1812 (Clarke 22), Baby Point was once "the site of an Iroquois fortress camp" (104)[13] and is now a wealthy enclave with large lots backing onto the Humber River ravine. When they arrived in the area, Jakob recalls, he and Athos "imagined" the "Iroquois fortress" while standing on "the sidewalk" and then indulged in a flight of imaginative fancy that can be read as an act of resistance to suburban modernity: they "imagined an Iroquois attack on the affluent neighbourhood, flaming arrows soaring above patio furniture, through picture windows into living rooms, landing on coffee tables that instantly ignited" (105). Nor is this all. Standing on the "darkening sidewalk," Jakob was able, through an effort of the imagination, to "transform…the smells of car wax and mown lawns into curing leather and salted fish" and, building on Athos's description of the murder of Étienne Brûlé (c.1592-1633), who was killed and eaten by the Hurons (Jurgen 133), to experience the hot afternoon air as "thick with burning flesh" and to "s[ee] the smoke rising in whorls into the dark sky" (105). At that moment, Jakob recalls, his "memory" was "[a]mbushed…cracked open," the reason being, of course, that Athos has described the death and, presumably, the roasting of Brûlé so vividly that it is palpable to Jakob and, as such, attacks and opens his memory to the "burning flesh," "rising" "smoke," and "dark sky"—the monstrous and terrible "Auto da fe" (105)—of the Holocaust. One "moment" has become (to adapt a phrase

from later in Jakob's Memoir) "two moments," one in the here and now of sounds and smells and sights and the other, triggered by those very things, in the past and in the memory (140).

What Jakob experienced at Baby Point was not a memory, however; rather, it was what, three years after the publication of *Fugitive Pieces*, Marianne Hirsh termed a "post memory" and defined as a "powerful and very particular form of memory" that is characterized by "deep historical connection" but "mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Jakob did not personally experience the "burning flesh," "rising" "smoke," and "dark sky" of the death camps, but, in Hirsch's words again, he "gr[e]w up dominated by narratives" of the Holocaust and "shaped by traumatic events"—the murder of his parents and the disappearance of his sister—that for years superimposed the past on the present, investing even the most mundane objects and events with crippling associations: a "hairbrush propped on the sink: Bella's brush…. [B]obby pins; Bella's hairclips…. Bella writing on…[his]back: [his wife] Alex's touch during the night…" (140). With the help and understanding of his second wife, Michaela (who is, appropriately, a museum '"administrator'" [175]), Jakob eventually ascends from the darkness of his trauma-induced melancholia[14] into the daylight of healthy memory where he can remember the past without self-destructive anguish: "I watch Michaela bake a pie. She smiles and tells me that her mother used to roll the pastry this way. Unknowingly, her hands carry my memories. I remember my mother teaching Bella in the kitchen" (193). "There's no absence, if there remains even the memory of absence," observes Jakob in the paragraph that follows this passage, "[o]r as Athos might have said: If one no longer has land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map" (193).

In the Chorley Park episode, the equipoise that Jakob achieves through Michaela lies in the distant future, but the emphasis in the episode on the persistence of memories in the face of absence is a step towards that destination, not least because it reveals to him a facet of the complex relationship between and among presence and absence, memory and things. Together with the Baby Point episode, it is thus a crucial rung in the ladder that eventually lifts Jakob from melancholia, as is the ensuing episode in which "a thread of memory" leads him to remember "a song of his mother's" that in turn releases a flood of memories and a torrent of words (109). "I whimpered," he recalls; "my spirit shape finally in familiar clothes and, with abandon flinging its arms to the stars" (110). "[A] thread of memory" is by no means an uncommon phrase, but perhaps in this context—when his epiphany occurs Jakob is "enrolled in…university, taking

courses in literature, history, and geography" (108)—it comes trailing its own memory from "The City of the End of Things," Archibald Lampman's depiction of the nightmarish outcome of urban modernity: a lifeless world in which a once glorious city is watched over by a gigantic and idiotic idol. Even in its early stages of decline, the physical, psychological, and spiritual effects of the City of the End of Things are devastating:

> ... whoso of our mortal race
> Should find that city unaware,
> Lean Death would smite him face to face,
> And blanch him with its venomed air:
> Or caught by the terrific spell,
> Each thread of memory snapt and cut,
> His soul would shrivel and its shell
> Go rattling like an empty nut.
>
> (180-81)

Fugitive Pieces and "The City of the End of Things" were written and published a century apart, but both serve as salutary reminders in these days of huge malls, planned obsolescence, sprawling suburbs, rented storage units, and repetitive and mass-produced architecture that the best use to which many of the things of our lives can be put is as aids to transcending them. Indeed, it could be argued from both the Anne Michaels' novel and Archibald Lampman's poem that it is not things that facilitate memory but their absence.

Notes

1 Unless otherwise indicated all parenthetical page numbers refer to *Fugitive Pieces*.

2 The wording here echoes William Denby's statement in *Lost Toronto* that Chorley Park was "a building that was certain to last for generations" (178). Since it was published in 1978, Denby's book would have been easily available to Michaels and may be a source—even the source—of her information about Chorley Park.

3 See D.M.R. Bentley, *Mimic Fires* 13-14 and 36 for examples of the combination of indigenous materials and imported forms in Henry Kelsey's "Now Reader Read…" and Thomas Cary's *Abrams's Plains*.

4 In the section entitled "Chorley Park" on the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario official website (to which I am largely indebted for the information about the building presented in this essay), the incident to which Jakob refers is put less hyperbolically: on 15 November 1938, the wife of the then lieutenant-governor, Dr. Herbert Bruce, "complained that the Public Works department was refusing to provide regular services like paying to have the chimney cleaned, or the light bulbs replaced" (12).

5 The style of Chorley Park thus aligns it with a series of national buildings rather than with Ontario provincial buildings such as Queen's Park and University College, Toronto that are adaptations of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Of course, the name "Government House" signals the overt connection between the residence and the political superstructure of the province and nation.

6 "'Ending is better than mending. The more stitches the less riches'" are two of the slogans inculcated through "sleep teaching" or "hypnopaedia" in Aldous Huxley's novel, as are "'I do love having new clothes'" and "'old clothes are beastly'" (46-49).

7 Other prominent victims of the period were the Chicago Federal Building, New York's Penn Station, and London, England's Euston Station. Among the buildings in Toronto that shared the fate of Chorley Park in the late 1950s and early 1960s were the A.R. McMaster warehouse, the John Macdonald and Co. warehouse, the Board of Trade Building, the Bank of Toronto, the Ontario Bank Building, the Toronto Arcade,the General Post Office, and the Normal and Model Schools (see William Denby, *Lost Toronto*, and lament).

8 It is worth remarking that the period of the material existence of Chorley Park—1915 to 1959—coincides with the Modern period in Canadian literature and art, a fact that must have made it appear increasingly anachronistic.

9 Bayer's observation appears in her *An Account of the Government Houses of Upper Canada and Ontario, 1792 to the Present* 77 and closes the account of Chorley Park on the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario's website (17). Denby remarks that "[s]o completely were all the traces of the house removed that its existence is almost forgotten" (178).

10 Curiously, in *A History of Canadian Architecture* Harold Kalman does not so much as mention either Chorley Park or Heakes.

11 For Scarry's reliance on John Rawls' conception of "'fairness'" as a "'symmetry of everyone's relations to each other'" see especially 93, 115-16, and 119.

12 "Regarding the question of memory, architecture is also transformed into autobiographical experience," observes Aldo Rossi in "An Analogical Architecture"; "places and things change with the superimposition of new meanings" (74).

13 "Iroquois fortress camp" is an unusual phrase: Baby Point was the site of a Seneca village, the Senecas being part of the Iroquois League.

14 See Bentley, "Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*" for a discussion of the novel in the light of Freud's conceptions of mourning and melancholy. To my shame, when writing this piece I took the absence of any reference to Chorley Park by Kalman as evidence that it was fictional.

Works Cited

Bayer, Fern. *An Account of the Government Houses of Upper Canada and Ontario, 1792 to the Present*, with Annotations *on the Portraits and Furnishings Currently in the Lieutenant Governor's Suite, Queen's Park, Toronto*. Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1983.

Bentley, D.M.R. "Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*." *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews* 41 (Fall/Winter 1997): 102-11.

——. *Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1994.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. 1980. London: Flamingo, 1984.

"Chorley Park." http://www.lt.gov.on.ca/en/Visit/chorley_park.asp?nav=8&sub=2

Clarke, John. "James Baby." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography.* 6: 21-22.

Dendy, William. *Lost Toronto.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1978.

Frye, Northrop. "Conclusion." *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English.* Ed. Carl F. Klinck. 1965 Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1973. 821-49.

Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1997.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World.* 1932. Perennial Classics. New York: Harper Collins, 1998.

Jurgens, Olga. "Étienne Brûlé," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography.* 1: 130-33.

Kalman, Harold. *A History of Canadian Architecture.* 2 vols. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1994.

Koolhaas, Rem. "Junkspace." *October* 100 (Spring 2002): 175-90.

Lampman, Archibald. *Poems.* Ed. Duncan Campbell Scott. Toronto: Morang, 1915.

Lefebvre. *The Production of Space.* Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Michaels, Anne. "Cleopatra's Love." *Poetry Canada Review* 14.2 (Mar 1994): 14-15.

——. *Fugitive Pieces.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996.

Rossi, Aldo. "An Analogical Architecture." Trans. David Stewart. *Architecture and Urbanism* 56 (1971): 74-76.

Roth, Michael S. *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History.* New York: Columbia UP, 1995.

Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture.* New York: John Wiley, 1849.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.