



Ruins and Fragments: Tales of Loss and Rediscovery

Robert Harbison

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For many of us, ruins are alluring, puzzling and endlessly fascinating: this elegant book seeks to explore why. What is it that makes us suspicious of works or histories that are too smooth, too continuous? Is it that urban experience is inherently discontinuous and fragmented, or that the only truths we can believe are partial ones? *Ruins and Fragments* guides us through ancient and modern worlds, sharing tales of loss, recovery and rediscovery. Beginning with ancient fragments, this book recounts how later history has recuperated, restored and exhibited them, and even how ruins have been found in unlikely places – such as a Hellenistic fragment from Pergamon located in remote Nottinghamshire. It considers modernist architecture's fragmentary effects, and how concrete made some buildings look prematurely ruined. It also explores architecture that has worked with ruins, from the Castelvecchio in Verona to the reconstruction of the Neues Museum in Berlin. In literature, from T. S. Eliot to Laurence Sterne, writers revel in fragments and create anew from

literary rubble. Some people deliberately construct or destroy to create ruin, Gordon Matta-Clark attacking buildings, for example, or dispossessed youth scribbling graffiti. Ultimately, destruction is balanced by attempts at reconstruction.

Whether focusing on ancient or modern remnants, literature or the visual arts, *Ruins and Fragments* is poetic without being sentimental. Far from 'ruin lust', this book seeks to explore fragments without fetishizing them. In doing so it offers new ways of understanding the history of modernity, while delighting in our perception of the world as a puzzle and the ways in which we can construct new forms of meaning.



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