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Fragmented narratives: Minding the textual gap

Abstract
This paper establishes a general view of how writers have utilised the process of writing in fragments since ancient times in expository, memoir, biography and fiction genres. A selection of fragmented narratives from classical, medieval, twentieth century and recent authors is discussed with particular focus on three forms – the aphorism, the feuilleton and hypertext – building to the idea that writers fashion a fragmented text so as to hand over a significant part of its meaning-making to the reader. In doing so, the writer manipulates the work as a mosaic of fragments and writes meaning – ie 'directions for reading' – into the gaps between the fragments. Relevant theoretical work by Walter Benjamin, Wolfgang Iser, J Hillis Miller, Simon Barton and others is applied to the discussion.
Keywords: writing in fragments, aphorism, feuilleton, hypertext

Introduction: Aphorism and the early development of fragmented texts

In the West, texts comprising sequences of fragments date back to Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* (400 BCE), recognised as seminal in the progress of medical knowledge. The work's opening fragment – especially the first six words – is particularly recognisable today:

> 1. Life is short, and Art long; the crisis fleeting; experience perilous, and decision difficult. The physician must not only be prepared to do what is right himself, but also to make the patient, the attendants, and externals cooperate. (Hippocrates 1994-2009: I, 1)

Surprising to most contemporary readers, the 'Art' Hippocrates referred to was that of the practice of medicine. This fragment was followed by 411 more. The next three began:

> 2. In disorders of the bowels and vomitings, occurring spontaneously, if the matters purged be such as ought to be purged, they do good, and are well borne…
>
> 3. In the athletae [athletes], embonpoint [plumpness], if carried to its utmost limit, is dangerous, for they cannot remain in the same

> state nor be stationary…
>
> 4. A slender restricted diet is always dangerous in chronic diseases, and also in acute diseases… (Hippocrates 1994-2009: I, 2-4)

Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* was a medical textbook, a physician's teaching manual, and a discourse on ideas operating in early medical practice. It introduced to writing the aphoristic form as an instruction genre. Hippocrates saw understanding, and writing for it, as step-by-step processes divided up into explanatory segments, but also as an overall mosaic of ideas that built to a system. Details might be presented as fragments, but the author's intention was for the gaps between them to be interpreted too; readers' thinking across and between gaps prompted comprehension of the overall practice. The first four fragments in *Aphorisms* seem at first sight a random start to such a complex work, introducing as they do life and art, the bowels and vomiting, overweightness, and the dangers of restrictive dieting. But the between-the-fragments reading indicates there is no easy entrance into the art of human medicine, just as there is no easy entrance into understanding life; fitting together knowledge of the complex whole is the key requirement.

The aphorism form was picked up by other classical thinkers, not specifically to teach a profession or craft but to reflect on, and guide in, piecing together a whole philosophy of life. For example, Stoic philosopher Epictetus (135 CE) employed the aphoristic genre to discuss values and ethics in the fifty-three-fragment *Enchiridion* (Epictetus 1948), as written down by his pupil Arrian. The following sequence gives an idea of the subtle threads generated by reading the gaps between the segments:

> XXXVII
> If you have assumed any character beyond your strength, you have both demeaned yourself ill in that and quitted one which you might have supported.
>
> XXXVIII
> As in walking you take care not to tread upon a nail, or turn your foot, so likewise take care not to hurt the ruling faculty of your mind. And if we were to guard against this in every action, we should enter upon action more safely.
>
> XXXIX
> The body is to everyone the proper measure of its possessions, as the foot is of the shoe. If, therefore, you stop at this, you will keep the measure; but if you move beyond it, you must necessarily be carried forward, as down a precipice; as in the case of a shoe, if you go beyond its fitness to the foot, it comes first to be gilded, then purple, and then studded with jewels. For to that which once exceeds the fit measure there is no bound. (Epictetus 1948: 34)

Epictetus builds his ideas in multi-stranded ways – as stanzas in poetry might do, each taking subtle thematic shifts forwards, sideways and backwards. He introduces ideas/images (self-respect, walking, the shoe, adornment, body-thinking) and allows them to dance in a collaged line of reasoning. Like playing with a kaleidoscope, the reader is invited to turn the images and ideas this way and

that, seeing how they reflect off each other to give various patterns of thought and understanding.

Other aphorism practitioners in the Western tradition include, for example, the pre-biblical writers of the books of *Proverbs* (c 700-400 BCE) and *Ecclesiastes* (c 450-200 BCE) in the *Old Testament*. The former comprises 915 fragments, the latter 222 (Just 2005). As is the case with the editing of other aphorism collections, conjecture lies around the intended structures of these books, and whether their planned effect comes from an original single author or from subsequent anthologists. But this does not alter the fact that they have impacted through the ages as shrewdly collaged, whole texts.

In Eastern traditions, Laozi's eighty-one fragment *Tao Te Ching* (sixth century BCE) fundamentally influenced the development of Chinese philosophy and religion. Two fragments in the sequence provide a sense of how the work was organised:

> 7. (Sheathing the light)
> Heaven is long-enduring and earth continues long. The reason why heaven and earth are able to endure and continue thus long is because they do not live of, or for, themselves. This is how they are able to continue and endure. Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved. Is it not because he has no personal and private ends, that therefore such ends are realised?
>
> 8. (The placid and contented nature)
> The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefitting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike. Hence (its way) is near to (that of) the Dao. The excellence of a residence is in {the suitability of) the place; that of the mind is in abysmal stillness; that of associations is in their being with the virtuous; that of words is in their trustworthiness; that of government is in its securing good order; that of (the conduct of) affairs is in its ability; and that of (the initiation of) any movement is in its timeliness. And when (one with the highest excellence) does not wrangle (about his low position), no one finds fault with him. (Laozi 2006-2019: 7, 8; *brackets shown as in source*)

Like the Western ancients, Laozi carved knowledge into digestible portions to gain focus and allow accessibility. He stepped out the thinking within each fragment, drawing comparisons between the external natural and the internal human worlds. He allowed the poetic structure of each piece – as in a sequence of haiku poems – to reflect subtly off each other when read in succession, each moving from environmental to human relevance. Buddha and Confucius too (c 500 BCE) used the aphoristic form to deliver educative narratives. Geary describes a key aspect of their aphoristic technique as 'to turn the seeker's mind back upon itself' (Geary 2005: 48). The concept that a piece of writing might be fashioned in such a way as to hand over a significant part of its meaning-making to the reader is fundamental to how the Eastern ancients wrote.

Aphoristic writing – sometimes referred to as 'wisdom literature' – typically involves sequences of short statements by a wise thinker presented in a form ideal for rhetorical impact, but not necessarily easily understood. The brevity and cryptic nature of the form makes it seductive: the reader engages easily, before realising there is more work to do before the promised meaning becomes clear. Aphoristic writing shares the notion of brevity with the allied forms proverb, axiom and maxim, all four being ideally an 'assertion expressed in a single sentence and formulated in a striking way' (Dupriez 1991: 265). But the aphorism goes further and utilises the rhetorical device of reduction (*detractio*), as Schmidt explains:

> This reduction could take on the form of an example without rule, intended banality, omission of a part in a logical sentence, and *double entendre.* The intralinguistic techniques to achieve this ranged from baffling word usage, neologisms, allusions, contrafacture ["the setting of a new text to an existing melody" (Classen 2010: 1478)], to juxtapositions of loaded words. (Schmidt 2009: 2)

Thus, the aphorism leaves room for the reader's interpretation, and sets them on a path towards insight by increasing the bounds of their own thinking. The word itself comes from the Greek '*aphorizein* "to mark off, divide", which derives from *apo* "from" + *horizein* "to bound"' (Harper 2001-2019). Jean Baudrillard glosses it as: 'to retreat to such a distance that a horizon of thought is formed which never again closes on itself' (Baudrillard 2006: 31). As Francis Bacon put it in the year 1605:

> Aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire further; whereas methods, carrying the show of a total, do secure men, as if they were at furthest. (Bacon 1828: 175)

Aphorisms do not necessarily state generalised, accepted truths, as maxims and axioms do; instead they provoke further reflection.

The major historic aphoristic fragment collections are not random compilations, even if their provenance as single-authored works is questioned. For example, there is debate as to whether Laozi existed at all – several hands are possibly responsible for his work (see Chan 2018). In such collections, the structure demonstrates overall planning and patterning, aimed at building towards a particularly wise and thought-provoking rhetorical conclusion or overview. Where books were made from a collection of aphorisms (as in the *Enchiridion* and *Proverbs*), the whole structure devised a thesis on understanding a broad sector of living even though the method emphasised segmented details. Where aphorisms are embedded into a more developed overall narrative – as with *Ecclesiastes*, ostensibly the story of Kohelet, the Preacher (Jewish Virtual Library 1998-2019) – the holistic intention becomes clearer because the collection is given a frame narrative to which the pieces apply.

A modern commentator, James Geary, says of the rhetorical effect of the aphoristic genre:

> Why aphorisms? Because they are just the right size to hold the swift insights and fresh observations that are the raw data of the wisdom of the ages. Aphorisms are literature's hand luggage.

> Light and compact, they fit easily into the overhead compartment of your brain… (Geary 2005: 9)

But the brain does not carry only hand-luggage; there is a more capacious hold where larger items go. There are multiple ways by which the staccato, the immediacy, the montage, the moving focus, and the drama of an aphorism sequence work on the reader's mind. The aphorism provokes the reader to narrow down their vision but at the same time to contribute to building a larger picture. The simultaneous engagement of focused and diffuse thinking (these opposed modes of creative thinking are discussed by many researchers, including for example Russ & Dillon 2011: 66-71) has the reader's mind at once honing in and reaching out. Ancient Eastern and Western writers and editors saw the impact value of the aphoristic sequence, as did intellectuals in later centuries who wanted their deeper ideas engaged with (for a study of the history of the aphorism see Hui 2019).

A key work in the Eastern tradition 1000 years ago is Sei Shōnagon's series of fragments titled *The Pillow Book* (c 1002) – an 'apparently crazy quilt of vignettes and opinions and anecdotes', as Meredith McKinney describes it (McKinney 2006: ix). Critics during the centuries have not praised it as a soberly managed sequence building to an efficient narrative (McKinney 2006: xxvii-xxviii), yet its exuberant engagement with life in the Japanese Heian court circa 1000 CE is now admired for its 'vivid and detailed visual awareness', its 'heightened awareness of taste and aesthetic sensibility' and its loving documentation of the life of the times (McKinney 2006: xv, xvi). The narrative is a compendium of personal observations, opinions about events, lists of objects and names, shared anecdotes, and quotes from poetry and story, all presented as fragments of irregular length:

> [27] *Things that make you feel nostalgic* – A dried sprig of *aoi*. Things children use in doll play. Coming across a torn scrap of lavender- or grape-coloured fabric crumpled between the pages of a bound book …
>
> [28] *Things that make you feel cheerful* – A well-executed picture done in the female style, with lots of beautifully written accompanying text around it …
>
> [29] A palm-leaf carriage should move at a sedate pace. It looks bad if it is hurrying. A basketwork carriage, on the other hand, should move at a smart pace. It's fun when people catch a glimpse of it as it flashes past … (Shōnagon 2006: 30-31)

In a supplementary fragment in one of the four manuscript versions of the work, Sei Shōnagon says:

> I have written in this book things I have seen and thought, in the long idle hours spent at home, without ever dreaming that others would see it. Fearing that some of my foolish remarks could well strike others as excessive and objectionable, I did my best to keep it secret, but despite all my intentions I'm afraid it has come to light. (Shōnagon 2006: 255)

Women's writing and opinions were not valued highly in the Heian period, but this is not the only reason the author makes her apology. As writers still do today, Sei Shōnagon worried that her individualistic project of recording the mundane

present of her personal limited environment might not be appreciated by readers seeking authoritative perception and deep understanding of the times. Brilliantly, however, Sei Shōnagon's elegant and witty observations and reactions create for us now an intimate and powerful account of her world. The fact that she herself is the centre of the account, and her voice and seeing bind its parts together, provides the text with the cohesion she worried might be missing.

Fragmentation was accepted too in medieval times. Major literary works from the period comprised collections, some of them drawing on both Eastern and Western sources. *One Thousand and One Nights* (eighth to fourteenth century) and *The Decameron* (fourteenth century) each collected together separate tales, gave them a unifying framework (a Persian king craving fidelity and entertainment in the former; a group of young Florentine nobles seeking relief from boredom during a plague in the latter) and suggested that a novel-length work – before the novel form was established – would have a fragmented, discontinuous structure, telling various related stories. But in Western literary culture, the linear continuous novel form gained ascendancy in the late eighteenth century even though, for example, the English novel had its beginnings in fragmented form with Daniel Defoe's diary-format *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Samuel Richardson's epistolary *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and Henry Fielding's episodic fictional histories *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749) (see Krauth 2016a: 22-26). The conventional linear literary narrative became entrenched in the nineteenth century, but was challenged in the early twentieth century with writers like Gabriele D'Annunzio and Walter Benjamin seeking to replicate life experienced as bitty and disconnected, and representing the mind's thinking as exploratory and fragmentary.

Expansion of the fragmented narrative in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Feuilleton, memory and montage

In finding that nineteenth-century conventions did not adequately communicate new ideas about the world in the early twentieth century, writers sought narrative approaches which made more intellectual sense of the uncertainty of the times for contemporary audiences. One key strategy, with potential to reflect the newly perplexing nature of experience after WW1, was to investigate fragmentation. Key reasons for this came from life itself: individuals had to put together an understanding of life by interpreting and amalgamating sequences of the many incomprehensible non-sequitur occurrences that life afforded, and they needed to decipher/parse/construe the gaps between those randomly presented events for clues to building an overall picture. Meaningfulness never arrived in sequitur sequences; the linearity of old-fashioned text and thinking was a literary, political and religious subterfuge; no lone individual was given access to a complete overview of life.

The Dadaists, the surrealists, and other experimenters worked on the project of finding a better way to represent the newly disintegrating world where politics, religion and morals seemed to be crumbling. In 1918 Tristan Tzara publicised the Dada cut-up writing method where a narrative's constituent parts were separated and rearranged randomly to form a new narrative. In 1920 Andre Breton and Philippe Soupault published *The Magnetic Fields*, an automatic writing experiment, announcing that the surrealists pursued the idea of writing in a manner *specifically* to avoid the logics of conventional linear narrative in order to overthrow the learnt rephrasing applied by 'rational' thought. In 1922 James Joyce

published the seemingly chaotic novel *Ulysses* in which the ultimate antihero, Leopold Bloom, perfectly represented the poignancies, complexities and weaknesses of humanity in the new century. WB Yeats summed things up in 1919 in his poem 'The Second Coming': he saw how the technological atrocities of WW1 had exploded conventional thinking and certitude about how the world worked:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world… (Yeats 1989)

The writer who best theorised writing in fragmented mode in this period was Walter Benjamin. He made the point in his post-doctoral thesis *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) that fragmented narrative replicated the non-linear *modus operandi* of the working mind. Benjamin perceived that we think in fragments consistently, and that we recall only disparate bits which we subsequently refashion together to form a mosaicked personal narrative:

> Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation… Just as mosaics preserve their majesty despite their fragmentation into capricious particles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking in momentum. Both are made up of the distinct and the disparate… (Benjamin 1998: 28)

Benjamin operated from this perception for the rest of his writing life. Collection of insightful fragments is the basal practice which underlies his acclaimed works *One-Way Street* (1928) and *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2002).

One-Way Street is a sequence of fifty-nine fragments covering approximately seventy-five pages. The pieces comprise a set of commentaries on the sights taken in and the thoughts experienced by a walker in a modern city. They have titles such as: 'Filling Station', 'Toys', 'Hardware' and 'Stand-Up Beer Hall' (Benjamin 2016), but they are far from being simple descriptions of a cityscape:

> In *One-Way Street* the mind is constantly at play, thinking, dreaming, free-associating, not distinguishing between the trivial and the world-historical, the modern mind trying to walk and psychoanalyse itself at the same time… Benjamin is tapping into an essential modern impulse, to remake the world out of attractive, invaluable fragments. (Marcus 2016: xxv)

While Benjamin theorised that the fragmented narrative replicated 'the process of contemplation', Michael W Jennings finds another reason for the author's attentiveness to the form – the feuilleton writing by which Benjamin augmented his often desperately low income [1]:

> Many of the pieces in *One-Way Street* first appeared in the feuilleton section – not a separate section, but rather an area at the bottom of every page – of newspapers and magazines, and the spatial restrictions of the feuilleton played a decisive role in the shaping of the prose form on which the book is based. (Jennings 2016: 2)

The feuilleton was the written fragment inserted under the line which indicated that a news article had finished. It was a filler, a footnote to events; it occupied a space in the paper where a reading between the lines of the rest of the news could occur.

Dustin Lovett studied the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the newspaper where Benjamin published most of his feuilleton pieces, and identified three major areas of focus for the feuilleton form: the reading of places (the cityscape); the reading of film (the film review); and the reading of books (serialised books and book reviews) (Lovett 2017: v).

> Where else but … "under the line", the pronounced bold stroke that separated the feuilleton from the news, would theatre, book, and film reviews brush up against descriptions of political rallies, sociological and philosophical observations, and travel reports. Where [else] would all of those share space with short stories and serialised novels? (Lovett 2017: 4-5)

Benjamin's adoption of the feuilleton fragment as key practice for his literary and political ambitions, and his gathering of those pieces together in new forms of collaged narrative producing sequences representing thoughts over a period of time, provides us with an understanding of fragmented narrative practice. The impulses underlying it are:

- to replicate processes of our thinking and the ways we communicate – not linear and streamlined, more often random and piecemeal;
- to represent the world as we actually perceive it – complex, contradictory, disjointed, sometimes baffling;
- to see and judge the world politically – the author wanting to pass on the benefit of their intense experience and their analysis garnered from a bewildering array of sources and pressures perceived in society; and
- to investigate writing itself – to test the usefulness of established techniques and conventional genres in the context of development in technologies, politics, morals and human interaction.

Later in the century, other academics followed Benjamin with influential fragmentary works: for example, Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (1951), Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977), Rachel Blau DuPlessis' *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (1990) and Jean Baudrillard's *Fragments: Cool Memories III 1990-1995* (1997). Brilliant nonfiction social commentators such as Fernando Pessoa (*The Book of Disquiet* 1982), Svetlana Alexievich (*The Unwomanly Face of War* 1985) and Sven Lindqvist (see below) wrote down their fragmented thinking which produced powerful collaged narrative. Fiction writers on all continents have written in fragments in hope of replicating the plural and unpredictable nature of real experience. And biographers, not feeling bound to represent the chronological flow of the histories they focus on, have resorted to fragmentary representation of lifetimes because history comes to us actually as a collage of human recall and the availability of diverse extant documents (see Hughes-Hallett 2013).

Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *The Pike: Gabriele D'Annunzio, Poet, Seducer and Preacher of War* (2013) is a biography of the Italian novelist, playwright and poet Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) who thrived in the turn-of-the-century and WW1 eras. It is written in fragments because, as she says:

> I have tried to avoid the falsification inevitable when a life – made up, as most lives are, of contiguous but unconnected strands – is blended to fit into a homogeneous narrative… Placing comments and anecdotes alongside each other like the tesserae in a pavement, *my aim has been to create an account which acknowledges the disjunctions and complexities of my subject, while gradually revealing its grand design*… Images and ideas recur in D'Annunzio's life and thought, moving from reality to fiction and back again: martyrdom and human sacrifice, amputated hands, the scent of lilac, Icarus and aeroplanes, the sweet vulnerability of babies, the superman who is half-beast, half-god. I have laid out the pieces: I have shown how they shift. (Hughes-Hallett 2013: 16-17, my italics)

Hughes-Hallett takes her cue from evidence that D'Annunzio in 1896 delighted in helping a tiler lay a pavement in Venice (Hughes-Hallett 2013: 17). A present-day visit to D'Annunzio's extraordinary house, *Il Vittoriale* on Lake Garda, now kept as a museum, convincingly shows that the author was obsessed with the collection and placement of myriad fragments in the pursuit of style and beauty in his life (Guerri 2018). His best work, the novel *Notturno* (1921), is a collection of fragments, written separately while the author was blindfolded and convalescing from a WW1 injury to his eyes:

> To keep his sentences from overlapping and running together … D'Annunzio recorded his own brief thoughts … on thin strips of paper. Each wide enough for just one or two lines of writing, which his daughter Renata … prepared for him. (Jewiss 2011: vii)

This method, enforced by temporary blindness, produced the focus, extreme economy and read-between-the-lines qualities of the *Notturno* narrative:

> I write not on sand, I write on water.
>
> Every word I trace vanishes, as if abducted by a dark current.
>
> It is as if I can see the form of every syllable I record through the tips of my index and middle fingers.
>
> But only for an instant, accompanied by a glow, a sort of phosphorescence.
>
> Then the syllable dies out, disappears, lost in the fluid night. (D'Annunzio 2011: 13)

Clearly, writing in the dark affected the author's process – he replaced his signature baroque hyperbole and expansive melodrama with the compelling poetic insight available from the technique he was forced to use: the need to be concise, the staccato structure; the lack of opportunity to embellish at will. *Notturno* is 'the most emotionally direct and formally original' of D'Annunzio's prose works, earning even Hemingway's grudging admiration (Hughes-Hallett 2013: 374). The immediacy of the writing throughout the novel derives from the strategy of bringing together thought, image and emotion and allowing them to impact without ornamentation.

Experimental writers later in the twentieth century continued to explore the concept of fragmented narrative structure developed by Benjamin and D'Annunzio. There is a long list, especially of fiction writers, whose narratives employed discontinuity and fragmentation, thus provoking the reader to join in the meaning-making by interpreting the gaps: John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-1936); William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930) and *The Wild Palms* (1939); John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* (1945); Marc Saporta's *Composition No. 1* (1961); BS Johnson's novels in the 1960s; Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) (trans *Hopscotch* 1966); several works by Italo Calvino in the 1970s; Toni Morrison's *Paradise* and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, both published in 1997 – to name just an acclaimed few. Speaking about critical reaction to the fragmentation technique of her novel *Paradise* in 1998, Morrison said:

> People's anticipation now more than ever for linear, chronological stories is intense because that's the way narrative is revealed in TV and movies… But we experience life as the present moment, the anticipation of the future, and a lot of slices of the past. (Mulrine 1998: 22)

In saying this, Morrison indicated that switched-on authors of the late twentieth century still thought about writing in fragments in the same terms writers used at the beginning of the century. This kind of writing cuts through the spuriousness of linear-text superimposition upon narrative; it represents more truly the processes of human experience and thinking about the world.

Sven Lindqvist is the writer who most prolifically committed himself to the investigation of fragmented writing in the late twentieth century. In a substantial series of memoirist monographs – including *Bench Press* (*Bänkpress* 1988), *Desert Divers* (*Ökendykarna* 1990), *'Exterminate All the Brutes'* (*Utrota varenda jävel* 1992), *A History of Bombing* (*Nu dog du: bombernas århundrade* 1999) and *Terra Nullius* (2005) – Lindqvist developed remarkable skill in employing the rhetorical power of the fragment to denounce the unfathomable tragedies of colonialism, warfare, racism and other aspects of the century's disintegration.

The cover blurb of Lindqvist's 169-fragment book *'Exterminate All the Brutes'* (Lindqvist 1996) describes it as: 'One man's odyssey into the heart of darkness and the origins of European genocide' (Lindqvist 1996: cover matter). It is, in fact, the most coruscating denouncement of British and European atrocities in Africa, based on the author's deeply penetrating library research. The fragmented structure drives home to the reader the fact that so much data about European genocide perpetrated upon Africans in the colonial period remains dispersed and uncollected. It also recreates the various physical, intellectual and emotional journeys the author took in writing the book.

By page ten of *'Exterminate All the Brutes'*, thirteen fragments have been narrated. The staccato montage and stacking of narrative elements set up a compelling effect for the argument. I will quote from just three of the fragments:

> 1
> You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.

> 3
> The core of European thought? Yes, there is one sentence, a short simple sentence, only a few words, summing up the history of our continent, our humanity, our biosphere, from Holocene to Holocaust.
> It says nothing about Europe as the original home on earth of humanism, democracy, and welfare… [The sentence Lindqvist refers to is that of the title of his book: Conrad's 'Exterminate all the brutes'.]
>
> 7
> The sound of heavy blows from a club, falling on the larynx. A crackling sound like eggshells, then a gurgling when they desperately try to get some air… (Lindqvist 1996: 2, 3, 6)

A summary of the first thirteen fragments goes like this:

> 1. Narrator's direct address to reader – about the difference between, on the one hand, knowing something, and on the other, having the courage to understand it and draw conclusions. (2.5 lines)
>
> 2. Scene set on a bus in the desert in central Algeria. (29 lines)
>
> 3. Narrator's reflection on European thought with reference to a sentence (not quoted) in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. (13 lines)
>
> 4. Scene about alighting from a bus in In Salah in Algeria at night. Getting lost in a new place which has no street lighting. Reflection on Scottish explorer Alexander Gordon Laing being attacked in this place and Thomas Hobbes' ideas about fear. (37 lines)
>
> 5. Narrator's reflection on Conrad's ideas about fear and Hobbes' agreement with them. (10 lines)
>
> 6. Description of a rickety hotel room in In Salah, Algeria. (16 lines)
>
> 7. Description of the sound of a club landing on a larynx. (6 lines)
>
> 8. Description of the geographical isolation of a Saharan town shown on a map. (33 lines)
>
> 9. Narrator's mixed reflection on getting a computer started, the extermination of species, origins of the word 'Europe', and Kurtz's sentence 'Exterminate all the brutes'. (25 lines)
>
> 10. Description of Latin origins of the word 'exterminate', and of European use of words like 'beast' or 'brute' to describe Africans. (13 lines)
>
> 11. Narrator's account of finding a direct source for Conrad's sentence 'Exterminate all the brutes' in philosopher Herbert

> Spencer's writing. (18 lines)
>
> 12. In contradiction to the previous fragment: narrator's account of discovering the prevalence of an extermination philosophy across a range of nineteenth-century writing. (20 lines)
>
> 13. Narrator's account of the 1990s German debate over the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust and its links to practices on other continents, especially those perpetrated by the British Empire. (30 lines)

In these ten pages, Lindqvist explores the staccato bombardment effects of:

- building an argument out of multiple, related thoughts and images
- changing genre voice within a narrative
- readerly transition moments across gaps between statements
- the filmic idea that each scene has its own present tense, and
- the notion that the notes for writing a narrative might become the narrative itself.

Lindqvist stabs facts down, bumps them up against each other, weaves them inexorably, and seduces the reader. It's as if chronology – the supposed basis of narrative flow – is discarded, left to the reader to engage with and provide on an individual basis. The logic of the argument is built from strategically arranged contributing slivers. The gaps between the slivers are crafted to create thought processes which provide the overall argumentative thinking, the visual thinking, and the narrative thinking that go together to create the full immersive experience for the reader. One might surmise that the notes for the writing have been pushed to become the writing itself. These notes are highly crafted, edited down, placed, and polished to perfection.

Just like the ancients, Lindqvist makes an overall mosaic out of a sequential montage. It involves not only the splicing together of different moments in time, but also the overlapping/superimposing of different voices, perspectives, genres, emotions and arguments to provoke the reader into discovering associations and realising new insights. In the process the writer is aware of readerly potential for putting images and ideas together to make meaning happen, and intentionally directs the thinking of the reader by the juxtaposition of the fragments in a selective manner.

In the twenty-first century, creative writers have sought to write in a manner that combines experimental findings from the previous century with the impact of further technological advance. Jonathan Safran Foer, Jennifer Egan, Shelley Jackson and many others recognise the influence of the internet and visual culture and how these have entered the space once occupied exclusively by text. Creative writers now need to look sideways and longways because the impacts from converging media require that fragmentation is more an issue than it was before. The novel, the memoir, the essay and the short story, in their traditionally published forms, still thrive. However, their linearity is impacted now not only by visual and audio genres playing in their space, but also by the fragmentation inherent, bit by binary-digit bit, in the contemporary sites of writing: the computer screen, hypertext and hypermedia.

Hypertext and beyond: Writing the textual gap

This article takes a broad sweep of the history of fragments, moving from aphorism to feuilleton and now, to hypertext. It is my contention that these forms share a common feature: the concept that a piece of fragmented sequential writing might be fashioned in such a way as to hand over a significant part of its meaning-making to the reader. This was picked up by J Hillis Miller in his article 'The Ethics of Hypertext' (1995):

> [I]n the period now coming to an end when the printed book dominated as the chief means of storing and retrieving information, it was still possible to be beguiled into thinking of a work like [Trollope's] *Ayala's Angel* or even like [Proust's] *A la recherche du temps perdu* as a stable and unmoving organic unity, on the model of a spatial array. Such a fixed text imposed on its readers a single unified meaning generated by a linear reading from the first word through to the end, in Proust's case more than three thousand pages later. The reader who accepted this model could think of the act of reading as a purely cognitive matter. I as reader do not create a meaning that did not exist before I actively engaged myself, "interactively," in the text. The meaning was there, waiting to be generated in me in an act of essentially passive reception. A hypertext that is overtly organised as such, on the other hand, offers the reader the necessity at every turn of choosing which path to follow through the text, or of letting chance choose for him or her. Nor is there any "right" choice, that is, one justified objectively, by a pre-existing meaning. A hypertext demands that we choose at every turn and take responsibility for our choices. This is the ethics of hypertext. Hypertext brings into the open the way the generation of meaning in the act of reading is a speech act, not a passive cognitive reception. As such a doing things with words it is not fully authorized or justified by the text. The text makes a demand on me to read it. My reading is a response to that demand… (Hillis Miller 1995: 38)

Hillis Miller saw, early on in the development of hypertext, that it laid bare how readers really read – they choose paths forward among the array of fragments (words, sentences, chapters, images, etc) offered to them – and especially how concepts of linearity and sequentialism are at odds with a text where a writer 'overtly organises' it to be interactively manipulated.

Much argument was generated by Wolfgang Iser and Roland Barthes on the role of the reader in interpreting the linear text, but far less has focused on the writer's willing understanding that the reader will contribute significantly to the work. In Hillis Miller's terms, the writer acknowledges the 'deconstructive' reading as opposed to the 'univocal' reading (Hillis Miller 1977: 439ff). Reader-response theory favours the notion that the writer takes up an authoritative 'univocal' position which must be antagonistic to, or out of touch with, the vagaries and manipulability of the reading process. Barthes's ideas around the 'death of the author' also appear to exclude the notion that the writer can write *to* and *with* the idea of multiple readings as opposed to being somehow disadvantaged by them. Writers working with fragmented texts have always understood that the reader is a co-creator and have written thoughtfully towards that outcome.

Iser's acclaimed studies in reader-response theory (eg Iser 1971, 1972, 1978) suggested that the reader fills in the blanks in a narrative in order to make it meaningful. Iser described 'the blank' in a text as not only a seemingly negative 'indeterminacy' but also a potential connection:

> the blank … designates a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns … [and] the need for combination. [The blanks] indicate that the different segments of the text *are* to be connected, even though the text itself does not say so. (Iser 1978: 182-183, italics in the original)

Iser examined how the reader of a conventional text picks up on and interprets the 'unseen' junctures which trigger meaning. He proposed that the reader is already 'programmed' (Suleiman 1980: 24) to fill in the gaps in the text which have been created by the author:

> [T]he text is constructed in such a way that it provokes the reader constantly to supplement what he [sic] is reading… Whenever this occurs, it is clear that the author is *not* mobilising his reader because he himself cannot finish off the work he has started: *his motive is to bring about an intensified participation* which will compel the reader to be that much more aware of the intention of the text. (Iser 1971: 33, my italics)

Here Iser allowed the idea that the writer 'mobilises' the reader to participate in the meaning-making, and suggested that the author *could* finish off the work but chooses not to. Reader-response critics such as Susan R Suleiman soon pointed out that Iser contradicted himself over the intentionality of the text/author and the nature of the response the reader makes. She noted that:

> According to Iser, it is because all texts contain elements of indeterminacy, or "gaps," that the reader's activity must be creative: in seeking to fill in the textual gaps – gaps that function on multiple levels, including the semantic level – the reader realises the work. But here again, the question of how much freedom the reader has is … answered in contradictory ways. Iser's conclusion is that "the literary text makes no objectively real demands on its readers, it opens up a freedom that everyone can interpret in his own way" [Iser 1971: 44]. This conclusion is opposed, however, by the weight of numerous other statements which suggest that the reader's activity of filling in the gaps is "programmed" by the text itself, so that the kind of pattern the reader creates for the text is foreseen and intended by the author. (Suleiman 1980: 24-25)

The concept of authorial intention as interpreted by critics is clearly of importance to the interests of creative writers. It is debated famously in the work of Roman Jakobson, Wayne C Booth, Roland Barthes and others, but seeing it debated among reader- and audience-response theorists is ironic. Author intention is an idea constantly shied away from in audience-response theory, since, of course, the theory is predicated on the reader being responsible for the reading. Reader-response theorists are more comfortable with an 'implied author', rather than a real one. Suleiman calls both reader and writer 'necessary fictions' (Suleiman 1980: 11).

Without denying the significance of the debate among audience-response theorists over the status of the 'gap' or 'blank', it can be said that where gaps in a narrative are conventional (eg between words, between sentences and paragraphs, between section and chapter breaks) readers in effect don't realise they are reading gaps at all because they are hard-wired by familiarity to thinking they are reading an uninterrupted narrative, for which they supply the connections. Vicki Mistacco's study of how readers read the nouveau roman – which plays significantly with ideas of conventional linearity – noted that the 'radical otherness' of these novels can be understood through seeing them as 'enactments of the practice of writing' (Mistacco 1980: 371-372). This kind of critical response began to acknowledge the role of the writer in utilising the meaning-making possibilities and 'written' textual significance of the gaps.

In written works where gaps are brought deliberately to the reader's attention and are fashioned by the writer *beyond* accordance with convention, the writer is in heightened reader-manipulation mode. (The writer is in *normal* reader-manipulation mode, of course, when they put any textual marks on the page/screen with intention of publication.) The writer is not ignorant of the gaps nor do they rely on conventional assumptions for their interpretation. The writer stage-manages these gaps, attempts to build *for-purpose* significance into them, and shapes them to direct reader understanding and make meaning. (Clearly here I defy Barthes and the idea that there is no such thing as effective author intention, but make no apologies for it.) In a real sense, by creating a gap – or possibly filling it with an asterisk or some other symbol to represent a gap – the writer writes nothing at all, or writes a sign representing nothing, and that nothing is meant to be pregnant with meaning. In creating such a device, the writer considers the impact, the drama, the interpretability and ideational likelihood of the 'missing' text. The writer writes by *not* writing text, by consciously refraining from filling/explaining/forcing meaning into the gap, but by intending meaning/s nevertheless. The writer thinks deeply about the gap and intends by textual absence potential meanings and directions for reading.

In the gap, the writer expects things will happen. As the ancient aphorism writers did, the contemporary writer intends that there will be readable frisson between the fragments, that textual energies will flow, that narrative dynamics will emerge to relate fragment to fragment and relate groupings of fragments to the whole. Themes, plots and whole characters or theses will emerge from the interplay allowed in the gaps. Each reader might get a different version of the themes, plots, characters or overall expository outcome, but that was going to happen anyway in a conventional reading. The point here is that the writer's process involves directing the reader's negotiation of the gap and guiding the reading of *no text* in ways not dissimilar to how the writer naturally attempts to control the reader by conventional text. The reader is invited to exercise their agency in reading the gap, to put a sequence of *no text* + *adjacent texts* together, as placed by the writer, in a manner consistent with how they 'read' their fragmentary experience of the real world. There is an honesty – and a sense of reality – embedded in the idea of writing with fragments and celebrating the work and potential of the gaps: by this method, the writer taps into the reader's normal understanding processes.

Simon Barton, in *Visual Devices in Contemporary Prose Fiction: Gaps, Gestures, Images* (2016), discusses intentional textual gaps, lacunae and ellipses in twenty-first-century prose fiction. He defines several categories of effect created in the reader by, for example, 'extended or additional blank spaces, missing content' etc, and particularly,

> new visual verisimilar narrative techniques that portray conscious and unconscious thought. For example, textual gaps found in the middle of sentences and in between the words that form a first-person interior monologue can represent the pauses in thought that are common in the psychological realism or the inward turn favoured by some of the Modernists… (Barton 2016: 4)

Barton recognises that an author may create a blank in the narrative for the reader to interpret *as a blank in the narrator's thinking*, but does not go so far as to say that the blank might be intended to create a period of intense thinking on the *reader's* part. About such elements in novels, Barton notes a 'lack of critical terminology that makes critics avoid or marginalise such visceral aspects of the page' (2016: 10). The 'critical' terminology is missing because critics are not seeing the text from the writer's viewpoint.

Barton categorises different versions of the gap and in the process acknowledges '*intentional textual gaps*'(italics in the original) as

> gaps that can be found [in] unconventional places on the graphic surface of the page rather than conventional and figurative gaps that are "filled-in" by the reader during the conventional reading process. The key distinction here is that intentional textual gaps fulfil a particular representational role while conventional aporia are an "unseen" part of the reader's comprehension of narrative. (Barton 2016: 27)

Barton never quite commits his discussion to what the writer may have intended. But his work is a good place to start an analysis. Barton asks questions like 'Does the gap represent missing narrative?'; 'Does the gap represent a pause for thought?'; 'How does the missing content fit the context of the narrative and how does the reader gain meaning from it?' (Barton 2016: 30). Questions such as these are paramount in the mind of the writer as they fashion a fragmented work.

In response to Barton's questions and in relation to my own previous work (see for example Krauth 2017, 2016b, 2015, or earlier, Krauth 2000, 1997) I can say that when I write in fragmented narrative mode I set out, from the start, with the intention of utilising and manipulating the gaps between the sections of narrative I choose to write down. It excites me, as a writer, to bump fragments up against each other, to work with the electrical charge generated by juxtaposed discrete ideas and experiences. For me, it's like atoms or continents colliding. I recall writing in the 1990s a story where I set out to write the pieces in the unplanned order they came to me with a promise to myself that I must rearrange them later on, at the time of editing, to make sure the final version made sense. In the end, I was very surprised to find that I could not better the order in which they first arrived in my head. The fragmented story was published in exactly the sequence I wrote it down (Krauth 1996). I found this method – perhaps to be called 'throwing it down anyhow', or 'just smashing it out' – to be a dependable way of writing creatively, because the directions for reading the fragments were already coded by the way my mind came up with the sequence. And I realised that 'minding' the gap between fragments does not mean paying focused and rational attention to them, it means allowing my mind (the writing mind, the conscious organ being used in the writing) to organise them – that kind of *minding*. When we read, our brains put the bits together subjectively even when the mode is linear. We (or at least those who aren't brainwashed) are not so hard-wired that we only think linearly as we read. All readers acknowledge, for example, that when we read a

text a second time we see, hear and feel it differently. Sometimes we take a different route of thinking to a conclusion previously reached; often we don't, our minds take us somewhere else. The writer who is happy to invite multiple conclusions to the reading of their work, as I am, perfectly accepts this situation. I think the writer should trust that the minding of the gap which their own brain does will significantly correlate with the minding the reader does.

In conclusion, it can be stated that writers fashion fragmented texts so as to hand over a significant part of the meaning-making to the reader. In doing so, they manipulate the work as a mosaic of fragments and they write directions for consequential reading into the gaps between them. This is not a new idea for writing. Hypertext and hypermedia have their antecedents in twentieth-century experimental writing and, ultimately, in the work of classical aphorism writers.

Notes

[1] 'feuilleton, noun: a part of a European newspaper or magazine devoted to material designed to entertain the general reader … a short literary composition often having a familiar tone and reminiscent content… The word is a diminutive of the French *feuillet*, meaning "sheet of paper", and ultimately derives from Latin *folium*, meaning "leaf". From this source English acquired "folio" (which can refer to a page, or leaf, of a book or manuscript) and "foliage" (meaning "a mass of leaves")' (*Merriam-Webster* 2019). return to text

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