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Attention and Mind-Wandering in Contemporary German Children's and Young Adult Metafiction

In this article, we draw upon cognitive sciences, narratology, and media studies to investigate the interrelation between metafiction, attention, and mind-wandering in two works of German children's and young adult metafiction: Michael Ende's *Die unendliche Geschichte* (*The Neverending Story*) from 1979 and Cornelia Funke's *Tintenherz* (*Inkheart*) published in 2003. Both works are attention narratives in that they employ textual strategies such as foregrounding, metalepsis, narratorial commentary, or intermedial references to guide their readers' attention and point them to aspects of their mediality. Moreover, we explore metafiction's effects on mind-wandering, that is, moments in which our minds stray from the here and now to engage in introspective thought and imagination. We contend that metafiction, due to its high attentional demands, can reduce the overall frequency and duration of mind-wandering, but that it can also, on the other hand, facilitate text-related mind-wandering, associated with productive, on-task reflections and meta-awareness.

1. (Not Quite) Lost in a Book: Attention and Mind-Wandering in Children's and Young Adult Metafiction

Children's and young adult metafiction has been viewed as a metafictional subgenre written for young readers (see e.g. Moss 1985; Nelson 2006; Hermansson 2019). This definition may appear somewhat paradoxical in and of itself. Metafiction, after all, is known as a particularly sophisticated type of text, and thus seems an odd choice for the novice reader (see Moss 1990, 50; Hermansson 2019, 35). Just like its adult counterpart, children's and young adult metafiction is replete with self-reflexive comments, metaleptic transgressions, or impossible loops, and engages with astonishingly complex epistemological and ontological questions about stories as well as about those who read and write them (see McCallum 1999). Nevertheless, metafictional elements can be found in children's literature from fairytales (see Müller-Wille 2019) to children's classics such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), or, in the German context, the works of Erich Kästner (see e.g. Langemeyer 2010). If anything, the genre's popularity seems to have increased over the past decades, with William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* (1973), Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (1991), or Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* novels (1999–2006) blazing a discernible trail. As we will argue in this article, part of the ongoing success of children's and young adult metafiction can be explained by the dynamics of attention and mind-wandering in these narratives. As a genre that combines entertainment with educational functions (see e.g. McCallum 1999; Hermansson 2019), children's and young adult metafiction

can foster readers' attention management skills and meta-awareness, both of which are vital to navigating the contemporary attention economy.[1]

Aspects of attention are mentioned frequently in definitions of metafiction.[2] Patricia Waugh, in her field-defining monograph, describes metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws *attention* to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (1984, 2; our emphasis). Linda Hutcheon, in her equally seminal work, states that "[t]he laying bare of literary devices in metafiction brings to the reader's *attention* those formal elements of which, through over-familiarization, he has become unaware" (1980, 24; our emphasis). She adds that "Through his [the reader's, N.B.] recognition of the backgrounded material, new demands for attention and active involvement are brought to bear on the act of reading" (ibid.). These definitions emphasise how metafiction constitutes a break from the default mode of (presumably immersed) reading by means of redirecting the reader's attention. As such, it serves as a technique to foreground aspects that are backgrounded when readers become absorbed by a narrative – such as the text's formal features or the fact that the storyworld is not real.

In children's and young adult metafiction, there are often specific stylistic features that work together to appeal to the reader and manage their attention (see e.g. McCallum 1999; Hermansson 2019; Klimek 2009; Kurwinkel 2017; Nelson 2006). On the one hand, techniques associated with worldbuilding, such as the creation of relatable characters, detailed settings, or suspenseful plots, are particularly prone to engage the reader, stimulate their imagination, and promote absorption in the storyworld: an experiential state characterised by deep attention and the feeling of being 'lost in a book' (see Kuijpers et al. 2017; Wolf 2013a). On the other hand, metafictional elements and especially "foregrounding devices such as italics, alliteration, unusual metaphors, repetition, or fragmentation" capture readers' attention (Baumbach 2019a, 42–43, with reference to Emmott et al. 2006, 2013; see also Sandford / Emmott 2012, ch. 4). Following Sibylle Baumbach's approach to "attention narratives,"[3] we propose to understand these formal metafictional elements as attractors that draw readers' attention to the level of discourse, or even to a book's materiality (Baumbach 2019a, 42–43).

One of the most potent attractors of attention in children's and young adult metafiction is metalepsis, the transgression of ontological boundaries between different diegetic levels (see Genette 1972; Nelles 1992; Wolf 2005; Ryan 2006; Klimek 2009; Kukkonen 2011).[4] As unconventional and ontologically "impossible" occurrences in fictional texts (Ryan 2013), metalepses can elicit surprise and wonder, or increase readers' awareness of the text's mediality by exposing the fictionality of the storyworld.[5] They also pose formidable challenges to readerly comprehension and attention management skills, creating complex world structures and paradoxes that offer ample food for reflection on the nature and functions of literary texts and the conditions of their production and reception (Langemeyer 2010, 314, 316). In metafictional children's and young adult literature, metalepses typically draw attention to artifice, celebrate the value of

literature and the creativity of the author (or, conversely, question their authority), or deconstruct boundaries between fiction and reality (see McCallum 1999, 144–45; Langemeyer 2010, 306–7; Klimek 2011, 33).

The introduction of a metalevel alone arguably increases the cognitive demands for the reader, who must attend to at least two different levels: an object level on which the story unfolds, and the higher cognitive level at which the text reflects on itself (Wolf 2009, 3). This task, in itself quite demanding, is further complicated by metalepsis, obtrusive narrators, typographical experiments, or the copious use of figurative language, to name but a few (see McCallum 1999; Bhadury 2013; Kurwinkel 2017; Potsch 2019). As a result, the reader must repeatedly switch between different layers of meaning as well as between cognitive frames of reception; a mode associated with hyper attention (Hayles 2007, 187–88) and high levels of stimulation. While the challenge to keep track of a minimum of two levels can be found in all metafictional texts, it is particularly significant in children's and young adult metafiction. Addressed to child readers and, arguably, "hidden adults,"[6] these texts must meet the dual demand of attracting the interest of the young readership while also fulfilling educational functions (Hermansson 2019, 21). In comparison to 'adult' metafiction, the didactic component is at once more pronounced and more closely bound up with playful and pleasurable reading experiences. As Casie Hermansson suggests:

> The ludic nature of metafiction is put in (disguised) service to the pedagogical function: to teach literacy skills, even multi-literacies; to engage readers to read; to convey to readers how writing and authorship are possible. (2019, 36)

The broad range of complex and unconventional formal elements in these texts trains advanced literacy skills and supports a critical, reflexive form of reading. This does not necessarily make reading less 'fun' or mean that young readers are not engaged. Navigating the metafictional text instead becomes a form of play, and not unlike a challenging game.[7]

On the level of content, too, there are motifs that serve to both "engage readers to read" (ibid.) and encourage reflections on reading and writing. Hermansson lists "bookworms and reluctant readers, bibliophilia, the authority of books and authors, [and] agency in readership and authorship" (2019, 25; see also Nelson 2006, 223) among the typical thematic concerns in children's and young adult literature. The child reader as protagonist invites identification and emotional engagement and is often positioned as a role model for desired behaviour (Nikolajeva 2016, 4). Novels ranging from Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) to Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), from *Die unendliche Geschichte* (Ende 1979) to *Das Buch* (Hohlbein / Hohlbein 2009) present characters engrossed in books, portray books as loyal companions, sources of wisdom, or thresholds into fantastical worlds, and express a deep love for reading (see Hunt 2016; Nikolajeva 2016; Farrell 2016; Kurwinkel 2017). This sustained attention to books and reading might mark metafiction's narcissistic preoccupation with itself; more interestingly in the present context, however, it can also take readers on a mental journey to the world of literature, encouraging introspection and text-guided reflection.

To expressly turn to the implications for mind-wandering, metafiction requires recipients to ponder questions of an often complex epistemological and ontological nature. Metafiction's own self-reflexiveness can stimulate readers to think about "textuality and fictionality" and related phenomena (Wolf 2013b, 513). Such reflexive diversions from the exact words on the page nevertheless remain on-task in that they are guided by and contribute to readers' engagement with the text and their understanding of its themes (see Kukkonen 2020, 97–98).

Following this line of thought, we argue that children's and young adult metafiction promotes specific forms of mind-wandering, namely those that are goal-directed, task-related and conducive to a number of adaptive skills (Schooler et al. 2004; Fabry / Kukkonen 2019).[8] There is some evidence that this kind of mind-wandering enhances readers' experience and understanding of a literary text because their minds travel along a trajectory outlined by the text. Regina E. Fabry and Karin Kukkonen, for instance, have discussed the possibility that metafictional elements (as well as other foregrounding and defamiliarising devices) not only interrupt unproductive mind-wandering but also initiate and guide episodes of productive mind-wandering (2019, 5).

Mind-wandering readers of metafiction can furthermore be expected to remain conscious of and retain some measure of control over their reflections because of their increased meta-awareness (Wolf 2009, 31, 43–44). Narratological approaches commonly recognise that metafictional elements that are "properly understood" by the reader activate meta-awareness as a kind of secondary cognitive frame (ibid., 31). The reader, that is, becomes keenly aware of the construed nature of the text as well as their own role as a reader (ibid., 27). In the cognitive sciences, meta-awareness denotes the "explicit awareness of the contents of our own experiences" (Smallwood / Schooler 2006, 946; see Chin / Schooler 2009). In mind-wandering research, it marks the moment when readers notice that their minds have wandered and regain control over their thoughts (Chin / Schooler 2009, 34). Readers of metafiction thus become aware not only of the fact that they are reading a book, but also of the cognitive processes that affect their reading experience, including where and when exactly their minds wandered while doing so. Meta-awareness facilitates experiences of controlled introspection on the part of the reader while also helping them to attend to attention, as it were; to consciously register and understand processes of attention and distraction (see Baumbach 2019a; 2019b).

Meta-awareness has numerous benefits in its relation to mind-wandering: it mitigates potential negative effects and increases the efficiency of navigating and processing multiple streams of attention (Chin / Schooler 2009, 36). As mentioned earlier, in children's and young adult literature, metafictional elements can be assumed to serve a work's overall didactic purpose in that they convey knowledge about literary codes and conventions and foster the child reader's (multi)literacy (see Hutcheon 1980, 19; McCallum 1999, 139). It therefore seems plausible that these works capitalise on the beneficial effects of mind-wandering, namely to entrain adaptive skills such as meta-cognition, creative problem solving (see Baird et al. 2012), and prospective thinking (see Smallwood et al. 2009,

2011; Smallwood / Andrews-Hanna 2013). In engaging in metafiction-guided mind-wandering, novice readers practice to "monitor and control their thoughts," to consciously pursue reading goals, and thus increase their self-reflective abilities (Chin / Schooler 2009, 39–40). Crucially, metafiction develops the ability to slip in and out of meta-conscious mind-wandering and thus make efficient use of its benefits while avoiding the pitfalls (ibid.).

It is this combination of attentional challenges and productive mind-wandering that turns children's and young adult metafiction into a training ground for attention management skills. Note that mind-wandering, while associated with cognitive release, is not diametrically opposed to attention (see Fabry / Kukkonen 2019). Especially in its productive, stimulus-driven forms, mind-wandering can afford conscious reflections on textual themes as well as one's own attentional behaviour. The dynamics of attention and mind-wandering, then, contribute greatly to the potential of children's and young adult metafiction to "help readers reconsider and refine their attentional habits" (Baumbach 2019a, 52). This also helps explain the continued relevance of the genre in the present age, in which anxieties of attention abound (see Hayles 2007; Baumbach 2019b).

Examples such as the linguistic experiments of Lewis Carroll's nonsense poems, the narrator's text-related ethical ruminations between the chapters of Kästner's *Pünktchen und Anton* (1931; see Langemeyer 2010, 306), or the reading scenes in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837; see Sroka 1993, 38–40) suggest that attention and mind-wandering are indeed constitutive of metafictional children's and young adult literature, be it on the level of the narratives, or their reception. Researchers seem to have recognised these dynamics, even though in-depth discussions of attention and mind-wandering in children's metafiction remain scarce (see Langemeyer 2010; Arnavas 2021; Zunshine 2022, ch. 6 for recent examples). The kinds of overt, ontological metaleptic transgressions we find in *Die unendliche Geschichte* and in the Inkworld trilogy, however, are not commonly used in children's literature before postmodernism (see Langemeyer 2010, 317). The following detailed analyses of these two 'new classics' of German children's and young adult metafiction therefore offer new perspectives on a popular genre by exploring the dynamics of attention and mind-wandering in these narratives.

2. Attention and Mind-Wandering in *Die unendliche Geschichte* and *Tintenherz*

Michael Ende's *Die unendliche Geschichte* (1979, hereafter *UG*)[9] and Cornelia Funke's *Tintenherz* (2003, hereafter *TH*)[10] can be considered classics of German children's and young adult literature, with translations into dozens of languages worldwide and considerable popularity among leisure readers and professional critics alike. They are also among the most prominent and well-studied examples of the metafictional subgenre (see e.g. Heber 2010; Etten 2013; Bhadury 2013; Gauger 2019; Hermansson 2019; Potsch 2019). For the present endeavour, they

are particularly well-suited since they are in many ways representative of the genre, make copious use of diverse metafictional attractors – among them rare and striking forms such as typographical experiments – and use triggers for mind-wandering for didactic purposes.

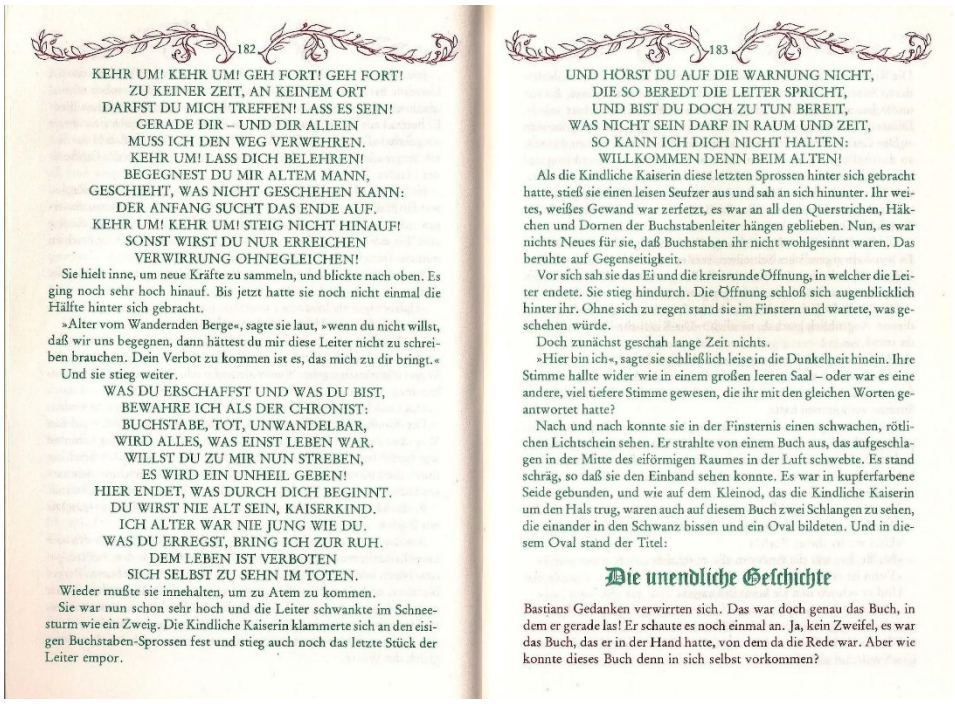
In the following, we investigate how metafictional elements on the discursive, structural, and diegetic levels contribute to the novels' attention management and the facilitation of text-related mind-wandering. The first part of the analysis focusses on the texts' formal-structural composition. We argue that the specific design of these narratives, in particular their use of metafictional attractors and foregrounding devices, metalepsis, and *mise en abyme*, tightly manages readers' attention, demands considerable focus, and may evoke states of both deep and hyper attention. The metafictional elements direct readers' attention towards the novels' fictionality, composition, and physicality, introducing various layers of complexity. The second part focusses on moments of cognitive release and considers mind-wandering episodes that are managed by the texts. We argue that metafictional comments in *UG* and *TH* can prompt productive mind-wandering, encouraging the recipient to reflect on reading as a cultural practice and to self-consciously evaluate their own approach to literature.

2.1 Typography, Paratext, and Materiality: Metafictional Devices as Attractors of Attention

UG's opening page presents a large frame containing mirrored writing (5) – a kind of illustration that works as a visual and linguistic attractor to individual letters as constituents of the story, while offering a visual focalisation of a bookshop owner's point of view from inside his shop:[11] It is the word "Antiquariat" ('antiquarian bookshop')[12] and the owner's name that the shopwindow bears and that he thus sees invertedly. The mirrored writing as well as the book Bastian finds in this shop foreshadow the novel's *mise en abyme* structure, in which Bastian's world and the world of Fantastica are embedded into one another in endless succession (see Gauger 2019, 39–41). The owner's name, Carl Conrad Coreander, moreover shares its improbably alliterative nature with the name of the protagonist, Bastian Balthazar Bux. Considering that alliteration is a key attention device (Sandford / Emmott 2012, 74), both names highlight their linguistic constituents, perhaps even their invented nature, which marks them as 'real-world equivalents' of the even more fantastical names of the characters that inhabit Fantastica.

In this opening chapter, the title of the book Bastian reads is printed twice very prominently in Gothic script (*UG* 10, 16), as are the chapter headings, each of which occupies an entire page. In addition to serving as foregrounding devices, these font variations create the impression of being 'quoted' from the very book Bastian reads. Each one of the book's 26 chapters starts with an elaborately illustrated, frontispiece-like initial letter that also covers one whole page and anticipates the respective chapter's plot, with the letters in alphabetical order.[13]

Occasionally, capital letters are used in the text, most strikingly in Chapter XII, when the entire poem that incorporates a ladder leading to the home of the intradiegetic *UG*'s creator, the Old Man of Wandering Mountain, is printed centred and in capital letters (182–83, see Fig. 1). Since every verse is to be seen as a rung, the representation of the poem even bears visual resemblance to a ladder (181).



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KEHR UM! KEHR UM! GEH FORT! GEH FORT!
ZU KEINER ZEIT, AN KEINEM ORT
DARFST DU MICH TREFFEN! LASS ES SEIN!
GERADE DIR – UND DIR ALLEIN
MUSS ICH DEN WEG VERWEHREN.
KEHR UM! LASS DICH BELEHREN!
BEGEGNEST DU MIR ALTEM MANN,
GESCHIEHT, WAS NICHT GESCHEHEN KANN:
DER ANFANG SUCHT DAS ENDE AUF.
KEHR UM! KEHR UM! STEIG NICHT HINAUF!
SONST WIRST DU NUR ERREICHEN
VERWIRRUNG OHNEGLEICHEN!

Sie hielt inne, um neue Kräfte zu sammeln, und blickte nach oben. Es ging noch sehr hoch hinauf. Bis jetzt hatte sie noch nicht einmal die Hälfte hinter sich gebracht.

»Alter vom Wandernden Berge«, sagte sie laut, »wenn du nicht willst, daß wir uns begegnen, dann hättest du mir diese Leiter nicht zu schreiben brauchen. Dein Verbot zu kommen ist es, das mich zu dir bringt.«

Und sie stieg weiter.

WAS DU ERSCHAFFST UND WAS DU BIST,
BEWAHRE ICH ALS DER CHRONIST:
BUCHSTABE, TOT, UNWANDELBAR,
WIRD ALLES, WAS EINST LEBEN WAR.
WILLST DU ZU MIR NUN STREBEN,
ES WIRD EIN UNHEIL GEBEN!
HIER ENDET, WAS DURCH DICH BEGINNT.
DU WIRST NIE ALT SEIN, KAISERKIND.
ICH ALTER WAR NIE JUNG WIE DU.
WAS DU ERREGST, BRING ICH ZUR RUH.
DEM LEBEN IST VERBOTEN
SICH SELBST ZU SEHN IM TOTEN.

Wieder mußte sie innehalten, um zu Atem zu kommen.

Sie war nun schon sehr hoch und die Leiter schwankte im Schneesturm wie ein Zweig. Die Kindliche Kaiserin klammerte sich an den eisigen Buchstaben-Sprossen fest und stieg auch noch das letzte Stück der Leiter empor.

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UND HÖRST DU AUF DIE WARNUNG NICHT,
DIE SO BEREDT DIE LEITER SPRICHT,
UND BIST DU DOCH ZU TUN BEREIT,
WAS NICHT SEIN DARF IN RAUM UND ZEIT,
SO KANN ICH DICH NICHT HALTEN:
WILLKOMMEN DENN BEIM ALTEN!

Als die Kindliche Kaiserin diese letzten Sprossen hinter sich gebracht hatte, stieß sie einen leisen Seufzer aus und sah an sich hinunter. Ihr weites, weißes Gewand war zerfetzt, es war an all den Querstrichen, Häkchen und Dornen der Buchstabenleiter hängen geblieben. Nun, es war nichts Neues für sie, daß Buchstaben ihr nicht wohlgesinnt waren. Das beruhte auf Gegenseitigkeit.

Vor sich sah sie das Ei und die kreisrunde Öffnung, in welcher die Leiter endete. Sie stieg hindurch. Die Öffnung schloß sich augenblicklich hinter ihr. Ohne sich zu regen stand sie im Finstern und wartete, was geschehen würde.

Doch zunächst geschah lange Zeit nichts.

»Hier bin ich«, sagte sie schließlich leise in die Dunkelheit hinein. Ihre Stimme hallte wider wie in einem großen leeren Saal – oder war es eine andere, viel tiefere Stimme gewesen, die ihr mit den gleichen Worten geantwortet hatte?

Nach und nach konnte sie in der Finsternis einen schwachen, rötlichen Lichtschein sehen. Er strahlte von einem Buch aus, das aufgeschlagen in der Mitte des eiförmigen Raumes in der Luft schwebte. Es stand schräg, so daß sie den Einband sehen konnte. Es war in kupferfarbene Seide gebunden, und wie auf dem Kleinod, das die Kindliche Kaiserin um den Hals trug, waren auch auf diesem Buch zwei Schlangen zu sehen, die einander in den Schwanz bissen und ein Oval bildeten. Und in diesem Oval stand der Titel:

Die unendliche Geſchichte

Bastians Gedanken verwirrten sich. Das war doch genau das Buch, in dem er gerade las! Er schaute es noch einmal an. Ja, kein Zweifel, es war das Buch, das er in der Hand hatte, von dem da die Rede war. Aber wie konnte dieses Buch denn in sich selbst vorkommen?

Fig. 1: The 'ladder poem', which warns Bastian and the Childlike Empress not to visit the Old Man of Wandering Mountain. Note also the title "The Neverending Story" in Gothic script and the change of text colours from green to red (bottom right). (182–83)

Perhaps the most flamboyant layout-related feature, however, is the text's print colour. The parts presented by the extradiegetic narrator who tells the frame narrative are printed in red while those presented by the intradiegetic narrator are printed in green / turquoise (see Fig. 1). This special design not only draws attention to the novel's textuality and the material book as a literary artefact (see Potsch 2019); it also has a very pragmatic function in helping the (juvenile) reader navigate narrative layers and their increasingly complex dependencies.

TH, too, makes use of conspicuous typography. The multiple quotations from other literary texts incorporated in *TH*, for instance, are emphasised and set off from the main text by italic print. On the one hand, the slanted letters serve a storyworld-consistent function as a visual indicator of the magic taking place when the characters read (aloud), "bringing letters and words to life" (*TH* 193). On the other hand, the italics accentuate the alienness of the quotes from *TH*'s own narrative. This also helps the reader, who is unlikely to be familiar with all these quotes, to navigate the transitions between the main text and its various intertexts. As metafictional attractors, the font changes return the reader's attention to the level of discourse at the beginning and end of each quote. Readers are thus never permitted to 'wander off' into the worlds of the

embedded texts for long but rather prompted, at regular intervals, to focus on the intertext's position and function within the context of *TH*. The italicised text's role as an attractor arguably increases readers' attentional focus while inhibiting mind-wandering.

The stress these high attentional demands put on the reader is offset by moments of release. Interjections, for instance, are common in *TH* where they counterbalance the long, complex sentences and evocative language in which the novel cloaks its metacommentary. When the diegetic "Inkheart's" author Fenoglio ponders the possibility of rewriting stories to change their characters' fate ("Keine geschmolzenen Herzen, kein verbranntes Papier, nichts als Liebesglück," *TH* 448),[14] Maggie promptly replies: "Deine Schrift ist schwer zu lesen."[15] The short sentences and the more natural language use of the child protagonist as well as her irreverence towards the powerful author figure introduce both cognitive and comic relief from the difficult narratological and existential questions the chapter touches upon.

Even more conspicuous is *TH*'s marked and sustained attention to the materiality of books. Maggie's father Mo is a professional bookbinder – or "book doctor," in Maggie's suggestive analogy (22). Readers repeatedly get a chance to look over his shoulder as he meticulously and lovingly goes about repairing damaged books while Maggie, the focaliser, provides context and explanations, feeding bits of knowledge to the reader (e.g. 66–67). What is most likely to direct the reader's attention to the book they are holding, however, is the correspondence between the metafictional commentary on the diegetic level and *TH*'s own materiality. Many of the details cherished by the main characters are mirrored in *TH*'s design, making them stand out to the reader and inviting newfound appreciation. The cover of the first edition (2003), for instance, shows illuminated initials that resemble the ones Maggie discovers in the diegetic book "Inkheart": "[D]er Anfangsbuchstabe jedes Kapitels war selbst so etwas wie ein kleines Bild. Auf einigen Buchstaben saßen Tiere, um andere rankten sich Pflanzen" (*TH* 58; see also Kurwinkel 2017, 55).[16] Incidentally, they are also evocative of the large initials adorning the pages of *UG,* signalling *TH*'s intertextual awareness of its literary predecessors.

In a particularly striking instance of foregrounding, *TH* combines verbal commentary and embodied experience to draw attention to the presence and function of endpapers. Watching her father Mo flipping through a collection of endpapers, Maggie remembers how he had once explained their function to her:

> Jedes Buch sollte mit so einem Papier beginnen […]. Am besten mit einem dunklen: dunkelrot, dunkelblau, je nachdem, wie der Einband des Buches ist. Wenn du dann das Buch aufschlägst, ist es wie im Theater: Erst ist da der Vorhang. Du ziehst ihn zur Seite, und die Vorstellung beginnt. (67)[17]

This explicit metafictional comment asks readers to pay special attention to the details and handicraft of the book they are holding. It is likely that readers will deliberately pause their reading in order to examine the endpapers beneath the cover of *TH*. In that case, the novel even affords an intimate and immediate haptic experience. The reader's mind-wandering is accompanied by a literal

movement away from the text to the material book. While this diverts readers from the words on the page, their engagement with the book is still very much on-task and arguably even necessary to understand the novel's message. Learning to appreciate the skill and deliberation that went into the invention of the storyworld as well as into the making of the physical book, readers form a mindful mental and physical connection to the literary text. Arguably, the novel's attention management, its guidance of readers' mind-wandering, and appeal to several senses can thus increase the depth of processing (see Sandford / Emmott 2012, ch. 5, 9).

The novels' complexity is further increased by their multiple storyworlds and the recurring metalepses between (intra-)diegetic levels, which lead to increaseingly impossible constellations. This is especially true for *UG*, where the boundary between the diegetic level of Bastian's reality and the hypodiegetic world of Fantastica already begins to dissolve in the first half of the novel, before Bastian even crosses the threshold and enters Fantastica. Until that point, metalepses are rhetorical in that no character or entity is yet "relocated across the boundary of the fictional world" (Kukkonen 2011, 2) and mainly descending, crossing the boundary from a higher to a lower level of narrative embedding. This makes it possible for the (young) reader to focus on the plot and gradually become accustomed to the concept of permeable boundaries between reality and fiction: 'breaches' only happen in one direction and tend to draw readers' attention to the hypodiegetic storyworld. When Bastian reads about Ygramul, the horrifying insect-like shapeshifter staring at Atreyu in Chapter IV (70), he utters a cry of horror, which immediately echoes through Ygramul's canyon on the hypodiegetic level. Although the characters in Fantastica wonder about the origin of the cry and Bastian is similarly confused, he does not seem to think about it any further. When Atreyu later faces the Magic Mirror Gate in Chapter VI, he is quite surprised by the image he is presented with: It is Bastian sitting cross-legged on his mats on the attic – reading a book (99). Bastian's reaction to this, reported in free indirect discourse, is strikingly rational:

> Jetzt ging die Sache entschieden zu weit! Es war doch überhaupt nicht möglich, daß in einem gedruckten Buch etwas stehen konnte, was nur in diesem Augenblick und nur für ihn zutraf. Jeder andere würde an dieser Stelle dasselbe lesen. (ibid.)[18]

As in the previous example, Bastian logically and correctly judges the phenomenon he experiences as entirely impossible, but still manages to comfort himself through a combination of quasi-adult rationalisation ("ein verrückter Zufall" / "a crazy accident") and childlike fascination with the vast opportunities that would emerge from this: "Stell dir vor […], wenn sie in Phantásien wirklich etwas von dir wüßten. Das wäre fabelhaft" (100).[19] Bastian repeatedly points readers' attention to the logical impossibility of the metalepses: He suggests what aspects of his experience are strange or unbelievable, and thus identifies breaches of literary convention. The use of two potent attractors – metalepsis and joint attention with the protagonist – makes these scenes stand out as key moments, conveys a sense of excitement, and ensures that even inexperienced readers

notice the disruption of literary convention. These instances support the novel's didactic function, familiarising readers with complex metafictional devices.

The interleaving of narrative layers progresses continually towards the pivotal point of metalepsis in Chapter XII. Just before Atreyu meets the Childlike Empress in the embedded story, there is an ascending metalepsis as Bastian sees the face of the Empress looking at him right before his eyes and is sure not to have imagined it (161). Understandably, this experience is even more unsettling for Bastian than the previous metaleptic episodes. At the same time, he seems deeply intrigued by the encounter and develops a strong emotional attachment to the Empress, who has become more than a fictional character to Bastian, which forces him to continue reading:

> Selbst wenn Bastian gewollte hätte, so hätte er sich nicht mehr gegen das wehren können, was da mit ihm geschehen war. […] Er wollte nur noch eines: weiterlesen, um wieder bei Mondenkind zu sein, um sie wiederzusehen. (ibid.)[20]

This metalepsis draws the reader's attention to a new aspect of the narratological connections presented in the novel up to this point, namely its bidirectionality, thereby preparing the reader for the incision that takes place at the end of Chapter XII: the ontological metalepsis that is Bastian's crossing the threshold to Fantastica.

At the heart of *UG* lies a metaleptic connection between diegetic levels that exponentiates infinitely. The extradiegetic world in which Bastian lives and the intradiegetic world of Fantastica are nested into one another in a paradoxically circular fashion – thus creating a 'never-ending' story in the most literal sense. The term *mise en abyme* refers to such nested structures of narrative layers that act as mirror images of one another (see Gauger 2019, 14–16; Wolf 2009, 56–60). This technique directs readers' attention towards the fictionality and the materiality of *UG* as they are reading it. It thus asks readers to maintain a split perspective, alternating between mentally 'wandering off' into the storyworld and actualising their meta-awareness. Already at the very beginning of the story, in Coreander's bookshop, Bastian finds a book that has the same title and looks similar to the empirical book the reader holds in his or her hands: Its text is printed in two colours, it employs illustrated initials, and the cover presents a modified ouroboros with two snakes forming an oval by biting into one another's tail (10).[21] While the metalepses discussed above merely establish a connection between the *two* narrative layers that are Bastian's reality and Fantastica, this description of the empirical book is an early hint that the complex nesting of narrative layers might even implicate the reader's reality. In any case, the similarities to the empirical book are likely to lead to confusion or wonder with a child reader. In Chapter XII, Bastian's confusion, which has been building up until then, reaches its climax when he realises that the story he reads also contains a book that looks exactly like the one he holds in his hands:

> Bastians Gedanken verwirrten sich. Das war doch genau das Buch, in dem er gerade las! Er schaute es noch einmal an. Ja, kein Zweifel, es war das Buch, das er in der Hand hatte, von dem da die Rede war. Aber wie konnte dieses Buch denn in sich selbst vorkommen? (183)[22]

For the implied reader, this passage adds a third layer to the nested structure, which gains further complexity by the fact that the Old Man of Wandering Mountain turns out to be the author of the intradiegetic "Neverending Story", writing down everything that happens in Fantastica as it happens (184).

Contrary to Bastian's – and presumably the reader's – expectations, the story composed by the intradiegetic author does not set out from the events in the hypodiegetic world of Fantastica (green text), but from the frame narrative of Bastian's arrival at the bookstore (red text) (Etten 2013, 126–27). When Bastian realises this, he quickly draws an analogy between himself and the reader of the empirical book – and perhaps many more 'superordinate readers' –, thus making the label '*mise en abyme*' truly appropriate:

> Er, Bastian, kam als Person in dem Buch vor, für dessen Leser er sich bis jetzt gehalten hatte! Und wer weiß, welcher andere Leser ihn jetzt gerade las, der auch wieder nur glaubte, ein Leser zu sein – und so immer weiter bis ins Unendliche! (188)[23]

Explicitly referring to the possibility that the readers themselves might be mere figments of another's imagination, *UG* presents a "popularised version of the old philosophical problem of scepticism and metaphysics" (Klimek 2011, 33), making it likely for the reader to share the sense of vertigo experienced by Bastian.

Researchers have pointed out repeatedly that *UG* is an intricate philosophical novel that can hardly be grasped in its entirety by a child reader (e.g. Ewers 2011, 6; Etten 2013, 134; Fuchs, qtd. in Gauger 2019, 37). Especially a section as complex and self-referential as Chapter XII could impair even an engaged child reader's attention and lead to 'unproductive' mind-wandering, or even frustration due to excessive cognitive and emotional demands.[24] Referring back to the numerous formal-stylistic characteristics discussed above, however, it seems more probable that the many typographical features Ende has included into this chapter will capture and bind readers' attention. Since a large portion of the chapter consists of dialogue, paragraphs are even shorter than in most other chapters and many in number (184–87). The text colour changes multiple times between short paragraphs, starting in Chapter XI (169–72), then again at the end of Chapter XII (187–90) – which is unusual in comparison to the rest of the book and conveys the rapidly accelerating events on a visual level, thus heightening readers' suspense.

Interestingly, it is a prolonged episode of mind-wandering through Goab, the Desert of Colours, after Bastian has arrived in Fantastica that makes him realise that he should be able to "send a signal" to the empirical reader from the intradiegetic world. Bastian's mind-wandering is depicted as productive, on-task, and conducive to problem-solving:

> Vielleicht stand auch jetzt alles, was er erlebte, in diesem Buch. Und es konnte doch sehr gut sein, daß ein anderer es eines Tages lesen würde – oder es sogar gerade jetzt, in diesem Augenblick las. Also mußte es auch möglich sein, diesem Jemand ein Zeichen zu geben. (211)[25]

Bastian then uses red sand to write his initials "B B B" in big letters, which is represented in the empirical book as a separate paragraph, centred and, of course, in red – in the middle of an 'entirely green' chapter. This signal and its position in the text connects to the attention-grabbing mechanisms discussed above (fragmentation, alignment, colour). The following lines explicate the novel's intentional, sophisticated guiding of readers' attention, suggesting that neither where readers look (attention) nor what they think about (reflection / mind-wandering) were left to chance when devising *UG*: "Dieses Zeichen konnte niemand übersehen, der die Unendliche Geschichte lesen würde" (ibid.).[26] As argued in this section, the use of metalepsis and other complex metafictional devices contributes to the text's tight attention management, which guides readers through the various diegetic levels and helps them cope with the textual challenges while maintaining a balance between proximity and distance, as well as immersion and meta-awareness.

2.2 Reflections on the Merits and Perils of Reading: Productive Mind-Wandering

The recurring metafictional elements in *UG* and *TH* not only draw attention to the value of literature, the appeal of creativity, and the fictionality of these works in a 'traditionally metafictional' way; they also provide ample opportunity for the reader to embark on self-reflexive, text-related mind-wandering. In those moments when complex literature-related anthropological, ethical, ontological, or reception-aesthetical questions are raised, external action is reduced to a minimum across several paragraphs to allow young readers to properly follow these trains of thought (e.g. *UG* 10–12, 25–26, 160–62, 190–93; *TH* 24–26; 161–63).

Bibliophilia and storyworld absorption, in this context, become both a motif and a kind of 'artistic morale.' In addition to being one of the most prominent characteristics of the protagonists, Bastian and Maggie, the love of books supports the novels' didactic argument in favour of reading books and actively using one's imaginative capacities. At the same time, the novels seem to caution readers against excessive forms of attention that come at the expense of cognitive flexibility, control, and reflective distance, as expressed in the metaphor of getting lost in a book. When Bastian encounters the "Neverending Story" in Coreander's bookshop, he is immediately spellbound: "Es war ihm, als ginge eine Art Magnetkraft davon aus, die ihn unwiderstehlich anzog" (10).[27] It seems as though Bastian has some purpose being in that very bookshop, which later turns out to be that there is a story to be told, namely that of *UG*. Books and stories are Bastian's passion, as the narrator repeatedly emphasises. Truly passionate readers like Bastian, it seems, tend to forget the entire world around them while reading, read by torchlight instead of sleeping, and cry over the end of a great story (11). The narrator even seems inclined to excuse Bastian's theft of the book on the grounds of his bibliophilia: "Wer nichts von alledem aus eigener Erfahrung kennt, nun, der wird wahrscheinlich nicht begreifen können, was Bastian

jetzt tat" (ibid.).[28] Bastian is introduced simultaneously as an ideal reader *and* an anti-hero, which already hints at the potentially problematic aspects of an exaggerated passion for books – or any passion, for that matter.

One of the effects of Bastian's immersed reading experience is a strong, positive identification with *UG*'s protagonist Atreyu, which emerges repeatedly in the first chapters, and later in the story, when Bastian chooses to become just like Atreyu. In Chapter IV, for instance, Bastian almost leaves the attic to go home after school is over, because he suddenly loses all his courage. Thinking about *UG*'s hero, however, strengthens his resolve to stay and, although still lonely, he feels proud and closer to Atreyu (66–67). Just like Atreyu is an idol for Bastian, Bastian becomes a role model for the child reader, encouraging them to look towards literature to bolster their self-confidence. Despite his shy nature, he embarks on an adventure into a book, faces numerous challenges, stays strong, and ultimately returns – as a changed person. Perhaps the most important aspect, though, is that he makes mistakes on his way and learns from them, mainly guided by a book, its attention management, and the virtues it presents to him.[29]

Bastian's passion for books, however, also becomes the subject of critical scrutiny. In the beginning, it is his untameable curiosity regarding *UG* that prompts him to steal the book from Coreander's shop even though he regrets it almost immediately afterwards. Not much later, the reader learns more and more about Bastian's reality – his (lack of) friends, his strong aversion to school, the difficult relationship with his father (e.g. 9, 13, 35) – and begins to realise that books and stories are not just a crucial part of Bastian's reality, but that, for him, the fantasy and imagination triggered by literature serve as a substitute for real-world activities and qualities. In fact, over the greater part of the novel, he expresses an escapist desire to have the fiction of *UG* replace his reality (e.g. 26). The implied reader of *UG,* by contrast, is not permitted such excessive forms of attention to the storyworld and oblivious reading. Through the alternation between different diegetic hierarchies and the dynamics of metafictional attractors, the novel enforces the kind of flexibility, attention management, and changes in perspective that Bastian has yet to learn. At regular intervals, the narrative evokes some distance between reader and protagonist(s), enabling the former to critically evaluate Bastian's behaviour and recognise the dangers of his obsession and loss of self even before their negative consequences come to pass.

When Bastian is in Fantastica, the contrast between reality and fiction is further corroborated by his growing aspiration to get rid of every single one of his unpleasant characteristics – e.g. his body shape, his clumsiness, his weakness (13, 54–55) – and instead assume the body and character of a literary hero like Atreyu. Although he knows and is warned repeatedly (268–69, 289–90) that he will forget parts of his past with every wish fulfilled, he cannot resist the temptation. The threat climaxes in "Old Emperor City" when he only has a couple of wishes left and realises that he will not be able to return to his reality once he has forgotten every aspect of his former self (364–70). This passage can be read as a concrete instruction to readers to avoid escapist modes of reading and not to

jeopardise their relation to reality (Etten 2013, 138). The displayed escapism is one of few elements of illusion-disrupting critical metafiction in *UG* that points out the potentially "seductive" (Bhadury 2013, 314–15), problematic, or dangerous aspects of literature and thereby prompts productive mind-wandering on the crucial relation between reality and fiction and one's own (mis)use of literary texts and stories.

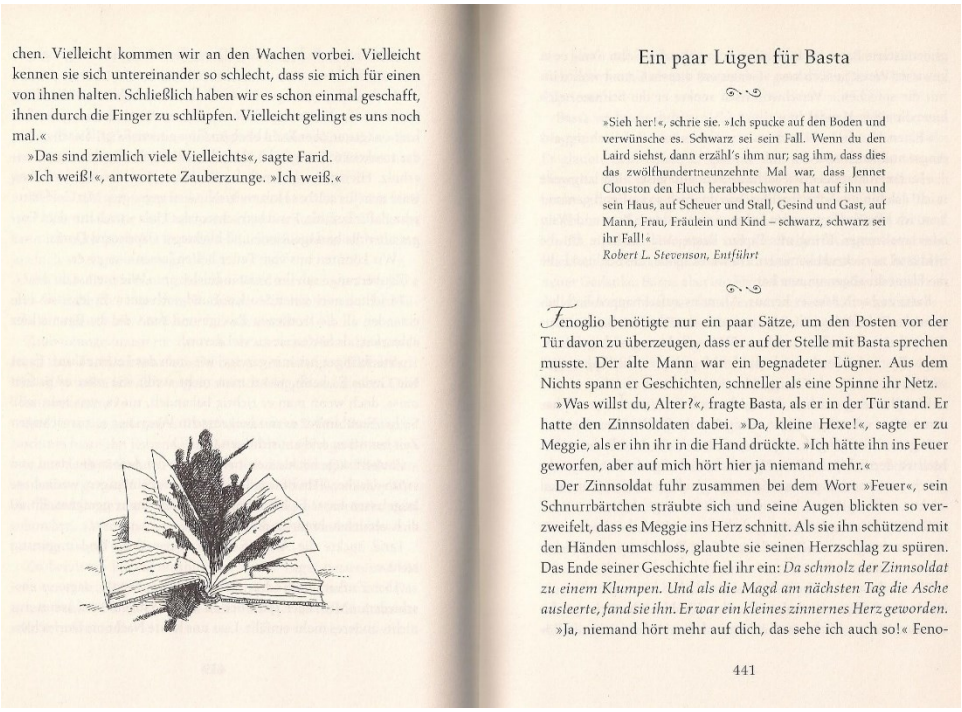
In *TH*, like in *UG*, metafictional elements may serve as springboards for reflections on the effects of reading. Maggie's own reading habits and reflections serve as a template to be emulated by the implied reader. Widely read at her young age, most of Maggie's thought processes seem to revolve around books and storyworlds, which become her "friends" (25) and sources of comfort as she braves one daunting adventure after the other. Packing a chest with her favourite books for the journey ahead, she recalls her father Mo's words of wisdom in one of the novel's many instances of explicit metacommentary:

> "Wenn du ein Buch auf eine Reise mitnimmst", hatte Mo gesagt, als er ihr das erste in die Kiste gelegt hatte, dann geschieht etwas Seltsames. Das Buch wird anfangen, deine Erinnerungen zu sammeln. Du wirst es später nur aufschlagen müssen und schon wirst du wieder dort sein, wo du zuerst darin gelesen hast. Schon mit den ersten Wörtern wird alles zurückkommen: die Bilder, die Gerüche, das Eis, das du beim Lesen gegessen hast … Glaub mir, Bücher sind wie Fliegenpapier. An nichts haften Erinnerungen so gut wie an bedruckten Seiten. (24)[30]

To Maggie and Mo, books serve as anchors in space and time that facilitate controlled and pleasurable mental (time) travel. Episodes like this, in which we witness Maggie's mind wander away from the 'here and now' into the worlds of books or to book-related autobiographical memories, may lead to second-order mind-wandering on the part of the implied reader (see Fabry / Kukkonen 2019, 6, 11). The more readers identify with a character, the more likely they are to project that character's experiences and self-referential knowledge onto themselves (see Smallwood et al. 2011; Fabry / Kukkonen 2019, 6). *TH*'s readers may feel inclined to browse their personal reading histories for similar experiences and consciously look for connections between literature and vivid autobiographical memory (see Nikolajeva 2016, 3). Following Maggie's ruminations on the pleasures of reading, they experience moments of joint attention as well as joint mind-wandering. Both arguably strengthen their emotional attachment to (long) narratives and instruct them to look towards literature for guidance and mental growth, thus underlining the novel's didactic mission.

TH's numerous intertextual references function as attractors of attention, as highlighted by their layout and position in the text. Like a golden thread, they guide readers' mind-wandering, introducing them to the larger intertextual web of literature into which the novel self-consciously inserts itself. Each of *TH*'s chapters is preceded by an epigraph, set off from the main text by indentation and subtle embellishments (see Fig. 2). The works quoted in these epigraphs represent a wide range of literary genres, though the majority is taken from children's classics and popular fantasy series, including Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1983), J.R.R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* (1937), or William Goldman's *Princess Bride* (1973). Their appearance within *TH* furthers the didactic purpose ascribed to children's

and young adult metafiction: The epigraphs as well as other intertextual references across *TH* serve as a kind of "library list," suggesting "directions for further exploration" to the child reader (Nelson 2006, 228). Unfamiliar works might spark the implied reader's curiosity and invite them to move on to the next book after finishing *TH* (see Nikolajeva 2016, 3). Works that are familiar to the reader in turn evoke a sense of gratification as they confirm a certain level of reading expertise.



chen. Vielleicht kommen wir an den Wachen vorbei. Vielleicht kennen sie sich untereinander so schlecht, dass sie mich für einen von ihnen halten. Schließlich haben wir es schon einmal geschafft, ihnen durch die Finger zu schlüpfen. Vielleicht gelingt es uns noch mal.«

»Das sind ziemlich viele Vielleichts«, sagte Farid.

»Ich weiß!«, antwortete Zauberzunge. »Ich weiß.«

Ein paar Lügen für Basta

»Sieh her!«, schrie sie. »Ich spucke auf den Boden und verwünsche es. Schwarz sei sein Fall. Wenn du den Laird siehst, dann erzähl's ihm nur; sag ihm, dass dies das zwölfhundertneunzehnte Mal war, dass Jennet Clouston den Fluch herabbeschworen hat auf ihn und sein Haus, auf Scheuer und Stall, Gesind und Gast, auf Mann, Frau, Fräulein und Kind – schwarz, schwarz sei ihr Fall!«

Robert L. Stevenson, Entführt

Fenoglio benötigte nur ein paar Sätze, um den Posten vor der Tür davon zu überzeugen, dass er auf der Stelle mit Basta sprechen musste. Der alte Mann war ein begnadeter Lügner. Aus dem Nichts spann er Geschichten, schneller als eine Spinne ihr Netz.

»Was willst du, Alter?«, fragte Basta, als er in der Tür stand. Er hatte den Zinnsoldaten dabei. »Da, kleine Hexe!«, sagte er zu Meggie, als er ihn ihr in die Hand drückte. »Ich hätte ihn ins Feuer geworfen, aber auf mich hört hier ja niemand mehr.«

Der Zinnsoldat fuhr zusammen bei dem Wort »Feuer«, sein Schnurrbärtchen sträubte sich und seine Augen blickten so verzweifelt, dass es Meggie ins Herz schnitt. Als sie ihn schützend mit den Händen umschloss, glaubte sie seinen Herzschlag zu spüren. Das Ende seiner Geschichte fiel ihr ein: *Da schmolz der Zinnsoldat zu einem Klumpen. Und als die Magd am nächsten Tag die Asche ausleerte, fand sie ihn. Er war ein kleines zinnernes Herz geworden.*

»Ja, niemand hört mehr auf dich, das sehe ich auch so!« Feno-

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Fig. 2: A typical chapter transition in *Tintenherz* (440–41), consisting of an illustration as well as the title and epigraph of the subsequent chapter.

The challenge *TH*'s intertextual elements pose to the reader as part of its attention management is learning how to navigate text and intertext and how to decode the thematic connections between them. Each epigraph either echoes the previous chapter or prefigures and thus sets expectations for the ensuing one. A quotation from *UG* in the second-to-last chapter, for instance, foreshadows and contextualises the anti-hero Dustfinger's theft of the diegetic book at the end of *TH*, as well as Maggie's increasing obsession with "Inkheart" in the series' second and third novels:

> Und doch wusste Bastian, dass er ohne das Buch nicht weggehen konnte. Jetzt war ihm klar, dass er überhaupt nur dieses Buches wegen hierher gekommen war, es hatte ihn auf geheimnisvolle Art gerufen, weil es zu ihm wollte, weil es eigentlich schon seit immer ihm gehörte! (*UG* 12, qtd. in *TH* 552)[31]

Like Bastian, Dustfinger is spellbound by the book to the point where he is willing to compromise his – admittedly rather flexible – moral code. Maggie, in turn, appears to prefer the fantastical world to her reality, reading herself into "Inkheart" in defiance of her parents in the second volume *Inkspell* (Funke 2005). Like *UG, TH* shows considerable sympathy for the characters' all-consuming desire to escape into the storyworld but keeps the reader at a critical distance by

means of (re)directing their attention and zooming in and out of the story-world(s).

Intertextuality and multiliteracy furthermore play a role in the manifold instances in which characters talk about or read aloud from other literary texts, the most memorable among them being Mo's and Maggie's recitations of *Treasure Island* (194) and *Peter Pan* (387–89), respectively. In both cases, reading (aloud) leads to literary 'cross-fertilisation,' as objects or characters from the embedded storyworlds suddenly appear in *TH*. When Maggie reads Tinker Bell out of *Peter Pan* and into the storyworld of *TH,* this significantly impacts the latter's plot and opens up a comparative perspective as several of *TH*'s characters start discussing the different kinds of fairy creatures they know from other texts (e.g. 390–91, 395). The stories' refusal to remain within their own boundaries serves as an allegory of the processes of inspiration and emulation that have shaped the history of fantasy fiction leading up to the publication of *TH*. *TH*, in turn, takes readers on a mental journey through this history, harkening back to classic works with a sort of nostalgic reverence but also taking creative liberty in their appropriation of and critical reflection upon these classics. The child reader's diegetic double Maggie repeatedly wonders whether a character should be returned to their original story and prefers to imagine (and later write) happy endings for them (e.g., 291, 446–47). With her increasing ability to navigate textual reality, Maggie also learns to take control of her situation, expand her agency, and begins to question and ultimately rewrite the stories around her, including her own.

Bastian's love for books is by no means uncritical or unqualified either. Pondering the merits of *UG,* Bastian contrasts it with the overt didacticism of strictly realist narratives that are unappealing to him (26). What he seems to like most about the "Neverending Story," besides its fantastic qualities, is that it does not overtly present any moral values aimed at 'educating the reader' as is often the case in children's literature. Nevertheless, it is in large part due to the "Neverending Story" that he learns to take responsibility for his actions and to articulate his emotional needs. While critical metafictional comments such as these are in themselves self-referential reflections on literary production aesthetics, they also reveal a close connection between metafiction and 'literary education' (see Hermansson 2019). In Nelson's view, the child reader's empowerment and emancipation is characteristic of contemporary children's and young adult metafiction's "double didacticism," which furthers values traditionally associated with children's literature while at the same time "suggesting that questioning authority – including the authority of the didactic text – may be reading's most important lesson" (2006, 233). In *UG* and *TH,* this lesson is facilitated by the narratives' attention management, which both trains readers to process complex stylistic devices and leaves room to 'wander off' to ponder ethical questions and exercise critical faculties. In the end, *TH*'s and *UG*'s recipients, both real and fictional, come of age as readers, writers, and critics, as they simultaneously emancipate themselves from the (hidden) adult and from the authorial text.

3. Conclusion

Both *UG* and *TH* exhibit a close connection between metafictional elements, their didactic functions, and dynamics of attention and mind-wandering. On the one hand, the novels are preoccupied with attention and mind-wandering on a thematic level, representing characters lost in books, wondering about ontologically impossible experiences, and engaging in productive mind-wandering. On the other hand, our analyses have shown that both novels meticulously guide the implied readers' attention. Due to their multi-layered narrative architecture and the need to simultaneously keep track of the diegesis and the metalevel, they present numerous cognitive challenges. These demands for intense focus as well as rapid task switching alternate with states of cognitive release, as readers become temporarily absorbed in the storyworld or engage in text-related reflections on literature and reading.

Due to the great care with which *UG* and *TH* manage their young readers' attention between the various poles of stress and relief, deep and hyper attention, immersion and critical distance, they can also be productively read in the context of the contemporary attention economy in that they counter rising concerns regarding the inattentiveness and decreasing concentration skills of young readers. The publication date of especially *UG* seems slightly too early to contextualise it within discourses about the attention economy in the age of new media and hypertext. Yet, both works seem to anticipate attentional demands of the current age (Bhadury 2013, 317). Scholars such as Poushali Bhadury have noted the similarities between the structural design of children's and young adult metafiction and hypertext fiction as both genres are replete with inter- and intratextual references and branching narratives, challenging readers to develop non-linear and multimedial reading strategies (321; see also Hermansson 2019, 44–45). In this sense, children's and young adult metafiction may serve as a training ground for a kind of 'multi-literate reading brain,' a perk that is particularly important in our contemporary (post)digital (media) culture (see Wolf 2018).

While our own analyses of *UG* and *TH* support this hypothesis, further research is necessary to corroborate and extend our findings regarding the dynamics of attention and mind-wandering in children's and young adult metafiction. It seems fruitful to investigate this relation in more detail by exploring other popular works of metafictional children's and young adult literature, many of which appear to use attractors and distractors to a similar extent and effect. This may include recent German narratives, such as Walter Moers's *The City of Dreaming Books* (2004) or other novels of the Zamonia series, Kai Meyer's *Die Seiten der Welt* series (2014–2018), or Elias Vorpahl's *Der Wortschatz* (2018), as well as international examples, some of which we have mentioned in this article. In our view, metafictional dynamics of attention and mind-wandering can be understood as a systematic, pervasive, and persistent literary-artistic phenomenon that is certainly worthy of scholarly attention in the years to come.

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[1] The attention economy is a state in which the value of a commodity is established by the amount of attention consumers allocate to it (Simon 1969; Davenport / Beck 2002). Especially contemporary literature responds to "demands [for] new strategies for attracting and binding consumers" while "reflect[ing] upon different strategies of attention and attention management" and exposing "key anxieties regarding attention deficits" (Baumbach 2019b, 55).
[2] We understand metafiction as fictional writing that comments on itself from a logically higher level and thereby draws the reader's attention to its fictional and/or linguistic design. For detailed accounts of metafiction and related phenomena, see Hutcheon 1980; Waugh 1984; Wolf 1993; Scheffel 1997; Fludernik 2003; Neumann / Nünning 2014. For discussions of metaisation as a transmedial phenomenon, see e.g. Hauthal et al. 2007; Wolf 2009.
[3] Baumbach defines narratives of attention as "narratives that respond to attention anxieties or engage readers in complex dynamics of attention and distraction to refine their capacities for mindfulness" (2021, 79).
[4] Metalepsis denotes the transgression between the extradiegetic level and the diegesis, or between different levels within the diegesis (Genette 1972, 243–51). As Karin Kukkonen succinctly puts it: "Metalepsis means literally 'a jump across' and, when it occurs in literature, film or other media, the boundaries of a fictional world are glanced, travelled or transported across" (2011, 1).
[5] While early studies tended to associate metalepsis with the disruption of aesthetic illusion (e.g. Hutcheon 1980; Waugh 1984; Nelles 1992; Wolf 1993), recent research suggests more nuanced functions (e.g. Klimek 2009; Kukkonen 2011; Wolf 2013a). As Marie-Laure Ryan has pointed out, ontological forms of metalepsis (in which the boundary between worlds is physically crossed) tend to be more disruptive than the rhetorical kind (in which case the boundary is seen or spoken across) (2006, ch. 9). Sonja Klimek, in turn, emphasises the importance of considering generic conventions when judging the anti-illusionist effects of metalepsis. In fantasy fiction, for instance, metalepses are often incorporated as wonderful occurrences that do not necessarily disrupt the coherence of the fictional world (2009, 7). See also Kukkonen (2020, 97–100) for an argument on the illusion-compatible functions of metafiction and metareference from the perspective of predictive processing.
[6] The term "hidden adult" alludes to various forms of adult presence in children's literature, whose very existence and consumption hinges on adult authority. Books are often chosen, sometimes read, and nearly always written by an adult, they frequently contain forms of double address, and include adult knowledge, norms, and experiences (e.g. Nodelman 2008; Hermansson 2019, ch. 1; Nelson 2006).

[7] Kuijpers et al. have similarly claimed that a text's formal features can contribute to pleasurable and absorbed reading. In children's and young adult metafiction, the source of readerly enjoyment thus seems to be of a more cognitive kind, and linked to challenge, flow, and the pleasure of learning or mastering the text (2017, 36–37; see also Hermansson 2019, 36; Nelson 2006, 226).

[8] Recent research suggests that mind-wandering phenomena are quite heterogeneous, varying a.o. according to task-relatedness, goal-directedness, and stimulus-dependence (see Fabry / Kukkonen 2019, 2). Mind-wandering that is task-unrelated, not goal-directed and independent of the stimulus has been linked to poor reading comprehension (see Smallwood / Schooler 2006, 952) and even unhappiness (see Killingsworth / Gilbert 2010). Due to their attention-grabbing and cognitively challenging nature, metafictional elements are likely to interrupt phases of mind-wandering and reduce its overall duration and frequency. This assumption is consistent with findings that difficult tasks and frequent on-task stimuli suppress mind-wandering (Smallwood / Schooler 2006, 249–51) as well as indications that mind-wandering decreases not only narrative comprehension but also the reader's "sensitivity to the lexical properties of the text" (Fabry / Kukkonen 2019, 4; with reference to studies by Reichle et al. 2010; Franklin et al. 2011).

[9] *Die unendliche Geschichte* revolves around the insecure boy Bastian, whose lack of friends and parental attention lead him to seek refuge in an eponymous fantasy novel. As it turns out, he assumes great responsibility by doing so: The fantasy world Fantastica is threatened by the mysterious "Nothing," which spreads and wipes out anything and everything, and only Bastian can stop it by literally travelling into the book and using his imaginative capacities to create Fantastica anew. In order to return to his own world, however, he must not only find his way through the most nebulous corners of Fantastica, but in fact find his *wish* to return to reality by accepting who he is.

[10] *Tintenherz* is the first book in the Inkworld trilogy, a series of metafictional young adult fantasy novels by Cornelia Funke. Its plot follows 12-year-old Maggie, who one day discovers her father Mo's mysterious ability to 'read' objects and people 'into' or 'out of' books. Soon after, they are tracked down by the villainous Capricorn, whom Mo had accidentally read out of a book called "Inkheart" nine years ago. Accompanied by Maggie's eccentric great-aunt Elinor, the pair embarks on an adventure to thwart Capricorns plans and find Maggie's mother, who disappeared into the pages of "Inkheart" in his stead. Funke has announced a sequel (*Farbe der Rache*) for October 2023.

[11] For a detailed analysis of gaze and mediality in *UG*, see Potsch 2019. The mirrored writing is taken up again later in chapter XII, when the words gain an auditory quality as they are read aloud by the Old Man of Wandering Mountain (*UG* 187). Mirrors and *mises en abyme* recur throughout *UG* (see Gauger 2019).

[12] Translations of the original German quotes are provided in the main text if they are short, otherwise in the endnotes. These are taken from Ralph Manheim's translation of *Die unendliche Geschichte* (Michael Ende: *The Neverending Story*. Transl. by Ralph Manheim. New York 1997) and from Anthea Bell's translation of *Tintenherz* (Cornelia Funke: *Inkheart*. Transl. by Anthea Bell. Frome 2003).

[13] Apart from the metaisation on the lexical level, the letters, by presenting content from the following chapter, can be understood as a prolepsis, which can in turn be interpreted as a prompt for prospective thought and productive mind-wandering, inviting the reader to pause and use their imagination to invent ways in which the story may continue. The connection between illustrations and their effect on mind-wandering processes remains a highly interesting area for investigation but exceeds the scope of this article.

[14] "No melted heart, no burnt paper, nothing but their blissful love."

[15] "Your [hand]writing is difficult to read."

[16] "The first letter of each chapter was itself a little decorative picture. Animals sat on some of these initial letters, plants twined around others".

[17] "Every book should begin with attractive endpapers. Preferably in a dark colour: dark red or dark blue, depending on the binding. When you open the book it's like going to the theatre. First you see the curtain. Then it's pulled aside and the show begins."

[18] "This was going too far. How could there be something in a book that applied only to this particular moment and, only to him?"

[19] "Just imagine, […] [w]hat if they've really heard of me in Fantastica! Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

[20] "Even if Bastian had wanted to, he couldn't have defended himself against this thing that had happened to him. [...] All he wanted was to go on reading, to see Moon Child again, to be with

her." In this sense, *UG* also presents the young adult reader with a version of a philosophical problem that has been aptly called the "paradox" of fiction (see Radford / Weston 1975): the fact that readers can feel very real emotions towards fictional characters.

[21] There are, however, some dissimilarities, arguably for pragmatic reasons: The empirical book does not have a copper-coloured binding, but a grey one, let alone the mentioned silk. Moreover, in our edition, the title is printed below the oval.

[22] "Bastian's thoughts were in a whirl. This was the very same book that he was reading! He looked again. Yes, no doubt about it, it was the book he had in his hand. How could this book exist inside itself?"

[23] "He, Bastian, was a character in the book which until now he had thought he was reading. And heaven only knew who else might be reading it at the exact same time, also supposing himself to be just a reader."

[24] Hermansson gives an overview of research arguing and presenting empirical evidence for the opposite, i.e., that even very young readers are able to comprehend complex metafictional narratives (2019, 23–24).

[25] "Maybe his present adventures and sufferings were in the book even now. And maybe someone else would read the book someday – maybe someone was reading it at that very moment. In that case, it must be possible to give that someone a sign."

[26] "No reader of the Neverending Story could fail to see his message."

[27] "It seemed to have a kind of magnetic power that attracted him irresistibly."

[28] "If such things have not been part of your own experience, you probably won't understand what Bastian did next."

[29] Despite Bastian's sharp critique of 'morally charged' narratives, *UG* itself stands in the tradition of the *bildungsroman* in that it offers a flawed protagonist as the subject for identification and presents his journey to virtue.

[30] "'If you take a book with you on a journey,' Mo had said when he put the first one in her box, 'an odd thing happens: The book begins collecting your memories. And forever after you have only to open that book to be back where you first read it. It will all come into your mind with the very first words: the sights you saw in that place, what it smelled like, the ice cream you ate while you were reading it... yes, books are like flypaper – memories cling to the printed page better than anything else.'"

[31] "Yet Bastian knew he couldn't leave without the book. It was clear to him that he had only come to the shop because of this book. It had called him in some mysterious way, because it wanted to be his, because it had somehow always belonged to him."