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Mind-Wandering and Attention in Literature

Following a short review of studies of attention, attention economies, and mind-wandering with regard to narratives, this paper aims to establish *attention* and *mind-wandering* as key concepts for the study of literary narratives. Based on an analysis of representations and enactments of both phenomena in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, we will outline the different levels of mind-wandering and attention in literary texts as well as the different levels on which narratives 'make minds move.' Offering a methodological toolkit for investigating aspects of mind-wandering and attention in literary narratives, including key attractors and distractors, this paper sets the frame for the contributions published in this special issue and, more generally, aims to offer the foundation for future studies in this field.

1. Mind-Wandering, Attention Economies, and Literature

We live in "the era of the wandering mind" (Callard et al. 2013) where distraction rules. In the increasingly digital media environments that characterise Western societies and an intensifying "attention economy" (Bueno 2017) where attention is the key currency, the deep and sustained attention necessary for reading literary texts appears to diminish (Baron 2021; Wolf 2018). According to N. Katherine Hayles, we are experiencing a generational shift from 'deep' to 'hyper' attention (2007), which was prompted by the 'shallows' offered by the internet (Carr 2010). Digitisation in particular appears to habituate our minds to multitasking and quick but shallow processing, which in turn seems to affect our capacities for attention, shorting our attention spans. It is not surprising, therefore, that a growing area in psychology addresses one of the most salient cultural worries today, namely, attention deficits, distraction, and mind-wandering. Especially research on mind-wandering as spontaneous cognition and self-generated mental activity (Callard et al. 2013) continues to be a growing research area, which was first introduced by Jonathan Smallwood and Jonathan W. Schooler's seminal article "The Restless Mind" (2006). Despite these advances, studies in psychology still struggle to agree on a stable definition of mind-wandering. For our purposes, we use this term to refer to instances where mental activity moves away from a prioritised task, often exploring alternative tasks in thought or imagining.

Though often regarded as separate, even opposing phenomena, attention and mind-wandering are intimately connected and were already associated with each other in early theories of attention in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Phillips 2011; Gettelman 2011). In the "era of the wandering mind," attention and mind-wandering are investigated together. The first approaches on what happens when the mind slips away from the task at hand strongly underlined the

negative effects of mind-wandering as a loss of attention, characterising mind-wandering as something "restless" and "unhappy" (Killingsworth / Gilbert 2010). In the meantime, however, a more diversified understanding of mind-wandering has emerged. As scholars such as Jonathan Smallwood and Hanna J. Andrews have emphasised, "Not all Minds that Wander are Lost" (2013). Mind-wandering has been linked to personal memory (Raichle et al. 2001), creativity (Baird et al. 2012), and happiness (Smallwood / Andrews 2013). More recent surveys of mind-wandering research highlight that the phenomenon goes beyond mere distraction from the task at hand: our minds can wander spontaneously or intentionally, we might be aware of mind-wandering while it happens, and we can have a metacognitive sense of control over mind-wandering (see Christoff et al. 2016; Murray et al. 2020; Seli et al. 2018).

With the surge of attention studies in recent years, research in this field has diversified to the extent that "[n]o one knows what attention is" (Hommel et al. 2019). This provocative statement, which counters the often-cited statement by William James, the father of attention studies, who in *The Principles of Psychology* (1950 [1890]) claimed that "Every one knows what attention is" (381), points to the difficulty in defining 'attention.' The latter arises from both the manifold attention processes we conduct in everyday life and the complex mechanisms involved in attention. Attention is not a unitary phenomenon, but rather involves diverse mechanisms related to processes of alerting, orienting, and conflict monitoring (Petersen / Posner 2012) and relies on several control modules (Chun et al. 2011). Some key aspects that research in this field has been concerned with include the identification of specific cues that elicit or inhibit attention; the impact of individual differences in coping with perceptual and cognitive load on attention (Murphy et al. 2016); the role of cultural habits (Masuda 2017), (changing) attentional environments or 'ecologies' (Citton 2017), or attention economies (Franck 2018); and the extent to which our attention capacities can be trained. These are explored by a variety of different approaches, spanning from art history (Crary 1999), philosophy (Williams 2018; Nanay 2015), media science (Nelson-Field 2020), law (Wu 2016), and rhetoric (Lanham 2006) to literary studies. What scholars generally agree on is that our capacity for processing information is limited. Consequently, the human mind selects and responds to small subsets of stimuli that are relevant in a specific information at a specific time. This also explains why mind-wandering is an essential component of attention, as it prevents cognitive overload, fuels our imagination, and facilitates creative thinking by enabling a temporary drifting away from the immediate object of attention.

How we read and respond to literary texts has been of particular interest for research on mind-wandering. Smallwood and Schooler (2006, 951) have argued that literary reading is an "ideal" way to measure mind-wandering in empirical studies. Reading is one of the activities that "involve the creation of online representations of the external task environment" (ibid., 951), where distraction away from the external task can be measured through a comprehension test. Literary reading certainly requires readers to deploy attention so that they can

build the mental model necessary for text comprehension (see Feng et al. 2013). It also relies, however, on mind-wandering. Peter Dixon and Marisa Bortolussi (2013) highlight the importance of readers' 'engagement' for drawing on their world knowledge and personal memories to achieve the construction and integration of the situation model of a text. The importance of such 'internal' processes can be extended: Readers embark on imaginative excursions in fictional worlds, and they establish personal relevance when texts remind them of their own experiences and emotional values (D'Argembeau 2018), which prompt spontaneous mind-wandering episodes in the form of personal memory and daydreaming. Much of the appeal of literary reading is only tangentially related to text comprehension. Closer attention to the dynamics of mind-wandering in literary reading therefore has the potential to contribute to current attempts in psychology to diversify our understanding of mind-wandering (Fabry / Kukkonen 2019). As suggested by this first research in the field, even when readers seem to be distracted from the prime task of decoding the text in front of them (either by external stimuli that draw their attention away from the text or by text-internal cues for mind-wandering), their mind-wandering may still be productive for the literary reading experience – and contribute to a deeper understanding of a specific text.

As recent studies have shown, contemporary literature responds to current concerns about the "attention economy" with new "fictions of attention" (Bennett 2018; see also Baumbach 2019b) or mega novels that strategically overstrain our attentional capacities to teach us how to modulate our attention (Letzler 2017). As argued by Alice Bennett (2018, 13), contemporary narratives foreground that "reading […] is something that has a dynamic mixture of attention and distraction built in from the beginning." A literary-studies perspective on attention and mind-wandering further confirms that today's worries about the decline of attention are not new. Research on the reading revolution of the 18th century (Cepic / Kukkonen 2019) and changing reading habits in the nineteenth century (Gettelman 2011; Arata 2004); eighteenth-century narratives of distraction (Phillips 2016) as well as aspects of attention in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry (Gurton-Wachter 2016; Koehler 2012), Victorian novels (Dames 2007), late Victorian detective stories (Baumbach 2019a), and changing forms of "poetic attention" throughout the ages (Alford 2020) are only some examples of literature's long-standing concerns about anxieties around attention.

As these studies indicate, literature does not only respond to, but engages in changing discourses on attention and distraction by a) implementing specific strategies for eliciting attention or fostering distraction and b) reflecting upon issues of attention and mind-wandering on a thematic level. Exceeding mere representations of characters struggling to concentrate, for instance, these 'attention narratives' (Baumbach 2019a) make readers experience the phenomena first-hand, precisely because the reading process itself depends so strongly on the dynamics of attention and mind-wandering. We therefore define *literary* attention and mind-wandering as the *representation and (re-)enactment of cognitive processes of attention and mind-wandering both in and prompted by literary texts.*

In what follows, we first discuss some key instances of representation and enactment of attention and mind-wandering based on the example of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). Building on our findings, we then devise a preliminary list of textual attractors and distractors before assessing their dynamics in terms of textual backgrounding and foregrounding.

2. Representation and Enactment of Attention and Mind-Wandering

The closing section of Virgina Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* begins as follows:

> "But where is Clarissa?" said Peter. He was sitting on the sofa with Sally. (After all these years he really could not call her 'Lady Rosseter.') "Where's the woman gone to?" he asked. "Where's Clarissa?" (Woolf 2008 [1925], 158)

It takes several pages, however, until Peter Walsh's question is answered in the very final lines of the novel:

> It is Clarissa, he said.
> For there she was. (Ibid., 164)

With this ending, the narrative, which opened with one of the best-known sentences in English literature – "Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (ibid., 3) – has come full circle, zooming in on the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway. The ending points to the important function of attentional structures in the novel on both the thematic and the formal level: on the one hand, it marks the end of Peter Walsh's search for his former love, who finally comes to him from the throngs of people at the party. On the other hand, it reveals the careful attention management that is at play in this narrative: Woolf first directs readers' attention to Peter Walsh's concerns. Using direct speech, the question about Clarissa's whereabouts is repeated thrice, focusing readers' attention on her absence. The latter is further emphasised, as the narrative then moves to Sally's and Peter's memories about the summer in Burton when they were young. While Clarissa continues to serve as the lynchpin of these threads of mind-wandering, she remains actually absent while Peter and Sally reminisce about the past. When the narrative finally comes to a close, readers might well have forgotten that Peter has been looking for Clarissa until she suddenly appears: "For there she was." Peter's search is concluded, along with the novel itself, with a sudden epiphany that centres attention on Clarissa Dalloway again.

In this final passage, Woolf brings to perfection the dynamics of tightening and relaxing attention that has shaped her entire narrative. *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel that focuses its action on a single day (13 June 1923), a single place (London), and a single event (the party). At the same time, the memories and musings of the different characters extend these temporal and spatial boundaries across multiple decades into the youth of Clarissa (and her choice of Richard Dalloway over Peter Walsh), across the British empire (Peter Walsh has returned from India) and its history (Septimus Warren Smith is a victim of the First World

War), and well across a plethora of events that have happened to characters that are far too numerous to list. While on the one hand the narrative's temporal and spatial setting is demarcated by a very specific deixis of time and place, its passages of free indirect discourse and free indirect thought continuously push these boundaries, expanding the range of the narrative through the frequent mind-wanderings of its protagonists. This dynamic of mind-wandering and attention represented by the fictional world and the fictional minds is at the heart of *Mrs Dalloway* and does not only aid the creation of the character of Clarissa, who materialises at the end of the novel in the act of joint attention on the protagonist ("For there she was"): it contributes to the novel's success and ongoing appeal.

Readers do not merely mirror the cognitive processes represented in the narrative: They respond to stylistic, semantic, and narrative attractors (or distractors) which help them maintain attention or let them slip into mind-wandering in the process of reading. Chapters, paragraphs, and the arrangement of the text on the page are the most obvious means to manage readers' attention. The breaking-up of the final sentence into two parts, for instance, which visibly exposes the novel's conclusion ("For there she was") puts special emphasis on the presence of Clarissa who – with the success of her party, the reunion with Peter, and the death of Septimus – finally seems complete at the end of a narrative which began with an outside view onto "Mrs Dalloway" and, after long periods of interior monologue, ends on a much more personal image of "Clarissa."

As suggested by the temporal and spatial monofocus of the narrative and its title, Woolf's novel is deeply invested in directing readers' attention. These attentional nodes are needed to navigate the world of the narrative, especially as the latter is presented through interwoven interior monologues of several characters, which puts a considerable challenge to readers' theory of mind. Lisa Zunshine (2003) proposes that readers track "levels of intentionality" between narrative agents through their capacities in theory of mind. Pushing the sixth level of intentionality (ibid., 280–281), *Mrs Dalloway* continuously runs the risk of overloading readers' attentional capacities, which would let attention flip into distraction. That both attention and mind-wandering are two sides of the same coin is emphasized by the fact that Woolf directs our focus onto a character that connects to the epitome of (mind-)wandering: Mrs Dalloway is a *flâneuse*, wandering through London's streets – yet not without an aim or a destination. Quite strikingly, rather than offering a space for deceleration and relaxation, Modernist narratives that employ the *flâneur,* a key figure of modern life (see Baudelaire 1964 [1863]), are often deeply invested in balancing strategies of attention and distraction. Woolf's narratives, such as *Mrs Dalloway*, its precursor "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" (1923), or "An Unwritten Novel" (1920) are cases in point: In the latter, the narrator, a *flâneuse,* carefully observes her fellow passengers during a train journey, interrupting her reading of the *Times* to conduct physiognomic surface readings. Thereby she moves from characters on the page to 'characters' on the face ("I read her message, deciphered her secret, reading it beneath her gaze" [Woolf 2008 (1920), 108]), indicating the necessity of close readings in literary and interpersonal contexts. Once the train stops, the story

ends and releases readers into mind-wanderings beyond the text, directing their attention away from the narrative to similar experiences that in turn keep the *flaneuse* (and the narrative) alive: "the last look of them . . . brims [her] with wonder – floods [her] anew" (ibid., 115).

On the one hand the *flaneur/flâneuse* represents unguided (mind-)wandering, which is further emphasised by the notion of vection (Liefgreen et al. 2020; Kukkonen under review), that is, of illusory self-motion, elicited by the train journey, which readers embark on together with the homodiegetic narrator. On the other hand, the narrative of "An Unwritten Novel" heavily draws on images of the 'eye' and includes multiple cues for gaze direction, drawing readers' attention to the deciphering of the different 'characters' the story is composed of. The careful balancing of attention and mind-wandering which takes readers on an imaginative journey, induces mind-wandering while engaging them to focus on several characters in the compartment. Under the guise of mind-wandering, the narrative, therefore, exercises "quickness of perception" (Leland 1891, 7), which connects to Woolf's conception of *flânerie* proposed in her essay "Street Haunting" (1930), where she combines it with goal-oriented and flexible attention: Intending to buy a lead pencil, Woolf wanders or 'haunts' the streets of London while attending to several encounters in rapid succession and with empathic attachment. The latter counter the notion of aimless wandering connected with metropolitan *flânerie* as well as the assumption that "the brain sleeps perhaps as it [the eye] looks" (Woolf 2009 [1930], 178).

In *Mrs Dalloway*, textual devices priming attention ('attractors') and priming mind-wandering ('distractors') appear throughout the entire novel. What complicates an analysis of attention and mind-wandering that goes beyond the thematic level as well as beyond readers re-enacting the processes of attention and mind-wandering that are represented in the text is the fact that these textual devices can often be deployed for different effects. Depending on their use and context, shifts in focalisation or changes of (temporal and spatial) settings, for instance, can be used as cues for both attention and mind-wandering. The same applies to mental imagery and associations prompted by metaphors, specific themes, or particularly striking descriptions which might serve both as attention anchors, or as cues that enable readers to let their minds wander into personal concerns (see Kukkonen 2019).

To our knowledge, the dynamics between attention and mind-wandering has not yet been investigated empirically. We also know very little about which combinations (and frequencies) of which narrative and stylistic devices can prompt our minds to focus, to wander, or, indeed, to exercise both our attention and mind-wandering – these issues mark a crucial research gap in literary studies. That they are still largely un- or underexplored is all the more surprising, considering the important role literary texts have played and continue to play in responding to, reflecting upon, and engaging in cultural anxieties of attention as well as in shaping readers' capacities and awareness of attention and mind-wandering.

The enactment of attention and mind-wandering in the reading process can draw readers' attention to their own reading habits. As David Letzler (2017) has argued, the "cruft of fiction" in (contemporary) mega-novels, for instance, presents surplus information in order to train readers to pay attention to relevant stimuli only. Many of the details offered in these narratives, including the various things characters are paying attention to, might not be relevant for a particular story at all, and readers need to learn to pace their attention, or they will never finish reading a text such as David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996). However, shorter texts are also used to develop readers' capacity for attention. Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* short stories wilfully hide 'clues' in the phase when characters collect evidence, prompt inattentional blindness, and it is often not until the expository discourse by the detective at the end that readers realise what they have missed. At the same time, Doyle's detective stories include numerous 'attractors' (including the figure of the detective, the use of direct speech, and foregrounding devices [see Emmott et al. 2013, also below]), which serve to capture readers' attention along with that of the narrator, Dr Watson, but they also go beyond the concerns of the fictional case and enhance readers' very capacity for navigating the increasingly distractive, late nineteenth-century media world (see Baumbach 2019a).

In these cases, the enactment of attention and mind-wandering is non-mimetic, because readers are taught how to manage textual artefacts and their contemporary attention economies better than the characters. Mimetic and non-mimetic aspects can, however, be combined for aesthetic effects: The following scene from *Mrs Dalloway* is a case in point. It reveals how Lucrezia Warren Smith attempts to support her husband Septimus by managing his attention for him, as he falls into a depression.

> "Look," she implored him, for Dr Holmes had told her to make him notice real things […]. "Look," she repeated.
> "Look," the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind. […]
> "Look," she repeated. […]
> "Oh, look," she implored him. (Woolf 2008 [1925], 22)

Woolf differentiates between the "Look" that Lucrezia utters and the "Look" expressed by the voice that exists in Septimus' mind. While Lucrezia only hears her own voice and Septimus only hears the voice of the 'unseen,' readers get to attend to both. To Lucrezia, Septimus appears to be mind-wandering, yet he is in fact paying attention to the voice in his mind, and while Lucrezia aims to direct Septimus' attention, she herself is on the brink of losing focus as she becomes overwhelmed by her own emotions of despair, as suggested by the final "Oh, look." Special attention is drawn to this scene by its sheer emotional impact. Further, readers might be reminded of different or related experiences in their own lives (from a similar communicational disconnection with a loved one to mindfulness meditation routines designed to sharpen one's senses and make one "notice real things"). Even if temporarily prompted to mind-wander themselves, readers' attention to this particular scene is reinforced and refreshed in later

instances in the novel when Septimus and Lucrezia choose flowers for decorating a hat or when Septimus searches their flat for means to commit suicide as Dr Holmes climbs the stairs to attend to him. In his final moments, Septimus does notice "real things" (ibid., 126–127). The attentional disconnection between different characters in the novel is played out to the bitter end, whereby the lack of visual attention (on the part of Septimus) and attentional care (on the part of Dr Holmes) is coupled with the dangers of mind-wandering, which brings about Septimus' suicide, suggesting that both a lack and an excess of either attention or mind-wandering has destructive effects. It is the balance between the two which enables us to successfully navigate and process our environment and constitutes a fluent reading experience, which explains the lasting success of *Mrs Dalloway*.

The dynamics of mind-wandering and attention is essential to establish a sense of what we read (that is, building a text base for comprehension), but also to recognise why a specific text is relevant to us as readers. These dynamics underlie the entire meaning-making process, irrespective of whether the text explicitly thematises the interplay between attention and mind-wandering, or whether readers are (made) aware of it. As we have seen, mind-wandering and attention can be represented mimetically and non-mimetically: they can be represented in characters or prompted by narrative, linguistic, or semantic devices. A close analysis of the representation and enactment of mind-wandering and attention in a specific text, therefore, offers new insights into the different ways in which literature not only mirrors minds, but also exchanges and extends our ways of thinking. In order to conduct such analyses, a taxonomy of textual attractors and distractors for attention and mind-wandering needs to be established. In the following, we will present a preliminary list of attractors and distractors. This list is not exhaustive, but designed as foundation for further research in this field.

3. Attractors and Distractors: A Preliminary List

How does a text draw (or divert) readers' attention? How does it prevent or prompt mind-wandering? Empirical studies in literary stylistics (Emmott et al. 2006) and theories in narratology (Rabinowitz 1987) have mostly focussed on how literary texts manage readers' attention, not their distraction. However, as suggested above and further explained below, attention attractors are closely related to distraction as well.

One way to distinguish between *attractors* and *distractors* is to differentiate between *foregrounding* and *backgrounding* devices. Emmott et al. (2006, 4) approach attention through the literary notion of foregrounding and the psychological model of "depth of processing." As they have shown, readers do not pay attention to every word of a sentence. In particular, words that are not strictly necessary to grasp the semantic sense of a sentence are often missed or ignored in a

kind of linguistic "change blindness" (ibid., 20): "Readers see the words in a sentence, but they do not necessarily draw all the inferences that could be drawn." (Ibid., 18) Instead, readers need what Peter J. Rabinowitz (1987, 52) calls "gestures of noticability" to know where to focus their attention. The technique of foregrounding ensures that words which are crucial to specific narratives are not missed. Foregrounding can be achieved, for instance, by the use of italics, deictic references, alliterations, fragmentation, or defamiliarization, i.e. when semantic or syntactic conventions 'ordinary' language readers are familiar with are strategically violated (see Emmott et al. 2006; 2013). Foregrounding, therefore, is the means through which literary language sculpts readers' attention.

As a consequence, readers' mind-wandering can be understood as the 'background' to attentional foregrounding, the 'noise' that necessitates attentional cues to bind readers to specific narratives. It does not suffice, therefore, to approach distractors as identifiable elements within a literary text. Background is relational, as the ground can only be perceived in contrast to the figure. This explains that, although it is possible to identify specific devices of attention in a literary text, mind-wandering requires a broader view that considers the complex processes of meaning-making – including specific modes of reading.

While skimming does not equal distraction (as some narratives, including mega novels, are designed for skimming), readerly distraction becomes apparent in all those moments when readers miss important words, when their glance glides across the text without actually processing the sentences they seem to read, or when they turn a page and cannot figure out how the first sentence on the new page relates to what they remember to have just read. Specific moments of inattention can be measured in empirical eye-tracking studies, which trace the degree to which readers mind-wander through stretches of text that their eyes pass without stopping (saccades); measure how long they stop at a specific word or phrase (fixation length); or assess the frequency of blinking, which helps identify where readers' attention slips (see Faber et al. 2018). However, when eye-tracking studies discuss what textual features are related to these patterns, they are primarily interested in word frequencies (how common words are used in relation to the general lexicon; see, e.g., Reichle et al. 2010), rather than in the narrative and stylistic features we discuss here.

We have already identified the significant research gap between existing empirical work on attention and mind-wandering and the complexities involved in *literary* attention and mind-wandering, which unfold through representation and enactment, and which depend on multi-purpose textual devices. For devising a first taxonomy of some key attractors and distractors used in narratives to evoke literary attention and mind-wandering, we therefore decided to draw on the empirical evidence, as far as available, and existing studies on attention and mind-wandering in literary studies, (cognitive) linguistics, and psychology (which we refer to below), and discuss more complex phenomena on the basis of our close-reading analysis of *Mrs Dalloway*. We will begin by discussing key devices for eliciting attention, many of which are used in combination in particularly salient 'attention narratives.' These include:

(1) Chapters and paragraphs
The simplest and most typical attention-guiding structuring device in narrative prose are chapters, indicated by chapter headings or numbering, paragraphs, and more generally the arrangement of the text on the page, which serve to (re-)orient readers' attention and offer visual anchors to help them regain focus in case their minds begin to wander.

(2) Deictic References
While *Mrs Dalloway* does not deploy chapters, the narrative is structured by the chimes of Big Ben, which strikes the hours of the day when the action takes place. Besides the protagonist herself, therefore, one of the key attractors of attention in the novel is Big Ben, as also indicated by the title originally intended for this narrative, *The Hours*. Big Ben is a spatial and temporal reference point for the characters as they roam London. Its chimes draw characters' attention, pulling them back from various trains of mind-wandering. Whenever Woolf's narrator mentions the bell striking a certain hour, this provides a point of temporal orientation for the reader while also indicating a sense of progress. Such deictic references attract attention and offer readers a moment of orientation.

(3) Repetition
Words can recur within a single sentence, or in multiple sentences across a paragraph, or even the whole narrative. Often placed in the subject position of a sentence, the name "Big Ben" is assigned a prominent position in the novel. The same applies to the recurring quotation from William Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1611)*,* "Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages" (Woolf 2008 [1925], 8, also 25, 34, 158), which serves as a structural metaphor (Wyatt 1973), drawing attention to the dynamics of death and life, which drive the narrative and are embodied by Septimus and Clarissa respectively. Repetitions of specific words, phrases, but also thematic references can be used to create a rhythm in a sentence, a paragraph, or the narrative as a whole. They draw attention to themselves while also serving as structuring points for the relevant unit of meaning.

(4) Fragmentation
Fragmentation, frequently used in Modernist but also postmodern literature, has been identified as a key attention-eliciting device used to foreground certain words and phrases (see Emmott et al. 2006; see also Baumbach 2021). Empirical research suggests that syntactic and visual fragmentation indeed draws readers' attention, leading to "more careful, deeper, processing […] just as we have generally been assuming in the stylistic analysis" (Emmott et al. 2006, 23). However, it appears that sentence fragmentation has the strongest effect here and that the visual fragmentation of very short paragraphs does not significantly increase attention (ibid.).

(5) Initial and End Positions

Woolf achieves much of the orientation effect in *Mrs Dalloway* by placing the mention of the ringing of Big Ben either at the beginning ("It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben" [2008 (1925), 80]) or at the end of a paragraph or larger textual unit, often separated by an empty line. She uses a similar technique of repetition at initial and end positions to foreground the appearance of Clarissa Dalloway in the final section of the novel (see above). The clefting of sentences, that is, placing words in a grammatically unusual positions in the sequence of a sentence, can also be used to draw readers' attention (Emmott et al. [2006, 11] use this principle to design the stimulus sentences for their empirical study).

(6) Focalisation Shifts

Emmott et al. (2006, 10) suggest that repetitions of certain phrases might represent an echo of that "phrase in the character's mind", indicating a shift to that character in the focalisation of the narrative. Throughout *Mrs Dalloway*, readers' attention follows multiple different focalisations. It is usually the moments when focalisation shifts from one character to another that draw readers' attention, signalling that one train of thought has come to an end and highlighting the beginning of the other. Special emphasis to these moments is given whenever they coincide with the ringing of Big Ben. While Emmott et al. remark that focalisation serves to highlight plot-information to readers, *Mrs Dalloway* illustrates that it contributes more generally to guiding attention in readers' meaning-making.

(7) (Direct) Speech

Characters' direct speech, especially when placed at the beginning of a new paragraph, tends to draw readers' and characters' attention. The scene mentioned above, i.e. when Lucrezia attempts to make her husband Septimus "notice real things" (Woolf 2008 [1925], 22) is a case in point, as the repeated "Look" is marked off by inverted commas, which traditionally indicates direct speech. Other visual markers in print, such as italics, also give words a particular emphasis, often realised in auditory mental imagery, and serve as attention attractors (Emmott et al. 2006, 9), which are furthermore linked to focalisation (ibid., 10).

(8) Metaphors and Attention-Eliciting Themes

Woolf (2008 [1925], 87) characterises the solemn sound of Big Ben in contrast to the lesser, commercial bells as a "mound of time," against which the lesser clocks which ring with a delay (such as St Margaret's) or clocks on shop facades "nibble" with their sense of "proportion" and their "genial and fraternal" nature. She links these lesser clocks to the less important characters of the novel, such as Sir William Bradshaw who makes sense of his existence through the notion of "proportion" (ibid., 84). The metaphors and themes of the novel, such as Peter Walsh's pocketknife or Septimus's obsession with Shakespeare (as well as far too many others to list here), link together multiple aspects of attentional

attraction already mentioned, including repetition, fragmentation, and initial and end positions. They further create their own web of significance that foster attention to interconnections between different parts of the narrative.

(9) Plot Events
Emmott et al. (2006) link their stylistic analysis of attention to the text's need to give 'plot-relevant' information to readers. Indeed, events that radically change the expected plot trajectory clearly serve as attention attractors for both characters and readers. The death of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* is a major turning point in the narrative, as it disrupts the party in the evening (even though none of the guests know Smith personally) when Lady Bradshaw mentions the event. Clarissa's disapproval ("What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?" [Woolf 2008 (1925), 156]) indicates that violations of social and cultural norms are also important attractors of attention (see Rabinowitz 1987, 69–72). Such radical plot events are the attention attractors least likely to be missed, as they lie at the core of the meaning-making process in reading. Furthermore, these events are often prepared or accompanied by other kinds of attractors, while vice versa, plot events give prominence to further kinds of attractors that are linked to them thematically or linguistically.

Considering that attention carries an inherent potential for its own disintegration if overstrained (Crary 1999, 47), the overabundance of devices listed above might have the opposite effect. Furthermore, taking into account the Proteus Principle (Sternberg 1982), i.e. the observation that different devices can be used to elicit the same effect, while one and the same device can also trigger different effects, many of the devices listed here can be used to trigger both attention and mind-wandering. As a consequence, our list of distractors reiterates some of the attractors discussed above.

(1) Repetition
Repetition draws attention, but when it carries on for too long, what was foregrounded becomes background again.

(2) Long Stretches of Text
Paragraphs and chapters serve to guide readers' attention through simple visual measures. In long stretches of texts, however, readers' eyes have no obvious point to come to rest and no obvious targets (such as paragraph or chapter endings) until which attention needs to be maintained. Literary texts can certainly deploy other stylistic, thematic, and narrative attractors within long stretches of text, but in contemporary novels at least, a page consisting of a single paragraph challenges readers' attention considerably.

(3) Embedded Information

If initial and end positions signal to readers the need to pay attention, then information that is embedded in subordinate sentences or the middle of a long paragraph can easily be hidden or backgrounded.

(4) Complexity

To the extent that it teases readers out of thought, complexity heightens attention. However, complex themes, metaphors, or syntactical structures always run the risk to overstrain readers' attention: if the cognitive load becomes too high (i.e. through multiple shifts of setting; levels of intentionality beyond the fifth level that exceeds our theory of mind; conceptual complexity, convoluted sentences, or highly abstract images) attention might slip to prevent frustration and seek for a more rewarding reading experience some passages or chapters later or somewhere else entirely.

(5) Focalisation / Stream of Consciousness

Having engaged in a literary text for a certain period of time, readers arguably no longer notice that the perspective from which a story is told is tied to a specific character. Instead, this perspective becomes the default point of view through which readers experience narrative events, irrespective of whether it is explicitly tied to a particular character (internal focalisation) or not (external focalisation and zero focalisation). As soon as habituation sets in, focalisation, therefore, no longer serves as an attractor that draws or binds readers' attention.

(6) Turn-Taking

Direct speech is as a strong attractor of attention for several reasons: (1) it is marked visually, (2) it includes auditory mental imagery, which intensifies readers' sense of presence (Kuzmicova 2012), and, finally, (3) it indicates turn-taking between at least two characters. If maintained at the right pace, this turn-taking can hold readers' attention for substantial stretches of text. If a text includes long passages of direct speech spoken by one and the same character, however, such lack of turn-taking can prompt distraction.

(7) Surprise Effects

The interrelation between attention and mind-wandering becomes particularly apparent in surprise effects, our final example for a Protean attractor/distractor device. Psychology distinguishes between "tuning out" and "zoning out" (Smallwood / Schooler 2006): If our minds slip from the task at hand, we either know it ("tuning out") or we only realise much later that we have not been paying attention for a while ("zoning out"). Arguably, readers are familiar with both modes of mind-wandering. In the interplay between backgrounding and foregrounding, literary texts can let readers' minds slip for a certain while from the main business of meaning-making only to pull them back with a strong attractor. The clue in a detective story, for instance, might be backgrounded in a mass of

detail and description and thus missed by everyone, until it is pointed out by the detective.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, there are no clues. However, other textual elements serve a similar function: the ringing of Big Ben – a feature that, due to its regular occurrence, might easily fade into the background – reminds characters of their present purpose and whereabouts, and devices such as Peter Walsh's pocketknife serve as strong attractors that bring characters' flights of thought to an end. Narratives that are not predominantly plot-driven, such as *Mrs Dalloway*, furnish many surprise effects on the level of metaphor and theme. Surprise effects are at the root of narrative and literary experience, and they arise when literary texts use the dynamics between background and foreground effectively. Surprise effects are not necessarily bound to mind-wandering. In fact, presuppositions, that is, letting readers believe they are drawing the correct inference, when in fact the evidence is at least ambiguous, also play a crucial role in generating surprise (see Tobin 2018, especially Ch. 4). Presuppositions are an instance of "shallow processing" (Emmott et al. 2006, 18), inviting readers to pay less attention than they usually would. Distraction that is related to surprise effects, therefore, can draw on both presuppositions supplied and then revealed by the narrative or, indeed, on readers' enactment of mind-wandering.

Identifying distractors is not as straight-forward as specifying stylistic features of attention, not least because moments of distraction do not draw attention to themselves in a text. The devices listed above largely refer to moments when a text moves past the point where stylistic attractors are effective or indicate instances of excessive uses of attractors. Research on the average length of attention spans in processes of reading and the limitations of working memory might help specify when exactly attractors, such as repetition, turn into distractors. To our knowledge, however, there are no empirical studies investigating these aspects to date.

4. Conclusion

Literary texts both represent focused attention and dispersed mind-wandering in the actions and mental experiences of characters, and lead readers to enact attention and mind-wandering themselves in response to attractors and distractors in the text. Attractors are designed to capture and focus readers' attention, while distractors indicate moments where readers' mind-wandering – be it in relation to the text or away from it – is likely to be encouraged. Attractors can turn into distractors and vice versa, depending on how prominently and frequently these devices are deployed in an overall backgrounding-foregrounding dynamics. Building on research in cognitive stylistics, narratology, and psychology, we have proposed here theoretical and analytical approaches to explore these dynamics between attention and mind-wandering in literary texts. These

approaches can be used for both textual analyses and for devising hypotheses for the empirical study of processes of attention and mind-wandering in response to literary texts. In 'the era of the wandering mind,' literature can tell us about when and why our minds focus and when and why they do not. This potential needs to be tapped by further research in the field, which integrates latest advancements in cognitive psychology, stylistics, and narratology to gain deeper insight into how we read and process literary texts.

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