

dissonant paradox, ‘day brought back my night’. This, of course, draws on a metaphor of the darkness of night as emotional darkness, but biographically also refers to Milton’s blindness where his days were also literally dark. (See Stockwell 2002b for further analysis.)

Engagement, depth and distraction

In the two analyses above of Yeats and Milton, I have indicated the common phenomenon whereby one dimension of resonant force (brightness, in both cases) is paralleled by other dimensions operating to the same polarity. So an increase in brightness is often co-located with large volume, noisiness, activity, involved agency, empathetic identification, and so on. Even where the accompanying elements in the close co-text are not in themselves aligned with these scales, the force of the attractor phrases is often so deeply intense that other parts of the text become coloured by the same perceptual quality. This is analogous to the halo effect that a bright white object confers on other light objects nearby, in visual terms. For example, in the Yeats poem, ‘old’ is lined up as a feature of slowness and sadness, rather than any of the other, more positive possible connotations of the term in general: the grounded elements in the text are given overtones by the presence of strong resonant attractors. This can be seen in the following famous sonnet by Shakespeare

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
 And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
 By chance or nature’s changing course untrimmed;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st.
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare (published 1609)

A hugely popular poem generally read as a straightforward declaration of love, this is also one of those several sonnets by Shakespeare that are as much, if not more, focused on the talent of the writer and the memorial

power of writing as on the object of affection addressed in the sonnet. The main feature of attraction is, again, light and brightness, but this is aligned and polarised with other dimensions, including volume as a means of delineating time, action as a means of distinguishing passing and eternal events, empathy in the form of personifications, and the nature of topicality and agency throughout. Because these dimensions are lined up throughout the sonnet, other elements are also placed in balance, and balance as an organising principle is established in the explicit comparison that is signalled in the first line.

Furthermore, since several attractor features are aligned, the sonnet has freedom to exploit both main forms of ongoing attentional change: shift and zoom. According to Carstensen (2007: 8), attention is caught most obviously by a 'state change': that is, the appearance of a new attractor in the perceptual field (*newness*, in my feature list above). Once the field is established, however, attention is moved around either by being shifted – this involves distraction from one figural attractor to another – or zoomed – that is, focused inward with a greater granularity or intensity. In the sonnet above, the initial attractor effecting the state change from the reader's pre-textual activity is the explicitly named and speaking/writing 'I'; this figure is quickly occluded by a distraction to two other perceptual objects: 'thee' and 'a summer's day'. This is a shift of attention, which involves temporarily backgrounding the 'I' (in fact, the 'I' remains backgrounded until right at the end of the poem). The two newly established attractors remain alternately in focus for most of the rest of the sonnet, as a consequence of the comparison being made between them. As I will show in detail below, the 'thee' figure tends to be associated with shifts of attention, while the 'summer's day' figure is characterised more by a zooming in and out of attention.

Lacuna effects

Developing gestalt principles, Carstensen (2007) formulates an approach to attention that focuses on the ontological status of perceived objects. He identifies gestalt shapes as *blobs* (if perceived singularly) or *groups of blobs* if perceived as a connected or continuous collection. A group of blobs can be attentionally zoomed to the granularity of an individual blob, of course. Thus, a person (such as the addressee 'thee' of the sonnet) is in abstract terms a unitary blob, while 'a summer's day' is in the first line a single blob, but is then delineated down to its several aspects as a group of blobs in the rest of the poem (a summer's day consists of the other elements mentioned in the text, which are zoomed in on as the reader progresses through the sonnet). Further in Carstensen's scheme, blobs can be positive (figures like 'thee' or 'day') or negative (part of the bounded background like 'I' through most of the poem). In natural everyday terms, concepts like 'dent', 'hole', 'fissure' or

‘valley’ are negative blobs, since they can be the focus of attention but they are defined by being *not* something which is in their immediate vicinity. The final key element in Carstensen’s scheme is an emphasis on edges and bound-ness, as a means of defining attentional relationships between blobs. Positive blobs have edges by definition; negative blobs *only* have edges (that is, there is nothing in the middle of them). A hollow, a shadow, a large crack in the wall might all be perceived as negative blobs (let’s call this phenomenon a figural *lacuna* in literary reading). Blobs are defined by their edges, and it is important to note that the edge itself belongs to the blob: Peterson and Enns (2005) offer evidence to show that the ground side of an edge is not processed, whereas the figure side is processed with the figure itself. Furthermore, figures and the nature of their edges (defined, or irregular, bright, or soft, and so on) are more likely to be recalled from memory on subsequent encounters than grounds: in other words, they have resonance. These insights correspond with the intuitive sketches of Magritte as outlined above.

In the Shakespeare sonnet, the addressee ‘thee’ figure is sustained as the primary focus of attention in the second line (‘Thou art more lovely and more temperate’) by being placed initially in topic position, where it also governs the voluminous pair ‘more lovely’ and ‘more temperate’. The ‘summer’s day’ at this point is relatively backgrounded, implicit as the second part of the *more / less* comparison. The next six lines (‘Rough winds . . . course untrimmed’) shift attention to different aspects of the ‘summer’s day’, with the addressee ‘thee’ temporarily neglected by non-mention: this is a gradual occlusion. The attractor feature of comparable volume in terms of physical size and length, brightness and heat is prominent in these lines: ‘all too short a date’ (here volume as an analogue of time), ‘too hot’, ‘shines’ / ‘dimmed’, ‘declines’, ‘changing course’, ‘untrimmed’. The binary comparisons between the current figure ‘summer’ and the backgrounded blob ‘thee’ are obvious throughout these phrases, but volume as an attractor feature is also deployed less obviously in the acquisitional verb ‘hath’, in the conventional dead metaphor that volumises time ‘sometime’ and ‘sometimes’, and even through the additive concept central to the three line-initial occurrences of ‘And’. The final word of these six lines that focus on ‘summer’s day’ – ‘untrimmed’ – contains the figural relationship in itself as a complex, self-referential lacuna (a negative blob).

These six lines represent an attentional zoom into the ‘summer’s day’. The succession of aspects for attention are attractive because of volume, as outlined above, but this is reinforced by a simultaneous and rich attraction realised in parallel terms too. Firstly, empathetic familiarity is deployed through a series of personifications: rather conventionally, the winds are described with a human trait ‘rough’ and are given an agency that can be read as wilful ‘do shake’; less conventionally, the buds are humanised as ‘darling’ (the seasons are polarised here into a *winter / summer* binary, with summer from mid-May to the end of August, according to popular Renaissance perception

rather than astronomical accuracy); there is an implicit personification of summer as the holder of a 'lease', and an even more implicit and grounded personified Time or Nature as landlord; the metaphor 'eye of heaven' for the sun involves an embedded personification of a face, which is what makes 'his gold complexion' a sustaining attractor; and 'chance' or 'nature' are personified as being on a journey and being capable of undoing the trim of summer's natural order. Secondly, action and agency are placed in parallel with the dimensions of volume and empathy: the verbs of summer all occur at the ends of lines ('shines', 'dimmed', 'declines', 'untrimmed') where they are placed in such a way that the subject position appears as a complex phrase. Adjuncts that would normally occur later or would follow the verb ('too hot', 'often is', 'from fair', 'by chance or nature's changing course') are brought forward to precede the verb and sit within the subject phrase. This complexity (also a matter of the physical volume of words on the page) further zooms attention to the different aspects of the summer's day. Lastly, again, there is an evident parallelism in the dimensions of brightness and heat, which are raised up and down to create a rich texture: 'hot . . . shines', 'gold . . . dimmed', 'fair from fair . . . declines'.

All of these different types of attractor are lined up in parallel while the summer's day is prominent. By contrast with the repetition of 'And', the next line starts with 'But' to signal the shift of attention as a distraction revivifying the addressee: 'But thy eternal summer shall not fade'. The distraction to 'thy' involves the relatively disengaged neglect (backgrounding) of the summer's day, but there is attentional drag apparent here. This line is cognitively complex in its attentional dynamics. The word 'summer' is repeated here, but attention has shifted to 'thy' and this is not a non-shift repetition that would keep the summer's day in focus: in fact, it is a transference of a different sort of summer attributed to the addressee – an 'eternal' one to contrast with the 'changing course' of the shining and dimming summer of the previous six lines. The summer remains in secondary focus as richly resonant background.

The addressee is maintained across the next four lines ('But thy . . . thou grow'st') by non-shift devices such as the continuous syntax linked not by 'And' but by 'Nor' and 'When', and by a sustained pronominal reference ('thy' or 'thou' in every line). The addressee is thus attentionally figured as consistent and continuous, by contrast with the recent memory of the variable and fluctuating summer. However, the stability of the 'thou' figure is simultaneously undermined by the profusion of negative expressions around this point in the sonnet. Though the focus remains on the 'thou' and the negational verbs and particles belong to this addressee figure, the shift from summer to 'thou' is a shift from a positive blob to a negative lacuna. The apparent object of the sonnet – who was focused positively in the first two lines – is by the end being disengaged from. At the same time, other disengagement features are piling up to diminish further the intensity of attention

on the 'thou'. It is 'thy eternal summer' not 'thou' which is the subject of the verb 'fade'. Mentioning fading, even while negating it, creates a figural lacuna where 'thou' is faded from attention to a greater degree than if such a verb had not been used at all. The mention of 'lose possession', even though preceded by 'Nor', has exactly the same effect. There is a strong personification attractor in 'Death', who is not only named and pronominalised but also speaks. Lastly, there is an aspect shift that distracts attention from the supposed addressee. Through almost all of the poem, the present tense has been used ('art', 'hath', 'shines', 'declines'), and is even cleverly arranged where it would have been syntactically easier to use a different tense or aspect ('do shake', 'is dimmed'). With the shift of attention to 'thou', however, the aspectual 'shall' is used. By this stage in the poem, the reader might recall the 'Shall' of the first line: there, it creates a question to which the sonnet is the enacted answer. In the later lines, though, 'shall' is used as an assertion that directs attention to the eternal future. All of these parallel dimensions serve to empty the apparent addressee of density, forcing the reader to notice only its defining edges, and thereby maintaining the resonance of the richer summer now in the textual past. The effect is so strong, I think, that even when 'thou' is made the active subject of a volume verb ('thou grow'st'), attention is attracted rather to the 'eternal lines' that are placed prominently earlier in this line, and of course the growing is encompassed 'in' those lines.

The stage is set with a decaying but richly resonant summer and an addressee that is also fading in intensity, and then the final couplet delivers the final attraction. The last focus is on the sonnet itself, and the proximal deictic 'this' is a very powerful attractor for its closeness, newness, currency and by the fact that the referent is an object physically in the reader's hands or the listener's ears. Physical presence is reinforced by 'breathe' and 'eyes [that] can see'; a strong empathy feature is asserted by the concrete 'men', and volume as length is again deployed ('So long') and maintained by repetition. The agency of the final clause, with 'this' sonnet in active subject position and 'thee' in recipient position, sums up the relative attentional status of the foregrounded text and the now secondary addressee. The richly textured summer, and life by extension, and the object of love are both encompassed by an even richer and intense sense of the force and immutability of writing.

The nature of attentional neglect has been prominent in this discussion. Clearly there are several key aspects to the workings of graded backgrounds when new or revived attractors displace previously focused elements. No previously focused element instantly disappears from consciousness in a reading: even outright predicate removal (such as 'The king died' or 'The shape disappeared') leaves a negative lacuna where a positive blob was perceived, and the trace of its recent existence persists in the memory. Similarly, defeating or negational expressions only occlude previous figures to a certain

degree. We can arrange the three examples ‘The ghost never existed’, and ‘The ghost faded from view’ and a text in which a ghost ceases to be mentioned along a cline from instant occlusion to gradual occlusion (see Figure 2a above), but ‘instant’ occlusion is a relative rather than absolute term: the resonance has a decay that is damped down in different ways. Different forms of negation are clearly important here, including predicate negation (*not* + *verb*), qualitatively negative predicates (‘died’, ‘disappeared’, ‘untrimmed’), negative particles (‘nor’, ‘never’), negative conjunctions (‘but’, ‘or’, ‘except’), negatively-oriented lexis (‘poor’, ‘sad’), negative prefixes (‘unloved’, ‘disjointed’), and negative exclamations (‘no’). In short texts, such as fourteen-line sonnets, most occlusion is towards the instant end of the scale, since there is not enough textual space simply to allow a previous figure to fade away by a form of gradual occlusion such as non-mention.

Resisting occlusion

Several other of Shakespeare’s sonnets feature even more negative expressions than are included in Sonnet 18 above. Perhaps the most popular of all is the following.

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments; love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wand’ring bark,
 Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle’s compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

William Shakespeare (published 1609)

Here, unlike Sonnet 18, the focus of attention is maintained almost consistently on *love* from the second line to the end. This is surprising given the huge amount and different types of negation in the text, which you might think would successfully distract attention away from the first attractor. Each of the following could potentially disengage the reader from a focus on *love* and occlude this figure with another attractor.

predicate negation	Let me not admit love is not love is never shaken Love's not Time's fool Love alters not I never writ
qualitatively negative predicates	alters bends remove shaken bears
negative particles	not x 4 never x 2 nor no
negative conjunctions	or although though
negatively oriented lexis	impediments alteration remover tempests wand'ring fool bending brief edge of doom error
negative prefixes	remover remove unknown
negative exclamation	O no

The reason why *love* retains its intensity throughout is because of the maintenance features that sustain it and resist the threat from all these negatives to shift attention onto anything else. The concept of *love* persists and in fact increases in intensity as a consequence of coming under repeated threat and yet being sustained. In spite of the mind-warping logical twists of the final couplet, this sonnet remains enormously popular and is a staple reading at

wedding ceremonies (of course reinforced by the phrase 'marriage of true minds').

The poem creates a strong attractor, firstly by negatively defining its edges: the impediments (distracting impurities) that are not admitted beyond the boundaries of the marriage (gestalt unity) of true (closely aligned as well as honest) minds. This negative lacuna is then named and rendered attentionally positive: 'love is . . .'. *Love* maintains focus by pronominal co-reference, elision and lexical repetition: 'it alteration finds', '[it] bends', 'it is a mark', 'it is a star', 'Love [i]s not Time's fool', 'Love alters not', '[love] bears it', spread across the middle of the poem. Even in the adjuncts and sub-clauses where love is metaphorically replaced by a counterpart element (an ever-fixed mark, the star to every wand'ring bark, Time's fool), the brief digression into the metaphorical domain merely reaffirms the focus of attention on *love*, since the counterpart identification is strong and only intervenes for a line or so.

Another major threat of neglect lies in the activeness of potentially distracting elements. The verbs directly associated with *love* are relational or static in nature: 'love is not love', 'it is an ever-fixed mark', 'It is the star', 'Love's not Time's fool', 'Love alters not'. However, the verbs associated with potentially threatening occluding elements are much more active and material: 'Let me Admit' (meaning both *allow in* and *confess*), '[non-love] alters', '[non-love] finds', '[non-love] bends . . . to remove', '[the] mark . . . looks on tempests . . . is never shaken', 'every bark's [boat's] height be taken [measured to ascertain its value in the water]', 'rosy lips and cheeks . . . come within the compass of the sickle'. The most active words are associated with other elements – 'alteration', 'remove', 'tempests', 'shaken', 'wand'ring' – and yet *love* still sustains its focus of attention. This is achieved mainly syntactically. The relational and existential verbs with 'love' as subject tend to be in main clause position. All of the active verbs and potentially occluding figures are relegated to subordinate clauses. So finding alteration is subordinated to 'Which', and bending is placed in parallel at that same subordinate level by 'Or', with 'to remove' as a further subordination later on. Again, looking on tempests is subordinate to 'That', with being shaken co-ordinated with 'and' at the same level. Taking the height of the boat is two levels down as a result of 'Whose' and 'although'. Coming within the range of the sickle is subordinate to 'though', and bearing out time is subordinated with 'But'. These potential distractions fail because as subordinations they remain grounded relative to the figural *love*, and *love* increases in apparent power and intensity as a consequence of resisting occlusion. Furthermore, each metaphorical challenge only attacks for a line or two before the poem switches to another different metaphor, or another aspect of the same nautical metaphor (with even the sickle's 'reach' metaphorised as 'compass'). Metaphor itself can be regarded as a form of negation of the literal, and so the comments above about the sustaining power of negation-resistance might apply in this respect too.

Sonnet 116 has sentences that run across line boundaries, since the subordinate patterning I describe could not fit into one line each. This necessary consequence of the cognitive mechanism contributes to the feeling many readers have of the poem that it runs forward seamlessly with a sense of balance and even-handed reason. This last impression is of course affirmed by the explicit logical reasoning in the final couplet: 'If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved'. However, where 'this' in the final line of Sonnet 18 is most likely to refer to the writing itself, 'this' in Sonnet 116 is more ambiguous. It could refer in general to the whole preceding argument about the affirmation of love (1); it could refer only to the immediately prior point about love outlasting time (2); it could refer alternatively to the strong figural attractor of love itself in general (3); or it could refer restrictively to the initial permissible action, 'Let me not admit impediments' (4). All of these are within the cognitive poetic constraints of the poem.

Of course, there are further permutations to consider. The ambiguous 'this' is embedded between a conditional 'If' and a subjunctive 'be', in a non-literal domain where it could be an 'error'. I suggest that this is too complex a logical relationship for most readers to resolve without a great deal of extended thought. Just in case anyone reaches for an understanding, the speculation is complicated by a further condition, 'and upon me proved'. Even if this line is regarded clearly by a particularly perspicacious reader, the complete couplet is very complex: *if x and y, then* 'I never writ, nor no man ever loved'. The first phrase here, 'I never writ', is oddly intransitive: you would expect a direct object such as 'it' or 'the sonnet' or 'anything'. It feels logically incomplete, even though it is strictly grammatically well-formed. The final phrase, 'nor no man ever loved', combines bewildering negations such that 'never' and 'ever' are rendered the same by different sequential means.

There are, then, many consequences of matching the figure to which 'this' refers and the logical positioning of the final couplet.

- (1) Where 'this' refers to the whole love-affirming argument in the text, then the final line means something like: if my argument is wrong, then I did not write, but since you the reader have the evidence of my writing in your hand, then my argument must be right, and furthermore since you know that people have loved, my argument is also confirmed. This is a reading which regards the poem as a rhetorical defence of love's constancy.
- (2) Where 'this' refers only to the last point about love outlasting time, then the final line means: if love cannot outlast time, then I will never again write and it is not worth anyone being in love again. This is a reading of abject surrender and disillusionment.
- (3) Where 'this' refers to love itself in general, then the final line reads as something like: if love is not as constant and eternal as I say it is,

then I might as well never have written about it. This is a reading of resigned sarcasm.

- (4) Where ‘this’ points back to the initial permit, then the ending means something like: if I admit impediments, then everything is worthless. This reading carries the consequential but implicit moral that impurities and impediments to truth and love should not be contemplated, lest they become self-fulfilling.

These readings are allowable and consistent with my analysis above. However, reading (4) is only found in academic contexts. Readings (2) and (3) tend only to be found in flippant commentaries in online contexts. Reading (1) is by far the most widely held, even though it contains errors of logical connection: there is no reason why the possibility that the argument is wrong should be conditional on having written anything. This is a mere unmotivated assertion. The rhetorical defence of love’s constancy is based on a false premise in the final couplet, but this fact is irrelevant to most readers. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the logical argument is so convoluted by the deictic ambiguity of ‘this’ and by the negations that most readers simply read the poem as the affirmation that they would like it to be – in other words, they allow the rhetoric to persuade them because accepting it is easier than resisting it by engaging with the logic. Secondly, and connected to this, of course, is the fact that this strategy is exactly the pattern that the poem has set up. The figural attractor, *love*, resists attacks from logical negations, reasonable metaphorical comparisons and analogies, and any attempts to shift it. The most popular, optimistic and love-affirming reading is the most consistent with the most natural patterning of attention. This is why the poem has such intense resonance for so many people. And in this most popular reading, the rhetorical and aesthetic texture over-rides the logical form.

Moving edges

Understanding the cognitive mechanics of figural edges is crucial for my account of attentional engagement and disengagement within a literary reading. In visual cognition, as outlined above, edges belong to figures and are processed with them; even where an object is minimally defined or defined only by *not* being something else (as a lacuna), it is the edges and edge-processing that is crucial. As an object moves across the visual field, its advancing edge occludes the static background: at the visual interface between the two, the latter has no edge, since only figures have edges. At the rear edge of a transiting object, the figural edge allows the redefined background to emerge again. The background does not normally change as it passes behind the figure. In fact, if a differently textured ground appears from an occlusion, it is likely in itself to be distracting and be attentionally regarded as a new figure. It is easy to picture this in the activity of mime-artists who

pass a fan across a smiling face to reveal a switched sad face emerging from the other side. The disorientation of a non-static ground is evident when you are looking out through the window while sitting on a train in a station, and you feel your own train carriage moving off as you pass by a parallel train, only for the other train to pass by completely, leaving your eyes looking at the unmoving opposite platform and you realise that it was the other train moving and not yours.

In the list of good textual attractors earlier in this chapter, several aspects are correlates of motion: active verb forms, topical and subjective action, wilful action in a scene, and even fullness, proximity and noisiness are often consequences of the relative motion of the observer and the figure against a ground. Spatial relations are a matter of attentional change, whether zoom or shift between figural objects, because seeing one object in relation to another involves looking first at one *and then* at the other. Since attentional change necessarily involves this sequentiality and thus a time-dimension, even stationary described objects have an apparent attentional motion in the reading process. In other words, reading involves the dynamic apparent or actual motion of figures across a ground. This can be regarded as a psychological basis for the common description of reading as a journey and the perception that texts are dynamic and motive, when in fact it is the reading that gives it this apparent relative motion. Furthermore, in visual perception, figural objects that are in motion are stronger attractors: think of how camouflaged objects like lizards in grass or a person in a crowd of waxwork figurines leap out for attention as soon as they move. Irregular or ill-defined objects (that is, those whose edges are indeterminate because they are irregular, unfamiliar or in the process of alteration) are rendered easier to delineate by their motion across an occluded background (Smith, Johnson and Spelke 2003). Motion also contributes strongly towards depth perception and the richness of a visual field.

These correlations in the literary domain can be illustrated by considering a reading of the following text.

Nantucket

Flowers through the window
lavender and yellow

changed by white curtains –
Smell of cleanliness –

Sunshine of late afternoon –
On the glass tray

a glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down, by which

a key is lying – And the
immaculate white bed

William Carlos Williams (published 1934)

Most academic readings of this place it in literary history as a modernist or imagist position against the logical syntax of nineteenth-century verse (Hillis Miller 1965; Moore 1986), and almost all readings observe that it is like a verbal still-life painting. Readers comment that it captures exactly the feeling of being on Nantucket island in the north Atlantic on a summer's day. In spite of the phrase 'still-life', which recurs often in readers' comments, and which clearly results from the lack of any main verb, there is a strong sense that the poem is not in fact 'still' but 'moves'. Readers speak of being 'drawn in' by the poem: one of my own student readers described it as 'cinematic', likening the apparent movement of the poem to a zooming or tracking camera shot starting outside and moving slowly through the open window to focus closely at last on the key and the bed.

In 'Nantucket', the strong visual resonance of the poem is generated by the emphasis on very precise figure-ground elements (named by noun phrases) and the precise relations between them. These spatial relationships are established not by verbs but by the deictic positioning of prepositions: 'through', 'by', 'on', 'down', and 'by which'. The first attractor of the poem – 'flowers' – is positioned 'through the window'. In image-schematic terms, 'through' carries a basic semantic profiling of the later point in a trajectory of a figure moving towards and *through* a landmark: there is an inherent motive element in this preposition (see the next section and Chapter 6 for a more detailed explication and application of the notion of action chains and image-schemas). Readers can read this first line either as their own viewpoint moving in through the window, or as the flowers moving virtually towards them. The effect in both cases is that the flowers appear to increase in size as attention zooms in on them, framed by the grounding window. This framing effect at the beginning of the poem, of course, is also likely to be an early cue for an analogy with painting. The emphasis on the core essence of the flowers is carried by the fact that the attributes of 'lavender and yellow', which you might ordinarily expect as distracting pre-modifiers ('the lavender and yellow flowers'), have been moved back syntactically into a post-modification, and even interrupted by the grounding 'through the window'. Since these two modifiers clearly attach to the flowers, rather than the window, the strong figural attractor is sustained across these two lines.

The poem continues by introducing potentially distracting elements, which however turn out instead to be part of a sustained focus on the existing attractor of the flowers. The effect is of an increased intensity of attention. For example, the verb participle 'changed' is potentially a distracting device, especially followed with 'by', suggesting that this is about to be a passive human agent taking readerly attention from the flowers. However, instead of

a person we get ‘white curtains’, and the post-modificatory direction of ‘laver and yellow’ has already cued us up to read ‘changed by white curtains’ as a further post-modification of the flowers. So intensely are the flowers being focused that hardly any readers with whom I have discussed this poem read ‘Smell’ in the next line as a main verb with ‘flowers’ as the subject, though of course this is allowable in the syntax and the apt semantic colligation of ‘flowers smell’. Instead – and assisted by the capitalisation of ‘Smell’ – this line tends to be read as a further parallel noun-phrase, and so is the following line, ‘Sunshine of late afternoon’. These two attractors take the reader’s attention, for these syntactic reasons as well as their position as capitalised line-initial /s/-alliterations; they also have fullness and brightness. However, I would argue that, although they occlude the flowers to a certain extent, they are an example of attentional drag (see Figure 2a earlier in this chapter), by which the resonance of the flowers persists and resists decay. This is because of the semantic sustainability for the flowers provided by ‘smell’ and ‘sunshine’. I would argue, therefore, that the poem falls into an exact first half up to this line, where the strong figural attractor of the flowers is first sustained and then not neglected by occlusion but by an intensifying attentional zoom; the effect of this is to drag out the echo of the flowers and keep their essence in resonant memory.

The rest of the poem effects a further closing-in zoom of attention. The lines following ‘On the glass tray’ represent the neglect of the flowers by attentional lift, replacing this original figure by a carefully outlined edge (a lacuna) in ‘On the glass tray’. Of course, the transparency of this negative attractor is semantically and iconically echoed by the ‘glass’, repeated too in the occluding attractor of the ‘glass pitcher’ of the next line. Indeed, the indefinite article (‘a glass pitcher’) here further establishes the transparency of negativity. (Perhaps the phonetic similarities of ‘pitcher’ and ‘picture’ here also suggest an analogy of the poem as a painting, for any reader who notices this.) Phrase by phrase the new attractor becomes more substantial, from its outlined edge (‘On the glass tray’) to its solid but transparent infill (‘a glass pitcher’), to a definite positive figural object (‘the tumbler’). However, even this last figural attractor is syntactically presented appositionally as an attribute of ‘a glass pitcher’; it is itself semantically downward within the morphology of ‘tumbler’, and it is further associated with down-ness, both in the word itself in ‘turned down’ and in the idiomatic meaning of that complete phrase itself (where ‘turned down’ means ‘rejected’). This closeness of reading can even be phonetically justified by the accompanying alliterative distraction of ‘tumbler turned’. The glass tray, pitcher and tumbler inside the room have occluded the initial flowers seen through the window, but are being rendered relatively insubstantial in anticipation of the ‘key’ figural attractor in the next line. Though the clause ‘a key is lying’ is syntactically embedded in the verbless noun-phrase preceding it, the key itself is a very strong new figural attractor since it is in new-line initial position, it is a