

Forms of Attention in *Ulysses*

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I

Around the noon of June 16, 1904, in the seventh episode of the book, Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), goes in and out of offices of the *Freeman's Journal*:

HOUSE OF KEY(E)S

— Like that, see. Two crossed keys here. A circle. Then here the name. Alexander Keyes, tea, wine and spirit merchant. So on. [...]

— The idea, Mr Bloom said, is the house of keys. You know, councillor, the Manx parliament. Innuendo of home rule. Tourists, you know, from the isle of Man. *Catches the eye*, you see. Can you do that? (7.141-151 emphasis mine)

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— Just this ad, Mr Bloom said, pushing through towards the steps, puffing, and taking the cutting from his pocket. I spoke with Mr Keyes just now. He'll give a renewal for two months, he says. After he'll see. But he wants a par to call attention in the *Telegraph* too, the Saturday pink. (7.970-974)

Bloom is an advertising canvasser. He acts as an intermediary between the newspapers and the stores, going to the newspaper offices, paying court to the editors and the printers, and seeking out the companies or shops interested in running advertisements (Wicke 126-7). In addition, as the citations above show, it can be said that Bloom “does concern himself with the creative aspects of the advertising profession” (Berger 26). What Bloom intends in designing the ad is, in his own words, something that “catches the eye” and “[calls] attention” of the readers of newspapers. In short, his consideration is paid to the problem of attracting attention. In this sense, his planning is utterly faithful to his advertising theory, which is presented in one of the catechisms of the seventeenth episode:

What also stimulated him in his cogitations?

[...] the infinite possibilities hitherto unexploited of the modern art of advertisement if condensed in trilateral monoideal symbols, vertically of maximum visibility (divined), horizontally of maximum legibility (deciphered) and of magnetizing efficacy *to arrest involuntary attention*, to interest, to convince, to decide. (17.576-84)

This passage is written in an excessively “clinical, objective” narrative style (Kiberd 1167),

which is aimed at making Bloom sound cleverer than he is. Therefore the citation “is not necessarily, or even probably, a verbatim transcription of Bloom’s thoughts” (Senn 57), but it is possible to regard the phrase “to arrest involuntary attention” as a perfect summary of his advertising planning during the day (Nakayama 28).

As the title indicates, my focus in this essay is on the problem of attention in *Ulysses*. I would like to argue and demonstrate that this issue of attention is essential not merely for Bloom’s advertising activities but for a clear understanding of Bloom’s actions especially in the first half of the book. Why does *Ulysses* record so meticulously Bloom’s everyday doings such as walking, eating, or writing mainly by the technique of interior monologue? My answer will be given by examining how Bloom’s everyday doings can serve to control his attention.

Before entering the detailed discussion, however, since the topic of attention is a fairly new one in the variety of approaches to *Ulysses*, let me sketch out briefly how this subject has caught the growing critical interest. The prime mover is evidently Jonathan Crary’s comprehensive studies on the art and cultural history of attention and its counterpart, distraction. In *Suspensions of Perception* (1999), Crary examines paintings by Edouard Manet, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne in the relation to the topics such as subjectivity, perception, modernity, and, of course, attention/distraction. Crary scarcely discusses literary texts, but under his influence, some literary critics have assumed that attention can be a problem worth considering. To give an outstanding example, Tim Armstrong explores in “Two Types of Shock in Modernity” (2000) the issue of attention/distraction in the work by Scott Fitzgerald together with the texts by Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, and others. Also in the chapter titled “Distracted Writing” (1998), referring to Crary’s article “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory” (194-196), Armstrong examines the automatic writing by Gertrude Stein in the contexts of psychological discourses. In the area of Joyce studies, Maud Ellmann’s article “The Sixth Act” (2003) is one of the earliest instances. Her focus is on distraction rather than on attention, and she suggests a way of inspecting the theme of distraction in its many meanings (countermovement of attraction, entertainment, and absentmindedness) by using quotations from Joyce’s late works. More detailed and focused on Joyce is Toru Nakayama’s article “*Ulysses*, or the Aesthetics of Distraction” (2003). His argument is based on the insights from Crary’s studies, and analyzes the passages written in the stream of consciousness in the wider context of the psychology of advertisement.

II

As observed above, the problem of attention is a fairly new one. Interestingly enough, however, when picking up the very word “attention” through a number of *Ulysses* studies, we can easily notice that the same scene in the fifth episode has been commented on by focusing on this specific word “attention.” Let us read this passage section by section with constant references to these criticisms of Joyce.

In the morning of the day, just after leaving the post office with an envelope in his pocket, Bloom comes across an acquaintance, M’Coy:

M’Coy. Get rid of him quickly. Take me out of way. Hate company when you.

- Hello, Bloom. Where are you off to?
- Hello, M'Coy. Nowhere in particular.
- How's the body?
- Fine. How are you?
- Just keeping alive, M'Coy said. (5.82-88)

On recognizing M'Coy, Bloom thinks "Get rid of him quickly," since he is impatient to read the letter from Martha Clifford, his clandestine correspondent. For Bloom, the encounter is an unwanted invasion, or, in the words of Harry Blamires, "an annoying distraction" (30). This intrusiveness into Bloom's mind is, on the level of narrative form, represented as an abruptly broken-off interior monologue. Without the interruption by the saluting voice, the phrase "Hate company when you" might be, for example, "Hate company when you are itching to do something secretly."

After usual greetings are exchanged, in the next section, Bloom turns his eyes away from M'Coy, since he has almost no interest in the conversation:

Mr Bloom gazed across the road at the outsider drawn up before the door of the Grosvenor. The porter hoisted the valise up on the well. She stood still, waiting, while the man, husband, brother, like her, searched his pockets for change. Stylish kind of coat with that roll collar, warm for a day like this, looks like blanketcloth. Careless stand of her with her hands in those patch pockets. (5.98-103)

Hugh Kenner comments these lines: "Note how abruptly a 'she' has come into Bloom's field of attention" ("Modernism" 103). It should be added that not only the woman but a lot of things come into "Bloom's field of attention." To name in the order of occurrence, a jaunting car ("outsider"), a hotel, a porter, a bag, a luggage container ("well"), a woman and a man transiently catch Bloom's attention one after another. We should also notice that all of these objects take definite articles. Paul Van Caspel makes an interesting comment on this "avalanche of definite articles" (79) in terms of attention: "Bloom is looking at not just *an* outsider, *a* porter, *a* valise, but *the* very outsider, porter, valise by which his attention is held here and now" (80 emphasis original). Then in the last two sentences the focus of his attention narrows down onto the figure of the woman.

However, as Kenner note, Bloom's attention is once more "suddenly disrupted by the intrusive voice" (103):

— I was with Bob Doran, he's on one of his periodical bends, and what do you call him Bantam Lyons. Just down there in Conway's we were.

Doran Lyons in Conway's. She raised a gloved hand to her hair. In came Hoppy. Having a wet. Drawing back his head and gazing far from beneath his veiled eyelids he saw the bright fawn skin shine in the glare, the braided drums. Clearly I can see today. (5.107-12)

Bloom's attention is drawn by M'Coy's voice talking of an event at a public house ("Conway's"), but, as the fragmented sentence "Doran Lyons in Conway's" suggests, Bloom hears it only with "semi-attention" (Kenner, "Modernism" 103), since his eyes catch the woman's figure in the next sentence ("She raised a gloved hand"). However, his attention is once again diverted from her by M'Coy's voice or by the images his voice evokes ("In came Hoppy. Having a wet"). In those lines, at almost every full stop Bloom's attention oscillates between the voice near him and the sight across the road. As Caspel states, Bloom's mind is working in a complex situation: it is operating "on more levels than one," namely, in the visual and the aural circuits at once (80).

The shift of attention reaches the height of its abruptness in the following part:

— *What's wrong with him?* he said. *He's dead*, he said. And, faith, he filled up. *Is it Paddy Dignam?* I said. I couldn't believe it when I heard it. I was with him no later than Friday last or Thursday was it in the Arch. *Yes*, he said. *He's gone. He died on Monday, poor fellow.*

Watch! Watch! Silk flash rich stockings white. Watch!

A heavy tramcar honking its gong slewed between.

Lost it. Curse your noisy pugnose. Feels like locked out of it. Paradise and the peri. Always happening like that. The very moment. (5.126-33 emphasis original)

In this section, the focus of attention moves, it can be observed, as every new paragraph (or every new line) begins. In the first paragraph, M'Coy is chatteringly reproducing the conversation at the pub word for word (italics above). Bloom does not listen to him attentively, of course. As the next line shows, he is on the point of gaining sexual pleasures from looking at the silk stockings ("Watch! Watch!"): the lady is about to get on the carriage. Once again, however, his voyeuristic desire is abruptly thwarted, this time, not by M'Coy but by the turning tramcar.

As this instance shows, the streets in Dublin are thronged with sensuous inputs such as voice or woman's figure, and these stimuli, whether auditory or visual, compete against each other for Bloom's attention. His attention swings among these stimulations at brief intervals, and the swift attention movements punctuate the narrative texture. As a result, the text is rendered, to use Kenner's words, "an orchestration of distractions and interruptions" ("Modernism" 105), and Bloom is depicted as one of those whose attention is attracted by the "distractions and interruptions."

III

Bloom, an ad canvasser, seems to regard the faculty of attention as a controllable one. In his framework, an advertisee is a passive entity that responds to advertisements, just as Bloom in the scene with M'Coy reacts to several stimuli in the streets of Dublin. However the same passage also relates his attempt to control his attention not passively but willfully and to turn it upon the woman's figure. As Cray writes, one of the crucial questions in the psychology of attention

around the turn of the century was: “To what extent was attention an automatic or voluntary act” (*Suspensions* 24). Bloom, an ad man, would say it is an automatic act, but Bloom watching secretly the stockings would give an opposite answer. It is difficult to specify the nature of attention in the book of *Ulysses* as well as in the field of psychology, but, what is important for our argument of attention in *Ulysses* is that it becomes essential for Bloom to control his attention voluntarily, especially on the afternoon of that day.

To see the importance of directing attention willfully, let us examine a passage of the sixth episode, in which the carriage heading toward the cemetery goes past a Dubliner:

Mr Dedalus bent across to salute. From the door of the Red Bank the white disc of a straw hat flashed reply: spruce figure: passed.

Mr Bloom reviewed the nails of his left hand, then those of his right hand. The nails, yes. Is there anything more in him that they she sees? Fascination. Worst man in Dublin. That keeps him alive. They sometimes feel what a person is. Instinct. But a type like that. My nails. I am just looking at them: well pared. (6.198-204)

Bloom is attempting to draw his attention from the Dubliner with “a straw hat” and to rivet it upon his hands as he “reviewed the nails.” The effort is in vain, however. The focus of his attention goes back to the man (“him”; “Worst man in Dublin”). Then Bloom directs it to his nails again, saying to himself “My nails. I am just looking at them.” Bloom is exerting himself to control the focus of his attention, to be more specific, trying to divert his attention from the Dubliner.

Bloom makes all those attempts because the Dubliner in the quotation is the very man from whom he is most anxious to distract his attention. The man is Blazes Boylan: “—Who? Mr Dedalus asked. / —Blazes Boylan, Mr Power said. He is airing his quiff” (6.195-196). It seems that, to use Kiberd’s phrase, Bloom in the citation “developed a sudden interest in his fingernails,” but they are of no particular interest to him. Bloom is looking at them just as a “distraction from the actual cause of his pain” (1011-12).

Bloom’s attitude toward Boylan can be described by the words such as “evasion” and “avoiding” (Benstock 161). For instance, Bloom never refers to Boylan by his name (Blamires 35) and “will do anything to avoid uttering his name” (Caspel 101). The obvious instance is the scene at a restaurant in the eighth episode:

—She’s engaged for a big tour end of this month. You may have heard perhaps.

—No. O, that’s the style. Who’s getting it up?

The curate served.

—How much is that?

—Seven d, sir.... Thank you, sir.

Mr Bloom cut his sandwich into slender strips. *Mr MacTrigger*. Easier than the dreamy creamy stuff. *His five hundred wives. Had the time of their lives.*

—Mustard, sir?

—Thank you.

He studded under each lifted strip yellow blobs. *Their lives*. I have it. *It grew bigger and bigger and bigger.*

—Getting it up? he said. Well, it's like a company idea, you see. Part shares and part profits. (8.771-785)

They are talking about a singing tour by Molly. Bloom is asked "Who's getting it up," but he does not reply to him at once (of course, he knows the impresario of the tour is Boylan). Rather, with the answer suspended, he tries to divert his attention to three things: to casual exchanges of words with the bartender ("curate"), to the cutting up of his sandwich, and to a limerick of Mr MacTrigger (italics above). Bloom's act of "evasion" is, it can be observed, intertwined with the act of controlling his attention.

In spite of the acts of evasion, Bloom is possessed by Boylan on that day. Several times he comes across Boylan or is struck by the thought of Boylan. The passage from the sixth episode above is the first instance of the encounters. Hugh Kenner makes a suggestive comment on the encounters in terms of attention: "any irruption of Boylan into Bloom's field of *attention* has the effect of suspending his faculties" ("Rhetoric" 384 emphasis mine). For example, when Bloom catches sight of Boylan at the close of the eighth episode, Boylan's intrusion makes Bloom's breath "flutter" (8.1176) and his heart "quop" (8.1169). At such a disturbed moment, as James Maddox points out, Bloom "attempts to wrest attention away from Molly and Boylan and relocate it somewhere else, anyplace else" (58). What are available to Bloom are only everyday details around him. The "anyplace else" in the case of the sixth episode is his nails and in the eighth episode it is his pockets: "I am looking for that. Yes, that. Try all pockets. Hanker. *Freeman*. Where did I? Ah, yes. Trousers. Potato. Purse. Where?" (8.1188-89). Anything will do, if it distracts his attention from Boylan. When Boylan intrudes into Bloom's field of attention, what Bloom can do is only to try to distract his attention from Boylan and put it upon everyday things near him.

The topic of attention helps us to understand Bloom's actions not only at such a detailed level but also in general. Bloom's daytime can be regarded as a series of activities that will distract his attention from the assignation between Molly and Boylan. Bloom arranges the day's doings so that he may not be distracted by the liaison. The activities can be sketched out as follows: after leaving his house and before attending Dignam's funeral, as Kenner observes, he devotes himself to "welcome distractions: picking up his clandestine mail at the post-office box, idling in a church, buying soap, ordering Molly's lotion, indulging in a bath" (*Ulysses* 51-52). During the funeral, the occasion itself is "an engulfing distraction," again in Kenner's words (*Ulysses* 52). After that, he returns to everyday tasks: "working to secure the Keyes ad, choosing a restaurant for lunch, renting Molly's book," which Shari Benstock calls "the absolute demands of the customary" (161).

Most of the activities listed above are daily routines indeed, but it does not follow that Bloom goes through them mechanically. Rather, he engages them willfully. Several times during the day Bloom brings to mind those routines, saying to himself "I must." To make a list: (1) "Must get that Capel street library book renewed" (4.360); (2) "That book I must change for her" (6.154-155); (3) "I must see about that ad after the funeral" (6,742); (4) "I must answer. Write it

in the library” (8.613); (5) “Must go back for that lotion” (8.628); (6) “That *Kilkenny People* in the national library now I must” (8.1043-44); (7) “First I must. Library” (8.1167). The quotidian tasks may have no importance of their own, but Bloom readily concerns himself with them, because they serve to distract his attention from the liaison.

Bloom makes attempts to draw his attention away from Boylan and to fix it on quotidian articles and activities. As a consequence, as Benstock already pointed out, everyday details dominate “the foreground” of Bloom’s actions in spite of “the exceptional backdrop of adultery” (161). While there is a blow-by-blow account of, for example, how Bloom gets breakfast ready in the fourth episode, there is no explicit description of the adulterous moment in the book. This moment is “arguably the most important element in the characters’ actions and consciousnesses,” but it is only “suspected, feared, and imagined by Bloom and remembered by Molly” (Brown 19). Even when the assignation or Boylan is on the verge of emerging into Bloom’s mind, he banishes it: “Think no more about that” (8.108-109); “Today. Today. No think” (8.1063); “Let him. Just close my eyes a moment” (13.1276-77). Thus Bloom manages to relegate the troublesome thought to the background.

What is relegated to the background will return to the foreground, however. Especially in the eleventh episode, Bloom’s mind is acutely driven by the thought of Boylan and Molly. At the outset of that episode, Bloom happens to find Boylan in a carriage. This is the third encounter with Boylan on that day: “Again. Third time” (11.303). Unlike the two earlier cases, this time Bloom does not avoid Boylan. He follows him and goes to the Ormond Hotel on the Liffey to see why Boylan drops at the Ormond, for it is just before four o’clock, the appointed time when Boylan visits Bloom’s residence: “Be near. At four. Has he forgotten? Perhaps a trick. Not come: whet appetite” (11.392-393). Soon the clock strikes four (11.383) and Boylan leaves the hotel (11.426), while Bloom remains there: “Bloom heard a jing, a little sound. He’s off” (11.457). Boylan’s withdrawing puts him in a predicament. His absence restlessly stirs Bloom’s imagination, and he suffers from a vision of the liaison several times. To take an instance: “Knock. Last look at mirror always before she answers the door. The hall. There? How do you? I do well. There? What? Or?” (11.689-691). To repel such an illusion, Bloom in the eleventh episode needs distractions from Boylan and Molly more urgently than in any other scene of the book.

While there is an increased need of distracting things in Bloom’s situation, by that episode he has already finished almost all the day’s tasks and errands. To check the list of “musts”: (1) “Must get that Capel street library book renewed.” Though there is no direct narration of the scene, the budget of the day tells he paid one shilling for the renewal of the book (17.1465); (2) “That book I must change for her.” One of the vignettes in the tenth episode shows that he got the book of *Sweets of Sin* (10.606); (3) “I must see about that ad after the funeral.” In the seventh episode, he was composing the advertisement of Keyes (observed above); (6) “That *Kilkenny People* in the national library now I must” and (7) “First I must. Library.” There are no narrations from Bloom’s point of view, but it is reported in the library that Bloom came there and Mulligan caught a glimpse of him (9.602-607). Now, Bloom has two unfinished tasks (4 and 5), but he has forgotten the lotion for Molly, as he recalls later: “O and that lotion mustn’t forget” (11.940). Then Bloom has only one distraction, namely, writing an answer to his clandestine

correspondent, Martha. Can he survive the day's most critical hour with a single distraction?

IV

Let us consider the passage in which Bloom writes the reply to Martha, by dividing it into three parts. First, he thinks: "To Martha I must write. Buy paper. Daly's" (11.229-230). Interestingly, it is while he is buying sheets and envelopes at Daly's stationary shop that he catches a glimpse of Boylan and chooses to follow him. After Boylan's taking leave, Bloom thinks of composing the letter to Martha: "Better write it here" (11.821). To examine in detail the situation of Bloom's attention, I would like to cite the whole paragraph in which Bloom gets down to the reply:

Hope he's not looking, cute as a rat. He held unfurled his *Freeman*. Can't see now. Remember write Greek ees. Bloom dipped, Bloo mur: dear sir. Dear Henry wrote: dear Mady. Got your lett and flow. Hell did I put? Some pock or oth. It is utterl imposs. Underline *imposs*. To write today. (11.859-862)

In this passage, the focus of Bloom's attention shifts from one thing to another. In the former part, it is directed toward the man in front of him. Bloom is with Richie Goulding in the dining room of the hotel. Fully aware of Richie's prying gaze ("cute as a rat"), Bloom conceals the contents of the letter by two simple ploys. First, he puts the writing paper behind the newspaper ("[He] Can't see [it] now"). Next, he murmurs a common phrase in commercial correspondences, with the intention of making Richie believe he is just writing a business letter. As a result, the words Bloom mumbles and the sentences he actually writes under the pseudonym of Henry Flower are juxtaposed: "Bloo[m] mur[mured]: dear sir. Dear Henry wrote: dear Mady." It can be said that Bloom's attention here is divided equally between Richie's eyes and the letter. After these two sentences, his attention gets absorbed in the composition gradually, and only the interior monologue in which Bloom writes and revises the letter is recorded fragmentarily on the page.

In the following passage, Bloom is fully occupied with the reply:

My poor little pres: p. o. two and six. Write me a long. Do you despise? Jingle, have you the ? So excited. Why do you call me naught? You naughty too? O, Mairy lost the string of her. Bye for today. Yes, yes, will tell you. Want to. To keep it up. Call me that other. Other world she wrote. My patience are exhaust. To keep it up. You must believe. (11.868-872)

Now that Bloom's attention has moved from Richie to the letter composition, the phrases associated with the letter dominate the language of the quoted interior monologue. For instance, "My poor little pres[ent]" is the expression which Bloom has reexamined several times during the day (8.1132-1133, 11.714, 825). "Write me a long" is the repetition of a sentence in Martha's letter (5.251). In addition, "O, Mairy lost the string of her" and "To keep it up" are the lines of

the street rhyme which Bloom reiterates with a little mistake. Bloom first recites it just after reading the message from Martha (5.281-284).

In this way, Bloom's attention is not turned either to the obsessive image of the intercourse or to Richie in front of him for a while, so it seems reasonable to call the writing of the reply as an "absorbing task" (Attridge 60). However, it is, in fact, far from "absorbing." Just after the sentences cited above, Bloom stops writing a moment and reflects upon what he is doing: "Folly am I writing? Husbands don't" (11.874). Rather, we should think of Bloom's letter-writing as "an instance of make believe" (Caspel 167): Bloom knows the replying cannot be "absorbing" but makes himself believe he is engrossed in it. In addition, there is Richie's disturbance:

— Answering an ad? keen Richie's eyes asked Bloom.

— Yes, Mr Bloom said. Town traveller. Nothing doing, I expect.

Bloom mur: best references. But Henry wrote: it will excite me. You know how. In haste. Henry. Greek ee. Better add postscript. What is he playing now? Improvising. Intermezzo. P. S. The rum tum tum. How will you pun? You punish me? Crooked skirt swinging, whack by. Tell me I want to. Know. O. Course if I didn't I wouldn't ask. La la la ree. Trails off there sad in minor. Why minor sad? Sign H. They like sad tail at end. P. P. S. La la la ree. I feel so sad today. La ree. So lonely. Dee.

He blotted quick on pad of Pat. Envel. Address. Just copy out of paper. Murmured: Messrs Callan, Coleman and Co, limited. Henry wrote: Miss Martha Clifford (11.886-897)

Bloom's attention is deflected by Richie's enquiry ("Answering an ad?"), and Bloom again mutters a plausible business phrase ("best references") so as to discourage Richie's curiosity. Then he adds a few more sentences and his pseudonym "Henry" at the end of the letter. While wondering whether to add a postscript, Bloom notices the piano improvisation.

Bloom's attention here is put in a more complex situation. To comprehend the following sentences fully, it is necessary to survey the spatial relationship of this episode. The main scenes of action are, to put in Caspel's words (159), "three separate yet mutually accessible" rooms in the Ormond Hotel: the bar, the saloon, and the dining room. The bar is next to the saloon and the dining room to the bar; the three rooms are partitioned from each other by the doors; but the door separating the bar from the dining room is already set ajar at Bloom's request (11.670). Bloom and Richie are in the dining room, while Simon Dedalus and his friends are in the bar and singing to the piano. It is this piano piece in the saloon that Bloom notices in the quotation.

What is noteworthy for the argument of attention in *Ulysses* is that this music can keep Bloom's attention from the images of the intercourse. Fritz Senn states: "Bloom *tries* to forget any thought of the imminent carnality in his own house and concentrates on any distraction available, notably the songs coming from the next room" (70 emphasis original). What is more, when the song is over, Bloom himself thinks: "Wish they'd sing more. *Keep my mind off*" (11.914 emphasis mine).

What is worth adding is that, as Kiberd points out (1043), Bloom can just hear the piano but cannot see who is playing or singing: "Wish I could see his face, though" (11.721). As a

consequence, only his ears are, or, so to speak, only his auditory attention is, directed to the music, while his eyes, or, his visual attention, to Richie and the letter. However, it does not at all follow that Bloom's ears and eyes work separately and independently of each other. Rather, the piano Bloom listens to has so profound an influence on his writing that the post-postscript can be read to the rhythm of the music, as Caspel shows: "la-la-la-ree / I-feel-so-sad / to-day.-la-ree / so-lone-ly-dee" (169). After writing the additional remarks, Bloom has to blot up the letter immediately, since he is being watched by Richie's eyes. Caspel goes on to state that even this motion seems to "remain under the spell of meter: He-blot-ted-quick / on-pad-of-Pat" (170). Then the resonance with the piano becomes faint, as Bloom puts down Martha's address on the envelope, repeating disguisedly the names on the newspaper.

We have observed in detail the shifts of Bloom's attention shortly after four o'clock. Let us sum up. Bloom's attention is, in a word, divided equally between three distracting objects: Richie in front of him, the letter under his eyes, and the piano from the next room. Evidently, these things can keep Bloom's attention from the images of the liaison, but none of them can draw the full of his attention. For instance, the reply to Martha may be, as quoted above, an "absorbing task" (Attridge 60), but Bloom cannot be entirely enthralled in it, as Kiberd notes (1052). However, it does not follow that Bloom fails to divert his attention from the adultery, since it is not the liaison but other distracting objects that compete against the letter for Bloom's attention. It can be said, therefore, that if Bloom has more items that hold his attention, it is all the better for him. We can find here Bloom's way of surviving the day's most pitiful moment. So as to prevent his attention from being drawn to the images of Molly and Boylan, Bloom divides his attention between as many distracting items as available.

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